

Wednesday, August 9, 2017

## **SIGNS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

Jesus' priority, above all else in his 3 year ministry, was preaching and teaching about the Kingdom of God and demonstrating it. The Kingdom is God's activity, His dominion over everything He has created. It is primarily a dynamic concept- God's sovereign reign or rule. The eventual outcome of His work (not ours) shall be a world-wide, universal Realm on earth. [A major resource for me about the Gospel of the Kingdom is the writing of George Ladd] It is popular to believe God's Kingdom is strictly spiritual, equating the Kingdom with Salvation and Heaven or simply with the Church itself. Others equate the Kingdom with Social Activism and, specifically, human efforts to transform Society/Culture worldwide according to current cultural (American) values. My understanding of the Kingdom and, therefore, of the Signs of the Kingdom is derived primarily from the entire Bible, including Genesis, the Mosaic Law, the Prophets, as well as the four Gospels and the rest of the NT.

God has been sovereign, ruling over His creation and Humankind, since the beginning of time and Human History! The Kingdom was kicked into high gear with the incarnation of God the Son and particularly with his ascension to the Throne in Heaven from which He now rules. It is executed world-wide by the work of God the Spirit. Understanding this reality challenges and changes our view about many common Christian doctrines and practices. It greatly enlarges our (my) perspective of God, His work and ours in today's world.

The Triune God's work in the world is accomplished directly or indirectly through many instruments and agencies. The Kingdom breaks through and progresses here and there, throughout the centuries and around the globe. Providential History is the attempt to find and record what God has been doing. Many Evangelicals believe such History simply cannot be done. Others, who would like to do it, are very cautious about doing it because it is prone to much speculation and very subjective conclusions. I am convinced however, while caution and humility is required, the six following developments in History or in Current Events are trustworthy Signs of the Kingdom of God at work. They also provide signs of strong Satanic obstruction to that Kingdom.

Care of the Environment (the Creation) as defined in Scripture

Neglect, waste, destruction and exploitation of natural resources are wrong

Preservation and fulfillment of all people(s) as rational, relational, creative, moral and spiritual human beings

Policies or programs that exploit, oppress, dehumanize or destroy persons are evil

Spread of the Gospel of Grace and Conversions of People to Christ and growth of the Church.

At a minimum, I believe we must define The Church as all people who believe in and worship the Triune God and who personally confess faith in Jesus as the Christ, their Lord and Savior

Restrictions, persecutions and attempts to destroy the Church are evil

Strengthening of Marriage and Family as defined in Scripture, ie- heterosexual, complementarian and extended (multi-generational).

Laws, policies and practices that undermine or destroy such Marriages or Families and their functions are wrong

Economics as defined in Scripture, ie- stewardship of private property for the common good and compassionate free-market capitalism

Laws and policies that undermine or destroy such Stewardship and Capitalism are wrong

Government as defined in Scripture, ie- a democratic but limited, constitutional republic under God and His Law, whose primary purpose is to preserve and protect the well-being of its citizens [Justice]

Laws, policies and practices that undermine or destroy such Government are wrong

Ideally, Believers should actively align themselves with the work God is doing in any or all of these six theaters of spiritual warfare. We do not build the Kingdom! God does! But we can be, the Church can be, His instrument(s) as we obey Him, individually and corporately, submitting to His authority and power in our lives, in the myriad places in the world to which He calls us. It is also important to recognize that God uses unbelievers and "secular" institutions to advance His Kingdom in the world. We must not discount Common Grace, even as we promote Special Grace. Our sovereign God rules as He shall, where He shall.

All of the above, very simply stated, requires much unpacking and real world application. My current personal study is to discover any or all of these signs of God at work (or the opposition to God at work) in the 50 year period of US History in the United States between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the First World War.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:23

Thursday, July 6, 2017

## **WHY PROVIDENTIAL HISTORY IS VALID**

"History" is linear, a meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God's purposes for humanity" "History is not meaningless. Rather it is teleological, going somewhere, directed towards a known end.: "History is the record of the involvement and concern of God in human events. History is the divine purpose of God in concrete form."  
Partial answer to Worldview Question 7 p.43; The Universe Next Door by James Sire, 5th Edition

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:32

Thursday, June 8, 2017

## **THE DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE**

The London Baptist Confession of Faith defines Providence this way: "God, the good Creator of all things, in his infinite power and wisdom, upholds, directs, organizes and governs all creatures and things, from the greatest to the least, by his perfectly wise and holy providence, to the end for which they were created. He governs in accordance with his infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness and mercy."

To understand History (what is really going on in current events, past, present and future) we begin with this Doctrine.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 17:07

Saturday, March 5, 2016

**RECOMMENDED TEN BOOKS ON CHURCH AND CULTURE**

<http://www.churchandculture.org/blog.asp?id=10129>  
recommended by James White

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:34

Wednesday, June 3, 2015

## **SEXUALITY AND GENDER ISSUES**

I wrote and posted a major essay with the title

Being Human: the meaning of person hood, sexuality and gender

It is very relevant to the current discussions of homosexuality and being transgender

[http://www.reformedliving.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=475:being-human-the-meaning-of-personhood-sexuality-and-gender&catid=67:life-issues&Itemid=57](http://www.reformedliving.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=475:being-human-the-meaning-of-personhood-sexuality-and-gender&catid=67:life-issues&Itemid=57)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:07

Saturday, May 30, 2015

## **DO OTHER ANIMALS HAVE THE SAME LEGAL RIGHTS AS HUMAN PERSONS?**

"I have often told my graduate students in theology that the most pressing doctrine of our day may very well be the doctrine of humanity. It is the area of Christian thought that is most challenged by the world in which we live – and the one where we have the least to draw from historically."  
<http://www.churchandculture.org/Blog.asp?ID=9235>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:40

Tuesday, September 16. 2014

## **A MESSAGE FROM THE POPE ABOUT THE CROSS**

Why the Cross? Here is the Pope's answer-

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/why-the-cross-pope-asks-during-sunday-angelus-61405/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:12

Wednesday, July 30, 2014

### **STAR WARS- WORLD VIEW**

Enjoy the action, but beware of the message-

<http://global.christianpost.com/news/the-faith-vs-the-force->

[http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4217915/k.7FF6/The\\_Worldview\\_of\\_Star\\_Wars.htm](http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4217915/k.7FF6/The_Worldview_of_Star_Wars.htm)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 17:48

### **STAR TREK THEOLOGY**

The dangerous world view of Star Trek

<http://www.pantheism.net/paul/history/star-trek.htm>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 17:33

Wednesday, April 16, 2014

### **NEW ESSAY: BEING A PURITAN AND POLITICS**

Many Christians I know and care for do not share my views about many social, economic and political issues. The specific reasons for our differences germane to particular issues, laws and policies in the daily news are secondary and debatable. The major, underlying and most important explanation for our disconnect on these matters is caused by our differing views about the Nature of God, of Human Beings and of Scripture. These three Doctrines have great political, economic and social consequences. In fact, all Theology does. This is clearly demonstrated in US History, as I shall try to illustrate in what follows  
<http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:26

### **THE HUMAN CONDITION AND PREDICAMENT**

Human beings are wonderfully made by a loving Creator. We actually image Him and this gives each of us infinite value. As His image, we have faculties for rationality, creativity, morality, spirituality and communality. God pronounced to be good, but shortly after we were created, something went radically wrong (radix = at the root). We rebelled against our Maker and fell away from Him.

FROM A NEW ESSAY JUST POSTED at <http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:19

Tuesday, December 10, 2013

## **ZOMBIES**

This writer delves into the subject of Zombies and finds a lot of moral, ethical and theological questions and answers. Imaginative and thought provoking.

<http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2012/11/zombies-and-god.html>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 22:40

Wednesday, September 25, 2013

## **TRANSGENDER THEOLOGY PROFESSOR**

What is a transgendered person? Is gender essential to being human? Is gender part of the Image of God within us? Here is a fascinating story that raises these and other important issues. How would and should Evangelicals react? <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/september/transgender-professor-azusa-pacific-heath-adam-ackley.html>?

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:36

Tuesday, August 13. 2013

## **THE BOUNDARIES OF SCIENCE AT BALL STATE**

Ball State [University] is currently reviewing its "Boundaries of Science" course with professor Eric Hedin to ensure that the curriculum fits within university and academic standards. Its original syllabus—which included books by intelligent design proponents such as William Dembski, Stephen Meyer, and Michael Behe—drew controversy.

Ball State's website describes the course as "examining the nature of the physical and the living world, to increase our appreciation of the scope, wonder, and complexity of physical reality. The objectives are to give a scientifically accurate introduction to the origin and development of the physical universe (cosmology), which has led up to the formation of Earth as a uniquely suitable environment to support life. The biological complexity of physical life will also be briefly examined. We will investigate these physical realities and the boundaries of science for any hidden wisdom within nature which may illuminate the central questions of the purpose of our existence and the meaning of life." [Emphasis added- CF]

UPDATE: The class will be scrubbed to remove any discussion of intelligent design.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/may/ball-state-will-investigate-course-on-boundaries-of-science.html>

"The objectives are to give a scientifically accurate introduction to the origin and development of the physical universe" How do they know this is possible? Does this exclude the possibility of other sources of knowledge about the origin of the physical universe?

"We will investigate these physical realities and the boundaries of science for any hidden wisdom within nature which may illuminate the central questions of the purpose of our existence and the meaning of life." Really? How will they discover and recognize and interpret "wisdom within nature" and the "purpose" and "meaning" of life using Science or the scientific method? And how do they know that there is nothing beyond "physical realities" or determine that their investigation is limited to physical realities? Sounds like the Religion of Naturalism or the Idol of Scientism is dominant at Ball State.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:14

Wednesday, June 19, 2013

## **DOES HIP HOP GIVE THE GOSPEL A BAD RAP?**

"Daniel White Hodge is a producer with a Ph.D. In his twenties he had production credits on Bone Thugs-N-Harmony's first album, E 1999 Eternal, as well as helping to score the first two seasons of New York Undercover. With a Ph.D. from Fuller Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, he is now the director of the Center for Youth Ministry Studies and assistant professor of youth ministry at North Park University in Chicago.

Hodge's books, Heaven Has A Ghetto: The Missiological Gospel & Theology of Tupac Amaru Shakur and The Soul Of Hip-Hop: Rims Timbs & A Cultural Theology are explorations of "theomusicology." CT's Wes Jakacki talked with him at the Calvin Festival of Faith and Music about Reformed rappers, why many Christians are still uneasy about hip-hop, and the religious themes that pulse underneath even the most secular rap."

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/may-web-only/starting-dialogue-with-hip-hop.html?>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:34

Friday, March 8, 2013

## **SIGNS OF THE KINGDOM of GOD**

The Kingdom of God defined as the dynamic Reign of God is constantly, irrepressibly "breaking into" our every day world, our current events. What are its Major Signs? These 5 Movements-

Pro-Missionary: world wide Evangelism and the consequent making of Disciples of Christ Pro-Life in every sense, especially the birthing, nurturing and well-being of every child conceived Pro-Biblical Marriage and Family  
Pro-Environment: Stewardship of Natural World, its care and cultivation Pro-Freedom- Political and Economic:  
Democracy and Free-Market Capitalism

Where we find these Movements, we see the Reign of God at work and the coming of His Kingdom on Earth  
I write about these Topics on my website as well as here on this Blog <http://www.calvinfox.com/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:19

Wednesday, October 24, 2012

## MOVIE SUGGESTIONS

Here is a film library of "stealth" movies that are not overtly Christian in nature, but open up opportunities to dialogue with people about spiritual issues. It is a good List from Church & Culture Blog and James White- The Omen (1976), directed by Richard Donner, starring Gregory Peck.Blade Runner (1982), directed by Ridley Scott, starring Harrison Ford.The Wall (1982), directed by Alan Parker, starring Bob Geldof (and largely written by Roger Waters).Minority Report (2002), directed by Stephen Spielberg, starring Tom Cruise.Devil (2010), directed by John Erick Dowdle, starring Chris Messina.

And here is the list of all movie titles suggested (in alphabetical order) by blog readers-

2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), directed by Stanley Kubrick, starring Keir Dullea3:10 to Yuma (2007), directed by James Mangold, starring Russell CroweA Clockwork Orange (1971), directed by Stanley Kubrick, starring Malcolm McDowellA Man for All Seasons (1966), directed by Fred Zinnemann, starring Paul ScofieldAmazing Grace (2006), directed by Michael Apted, starring Ioan GruffuddAngels and Demons (1970), directed by Carlos Hugo Christensen, starring Eva ChristianAs it is in Heaven (2004), directed by Kay Pollak, starring Michael NyqvistAtonement (2007), directed by Joe Wright, starring Keira KnightleyBabette's Feast (1987), directed by Gabriel Axel, starring Stephane AudranBen-Hur (1959), directed by William Wyler, starring Charlton HestonBig Fish (2003), directed by Tim Burton, starring Ewan McGregorBlazing Saddles (1974), directed by Mel Brooks, starring Cleavon LittleBless the Child (2000), directed by Chuck Russell, starring Kim BasingerBlood Diamond (2006), directed by Edward Zwick, starring Leonardo DiCaprioBorn on the Fourth of July (1989), directed by Oliver Stone, starring Tom CruiseBraveheart (1995), directed by and starring Mel GibsonBruce Almighty (2003), directed by Tom Shadyac, starring Jim CarreyCentral Station (1998), directed by Walter Salles, starring Fernanda MontenegroChariots of Fire (1981), directed by Hugh Hudson, starring Ben CrossCharlotte's Web (1973), directed by Charles A. Nichols & Iwao Takamoto, starring Debbie ReynoldsConstantine (2005), directed by Francis Lawrence, starring Keanu ReevesContact (1997), directed by Robert Zemeckis, starring Jodie FosterEvan Almighty (2007), directed by Tom Shadyac, starring Steve CarellExpelled: No Intelligence Allowed (2001), directed by Nathan Frankowski, starring Ben SteinGattaca (1997), directed by Andrew Niccol, starring Ethan HawkeGet Low (2009), directed by Aaron Schneider, starring Robert DuvallGran Torino (2008), directed by and starring Clint EastwoodHarry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2 (2011), directed by David Yates, starring Daniel RadcliffeHellbound? (2012 Documentary), directed and written by Kevin MillerInception (2010), directed by Christopher Nolan, starring Leonardo DiCaprioIt's a Wonderful Life (1946), directed by Frank Capra, starring James StewartJoyeux Noel (2005), directed by Christian Carion, starring Diane KrugerKingdom of Heaven (2005), directed by Ridley Scott, starring Orlando BloomLast Ounce of Courage (2012), directed by Darrel Campbell & Kevin McAfee, starring Marshall R. TeagueLes Miserables (1998), directed by Billie August, starring Liam NeesonLife as a House (2001), directed by Irwin Winkler, starring Hayden ChristensenMan on Fire (2004), directed by Tony Scott, starring Denzel WashingtonMoulin Rouge (2001), directed by Baz Luhrman, starring Nicole KidmanOn the Waterfront (1954), directed by Elia Kazan, starring Marlon BrandoPay it Forward (2000), directed by Mimi Leder, starring Kevin SpaceyPoint of No Return (1993), directed by John Badham, starring Bridget FondaPrometheus (2012), directed by Ridley Scott, starring Noomi RapaceSaints and Soldiers (2012), directed by Ryan Little, starring Corbin AllredSaving Private Ryan (1998), directed by Steven Spielberg, starring Tom HanksSchlinder's List (1993), directed by Steven Spielberg, starring Liam NeesonShooting Dogs (2004), directed by Michael Caton-Jones, starring John HurtSigns (2002), directed by M. Night Shyamalan, starring Mel GibsonSpartacus (1960), directed by Stanley Kubrick, starring Kirk DouglasStar Wars (1977), directed by George Lucas, starring Mark HamillStill Breathing (1997), directed by James F. Robinson, starring Brendan FraserThe Artist (2011), directed by Michel Hazanavicius, starring Jean DujardinThe Big Kahuna (1999), directed by John Swanbeck, starring Kevin SpaceyThe Book of Eli (2010), directed by The Hughes Brothers, starring Denzel WashingtonThe Butterfly Effect (2004), directed by Eric Bress & J. Mackye Gruber, starring Ashton KutcherThe Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (2005), directed by Andrew Adamson, starring Tilda SwintonThe Dark Night Rises (2012), directed by Christopher Nolan, starring Christian BaleThe Day the Earth Stood Still (1951), directed by Robert Wise, starring Michael RennieThe Devil's Advocate (1997), directed by Taylor Hackford, starring Keanu ReevesThe Exorcism of Emily Rose (2005), directed by Scott Derrickson, starring Laura LinneyThe Exorcist (1973), directed by William Friedkin, starring Ellen BurstynThe Final Cut (2004), directed by Omar Naim, starring Robin WilliamsThe Green Mile (1999), directed by Frank Darabont, starring Tom HanksThe Grey (2011), directed by Joe Carnahan, starring Liam NeesonThe Horse Whisperer (1998), directed by and starring Robert RedfordThe Iron Giant (1999), directed by Brad Bird, starring Eli MarienthalThe Life of Brian (2002), directed by Henri Behar & Karim Akadiri Soumaila, starring George LucasThe Lorax (2012), directed by Chris Renaud & Kyle Balda, starring Zac EfronThe Lord of the Rings Trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003), directed by Peter Jackson, starring Elijah WoodThe Matrix Trilogy (1999, 2003), directed by The Wachowski Brothers, starring Keanu ReevesThe Patriot (2000), directed by Roland Emmerich, starring Mel GibsonThe Road (2009), directed by John Hillcoat, starring Viggo MortensenThe

## Blog Export: DUTCH TREAT- Cal Fox's Blog, <http://www.calvinfox.com/blog/>

Shawshank Redemption (1994), directed by Frank Darabont, starring Tim Robbins  
The Truman Show (1998), directed by Peter Weir, starring Jim Carrey  
Truman (1995), directed by Frank Pierson, starring Gary Sinise  
Tsotsi (2004), directed by Gavin Hood, starring Presley Chweneyagae  
We Were Soldiers (2002), directed by Randall Wallace, starring Mel Gibson  
What Dreams May Come (1998), directed by Vincent Ward, starring Robin Williams

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 18:58

Friday, August 17, 2012

## **THE AWE-FUL DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE**

I have just posted 2 short Bible studies and one 8 Part, extensive study on the unpopular and strong but Scriptural Doctrine of Providence. The latter is based on the Westminster Confession of Faith and Wayne Grudem's book, Systematic Theology. - Lots of Scripture. Very thought provoking.  
<http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:11

Wednesday, May 16, 2012

### **THE "NEW CONVERSION" - EVANGELICAL SEA CHANGE**

"It is not be an overstatement to say that evangelicals are experiencing a "sea change"—a paradigm shift—in their understanding of conversion and redemption, a shift that includes the way in which they think about the salvation of God, the nature and mission of the church, and the character of religious experience."

Read the full article in which I respond at length to the writer of this statement published in Christianity Today <http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:31

Friday, January 20, 2012

### **MOST REDEEMING FILMS OF 2011**

"Stop, look, and listen." That could be the motto for Christianity Today's list of the Most Redeeming Films of 2011. A number of them, including No. 1 *Of Gods and Men*, are slower-moving, contemplative movies, films that ask you to put the popcorn aside, pay close attention, engage your heart, soul, and mind, and invest in the movie. Brain and your heart, and engage. In other words, everything *Transformers 3* would never ask you to do. ... the year's best movies that include stories of redemption. Several feature characters who are redeemers themselves; all have characters who experience redemption to some degree. Some are feel-good flicks; others, less so. Several of the films are rated R and PG-13 and are not intended for young viewers, so please use discretion. But in all of these films, redemption itself is one of the main characters or plot points."

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/movies/commentaries/2012/10redeemingmovies2011.html>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:55

Friday, October 21. 2011

## **FIGHTING LIBERALISM AT HARVARD**

There is no doubt about it. America began as a Christian Country. From the founding of the Plimouth, Massachusetts Colony in 1620 and, soon after, the settlement of the nearby Boston area for the first 120 years, the Protestant Faith (Calvinism) of the Pilgrims and Puritans was dominant everywhere. Harvard University was founded in 1636 primarily to educate young men to become Pastors.

"Yale University was founded on October 16, 1701, by Congregationalist ministers unhappy with the growing liberalism at Harvard. The first classes were held in the residence of Rev. Abraham Pierson. Not until 1745 was the school moved to New Haven and renamed Yale in honor of Elihu Yale, a successful merchant who made a donation of goods valued at \$2,800. The purpose of the renamed school was "To plant and under ye Divine blessing to propagate in this Wilderness, the blessed Reformed, Protestant Religion, in ye purity of its Order and Worship."<http://www.christianity.com/ChurchHistory/11630185>"The blessed Reformed, Protestant Religion", of course, was Calvinism; but by 1700 its influence was on the decline to be replaced by Deism and Unitarianism [Liberalism] in New England.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:07

Wednesday, August 31, 2011

**NEW ARTICLES ON MY WEBSITE TODAY**

Back to School: Two Methods of Knowing Anything  
The Core Biblical Concept of Knowledge"; The One & The Many  
What is the Enmity of Genesis 3:15" The Doctrine of The Antithesis  
The Rejection of Reason and Rationality Re/Formed Living

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:35

Thursday, August 11, 2011

### **IS AMERICA A CHRISTIAN OR BIBLICAL NATION? Part 1 of Series**

In the 17th Century, besides the English, the French, Spanish and Dutch had settlements in some Northern, Southern and far Western regions of what is now the United States. But for all this ethnic and religious diversity, working backward from today, the dominant or mainstream political and social Foundations of the United States trace primarily to New England and the Protestant Colonists who settled in Massachusetts (not, for example, to Roman Catholic settlements in Florida, California or Maryland) and back through them to England and then to Europe. The first of those Colonists were predominantly Pilgrims and Puritans, coming out of the Church of England. These groups had their difference, but they were Calvinists (not today's Evangelicals). Later other Protestants arrived (Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, Quakers) as well as Roman Catholics and Jews. Of course, there non-religious people, too.

Continued on my website <http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:31

Tuesday, April 19. 2011

## **TRENDS IN THEOLOGY AND WHAT IS HEARD IN CHURCHES**

Many conservative Reformed Christians have serious problems with Contemporary Christian Music and Worship. Their main objection is that such music and worship is characterized by "neo-gnosticism" or what is more commonly known as "Pietism (a relationship with God or "piety" that is individualized, private, subjective and romanticized) There is good reason for this concern, but I believe a more important concern is the influence on contemporary Worship, Sermons, Christian" books and Music of Open Theism. Open Theism is characterized in several ways, all of which give human beings pre-eminence over God. (I am more important than God. God exists for me, Even the Cross was all about me.) The following 8 Concepts (printed in bold type) are an outline of the tenets of Open Theism taken from this article- Source: <http://www.challies.com/articles/challenges-to-the-church-open-theism> We must recognize the Concepts and reject sermons, books or song lyrics that promote them. The comments in this Essay, before and after each Concept, are my own responses and rebuttal to them. See the full Essay <http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:21

Saturday, April 16. 2011

### **More on Christians and Muslims**

On Tuesday, April 5, I posted notice of a good review of a book about Christian-Muslim Dialogue. The current Christianity Today has a different perspective of the same book, Allah, A Christian Response, by Miroslav Volf <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/april/muslimschristianssamegod.html>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:51

Tuesday, April 5, 2011

### **ENGAGING ISLAM- Book review**

Here is a fair, thoughtful and extensive review of Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (HarperOne, 2011), 336 pp., \$25.99. "Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? Does the answer to that question have significant implications for how Christians and Muslims engage each other in the world today?" Volf writes as one who has seen the bitter hostilities between Muslims and Christians [in the Balkan Wars] and wishes to see those hostilities cease. Accordingly, he makes several points that provide excellent stimulation for Christians who are considering how to think about and engage with adherents of Islam. "First, Volf helpfully summarizes key similarities and differences between normative Islam and normative Christianity" "Second, Volf presents a careful model of engagement with both Muslim and Christian theology on one of the most contentious issues between the two communities. He puts a great deal of effort into clarifying exactly what the Qur'an affirms about God's unity and what it denies about the Trinity." "Third, Volf articulates clearly what many Christians (and Muslims) have sadly missed in the history of Christian-Muslim relations: "Fourth, Volf provides much food for thought in how we lose our prejudices and exercise our rights concerning issues of blasphemy. The Reviewer gives a good, constructive response to Volf's argument. Read the Essay here- <http://tgcreviews.com/reviews/allah-a-christian-response/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:37

Friday, March 18, 2011

## **TSUNAMIS, NUKES, GODZILLA & MOVIES**

Want good, intelligent Christian reviews of movies? check out  
<http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctentertainment/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:40

Thursday, February 17, 2011

## **BEYOND SCIENTISM: SCIENCE AS GOD**

In a recent article titled "Science on Faith," sociologist Elaine Howard Ecklund notes the influence of "nonoverlapping magisteria" (NOMA). The idea of NOMA was made famous by the late evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould. For Gould, science and religion were two completely separate ways of discovering truth. Commenting on Gould's influence, Ecklund writes that according to the principles of NOMA, "Religion...operates within the realms of purpose, meaning and values, while science operates within the realm of empirical facts – and the two should respect but never interfere with each other." In other words, continues Ecklund, "the proper relationship between science and religion is no relationship at all." All the more reason to be intrigued by John Gray's forthcoming book, *The Immortalization Commission: Science and the Strange Quest to Cheat Death*. Gray, a professor of European thought at the London School of Economics, notes that the "myths" of animism and religion have retreated in our culture, "but only...to resurface through the channel of science, so that ...now..., we look to science to provide a kind of meaning in the universe...which these older myths once did." Gray's point is that we have emptied our world of God, but now look to science to give us what a belief in God once did. Or as he puts it, "the attempt to re-inject human meaning into a world from which science has emptied meaning." This is a step beyond scientism. Scientism, Ecklund notes, "is a disciplinary imperialism that leads scientists to explicitly or implicitly assert that science is the only valid way toward knowledge, and that it can be used to interpret all other forms of knowledge." What Gray is unveiling is the attempt of science to provide the transcendent promises of religion. In this case, resurrection from the dead and/or immortality. The things we used to put our faith in God for, can now be placed squarely into the hands of science. From James White's Blog- <http://www.churchandculture.org/blog.asp?id=794>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:10

Saturday, January 22, 2011

## **CHRISTIAN CREEDS & CONFESSIONS**

For people to insist that they are only "Christians", and that is all they want to be, is meaningless. All true Christians are Creedal in that they use the first 4 Creeds of the early catholic Church as statements of the most fundamental and essential doctrines of their Faith, the test of what is Orthodox. Apostles' Creed Nicene Creed (325 A.D.) Athanasian Creed (500 A.D.) Chalcedonian Creed (451 A.D.) Confessional Christians are those who express all the doctrines they believe in a Confession of Faith. There are several Confessions (available. Many Reformed Christians prefer the Westminster Confession (or others based upon it) which has British and Scottish origins. German and Dutch Reformed Christians prefer to confess the Doctrines of their Faith with the Heidelberg Catechism. As a traditional Anglican, I also consider the 39 Articles of Religion as a good Confession of Faith. All these are grounded in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th-17th Centuries. A Catechism is designed to make it easy to learn the doctrines of the Confession. Memorizing the Questions and Answers of a Catechism was the main educational method for centuries in all churches. "One of the best known catechisms of all time is the Heidelberg Catechism.

It is named for a German city, where it was prepared by theologians of the University of Heidelberg at the request of Elector Frederick III, a friend of the Protestant Reformation. Frederick hoped the new catechism would secure harmony among Protestants in his territories and strengthen the hold of the Reformed faith on his provinces. He wrote the preface of the Catechism himself, which is dated this day, January 19, 1563. The Heidelberg Catechism is used by the Reformed Church. Hundreds of thousands of people have memorized it and lived by its teachings over the years since then. The Catechism presented 129 questions with their answers, backed up by more than seven hundred Bible references. The authors said they wanted it to be an echo of the Bible. Frederick pointed out that the references had been selected "with great pains" to give the best possible authority for its claims. A nice thing about the Catechism is that it is very personal, using the words "I," "me," and "my" in its answers. For example, listen to question 56: 'Question: What do you believe concerning "the forgiveness of sins?" Answer: I believe that God, because of Christ's atonement, will never hold against me any of my sins nor my sinful nature which I need to struggle against all my life. Rather, in his grace God grants me the righteousness of Christ to free me forever from judgment.' "

<http://www.christianity.com/ChurchHistory/11630006/>

<http://www.reformed.org/documents/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:04

Saturday, December 18, 2010

## **THE MISSION OF GOD?**

The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization met in October. Some 4000 delegates were chosen to represent countries around the Globe. The majority were from the Global South and East (not from the the United States, Great Britain or the "West") The great majority were under 50 years old and 35% were women. This reflects the demographics of the Church today. The Congress produced the "Cape Town Commitment" which reflected the values and priorities of this assembly and which gives us a good idea where the "catholic" Church is now and will be in the years ahead. That means "The Commitment" is very important. This Essay is in response to the article about the Cape Town Congress in the current issue of Christianity Today.

<http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 18:49

Thursday, December 16, 2010

## **JESUS versus PAUL**

I have just posted two extensive Articles on my website <http://www.reformedliving.org/> They are in response to the cover story of the current issue of Christianity Today, titled "Jesus vs. Paul" and they particularly address the growing belief among younger Evangelicals that there is a conflict between Jesus' teaching of the Kingdom of God and Paul's teaching about Justification by Faith. Is there such a conflict? Please read my Articles.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 20:03

Wednesday, September 15, 2010

### **ARE AGNOSTIC SCIENTISTS REALLY AGNOSTIC?**

Here is a blog that I find very interesting. It is from Inter Varsity and covers the wide field of Christians (Mostly Professors and Grad students) in Academia. The article I just found challenging in today's edition is about Scientists and their Faith.

<http://blog.emergingscholars.org/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:32

Wednesday, September 8, 2010

## **YES, WE ARE NARROW MINDED**

Our concern is not primarily with Radical Muslims. It is about Islam. And it is about Hinduism and Buddhism and Judaism. It is about Civil Religion and Atheism. It is about all non-Christian Religions, Faith Systems, Ideologies and Worldviews. There is Salvation is no one but Christ. No one comes to the Father but by Him. 2 Cor 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:21

Sunday, August 29, 2010

## **ARE MISSIONARIES GUILTY OF CULTURAL IMPERIALISM?**

"But outside the Evangelical world, "proselytizing" is indeed a bad word. Other Protestants and the secular media regard it as an expression of "fundamentalism"—an elastic term, which can mean anything religious one does not like, in this case a faith that is intolerant and aggressive. The politically correct of all or no religious persuasion associate it with ethnocentrism, cultural imperialism and colonialism. Roman Catholics tend to be more cautious in condemning "proselytism"—after all, they practice it themselves, asserting as they do that theirs is the only true church—but the more progressive ones also shy away from outright conversion activities, preferring terms like "enculturation" (adapting Christianity to non-Western indigenous cultures rather than going at them head-on) and "Christian presence" (bearing witness not by overt preaching, but rather by quietly practicing the Christian virtues of compassion and charity). The most favored alternative to "proselytism" is "dialogue," the non-confrontational, open-minded conversation with "the Other."

Read the entire article by Peter Berger on my website <http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:30

Wednesday, August 4, 2010

### **NEW ARTICLES POSTED ON MY WEBSITE**

I have just posted 7 new articles on my website for your perusal. They are about the Sacraments, Salvation by Faith Only, Missions and Beth Moore  
<http://www.reformedliving.org/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:27

Tuesday, May 4, 2010

## **DO HUMANS FACE DYING LIKE CHIMPANZEES DO?**

Here is an interesting but very misleading article- content

"Although we tried hard to avoid anthropomorphism when describing the chimpanzees' behavior, it was difficult not to see some striking parallels between how they reacted to the dying individual and how humans react when faced with the peaceful death of a close relative or companion," James Anderson, a psychologist at the University of Stirling in Scotland and lead author of the Pansy study, said in an e-mail. "It is often stated that humans are unique in being aware of death, but our observations . . . indicate that this position is open to question." The study of the mothers hanging on to their dead babies suggests that "a period of continued contact after the death of an infant may be important for a mother chimpanzee to adjust psychologically to her loss." Sounds pretty human."

Animals certainly do share similarities with Humans. We are animals, but animals are not humans or persons. They are not created in the Image of God, they are not His Children. They do not and can not have a personal, spiritual relationship with God and when they die they do not go to Heaven to love, serve and enjoy the Lord for Eternity. That is not what they enter into when they die. Death has a totally different meaning for animals than it has for people, especially Christians! Let us discern and maintain the difference.

This article does not contradict what I have written, but lends support to people who do.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:26

Saturday, March 20, 2010

## **CELTIC CHRISTIANITY**

Every year I say, in the name of historical accuracy, "Saint Patrick" was neither Roman Catholic nor Irish. Here is a very good list of resources about Patrick, but especially about Celtic Christianity  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1998/issue60>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:23

Friday, February 26. 2010

## **WHAT IS GOOD ART?**

I have not posted a lot on this Blog recently, as I have been busy (among other things) researching a paper on Aesthetics (a Biblical Philosophy of Art) that I plan to put on my website soon. The article below was in the Boston Globe this week. It illustrates what is not "Good Art" by Biblical Standards. Standards for good art include Philippians 4:8 "whatever [Art] is true, whatever [Art] is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise- [this is good Art]" [articles/2010/02/25/whitney\\_show\\_sings\\_an\\_anthem\\_to\\_the\\_awful/](http://www.calvinfox.com/articles/2010/02/25/whitney_show_sings_an_anthem_to_the_awful/)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:30

Wednesday, December 9, 2009

## **ENVIRONMENTALISM vs CONSERVATIONISM**

There is a great difference between Environmentalism and Conservationism. Simply put, Conservationism views Nature as a resource for the benefit of human beings. It is to be conserved and managed so that it will be around for ages to meet human needs. This is an anthropocentric viewpoint.

Environmentalism sees Nature as a living complex, a web, of biological and physical relationships which is good in itself. It has intrinsic value in itself apart from any human use and should be left alone by humans other than to protect it for its own sake and allowed to remain "natural" as much as possible. This is a bio- or eco-centric view. It has strong undercurrents of New Age and neo-pagan concepts about the earth, spiritualizing and personalizing all of nature, placing it on the same level of importance and value as human life. It should be needless to say, Conservationism is far more Biblical than Environmentalism. You should be able to see which of these perspectives is the most compatible with the thinking and actions of the most vocal advocates of the proposed changes dealing with Global Warming. I am writing a paper for my website on this subject. A good resource is *Where Garden meets Wilderness* by Calvin Beisner

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:05

Tuesday, November 3, 2009

### **NEW ARTICLE ABOUT REFORMED THEOLOGY ON WEBSITE**

Today I posted a new Essay on my website which introduces the major tenets of Reformed Theology. [HERE](#)  
Originally Martin Luther called the Church that began (16th Century) with his followers "The Evangelical Church" because it was grounded in the "Evangel" (Gospel). That was the original use of the name "evangelical" and for years it referred to Protestants or the followers of the Protestant Reformers. The name mostly fell out of use and resurfaced in the 18th Century and historically took on more of the meaning familiar to us: people who preached the Gospel and did personal and public evangelism with the object of having sinners come to Christ and having a conversion experience of being saved or born again. There are many varieties of "Evangelical" today but the name in America no longer means simply Protestant or Reformed. A good resource to learn more is [HERE](#)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:59

Saturday, October 31, 2009

## **THE SACRAMENTS**

I just posted a new article on my website [HERE](#)  
It is titled- The Sacraments: Biblical, Reformed and Anglican

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 08:21

## **TODAY IS "REFORMATION DAY"- observed tomorrow**

Tomorrow many churches commemorate the work of the 16th Century Reformers, beginning with Martin Luther and the next generation which included John Calvin and, in England, men like Thomas Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley and Jewel. If you consider yourself to be an Evangelical, these men should be your heroes. They gave you your Protestant Heritage. "Protestant" and "Evangelical" were the same 400 years ago and most of the years since- until our day. Today the lines are blurred. In fact, today's young Evangelicals do not care to call themselves Protestants and what they mean by "evangelical" is very different than what was meant by the first Protestants. The secular world recognizes the major influence the early Protestant Reformers had on politics, economics and education. They started a revolution that changed the course of world history. But we obviously honor these men most for their Theology. Many of them suffered and died for it. They are particularly known for the "Five Solas". "Sola" is Latin for "alone". Their revolutionary Theology was that Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone according to Scripture alone. These Solas together are the essential Protestant or Evangelical Faith. We rightly honor this Heritage today, but the best way to do that is to keep it alive.  
[HERE](#) is why Oct 31, is Reformation Day

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 06:57

Friday, October 2, 2009

## **ARDI, LUCY WERE NOT HUMAN BEINGS**

The concept of "person" is one of the most important and is widely debated, even debunked. The crucial debate about the Creation account in Gen 1 and 2 is not the definition of "day" (literal 24 hour or some other period of time or simply poetic symbol?) but the definition of "Man". "In the beginning...God created...Man. It is clear from the text that Man is a living being like many other living beings created after all other living beings were. An evolutionist could agree with that statement. They may not agree with "God" or "God created" but those words are essential to understanding "what Man is. What is especially crucial to our understanding of Man is that [he] is the Image of the God who created [him]. This "Image" is what makes Man a Human and a Person. If we do not know or agree with that belief, then we can not correctly define or understand Man or Human or Person. At best, we will have a very different definition of Man and "Human" and that is what makes statements such as the following from today's Washington Post really disturb me. Washington Post Headline: 'Ardi' May Rewrite the Story of Humans HERE "Ardi" is the nickname given to a shattered skeleton that an international team of scientists painstakingly excavated from the Ethiopian desert, analyzed over the course of 15 years, and declared Thursday to be a major breakthrough in the study of human origins. Ardi lived more than a million years before "Lucy," a much-celebrated, 3.2 million-year-old fossil of an early human progenitor found just 45 miles away." The Globe writer dogmatically claims, "The origin of the human species via evolution from earlier primates is beyond scientific dispute". Like many other stories, whenever you read the words, "beyond scientific dispute" be very, very skeptical. That applies to another article in today's paper about Global Warming. There are many legitimate, credentialed Scientists who dispute Darwinism and question theories of Natural Evolution (and Global Warming theories) on scientific grounds. I dispute them on Biblical grounds, which I must do as an Evangelical Christian (a Christian who accepts the Bible as the inspired and inerrant verbal revelation of God and His work and this the ultimate authority in such matters as who Man is and where he came from) According to Genesis 1 and 2, human beings are persons in the same sense that God is a person. They are self conscious change agents who can think abstractly and rationally, communicate rationally with verbal propositions, create intelligently and intentionally with purpose, make moral decisions and intentionally chose behavior accordingly, have interpersonal, intentional covenantal relationships with each other and, most significantly, with the Person who is their Creator. They see their lives as defined by this latter relationship and consciously live them in that relationship, now and with Eternity in mind. One final fact is relevant to this topic. Human beings did not evolve over time. God has always been God. He did not become God. Likewise, Jesus has always been God and did not become God during his life on earth. When He was born, He was already God. Likewise, Man has always been Man, He has been the Image of His Creator from the beginning of his existence. Hence, "The origin of the human species via evolution from earlier primates" is impossible. No one denies that we are part animal and share much in common with other animals. It makes no difference to me that there are some similarities between Man as a primate and other primates. The latter were deliberately created by God at a moment in time and were fully human then and there. (I am open to the possibility that perhaps Adam and Eve were possibly Cro Magnon, who are considered to be the earliest Homo Sapiens from the late Paleolithic Period, from about 40,000 to 10,000 years ago.) But "Ardi" and "Lucy" were not human beings and did not become human beings over time and therefore I do not buy what was written in today's Globe- "Field work over the past century has shown that the human line originated in Africa, and the fossil findings have been bolstered by laboratory analysis of the genetic codes of humans, chimpanzees and other primates. The fine details of human origin, however, become sketchier, and more subject to interpretation and debate, as the researchers dig deeper into the past and the fossils become scarcer. The human line of primates could have splintered, with some species turning into genetic dead ends. Lucy's line of primates could have diverged from Ardi's line long before Ardi lived. Even so, White said he believes that his team has documented an evolutionary sequence that shows, at the genus level, where people came from. Ardipithecus, then Australopithecus, then Homo"

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:05

Friday, September 18, 2009

## **GOD THINKS LIKE A "MODERNIST"**

A friend who identifies himself as a postmodernist told me I am a modernist. Years ago, in church circles, "modernist" meant "liberal". Today it means believing in a rational, systematic, logical approach to life and its problems. I agreed with my friend, yes, I still believe in being rational (but not Rationalism, which is different). Actually, I think that even people who like to consider themselves post-modern are still very much "modernist" in their approach to most things. However, many folks are not very clear as to the rules that are involved with rational discourse and why they are important. Many Evangelicals do not seem to realize that believing in God requires us to be logical. Here is why.

These are quotes from my Essay on Basic Logic on my Website

Logical thinking or rational discourse presupposes and requires certain Rule or Laws of Thought:

Identity (A is A)

Contradiction (A can not be Not A at the same time and place)

Excluded Middle (A or Not A)

What is the justification of these Rules of Logic? They are considered self-evident. Their proof is pragmatic: they work. However, these Laws have a much better foundation: they are derived from the way God actually thinks. He is not obeying the Laws, they are derived from Him. God is Personal. He has a Mind. He thinks and His thoughts are rational. How God thinks, speaks and acts may be described by the 3 Laws of (Aristotelian) Logic. Therefore, these Laws are derived from and justified by, the very Nature of God.

Read the entire Essay [HERE](#)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:57

Wednesday, September 2, 2009

## **TED KENNEDY AND REDEMPTION**

Lot of discussion about Sen. Kennedy's personal letter to the Pope. [HERE](#)

It is fair to wonder if at least part of Ted Kennedy's motivation behind his support and legislation for popular "Social Justice" causes and the request for the Pope's blessing and prayers was personal Redemption for his many admitted "short comings." Perhaps his conscience seriously troubled him and he was trying to earn forgiveness from both God and others for his sins by "doing good" (as he saw it) on a massive scale. If this is so, he was doing nothing that millions of others have attempted to do. And like them, he would not succeed. A Sinner, rich and powerful or poor and powerless, can not atone for his sins no matter how much he tries.

The good news is that God in Christ has done it for us. The death of Christ (His Blood) paid the price of Atonement sufficient for all sin and sinners. The motive for any good works is gratitude for that grace. It must never be an attempt to deserve it. I wonder if Ted Kennedy ever heard or believed that? If he didn't, he is eternally lost, even with the Papal Blessing he asked for and after that magnificent Funeral.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:34

Saturday, May 9, 2009

## **NEUROLOGICAL BASIS OF RELIGION?**

"How God Changes Your Brain" has many revelations -- and a few limitations. In a practical, how-to tone, it predicts "an epiphany that can improve the inner quality of your life. For most Americans, that is what spirituality is about." But if this is what spirituality is all about, it isn't about very much. Mature faith sometimes involves self-sacrifice, not self-actualization; anguish, not comfort. If the primary goal of religion is escape or contentment, there are other, even more practical methods to consider. "I didn't go to religion to make me happy," said C.S. Lewis, "I always knew a bottle of port would do that." The same could be said of psychedelic drugs, which can mimic spiritual ecstasy."- Michael Gerson

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/14/AR2009041401879.html>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:06

Thursday, April 2, 2009

## **FINAL SHACK DISCUSSION GROUP**

On Mar 6, I posted a review of *The Shack* on this Blog. I had read critiques of the book before reading it and writing my own. Last night, we finished the group discussion of the book at our church. My view has not changed. I have posted these updates under the categories of "Christian Living" and "Theological Issues". The book deals with both. The greatest appeal of the book seems to be with the help it gives for the "Living" and the difficulties with the book remain "theological".

I found the discussion very interesting and it was a great way of learning more about folks we worship with each week. The sharing was personal, practical and helpful. It was positive. The theological discussions stirred a lot of questions and interest in the Trinity, the Nature of God, Forgiveness, Free-will, etc. We discussed related Scripture passages at each table, shared and prayed together. Each evening began with a Soup and Bread Lenten meal. It was a worthwhile series. We are glad we participated.

That said, all the theological issues I wrote about on March 6 remain unresolved. Nothing discernible has changed about that. The need for theological and Biblical education remains, perhaps now there will be more interest in pursuing them.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 08:19

Thursday, March 19, 2009

## **LEARN MORE ABOUT GOD HERE**

Part 1 of this Essay about the attributes of God, comes out of a larger study and concern I have about Open Theism, as well as the changes I see in Theology among advocates of the Emergent and Missional church movements, which in turn are rooted in, or greatly influenced by, Post Modernism. I like the challenge and admit I have had to rethink some basic convictions I have held.

Read Parts 1 and 2 of this Essay about the attributes of God on my website [HERE](#)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 08:23

## **THE SHACK DISCUSSION GROUP THIS WEEK**

Last night the discussion of The Shack continued at our church. We sit around round tables and after a brief introduction by the Pastor, we discuss the assigned chapters, using a discussion guide the Pastor provides each week. My wife and I have intentionally sat with different people each week and have been impressed with the participation. The best part of this series is getting to know people better. The book challenges preconceptions and provokes a lot of sharing. That is all to the good. What is not good is that, once raised, there is no study to find answers to the questions. Last night the focus was on the Trinity. It could be this, it could be that. How do we know what it is? Do we just share off the top of our heads? There is no recourse to Scripture, let alone any time to study it. That is a shame, because most every one seems primed for such study. It is a good teaching and learning moment lost. The hope would be that Bible Study classes will be offered soon as followup.

The most depressing moments were those in which some people were disparaging of others who have criticized the Shack for its Theology. There is a tendency for those who like, approve and take seriously the book's Theology, and there is a lot of that in the book, to answer would-be critics by saying, "Hey, lighten up, it just fiction". Yes, the plot or story line is fiction, but that fiction is used by the author to teach his point of view about, eg- the Trinity. And in my view, what the author teaches about the Trinity, along with many other topics, is definitely not Scriptural.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 07:45

Tuesday, March 17, 2009

## **INTRODUCTION TO BASIC LOGIC**

Logical thinking or rational discourse presupposes and requires certain Rule or Laws of Thought:

Identity (A is A)

Contradiction (A can not be Not A at the same time and place)

Excluded Middle (A or Not A)

What is the justification of these Rules of Logic? They are considered self-evident. Their proof is pragmatic: they work. However, these Laws have a much better foundation: they are derived from the way God actually thinks. He is not obeying the Laws, they are derived from Him. **READ THE ENTIRE ESSAY HERE**

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:08

Monday, March 16, 2009

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF MATH**

This is an essay introducing the Philosophy of Mathematics. It is not about Math itself or doing Math, which I confess I am not well versed. Conversely, I find few students of math who are well versed in the Philosophy behind their subject. They just do the math! But, if Christians are to do Math, thinking as a Christian, understanding what they do from a Biblical Perspective, knowledge of the philosophy (or assumptions or faith) that under-girds and shapes "doing math" is essential. We are challenged to see Christ and His Word as Sovereign over every academic subject. Many insist that academics may (and should) be done autonomously and impartially. Fact is, they are never done apart from faith statements, assumptions and biases of some kind. Nothing is neutral and completely objective. We believe the beginning of all knowledge is the fear of the Lord. I admit that to be my presupposition as I approach every Subject. True truth can be known only when a subject is studied in relation to God and what He has revealed about reality, this includes Mathematics. This essay will begin to study Math in light of the Bible and Christian Theology.

**READ THE ENTIRE ESSAY [HERE](#)**

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:10

Saturday, March 7, 2009

## **WHERE HAVE YOU READ SOMETHING LIKE THIS RECENTLY?**

Relocation of Christ to the Community Perhaps the more radical solution for feminist Christological reconstruction is found in a complete definition of what "Christ" is supposed to be. Some feminists are willing to dislocate Christianity from the historical person Jesus Christ completely. Rita Nakashima Brock asserts that "Jesus Christ need not be the authoritative center of a feminist Christian faith."<sup>70</sup> Brock relocates Christ in the community of which Jesus is one historical part, such that it is the community, not Jesus that is the locus of redemption.<sup>71</sup> Brock is clear that Jesus has been eclipsed by "Christa/Community":

The feminist Christian commitment is not to a savior who redeems us by bringing God to us. Our commitment is to love ourselves and others into wholeness. Our commitment is to a divine presence with us here and now, a presence that works through the mystery of our deepest selves and our relationships, constantly healing us and nudging us toward a wholeness of existence we only fitfully know. That healed wholeness is not Christ; it is ourselves.<sup>72</sup> When feminists remove the exclusive, perfect Godman Jesus Christ from the center of Christology, women may reclaim themselves and, then, reclaim the historical Jesus. Brock states, "We may reclaim Jesus as a remarkable man for his time. De-divinizing him allows us to appreciate his remarkability without his humanity or theology being the measuring rod for our existence."<sup>73</sup> Thus, feminists contend, Jesus' historical identity is not significant for Christology. Jesus becomes irrelevant for Christology, save the prophetic message that he embodied. In this way, his particulars, especially maleness, "[do] not constitute the essence of Christ, but, in the Spirit, redeemed and redeeming humanity does,"<sup>74</sup> since the community of the baptized now embodies the same message. Feminists conclude, then, that Christ is quite accurately portrayed as black, old, Gentile, female, Asian or Polish, etc., or whatever the demographic of the community exhibits.<sup>75</sup> Ruether concurs, "Christ, as redemptive person and Word of God, is not to be encapsulated 'once-for-all' in the historical Jesus. The Christian community continues Christ's identity. As vine and branches Christic personhood continues in our sisters and brothers."<sup>76</sup> Closely aligned with this Christological reconstruction is the argument that Jesus' significance is tied to his iconoclastic prophetism. By prioritizing the message and not the gender of Jesus, Christians become a "redemptive community not by passively receiving a redemption 'won' by Christ alone, but rather by collectively embodying this path of liberation in a way that transforms people and social systems," men and women alike.<sup>77</sup> Feminists resist separating this ongoing redemptive work from the Christian community. In as much as the community embodies the message of Jesus, then redemption is carried on and communicated through them. So, "Christ can take on the face of every person and group and their diverse liberation struggles. We must be able to encounter Christ as black, as Asian, as Aboriginal, as women. The coming Christ, then, the uncompleted future of redemption, is not the historical Jesus returned, but rather the fullness of all this human diversity gathered together in redemptive community."<sup>78</sup>

This is an excerpt from an article about radical Feminist Theology. That can be found [here](#)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:17

Friday, March 6, 2009

## **THE SHACK- MY REVIEW**

As in many other congregations, folks in our church began a group discussion this week of the book, *The Shack*, by Paul Young. This book is the "hot" item these days in Christian circles everywhere, with over 6 million in print in 30 languages. It has been on the top of the NYTimes best-seller list for more than 36 weeks. What follows is my review- I attended the meeting to be in on the Introduction and get a sense of how it might go. It would be a good opportunity to get to know folks better than on Sunday mornings or in committee meetings. As people respond to the story, they obviously will be sharing much about themselves. The meeting was enjoyable on the fellowship level.

Because this book has been criticized on doctrinal grounds, we were reminded at the beginning of our meeting that the book is just fiction. "Not a Creed, but a conversation starter". If it is "just fiction" why are we reading it for Lent? Fiction, like any work of art, teaches. People learn from fiction, from stories. Is what they learn valuable and worthwhile? Is it life affirming or destructive? Does it reflect a Biblical world-view? What do we learn about God, ourselves and the world from the fiction? *The Shack* is not "just fiction"! If we are learning about God, ourselves and the world, we are coming to believe things. That is creedal ("credo" means "I believe") Are these beliefs derived from the fiction true? Do they correspond with what the Bible teaches us to believe? Many who had read the book in advance testified about the impact it had on them. Through reading this fiction, they shared, "I came to understand...I realized...I now believe..." This book is more than a conversation starter! And when our beliefs are based on our reaction to fiction, rather than the Bible we are on very unstable, shaky ground. These issues were not discussed, let alone broached last night. It was, of course, only the first meeting, the Introduction. I am hoping our Pastor will guide the 35 people in the group through the theological shoals skillfully. Reading and discussing this book could be a wonderful teaching/learning opportunity for everyone involved if done right. The Pastor mentioned that one of the most criticized elements in the book is that God the Father is portrayed as a woman at the beginning and for most of the story. She is presented as a stereo-typical "Aunt Jemima" (Other characters portray God the Son and God the Spirit) He assured us that this should not be an issue. The gender is not relevant. Well, why did the author decide to portray God this way rather than as a man? What informed his deliberate decision to do this. Should the readers know and should they care? Some said it made no difference to them. What is important was the character of the character. I had not read the book before the discussion. Now that I have read it, I learned that God assumes the image of a large Black Woman (named Papa) because the main character has a serious problem relating to his human father. Unlike his father, "Papa" communicates that God is non-judgmental, wise, warm, loving, accepting, even fun to be with. That, folks at the discussion said, is what counts. When the main character reconciles with his natural father, God begins to appear to him as a Man, rather than as a Woman. Both the Man and the Woman figures are devices adopted by God to communicate who God is as [He] deems most appropriate for the people in the story at the time. Who God truly is, apart from these figures, is not explained, but apparently He is neither Man nor Woman. Well, is this how the Bible portrays God the Father? That is what counts! This is not a matter of indifference or convenience. God has revealed Himself in Scripture as masculine (not male!) This is important! Undoubtedly, God the Father can "speak" to people through a woman, but that is not to say that God is a woman. By revealing Himself as a "person", we know what a "person" is. That is absolutely important to know. That is a Truth upon which all kinds of human behavior and decisions are based and judged. Likewise, by revealing Himself as a "him", God makes known to the world what it is to be "masculine", a "man", as well as a "father". God is eternally a "man" and "father". In these days of unisex clothing and increasing confusion over gender and gender roles, this inscripturated revelation is essential. This is why, gender specific language in the Bible must not be replaced by gender neutral language (unless warranted by the original text to the best of our knowledge). Understandably, none of this was discussed this week, but the issues were raised by this book. When will the participants study the Topic? Having now read the book, I have made a list of the heavy theological topics that are discussed in it that demand to be explored. The format and schedule make it impossible to really "dig in" and do justice to the topics that the Writer is fronting through his Fiction. The book may be "just fiction" but these topics are real. If they are not properly addressed, people may well go away from the weekly discussion with very mistaken concepts instead of what God has revealed in His Word. . It is easy to see why the book is so popular. It speaks to current concerns of millions of people. Evil, suffering of "innocent" people, especially children; healing, bereavement, especially the loss of a child; child abuse, guilt, fear, anger, honesty, relationships; death, life after death; the nature and attributes of God, the Trinity, Creation, the Death of Christ Redemption, Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Judgement, Heaven, Spirituality, organized Religion, the Law of God, Grace. All these serious personal, theological and philosophical topics are "taught about" in this work of Fiction. It is well-written for the most part and so it really touches people deeply and greatly effects them, according to the accounts of many people. If we are being pragmatic and judging the book by its positive effect on readers, this is a very good book- a life changing book for many. What the writer does teach (let's drop the "just fiction" charade) reflects both the beliefs of many in the "Emergent Church" and those of perhaps (it seems to me) the majority of today's Evangelicals. Their focus is on love and relationships above all else. These are their most important values. The

writer has a real problem with organized Religion, Rules and Legalism, Doctrine, even Seminaries. They are all oppressive and repressive, causing people to live in fear and guilt [the writer has a real aversion to any kind of authoritarianism and values equality and egalitarianism. He sees the Trinity as a Model for this.] He believes God is all about freedom and living without fear. God is in the present and is dynamic. Life with God will be creative, spontaneous, chaotic and messy. All that is what it means to be free. People have true free-will, although they must live with their choices; but that is ok, God is always there to help no matter what the choices and consequences may be. He makes everything turn out right, no matter what. Our primary problem as human beings is that we simply do not trust God. Hopefully, they will come to realize God is open and available to them wherever they are, what ever they have gone through, what ever their secrets and pain may be. [Yes, there are suggestions of Open Theism in this book] Hopefully, all people will chose to (re-) turn to God and live everyday trusting Him. He wants to fill them and their lives with Himself and His love. Experiencing that is real living. There is some truth, wisdom and practical counsel in what the book teaches, but it does not teach the classic, historic Doctrines of either the Catholic or Reformed churches. God, the Trinity, Salvation, Ecclesiology, Eschatology and the Kingdom. In my judgment, it does not teach them Scripturally and the major reason for that is the book does not have a high view of Scripture itself. According to the writer and key characters, God wants to speak directly to people (all people) within their hearts and we (all people) are to learn to listen and recognize His voice there. Scripture is definitely not authoritative. Confirmation of what I am saying is especially obvious with the book's apparent Universalism (Christ died for the redemption of everyone. Everyone has been redeemed but they just don't know it yet- there is no Hell) When asked if all roads lead to God, God says, in effect, "No, most don't lead anywhere. But I walk on every road people may chose and I meet people there." See p 184 Clearly, these are not Scriptural views! According to this book, the knowledge of God is not given through inscripturated Revelation. It is first and foremost experiential and subjective, judged empirically by its consequences. Life with God is interior, spiritual and private. God is not interested in, and does not lay down rules or norms or duties to keep or live by. Life with God has nothing to do with economics, government or any kind of social activism (i.e.- with the world). Christian living has nothing to do with the subjects I study and write about on my website! It is spiritual and within the heart and is all and only about loving and personal relationships. The tragic part of all this is that the writer and his main character apparently grew up and out of what seem to have been legalistic, fundamentalist Churches. They not only got poor treatment there, they were not taught well because what they say those churches believed is not Scriptural (or true to what I was taught in such a church myself and I was ordained in one) The writer and main character imply all such churches are narrow-minded and judgmental and control their members with fear and the threat of damnation, According to the author and main character, such churches apparently knew nothing of God's grace or salvation by anything other than works. This book seems to have grown out of such an environment. Many of the Leaders in the Emergent Movement seem to have been greatly influenced by the same type of church background.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:50

Tuesday, March 3, 2009

## **UNDERSTANDING THE DARK SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE**

A Biblical understanding of the relationship between God and Human Beings requires an understanding and acceptance of the "Antithesis". Yet it is omitted or unknown by most evangelicals today, including those claiming to be Calvinists who believe the Doctrine of Total Depravity is true. The malleability of human nature and the confidence that it can be shaped, especially by public school education, to produce mature, productive citizens with moral character is a bedrock article of faith among Americans, including evangelicals. Sure some people do terrible things, but most people are thought to be basically good, have free will and will chose to do good unless they are pressured or forced by circumstances not to. American Evangelicals tend, in practice, to accept this liberal, progressive view of human nature. One of the most important values we share in our society is the importance of the individual, especially the individual's freedom of conscience and choice. However, today's Western, American understanding of the "Individual" is neither Scriptural nor Reformed. Every of us has infinite worth, not because of our potential, what we may do in life or may contribute to Society, but because of what we are as human beings. That is an extremely important concept with many consequences. We all share the same human nature and that nature images certain attributes of God. You can read the entire Essay on my website

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:41

Wednesday, February 25, 2009

## **THE SHACK**

One of the most popular "Christian" books ever is "The Shack". Many churches are using it for discussion groups during Lent. Evangelical Pastors I know think it is wonderful and highly recommend it. Reviewers are ecstatic in their praise. Many claim the book has radically changed their lives for the better. However, it is full of serious unscriptural teaching and should be read, if at all, with a prayer for spiritual discernment.

Many who wouldn't recognize the beliefs and values of the so-called Emergent Church will find them in the pages of this book. Solid believers will begin their reviews saying, "I know there are yellow flags and I have serious problems with the doctrine in the book", but go on to say, "nevertheless, I love the book and found it so freeing." That is the word used often. In the book, as in the Emergent Church literature, relationships trump doctrine. What is most important is love, acceptance, affirmation, forgiveness and reconciliation. They find all of that in this book and that is what really matters to those who love the book, even if it is unsound in its teaching about God, the Trinity, Salvation and the Scripture. (What does that say about people in general and contemporary evangelicals in particular?) Here is an excellent, extensive review of the book that should serve as a guide if you are spending time in the Shack.

[http://www.challies.com/media/The\\_Shack.pdf](http://www.challies.com/media/The_Shack.pdf)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:40

Friday, February 20, 2009

## **AN IMPORTANT NEW ESSAY Re EMERGENT CHURCH**

I have just posted a new extensive Essay on my website (Reformedliving.org- click on the link in the column at the right). It is entitled, Reaching the Emergent Generation.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:40

Tuesday, December 16, 2008

### **RANDOM ROLL OF THE DICE?**

I have just added new Essays to my <http://www.reformedliving.org/> website. They continue the series answering "Who is Jesus?". I hear "Jesus is the main thing." "It is all about Jesus." "We just want to follow Jesus." But no one explains who Jesus is. They assume everyone knows who he is and that we all mean the same person when we invoke his name. Well, not really! For many, I think Jesus is just an idea or an ideal. For most, Jesus is whatever and whomever they want him to be and these days that is often a compassionate Servant who went about peacefully helping and healing the marginalized. My series explains how Jesus has been perceived through the centuries by Christians and the world. The perception has changed from generation to generation. Who is the real Jesus? The new Essays explain what it means to call Jesus the Word of God and, the 4th and 5th Century favorite- the Cosmic Christ (That name is very relevant to a Philosophy of Science and is the answer to those who believe that life is absurd and the Universe a random crap shoot)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:55

Monday, October 6, 2008

## **EMERGING CHURCH OR SINKING CHURCH**

As I write this there are warnings on the TV telling people here that Hurricane Hana is on its way and they should prepare for it. Last week, the same thing happened for Hurricane Gustav for the folks on the Gulf Coast. Soon there will be warnings of danger and destruction posted in Florida for Hurricane Ike. The current issue of CT (Sept 2008) has two articles that should be considered a warning to conservative Evangelicals about the coming of Hurricane Brian and the Emerging Movement that is making its inroads among a growing segment of younger Christians. The "more progressive wing" of the Emerging Movement has become known as "Emergent Village" and its main spokesmen and leaders are Brian McLaren, Tony Jones and Doug Pagitt. I have not read any of their books, but I have read articles they and others Emergents have posted on the Emergent Village website of the same name and on the many related websites. McLaren is frequently interviewed in many magazines and radio programs and there are videos with him speaking, as well as articles like these in CT. I have also read a number of books by Theologians whom I trust to be fair and very knowledgeable on the subject. What follows here is my personal understanding of key issues. The Emergent and Emerging Leaders as such are not my focus. I am not doing a book review or critiquing individuals. My concern is with the concepts and ideas of the Emergent/Emerging Movement as I see them and these are evident everywhere. For the rest of this Essay please find it on my website on the TheologiCAL section menu <http://www.reformedliving.org/index>.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 08:12

Friday, September 19, 2008

## **JAZZ AND THEOLOGY**

I love to sing old Hymns in Worship. When it comes to instrumental music to relax with, I enjoy certain kinds of Jazz (as well as certain kinds of Classical Music). Here is a very interesting essay about Jazz and Theology. It is written by a conservative Evangelical professor of theology who compares his theory with another theory on the subject by James I Packer, well-known Reformed Theologian, who also enjoys Jazz (as did another one of my favorite Reformed Scholars, Hans Rookmaaker).<http://www.tesm.edu/sh/2008-4/jazz>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 08:03

Wednesday, September 3, 2008

## **ATTRIBUTES OF GOD, continued**

Follow-up on the study of the Attributes of GodThe short study I posted [below] two days ago, about the attributes of God, comes out of a larger study and concern I have about Open Theism, as well as the changes I see in Theology among advocates of the Emergent and Missional church movements, which in turn are rooted in, or greatly influenced by, Post Modernism. I like the challenge and admit I have had to rethink some basic convictions I have held. This is good. The study itself leads to questions about God and Evil, the Trinity and Christology. Today's Essay (post) is a work in progress, as I think out loud about these things. The prior study is the jump off point and I build on it. This, of course is not final or definitive. We are, after all, dealing with mysteries with seeming paradoxes or contradictions and things that don't make sense logically. God is a spirit (non-corporeal) Being, a self-conscious, self-determining, free and self sufficient, immutable Person. He is essentially unlimited or infinite in relation to time and space. In relation to the created natural world, He is altogether Other, separate, holy or transcendent. We are made in His Image. Exactly how do we image such a Person?

It follows from the above, that we, too, must be essentially spirit Beings, but we are not non-corporeal. We have bodies. We are "of the earth" and mortal. [Long ago, I exchanged the tripartite (spirit, soul and body) view of Man for the view of Man as a unity of soul and body, inseparable now and in eternity. I am revisiting that concept]. We are self-conscious, self-determining and free Persons We are not immutable or self sufficient. We are in no way self-sufficient. We are limited and subject to contingencies of time and space. And we are subject to change and being changed!In relation to the created natural world, we are both holy or transcendent and very much, simultaneously, earth bound in the here and now. Unlike God, we have a "sin nature". Like God, we are free to make choices determined by our character or nature, but nonbelievers will always chose according to their sin nature. (Regeneration makes it possible for Believers to chose according to their new nature in Christ.) We actually hate our Maker and resist Him in our lives and refuse to serve Him, even though He is our maker and we share His Image. This sin nature is not a part of our personhood. It is not essential to who we are as the Image of God. It is a "disease" or intruder, not in us by creation and must be removed. We can not deny our spirit nature. Many seek to repress it, but all of us, inconsistently, but continually and unsuccessfully, seek to express or fulfill it in ways other than in God, as He intended.While God exists "apart from" or 'above' or 'outside' of the natural world, the Transcendent God is also always and everywhere present "in" it. (We can not describe God or His work without using spatial, and other, metaphors, as inadequate as they are.) God's presence in the world is what we call the Spirit of God or the "Holy Spirit". Although the Spirit is God, God is "greater than" the Spirit. The Spirit is the immanence of the transcendent God. He fills everything, everywhere. We all live and move and have our being in Him. In fact, we draw our very breath from Him. The Spirit works in and through material or physical agents and instruments (so-called "secondary causes") to accomplish God's work. He is not the same as His agents. They are not to be identified with Him, simply used by Him to accomplish God's purposes in the world and history. It can be said that these instruments or agents manifest God or make Him visible or reveal Him. This is especially true of the natural, created World and its elements. Likewise, it can be said that, while God is everywhere at all times, these manifestations of Him may be where His presence is especially found or experienced at any particular time or place. This includes visions, theophanies, appearances in clouds and fire, especially in regard to the Tabernacles and Temples, and miracles. The Spirit of God is particularly found in the hearts and lives of Believers everywhere. He "dwells" in them, although He does not literally need or have a "House". Before Pentecost, the Spirit "came upon" Believers, worked wonders and departed. After Pentecost, He came to abide in the Church permanently. But, God can not be confined or limited to the Church. Again, He is everywhere at all time, but because members of the Church are people of faith, God is able to particularly "fill" them with His love and peace and work through them in the world. God is manifested most of all in the Church when she is gathered for worship. He meets with the Faithful (manifests Himself to them) in their corporate praise of Him and through His Word and Sacraments when these are being received by them.What about Jesus on earth and, now, in "Heaven"?Scripture teaches that Jesus on earth was fully God and fully Man and that all the attributes of God apply to Jesus. Again, in review, God is a spirit (non-corporeal) Being, a self-conscious, self-determining, free and self sufficient, immutable Person. He is essentially unlimited or infinite in relation to time and space. In relation to the created natural world, He is altogether Other, separate, holy or transcendent. However, all the attributes of Man (as Man, the Image of God, not Man as sinner) must also apply simultaneously to Jesus. How can that be explained? Like all people, Jesus was essentially a spirit Being, but not non-corporeal. He had a body. He was a self-conscious, self-determining and free Person, but he was not immutable or self sufficient. He was born and he died. He had to eat and sleep. He had, and depended on, family and friends. He was opposed and murdered by enemies. He was limited by and subject to contingencies of time and space. He did not have omniscience or omnipotence. How could all of this be, while he had all the attributes of God at the same time?

The answer to that-He voluntarily limited himself in the use of those attributes that prevented him from acting as a normal man, especially his attributes of omniscience and omnipotence. In relation to the created natural world, Jesus, as every man, was both holy or transcendent and very much, simultaneously, earth bound in the here and now. However, not having the defect that humans have, a sin nature, Jesus was not a sinner. He did not hate our Maker and resist Him and refuse to serve Him. He did not deny his spirit nature and did commune with God. Somehow, the infinite, non-corporeal transcendent God who is immanent and fully present everywhere at all times throughout the time-space world, also became God both limited and corporeal (incarnated) in the man, Jesus. The difference between Jesus and all other humans was not qualitative. He was simultaneously both fully God and fully Man. Being fully Man as created, he was not fully Sinner. He was the perfect Man (the New Adam) and absolutely unique! How this is possible is unknown. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is a mystery clearly taught in Scripture and acceptable by faith alone and not logic. God was not confined to the body of Jesus during the incarnation. Jesus prayed to God as His Father "in Heaven". He came "down from Heaven" to do his Father's will, not his own. He would "ascend to Heaven" where His Father was. In contrast, God the Spirit, is fully everywhere at all times, unlimited and undivided. While Jesus was fully God, God was not fully Jesus. God included Jesus, but God was more than, other than, Jesus (language and metaphors are totally inadequate here).When Jesus ascended into "Heaven" after His resurrection, He remained fully God and fully Man. He re-entered the realm of the Eternal from which He had come. However, all his self-imposed limitations were laid aside. In Heaven, He is a spirit (non-corporeal) Being, a self-conscious, self-determining, free and self sufficient, immutable Person. His physical body remains, but it has been transformed or glorified. He is once again essentially unlimited or infinite in relation to time and space. His omniscience and omnipotence have been fully restored. In relation to the created natural world, He is altogether Other, separate, holy or transcendent. (I am open to the idea of that we are talking here about entering other dimensions.)Concurrently, the Holy Spirit remains in the world as the immanence of God. As God, the ascended Christ has all the attributes of Man as he was at Creation. He is the New Adam, the perfect Image of God. God is still "greater than" than Christ. But, He does not become absorbed back into God. He remains, at the Father's side, in the role of Head of the Church, the New Humanity. Together, the Risen Christ and His Church shall one day inhabit and enjoy together the New Heavens and the New Earth. (Again, a real heaven and earth, but transformed or redeemed- maybe in another dimension.) Neither the present earth nor Humanity on earth are His Body. He is Sovereign over the earth and Humanity, but He is not the Lord and Savior of them, as He is of the Church. The Risen Christ remains in communion with all his faithful People, those in Heaven now with Him, as well as those still one earth. The Church, His Body, lives by virtue of its union with its Head. His resurrection life flows into it and nurtures it, especially through His Word and Sacraments. In the latter, Christ is manifest to the Faithful on earth, while His real and true Presence is in Heaven. He reigns over all from Heaven until He comes again. The Incarnation was not simply to reveal God more clearly than He had already been revealed in Creation and in the works of His Hands or in His acts in the History of Israel. The Incarnation was not to add to the revelation God had already given of Himself in His many Names and Titles declared in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Incarnation was not to reveal the personal characteristics and attributes already learned and experienced by innumerable Old Testament Saints, after all, they walked and talked with Him. They knew Him and had saving faith. Abraham was His Friend. They experienced both His Wrath and His Goodness. They knew of His love and compassion. They received His mercy. They had heard His Word, and His Law, through the Prophets for centuries. They new first hand His miracles and were blessed by His Redemption. They had learned He keep His promises. The Incarnation was not needed to reveal any or all of this. The Incarnation was first and foremost about the Salvation of God's Elect. It was to make possible the one, all-sufficient Atonement for the sins of the world. Jesus came to die. He was God Himself making the sacrifice of Himself to satisfy His own transgressed Law. The Incarnation was not about serving the poor, the sick or the marginalized, although Jesus did that while he was here- the same as God had done for centuries before the Incarnation. It was about Ransom. It was about the defeat of the Evil One, Satan. It was to secure the death of Death. The Ascension was to wrap up all this business. Christ reigns now to finally put away Death and Satan for good. They are destroyed, but refuse to admit defeat. They will.From all the above, the Doctrine of the Trinity was crafted centuries ago. God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit are One, sharing the same nature, character and attributes, but having different roles or functions (Latin: "persona"). That God is Triune, three "Persons" in One is the unique and most basic Doctrine of the Christian Faith. But we rightfully talk most about "God in Christ" because it is in Christ that we today first meet and are personally introduced to God. Through hearing and believing the Gospel about the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, we receive the eternal Life of God. We "come alive" to God and to Life "in Christ". We discover "God in Christ" and this becomes our witness to the world.References:I have pages of notes taken from reading the following books and others, which notes include dozens of Scripture passages. The Essay here is not an academic paper, but a sketch of my thoughts on the subject for my own benefit, as I try to organize my material. The process of writing it all out is helpful to me. I hope reading it will be interesting and helpful to you as well. Comments are welcome, if they are about what I have actually written. Thanks.Manual of Christian Doctrine, Louis BerkhofSystematic Theology, James O. BuswellChristian Theology, Millard EricksonSystematic Theology, Wayne GrudemChristian Theology, Alister McGrathGod the Almighty, Donald BloeschEvangelical Theology, Donald BloeschThe Living God, Thomas Oden

**Blog Export: DUTCH TREAT- Cal Fox's Blog, <http://www.calvinfox.com/blog/>**

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:25

Monday, September 1, 2008

## **ATTRIBUTES OF GOD (Part 1)**

Who is the God the Psalmist talks about? Whom does he seek, for whom does He thirst? You may assume you know or that every Christian will answer the question in the same way. Of course, we all know who God is! This is actually difficult to answer. God created our world and us. He is complete without us. He is totally other than us. So how can we describe Him? This is normally done by describing, or trying to describe, attributes about Him (and sometimes it is done by describing things which people believe God is not). The most common attribute, the one that is probably the most popular today is simply Love. If God is anything, many say, God is love. The very essence of God is Love. Love is what God is [literally] all about. This statement is emphatically not Biblical!

God reveals Himself in Scripture. The basic, essential nature of God revealed there is not Love! When Theologians describe God they actually talk about "attributes". These are aspects of who he is, His essential character or essence as God. Not every Theologian makes the exact same list of Attributes. They agree in general, and all agree on placing God's attributes into two categories: those which He shares in some degree with us human beings and those which He does not or can not share with us. Theologians do not agree as to which category a particular Attribute belongs. I am listing them here in an order that makes sense to me. The first group of attributes are known as "Communicable", because they are characteristics of God which He transmits or communicates to us. We are, after all, created by Him in His Image. The other group of attributes are not communicated to us. They are "Incommunicable", because, after all, we are limited created beings. (Some maintain that the difference between categories is a matter of degree.) God does not exist apart or behind His attributes. Nor do His attributes exist apart from Him. They were not added to God and they are not parts of God. They can not be separated out (except when we are trying to define and discuss each one). As we shall see, one aspect of God is His oneness or unity. He is One. In practice, God is always all that He is everywhere, at all times and in all places. This is why we can not say God is Love. Love is only one of many attributes of God. God is God and, among many other things, it is the nature or character of God to love. God loves, but it is not correct to say that the nature or essence of God is Love or is primarily Love. When we do that, we are ignoring, or even denying, all that God is. That, in effect is denying God. He is all or He is nothing. He can not be a "part" of Himself. One attribute of Him can not be all of Him. His character or nature or essence is one. He is not the sum of His attributes; He is essentially, equally, all His attributes together. Incommunicable Attributes (brief definitions)1. Self-existence, Independence- God does not need us or anything else in creation for Him to be God. God needs only Himself to be God. Being God is a given. Nothing existed before Him. He is uncaused. God is totally Other, totally Unique- there is none like Him. This is the first meaning of Holy.2. Spirituality- God exists as a being not made of any matter. He is a spirit, a non-corporeal Being. He has Life. He is the source of Life. He can not be perceived by any of our physical senses. Human beings are not spirits, but, in creating us, God endowed all humans with spirituality. (We are a unity of body and soul. Our soul has the need and ability to commune and communicate with God. That need and ability is our spirituality. We do not have a non-corporeal spirit living within our bodies, to be released at death.) 2. Invisibility- This is related to God's spirituality. God can not be seen by human eyes, although He makes something of Himself visible on occasion through visible things (known as theophanies, such as the burning bush or some angelic appearances). 3. Personality- God is a personal being. A "person" is defined as a being capable of self-consciousness and self-determination. The latter includes free-will. God has revealed himself in nature and in the Bible as a Being who speaks and acts within time. He is causally related to specific events in the world. He is revealed to be a Person distinguished by Rationality, Creativity, Morality and Communality (a Trinity).3. Unchangeableness- God is unchanging in His being, nature or character, as well as in His purposes. The technical word for unchangeable is "immutable". God is immutable, but God is not "impassible", i.e.- God is not without emotions or feelings. He is capable of both compassion and anger. (But, God is not a hot-head, flying off the handle, given to passion in the sense of being capable of irrational "crimes of passion", such as humans are. The latter is impossible given that God's nature and character and purposes are immutable!)3. Infinite- Everything about God is absolutely perfect. When Scripture tells us to think about all that is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy, we are to think of God. He is the standard or measure of all such things. This applies equally to all His attributes. They are all infinite, without quantification or qualification.4. Eternity- Infinity in relation to time is eternity. God has no beginning or end. He does not progress or develop. In Himself, He transcends time and He possesses His life complete and all at once. He created time and existed before there was Time. Therefore, we say God is timeless in Himself. But, God acts within time. He is not limited by it. He somehow is above Time and yet is involved in events as they occur in time, using them for His purposes. He knows tensed time. (See Omniscience) 4. Omnipresence- God is unlimited with respect to space, as well as Time, having created both. He has no spatial dimensions (He has no size. We can not properly say God is immense or big.) All that is God is present at every point everywhere at all times. 5. Unity- God is not and can not be

divided into parts. That is the original meaning of "Simple" and the Unity of God is sometimes known as His simplicity. As said, earlier, God is not a collection of individual attributes. Every attribute applies to His entire being. God is a completely integrated Person infinitely perfect in all His attributes. Communicable Attributes (brief descriptions)1. Omniscience- God fully knows Himself and all things actual and possible, past, present and future and this knowledge He has now, all at once. (See the attribute of Eternity.) His knowledge is complete and perfect, unchanging. He never learns or forgets anything. Our ability to know is predicated on God's prior knowledge. We can know because He does. That proves there is a reality which is knowable. Our education is in learning for ourselves what He knows about that reality. 2. Wisdom- God's wisdom, based on His knowledge and purposes, is His ability to choose the best goals and the best way to attain them. We are to seek His Wisdom for ourselves3. Truthfulness- All that God is defines reality and what is true. All of God's knowledge is true, without error. His words (revelation) expressing His knowledge is therefore also true. God can not lie or contradict Himself. The standard or measure of truth is conformity with the character, knowledge and words of God. God gives us the desire and the ability to receive, love and live by Truth. His Truth is the sure foundation for our world view and our lives.4. Goodness- Likewise, what God is defines what good is. "Good" is everything that is in harmony with the character and works of God. (cf. Perfection) Particularly, God's goodness refers to His Love and that includes the Grace, Mercy and Patience or Long-suffering He has for us. 5. Holiness- The second meaning of Holy is ethical. God has unique standards of ethical behavior and morals for Himself and for human beings. We are to be holy as He is holy. We are to love His Law, His Norms for how we are to live. We are to hate transgressions of His Law and separate ourselves from behavior that does not conform to His Norms.6. Righteousness- God is a God of Justice. He governs the world by His Law and holds it accountable to live accordingly. His Justice rewards those who do and it condemns those who do not. 7. Sovereignty- God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. He has his secret will and His revealed will for all things and all peoples. Though it is resisted, that resistance will fail and God's will shall be obeyed. This is because God is also sovereign in power. He is omnipotent, King of Kings, Lord of Lords. But His power is not exercised ruthlessly or arbitrarily. God's power is in the service of God's character and of all the attributes we have listed here. Summary God is a non-corporeal spirit Being, a Person who is self-sufficient, complete, unchangeable, infinite, eternal, omnipresent, and simple. He is omniscient, wise, truthful and good. His goodness is Love and that includes grace, mercy and patience toward us. God is also holy and righteous, decreeing and upholding the highest standards of morality and justice. And God is sovereign in His will and purposes, as well as in His power. All of this together describes the essential nature of God and begins to answer our question of who God is! This is the God with whom we have to do, the God we worship and serve. To Him be the Glory now and always.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:13

Saturday, June 14, 2008

## **WHICH JESUS DO WE MEAN?**

Many Southern Baptist Bloggers are weighing in with their thoughts about their recent Annual Convention. One of them, whose site is labeled as "Downshore Drift", writes a sentiment that I have read on several Blogs- "Southern Baptists are strongest when we focus on Jesus and ALL work together to carry out His mission." I can't believe people say this. Sounds good, but what does this actually mean? "Let's just focus on Jesus" is a bromide. Presbyterians say the same thing. So do Episcopalians and Lutherans! Both Liberals and Conservatives! Can the slogan have the same meaning for each of these groups?

For it to have meaning, we must clarify "Who Christ is" and the answer to that is usually determined by "Who's Christ?" Each group assumes that the Christ in question refers to the One in whom they believe. "What is there to question," they might say to me, "we know who Christ is!" But in his book, *Jesus through the Centuries*, Jaroslav Pelikan describes 18 different historic views of the one called Jesus. Jesus himself may be the same, yesterday and forever, but at various times, each of the 18 views has been held by groups convinced that their view was the true one- their Jesus was the real Jesus who abides forever. The Baptist blogger said Baptists "are strongest when we focus on Jesus". Which Jesus? Which of the 18 popular views is the Southern Baptist view? Even that is an inadequate question because there are different views among Southern Baptists. Without descriptive modifiers, the Blogger's statement is vacuous. All this applies also to the admonition to "carry out (Christ's) mission". Exactly what is that mission? Again, the Blogger assumes his readers both know and agree about what it is. But do we? There are very different ideas about the mission of Christ among Christians. Different views of Christ lead to different views as to what his Mission might be. Without defining the phrase, "His Mission", the Blogger's exhortation is really void of meaning.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:42

## **WHAT IS THE FAITH THAT SAVES?**

It was once common for churches to use the slogan: "The Blood, the Book and the Blessed Hope". There is a reason why we rarely hear this Motto today. Self-professing "Evangelicals" do not give much importance or attention to these three "Bs". The Blessed Hope is, of course, the Hope of Christ's imminent Return- the Second Coming. The Book is the Bible understood as God's Word (Revelation) written, inerrant and infallible and the ultimate authority for our faith and practice. The Blood is the full and complete Atonement that Christ offered on the cross by his death, a penal substitution sufficient to cover the sins of the world. The intentional death of Christ both expiates our sin and guilt (appeases or satisfies the demands of God's Law or Justice) and propitiates God (removes the cause of His wrath toward us, thus gaining His favor) once for all. This is why Jesus came to earth. This was his primary mission. It was necessary for both our salvation and the defeat of Satan.

It is not essential to Salvation that one believe in the Book or the Blessed Hope, although study will reveal that they are connected. It is essential to believe in the Blood. This is very basic, yet I have come to realize that many who say, "Yes, I believe in Jesus" do not mean, "I believe in Jesus' death or that his death was a necessary sacrifice for my sins." But that is exactly what faith in Jesus does mean. For many, following Jesus and being his disciple (which usually means practicing a lifestyle of compassion, especially toward the poor and marginalized) does not have anything to do with faith in a doctrine about a blood sacrifice to satisfy the Law of God and propitiating His wrath. There simply is no connection. I need to make this clear. People who do not believe in the classic Gospel of Grace promulgated by Paul, M. Luther, J. Calvin and T. Cranmer (Anglican Reformer), are not saved, as those men understood Salvation. In fact, I have come to realize that "Disciples only" or so-called "Red Letter Christians" (those for whom being a Christian is living a life according to the words of Jesus printed in red in many New Testaments, which they interpret in terms of social ministry) have a very different understanding of the Gospel and Salvation and of Christ, than those 16th Century Reformers had and that this Calvin has. Increasingly, people speak about believing in Jesus, having a personal relationship with Jesus, following Jesus, being a disciple of Jesus. Jesus, they declare, is their Lord and Savior, their Teacher and Model. He is their Friend, Comforter and Guide. They share how Jesus has changed their life, made them a new or different person. He has given them meaning, purpose, peace. He is everything to them. It is possible to speak this way and still not have saving faith. None of this is the same as the faith that saves. The true (Scriptural) Gospel is "The Gospel of Grace" and that includes five key doctrines in its definitive expression: "Sinners are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the Glory of God alone. This is based on Scripture alone." "Faith in Christ alone", by which sinners are saved, primarily means faith in the saving work of Christ alone, not faith in Christ

himself alone or being a disciple of Christ or having a personal relationship with Christ. It has become necessary to spell this out because so many today are projecting a Jesus of their own making, professing faith in that projection and claiming such faith saves. By locating the object of saving faith in the Blood of Jesus, we are prevented from falling into this error. Again, faith in the person of Jesus alone without any reference to his blood sacrifice is not saving faith. The noun, "Faith" (pistis) means assent, but it also must mean trust, reliance, commitment. This is particularly clear with the verb "believe" (pisteuo) accompanied by the preposition "into" (eis) indicating motion: believe into or rely on or commit to Christ. In John, the object of saving faith is the person of Jesus or the fact of who Jesus is, i.e. - the Christ. The Gospel of John assures us that all who come to Jesus have eternal Life. However, it makes clear, that "coming to Jesus" means coming to his atoning sacrifice, eating and drinking (appropriating, receiving) his flesh and blood given for the life of the world (Chapter 6). Believing in Jesus means believing in his sacrificial death. Believing that Jesus is the Christ is believing in the work of the Christ as the Servant of God who suffered and died for the sins of the world. This is not at all the same as coming to Jesus' teaching about servant love and leadership and committing oneself to follow Jesus' example and obeying that teaching. We must not substitute the latter for the former. In Paul, saving faith is intellectual assent to the truth of the Atonement accompanied by personal trust in or reliance on that Atonement alone for salvation (Romans 3:25) or in the Promises of God alone that those who believe in the Atonement are saved (Romans 4:16-22). That is saving faith. Believing that Jesus is the Son of God and the Model for how we are to live is not saving faith. Commitment to be his disciple and to attempt to live as he lived is not saving faith. Saving faith is faith in the saving work of Jesus, i.e.- in the "Blood". Trust in Jesus is total personal reliance, not on Jesus himself, but on His saving work alone for salvation. Trust in the Blood alone for salvation is not meritorious. It is a gift given to the Elect by God who has chosen them to have it. It proceeds from His work of regeneration in their hearts upon their hearing the Gospel. That rebirth sets their will free from its bondage to the sin nature within, inherited at birth. Thus the will is free to make the choice to trust Christ, relying on His Death alone to atone, which it otherwise would not. (The unregenerate always chose to save themselves.) Having been regenerated and having received the gift of saving faith, the new Believer also has received the gift of repentance. That means s/he has a new mind, a new perspective on what life is about. S/he now wants to live for the One who died for her or him. Saving faith has led to union with Christ and justification in Him, which is the forensic imputation (not impartation) of Christ's (external) righteousness and a standing or position in grace before God as well as adoption as a son of God. Adoption means that God gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell the Believer. That indwelling Spirit motivates and empowers the Believer to obey and serve Christ. Thus begins the life-long process of sanctification or holiness or becoming like Christ. This sanctification is the evidence that the profession of saving faith is genuine. [This paragraph is loaded with Scriptural doctrine and needs to be unpacked.]

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:34

Monday, April 28, 2008

## **PRINCE CASPIAN, CS LEWIS AND HEAVEN**

"In the opening chapter of his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis describes this powerful longing he experienced from his youth onwards. There he cautions that anyone with no interest in this kind of experience need read no further, for, as Lewis asserts, "the central story of my life is about nothing else." Lewis found this yearning hard to categorize. He finally gave his sensation of deep longing the title of joy, defining it in a special way that distinguished it from mere happiness or pleasure and putting it center stage in his

title." <http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/commentaries/isthismancaspian.html>

This is a quote from an interesting CT article in which comparisons are made between the life of Prince Caspian [Narnia Tales] and his creator, C.S. Lewis. The author's deep desire for "Joy" is the same as many Christians desire for God or Heaven, words used interchangeably. Indeed, Dr. Peter Kreeft believes all human beings have that longing, which is the title of one of his books, *The Heart's Deepest Longing*. I agree. Certainly, I have that longing. This is said with another CT article in mind by N.T. Wright, "Heaven is Not Our Home" It is material from Dr. Wright's book, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*

(HarperOne). <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2008/april/13.36.html> I agree with Dr Wright's thesis and what he says in the CT article about "life after life after death". He is correct in saying that the focus in the New Testament in the matter of what happens after we die is on the resurrection of our bodies. That is not new at all. I have believed and taught that for many years. The clinching argument for me that there would be a millennial or Messianic Kingdom on earth was predicated almost solely on this Doctrine canonized in the earliest Church Creeds. The very End Times would not be simply a bodiless, spiritual existence wherein our saved souls enjoy Eternal Life. The physical resurrection of the body of Jesus demonstrated how essential the body and its redemption is. Other wise, why bother? Jesus could have gone back to being a spirit as God is and we would do likewise at our death. Since all the departed are now alive "in Heaven" and millions have been for millennia, apart from any resurrection, who needs it? What would be the point? The resurrection of the body is a Doctrine with much Scriptural support. There are very few verses to support the far more popular belief in a spiritual afterlife in "Heaven". Those verses speak to this hunger for Joy that Lewis and Kreeft have written about. Jesus taught us to pray for the Kingdom to come on earth. But our longing to be absent from the body and instantly present with the Lord is far more keen and deep than any desire we may have for that earthy Kingdom someday. Yesterday (Sunday), many of us believe we enjoyed communion with the Risen Lord who was truly present with us during the Communion Service. The Lord's Supper and that communion is often said to be a foretaste of Heaven. We look forward to the consummation some day of that communion with the Triune God which we enjoy now in a very limited way. That is our deepest longing and "Joy". Yes, I believe that, as with our bodies, so there will ultimately be a new heaven and a new earth; but, the realization of that is not our deepest longing. As with Jesus' resurrection, so the redemption of Creation will vindicate the Creator. Finally, death and decay on every level will be defeated and removed forever. That is why the redemption of the earth, as with our bodies, is essential- it is for the glory of God. We do long for that glory to be manifest, but on a very personal level we long for our time with our Risen Lord most of all, when every tear shall be wiped away, all pain removed and we shall enter into the joy and peace promised us by the Lord. That hope makes the few verses about "being with the Lord" in Heaven immediately upon our "death" far more meaningful and helpful to most of us, especially when we go through bereavement, than the many more verses about Resurrection and the New Heavens and Earth some day. "Heaven" is going to be our Eternal Home. Jesus purchased it with His blood and there will never be a foreclosure on that transaction. Footnote: Yesterday, we heard a sermon the Preacher thought was based on John 14- the text in which Jesus promised to take us to be with Him in His Father's House where a "dwelling place" has been prepared for us. The Preacher dismissed any literal interpretation of the text and said this passage was about how every human being is already a dwelling place for God and that when they love, human beings experience God's presence within them. That is terrible, unscriptural Theology. I will stick with my anticipation of a very literal "room" awaiting me. Jesus assured us, "If it were not so, I would have told you."

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:55

Friday, April 18, 2008

## **EXPELLED? NATURALLY**

There is a movie opening this week that conservative Christians are promoting: EXPELLED. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/2008/expelled.html>The major theme is the alleged suppression in academia of Professors who want to teach Intelligent Design in their classrooms (They have allegedly been "expelled"). The secondary theme is the claim that Academia denies teachers and students freedom to consider ID, circling pedagogical wagons around Darwinism.

Both Christians and non-Christians need to know that Intelligent Design is not Creationism or Christian. The underlying issue in this debate is Philosophical Naturalism. To most, that is the basis for Science. The "Scientific Method" itself is grounded in Naturalism. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the Scientific Method involves "principles and procedures for the systematic pursuit of knowledge involving · the recognition and formulation of a problem· the collection of data through observation · experiment· the formulation and testing of hypotheses" We frequently hear that the natural world is all the reality there is. Energy, matter, time, and space are all that there is. The universe is closed. It is a box. We human beings exist in a finite, limited, box consisting of energy, matter, time, and space. - a closed system of causes and effects. This is the dominant Philosophy of our time. It is called Philosophical Naturalism. Almost ever subject taught in our schools at all levels is based on it or assumes it. The Bible teaches us Naturalism is not true. Naturalism does not correspond to Total reality (and that is the traditional definition of Truth) Beyond and apart from the natural world is another reality. Genesis 1:1 tells us that there is the natural reality and there is the super-natural. "Super" means "more than", "in addition to". Total Reality includes both. There is the natural order and there is God. God is not the same as the natural order. The natural order is not God. We do not live in a box. We are not confined to a world consisting of energy, matter, time, and space. Many have been deceived and misled by their public education to believe that they are so confined. Let us be very clear- energy, matter, time, and space do not define, exhaust, contain, enclose or limit all of reality! That is what Genesis 1:1 teaches. Christians must learn to think out side the box made by Naturalism. I can't emphasize enough how fundamental, how important, this Truth is. It affects everything we do, how we think and how we live. What our children learn in schools in almost every field would be radically different if this Truth about Total Reality were to be taught and made the basis of all other knowledge. Unless and until we can show the inadequacies of Naturalism, there will be no real movement toward solving the Debate about Origins. A movie exposing opposition to ID at the University (nothing new there) won't make any real difference or change the minds of Philosophical Naturalists.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:39

Wednesday, April 16, 2008

## **IS THE POPE A CHRISTIAN?**

I admire this Pope Benedict and his predecessor as well. I admire them for their strong, public stand on moral issues of our time, against much opposition. However, that does not mean he is a Christian. If a Christian is someone who believes the Doctrines of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, then Benedict is a Christian. He is certainly orthodox in that regard. Is it enough? He has been baptized and regularly receives communion and publicly identifies with a Church. For most people, that certainly means he should be considered to be a Christian.

Does Benedict know and admit that he is a sinner? I'm sure he does. Does he believe that Jesus' death was a substitutionary atonement for his sins? Certainly. Does Benedict believe that faith in Jesus and his Sacrifice is essential for salvation? Yes- for everyone? Yes. Certainly all this means the Pope is a Christian! There is still something else.

Does the Pope trust in Christ alone for his salvation? Does he trust in grace alone for his hope of eternal life? If the answer is "no", then Benedict is not a Christian according to the classic Reformed, Protestant definition. By that definition, Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. If the Pope believes that good works, as well as faith, are essential for salvation or that the grace that saves requires Sacraments to communicate it to the sinner, then the Pope is not a Christian- or at least not a Protestant Christian. And that will be because the Pope does not accept the fifth distinctive Protestant Doctrine that the definition of the Gospel and how to be saved must be based on Scripture alone. [Those are known as the Five Solas] Someone might ask how I can be an Anglican/Episcopalian- isn't that the same as Catholic? In some ways, yes. We are "Catholic", like the Pope, in that we are Creedal, Sacramental and Liturgical. Evangelical or Reformed Catholics certainly believe in the Creeds of the early undivided Church, as well as the Protestant Confessions. And we value and enjoy the Sacraments as means of grace, i.e.- as means by which God strengthens our faith. They are very helpful (grace- full) That is not to say we believe that Baptism and the Eucharist are essential to salvation. Unlike Roman Catholics, we do not believe that. Likewise, the Church and its Worship (Liturgy) is very important to building up and maintaining our faith, but we do not believe that they are essential to our salvation. The key word here is "essential"- desirable, helpful, important- but not essential. As to good works or holiness or righteousness- these are the results, the fruit and evidence, of having been justified (saved) by faith alone. They are not essential, in addition, to that faith or essential to salvation. As to Scripture alone, we do read them in light of Tradition and Reason; but, these are not of equal value or importance. Some Anglicans make them out to be 3 equal legs on the stool of our Authority for Faith and Practice. When they contradict each other, another leg is used, that of the Spirit speaking from within a Faith Community. An evangelical or Reformed Anglican consults several resources, but the Scripture is primary and ultimate for Faith and practice. If it seems to contradict the other "legs", the Reformed Anglican will proceed humbly and with caution; but the Word will prevail over all. (Of course, unlike Roman Catholics, we do not have a Pope or Church to interpret for us officially what Scripture means or to be a tie-breaker when we do not agree).

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:12

Monday, April 14, 2008

## **BASEBALL AND THEOLOGY**

"There is no question that a "slippery slope to liberalism" exists. I have observed it enough times in my academic career. But there are actually two slippery slopes with which we should be concerned. The one is to run rough-shod over our past, thus driving us so far from our roots that we become essentially disconnected with our own past. But the other is just as dangerous. It is to define ourselves so rigidly and unyieldingly that no movement is possible, to canonize a particular cultural moment, to perpetuate uncritically the shape of our seminary when it was in its very infancy, and thus to slide down the other side of the mountain, down the slippery slope to traditionalism. Liberalism's opposite is not healthy conservatism but an entrenched, unyielding adherence to the past."

"A healthy church and seminary must continually seek to steer clear of either slippery slope. We must never lose sight of the fact that Westminster is not a context less phenomenon. The seminary was born in a particular cultural-theological-ecclesiastical moment. There were concrete factors in the first quarter of the 20th century that influenced the shape Westminster tradition took. The world around us has changed since then. There are new cultural-theological-ecclesiastical moments to address. We are perhaps most true to the Westminster tradition when we, as our founders did and as subsequent generations of faculty have already done, shape ourselves in conversation with the world in which we live. And this process will invariably lead to adaptations, shifts in emphasis, rethinking long-held opinions while firming up others. And we do this, not despite our tradition, but precisely because of it." A Enns, "Yankees/Westminster," <http://peterennsonline.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2007/11/> This is part of a very interesting article by the embattled Dr Enns, suspended WTS professor. He illustrates his comments about the Seminary with comparisons to the history of baseball and the Yankees. Babe Ruth, for example, is part of the Yankee Tradition, but could not play today because of the changes in the game. My Question: Does Enns' analysis hold when we consider, not the Seminary, but the historic Reformed Confessions? Are they unchanged or must they, too, be rewritten to keep up with the Game?

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 07:50

Thursday, April 10, 2008

### **CHRIST DIED FOR ME! HALLELUJAH**

Here is an excellent essay explaining the Gospel according to Paul, particularly the Doctrines of Substitutionary Atonement and Justification by Faith alone in Christ alone. Good Gospel Stuff!![http://www.fuller.edu/news/pubs/tnn/2008\\_Winter/4\\_atoning\\_cross.asp](http://www.fuller.edu/news/pubs/tnn/2008_Winter/4_atoning_cross.asp)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 20:36

Sunday, March 30, 2008

## **SEMINARY CENSORSHIP?**

Do you believe the Bible you read is verbally inspired by God, word for word, and literally true? There has been controversy brewing at Westminster Theological Seminary since the publication of a book by one of its Professors some two years ago. He was suspended last week. Apparently he taught the possibility that the Pentateuch, as we have it, came through the work of several editors, including a change in the actual language in which it was written, and not directly from Moses nor in the language he spoke. Whatever all the facts are in the WTS case, the controversy involves the process of revelation, inspiration, transmission and inerrancy in regards to the Bible and what the Westminster Confession (and hence the Seminary) teaches on the subject. I have posted essays recently in this Blog on those topics. See March 24 (below) and February 29 (a Series with 14 Parts- click on the calendar at the right)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:34

Saturday, March 15, 2008

## **HERE IS A BOOK THAT NEEDS TO BE READ**

This essay marshalls great arguments against Atheism and for Christianity. It is written by Tony Snow and is based on this book by Dinesh D'Souza <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/march/25.79.html?start=3>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 17:01

Saturday, March 8, 2008

## **ASIAN THEOLOGY?**

Mustard Seed and Leaven, Reflections on Asian theology by Nate Jones There is a review in the current Books and Culture magazine about "Asian Theology". The authors reviewed seem to think they are into something unique to Asia. And the reviewer is impressed with what they write. I am amazed if these three Theologians think they are onto something uniquely Asian. And I am surprised and dismayed that the reviewer not only likes what he is reading, but that he seems totally unaware that it is very common here in the States. Read any of the post modern, emergent and missional websites and the authors and books recommend there. They promote the same concepts that these Asian Theologians and their reviewer think are so "Asian". Actually, they are rooted in 19th and 20th century German and French philosophy made popular here first in University English Departments, beginning more than 30 years ago. Read the serious and extensive article here and see what we are dealing with in many of today's churches on an intellectual level and yet which is grabbing the minds and hearts of many young Christian social activists today on a very practical level. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2008/001/22.44.html>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:19

Tuesday, January 29, 2008

## **COVENANT THEOLOGY**

Apparently only two people have read my essay below (Jan.18) entitled "The Two Most Important Men in History". I have added the subtitle: An Introduction to Covenant Theology. Perhaps that will attract a few more readers. I hope so. Let me know. Thanks

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:51

Friday, January 18. 2008

## **THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT MEN IN HISTORY: Introduction to Covenant Theology**

Millions of people do millions of things, live and die, every day. There are two, only two people, and what they did, in all of human history that are truly pivotal. (We know this and what we are going to write next, only because God, in the Scripture has revealed it.) Before the beginning of time, God had a vision of a world and of people in that world. He created the earth and put the first person on it. This person was the first of billions- the prototype, if you will. He was created to be the image of God on earth- like God in a number of key ways and as such he was intended to represent God as His caretaker of the earth. Most of all this man, and all human beings like him, were meant to live in a perfect relationship with his Creator. That perfect relationship required perfect obedience. Failing this would require God to scrub the entire mission.

The one man did fail. He could not live up to his Maker's (his father's) expectation of him. His Maker had devised a test case: if Adam (the man's name) were to obey his "Father" perfectly in this matter (he was commanded not to eat a particularly desirable piece of fruit) all would be well and his Maker would grant him Real (Eternal) Life. Obviously, Adam already had physical life and up to this point had been a good person. This deal between God and Adam has been called, by Theologians, a "Covenant", specifically the "Covenant of Works." Adam's work of obedience in this case was required of him if he were to be given Life. His obedience would not earn or merit life- it was not a quid pro quo (Obedience for Life) as though they were of equal value or importance, nor did Adam's obedience force or compel God to give him Life. The latter would remain a gift- God owed that Man nothing and certainly the creature had no coercive power over his Creator. The whole "covenant" was His idea in the first place. If Adam lived up to His expectation, it was God's gracious will to freely give him this gift of Life- conditioned, yes, but not required or deserved. But Adam failed. He was denied Life. What makes this one act so devastating for the rest of Humanity, is that Adam represented all of us. He was our "federal" head. Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 teach that Humanity is represented by Adam. He is our federal head, as it were. "Federal" comes from a Latin word for a "Compact" or League and that word, in turn, comes from another word, meaning trust. "Federal" refers to a compact or agreement in which separate states, in trust, surrender much of their authority to a central government over them all. In Theology, it is said that all individuals, all humanity, is united under the authority of Adam. As our representative, he acts on our behalf. What he does involves us all. We all are accountable for his actions. We all disobeyed "in Adam" and we all died "in Adam". His actions are our actions. The big difference- we never voted on this arrangement. It is not voluntary. It is a God-idea. Likewise, Christ is the Second Adam. He is the federal Head, the representative of those who have chosen out of Humanity to be God's Elect. He represents us and acts on our behalf. What he does involves us all. We all are accountable for his actions. His actions are our actions. We never voted on this arrangement, either. It, too, is not voluntary. It is also a God-idea. And we are eternally grateful for it! Adam's act was not simply one of millions of human acts- it was of mythic proportion- of far greater importance and effect than any other. Upon this One Act hangs the destiny of all Mankind. We know this only because God has revealed it, centuries later in Scripture. It was not simply a bite of forbidden "apple" (I mean who hasn't done something like that?) or like an "oops, better get Maaco" moment; and saying, "I'm sorry Dad, I screwed up, but come on, it's not the end of the world.", just will not do. In God's eyes, that moment was pivotal for the destiny for every human being ever to be born. Thus, I call it "mythic", but that is not to question its historicity, because it is parallel to another singular act that absolutely was historically true. Now God foresaw, or knew of, Adam's failure and the predicament it caused, long before it even happened, actually from all Eternity, He devised a Plan whereby there would be another Adam, the Second Adam, who would more than counter act and literally atone for what the First Adam had done. Of course, that would be Christ. Actually, God the Father and God the Son and God the Spirit, together, agreed on this Plan and how (they) would affect it. That agreement, Theologians call, the Covenant of Redemption. God still wanted a People to represent and serve Him on earth. As it was, as a result of their federal head's disobedience, all people would be born spiritually dead, alienated and separated from their Maker. Worse, they would hate Him deep in their hearts and strive to be autonomous from Him (Reformed Theologians call this The Antithesis) They would be helplessly enslaved to a "fallen nature", called Total Depravity, by those same Theologians. In other words, people being born would no longer make good prospects to be the People God had in mind. As it happens, we are told in the Book of His Revelation, God chose millions of these lost sinners to become His People, known as the Elect. He did this from Eternity, before they ever existed on earth. God can do something like that because He is God. He began to reveal a Plan in the Bible, called The Covenant of Grace, that He would make with the Elect to counter the effects of the Covenant of Works He had made with Adam. In fact, He began to reveal this Plan to Adam himself, right after his big transgression. This Plan would not fail. The heart of it was (is) the perfect life and obedience of the One of whom Adam was the "type" (in the Bible, a type is a person or thing prefiguring a future person or thing, such as the Tabernacle was a type of Heaven) Christ is the Second Adam. All of human history is grounded in these two

Figures. Amazing! All human beings today are either in union with the First Adam or with the Second Adam. (The most important question you could ask anyone is: "Are you in Adam or in Christ?" Of course, most will have no idea what you are talking about!) Millions of men, since Adam, had lived, done millions of things, and died. The historical life and singular act of only one of them is "mythic" in the same sense that Adam's was. The life and act of this one man would change the eternal destiny of hundreds of millions of the sons and daughters of Adam. Christ's perfect obedience would counter Adam's disobedience and by it, billions of lost sinners would be saved and become the People that God always wanted. The Covenant of Grace involved the incarnation of God the Son, Jesus, and the sacrificial offering of his perfect life on behalf of those whom God had chosen. That offering would be his act of obedience. Now, their wills being in bondage to their fallen nature, no person would or could choose to accept Christ or what He did on their behalf. God's Plan of Election was the only way any people at all would be saved. God the Spirit effectively called the Elect (and still does) when they hear the Gospel. He works the miracle of regeneration in their hearts, freeing them from that spiritual bondage so that they are free to choose Christ. God the Spirit convicts them of their sin and awakens saving faith within them. That is, God gives the chosen both repentance and faith. They come to Christ. They willingly accept Him as Lord and their Savior. That is all of Grace, all of God own doing. Revival techniques can be used to artificially generate pseudo repentance and people can be manipulated to pray the Sinners Prayer. Such repentance and faith is of no avail. It is must not be accepted as the "real thing". If it were left to sinners to decide whether or not to come to Christ, they would choose not to do it. To allow the fulfillment of God's Plan to rest on the "free" will of sinners is unthinkable. To allow the sacrificial offering of Christ on behalf of sinners to be rejected and come to nothing is unthinkable. Unconditional Election (the work of God the Father) and prevenient and irresistible Calling (also known as Irresistible Grace, the work of God the Spirit), are the only hope for any lost sinner to be saved. The consequence of Adam's disobedience requires it. That made Election essential and an Atonement limited to only those who were elected to accept it, the effective way of achieving it. If it were not for the Covenant of Grace, none of us would be saved. Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement and Irresistible grace, as well as Perseverance, are known as the Five Points of Calvinism, TULIP, or the "Doctrines of Grace". In my experience, most Evangelicals are not Calvinists and many of those who are "5 Pointers" are not Reformed Calvinists, meaning they are not Covenanters. This leads to the next topic: Covenants today. The Elect, in their personal history, enter into union with Christ by repentance and faith. They do not simply have a Savior, they actually have a union with Christ. This is an extremely important doctrine. Just as we were lost "in Adam", so we are saved "in Christ", our federal Head. Many seem to think that they are saved by having the experience of being born again or because they said the Sinner's Prayer or simply because they believe Jesus died for them. Not so! If anyone is saved it is because of a union with the Second Adam, just as people are lost because of their union with the First Adam. God sees, reckons or considers those who entered into never ending union with Christ by repentance and faith, as righteous. They have no righteousness in themselves. The repentance and faith are not works of righteousness. Instead, they have the righteousness of Christ. We have a right standing before God because the perfect obedience of Christ is imputed to us. (By His imputed obedience, we are saved- exactly as, by Adam's disobedience we had been lost sinners). This is the Gospel of grace. This Gospel of Grace or, better, this Covenant of Grace has always been the way sinners become saved. There have been saved people since Adam's day on this same basis of grace. People were never saved by the Law, always by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We look back to the Cross. Saints in the Hebrew Bible (what we misleadingly call the Old Testament) looked forward to the cross, starting with Adam and his family. The Covenant of Grace was progressively revealed through out the Bible- some to Adam, more to Noah, even more to Abraham and then to Moses and the Prophets. There has always been only one Covenant of Grace, although the way in which it was ministered and the responsibilities laid on its beneficiaries has changed through the years. Finally, this Covenant in its fullness was revealed by Jesus and the Apostles. In this form, it is properly called the New Covenant- the original old Covenant of Grace now in its final finished form. (All this makes for the unity of the entire Bible and for a fascinating Bible study.) Many Christians in my experience do not know anything about the Covenant because older ones were raised in Dispensationalism and newer Evangelicals are being raised in a pared down, "mere" or core expression of the Faith. (The primary exception are those few Christians raised in conservative Presbyterian and Reformed circles). What practical difference does all this make? The first difference is in the amount of glory God receives. In this Two-Man, Covenantal approach- salvation is all God, beginning to end. In the usual evangelical approach it is part God and part Man: God offers Salvation, Man decides whether to accept and keep what God offers. In practice, doesn't that make Man superior? The second major difference is that the Two-Man, Covenantal approach is a better foundation for assurance and daily Christian living. That is because both of them are grounded and secure in God Himself. It teaches the difference between our objective standing or position in Christ and our subjective experience of being in Christ. Without the former foundation, the latter depends a lot on changing circumstances and feelings and requires the constant search for something to pump us up spiritually. The third very practical difference has to do with Ecclesiology. I will try to explain next in more detail. Church as a Covenant Community The concept of Covenant is central in the Bible and very important in all of God's relationships with People, in fact, with all of Creation. The key Hebrew word is berith, while its Greek equivalent is diatheke. Together they are used 292 times in the KJV or 319 times in the ESV. Diatheke is usually translated "Testament", as in "Last Will and Testament", a legal paper (a Will) in which the person dictates to whom his estate shall go and the conditions for its inheritance, if any, upon the testator's death. Obviously, neither the 39 "Books" known as the Old Testament nor the 27 "Books" known as the New Testament are collectively an actual Testament. Tradition has misnamed both the Hebrew

Scripture and the Christian Scripture, even though it is accurate to say our Bible teaches us about an Old and a New Testament or Covenant! How central and important the word and concept of Covenant are is indicated by the fact that the central act of our corporate Worship is based on the declaration of Jesus that we are remembering the "Blood of the Covenant" (Matt 26:28, Mark 14:24) And central and important to remember about Covenant is that it is made primarily with a nation, not with individuals. If we want to endorse and use this concept we must accept the fact that covenant is first and foremost corporate. All Covenants include both promises and conditions. God's Covenant with His people, to be known as Israel, consists of His Promises to them (basically to be their God, providing for them) and the condition that they would serve and obey Him (basically, keeping the Ten Commandments)--as a Nation. The Covenant Nation of Israel came into existence in history when the various tribes of the Hebrew people agreed together to accept both the Promises and Conditions God dictated to them at Mt Sinai. (They did not negotiate with God about either). Male Circumcision became the official sign of membership in the Covenant People of God. No male without circumcision could be considered a member (females were considered members by association with the males in their family unit). Remembering their deliverance by God from slavery in Egypt was a required annual Festival, complete with a Family Meal (The Passover) to maintain their national identity. There were other required Festivals, as well. Israel was to rehearse and remember what God had done for them as a People and to be thankful to Him. The Torah contained God-given norms or principles by which they, as a Nation, were to conduct all their affairs. Obedience was an essential requirement of the Covenant. The Nation was only as good as its citizens. Every member, every individual, was to do their part in keeping all these conditions for being God's Chosen People. Now, no one could know who among all the members were actually regenerate, Israelites who had circumcised hearts and the personal faith of Abraham. That only God knew. Many were, many were not. The important point here is that every circumcised member and his family was treated the same. All were considered publicly to be among the Chosen, even though actually all were not. (Jesus would speak of tares and wheat growing together in the same field and that no attempt should be made to separate them out). On the other hand, if citizens of Israel or Israel itself were to demonstrate gross disobedience or infidelity, publicly disavowing the Covenant, they would be considered cursed and punished. Individuals could be cast out and separated from the Nation and the Nation itself could fall under Judgment involving hard times, destruction and exile. Again, I wrote above, "There has always been only one Covenant of Grace, although the way in which it was ministered and the responsibilities laid on its beneficiaries has changed through the years." The life, death and resurrection of Christ inaugurated that form of the Covenant known as the New Covenant. The way it is now administered and the responsibilities laid on its current members has changed from the times of Moses. But it still involves a People, a Chosen Nation and there are still Promises and Conditions. God's intent has always been to have a corporate people, a Nation that would worship, serve and obey Him, not simply to save individuals. The latter has been the emphasis for most evangelicals. Nevertheless, God's intent remains. The Covenant remains in place and the Covenant is a corporate concept. Reformed Christians argue about the difference between the so-called invisible Church, meaning the Elect and the visible Church meaning the institution in which are both the Elect and the non-Elect together. I believe the latter is what we should consider to be the primary and functional meaning of "Church". God the Son not only died for the Elect, He actually founded an organization: "I will build my Church". He meant an institution of which the Elect would be members. He was not talking about an invisible Body of the Elect. The Church He would build has ordained Leaders (Apostles), a Doctrinal Foundation (based on revealed Truth and grounded in who Christ is), Sacraments (Baptism and Lord's Supper), Regulated Worship, and Discipline. This is not an invisible, spiritual Body, but a very visible one. There is no union with Christ apart from union with His Body. This Body, while definitely not synonymous with it, is inseparable from the organized Church. Those who come to saving faith and enter into union with Christ also enter into union with the corporate Body of all other Covenant People. The Covenant Community under the old Mosaic version of the Covenant is the model for the new version. The latter is analogous to the former in essential ways. Old Israel was a visible body. The New Israel (the Church) is a visible body. It would greatly help the debate on this subject if the Church were considered, first and foremost, to be a Covenant Community. Inasmuch as the sign of initiation and the seal of membership in the Community under the Old Covenant was circumcision of believing men and their male children. The equivalent sign and seal in the New Covenant is Baptism of all Believers and their children. Likewise, as the means by which Covenant obligations were renewed in the Old Covenant were Passover and other Festivals, the means for covenantal renewal under the New Covenant is frequent Communion at the Lord's Table. These are very public and visible signs and seals for a very public and visible Community. And obedience to the Torah, interpreted now by Christ and the Apostles, remains a necessary condition for Covenant membership and the blessings of God upon His People. The analogy also holds in the matter of judging membership. No one knows who is truly regenerate and among the Elect. That, of course, is determined completely by God and known only to Him. Therefore, all the Baptized should be considered publicly as Chosen, true Believers unless and until they should publicly disavow God and their faith by their words and actions. Every member of the Church is to claim both the Promises and to be held accountable for the responsibilities spelled out by God in the Covenant. Of course, that does not mean that all the baptized members of a local Covenant Community are regenerate. Many will not be. But we move forward by doing as Paul did in his letters to such Communities, addressing all their members together as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ- their Lord and ours." 1 Cor. 1:2 Please do me a great favor: if you read this all the way through, please let me know that you have done so with a Comment that says so. You need not write more than that. Thank you very much.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:43

Sunday, January 13, 2008

## **DISPUTE OVER GOSPEL AMONG YOUNG LIFE STAFF**

Recently, Staff of Young Life (evangelical youth ministry) in Durham, North Carolina decided to resign, rather than agree to "Non-negotiables" in content of the Gospel. That is serious and sad in itself; but from my readings, the same issues exist elsewhere among "Evangelicals" these days. Read careful what the dispute is about. Apparently the Staff have a problem with telling teens that, as sinners, they are alienated from God and lost. They would rather tell them that no one is lost, all are redeemed and that "evangelism" is helping them to enter into a deeper relationship with the God who has already accepted them. Apparently they have come to accept the idea that God has a "Covenant" with Humanity. To them, this means that God has a loving relationship with all people, whether they know it or not. The old idea that the wages of sin is death and that means eternal separation from God is not possible because of this "Covenant". I may be misunderstanding them, and so I say "apparently", but I do pick up on these same themes elsewhere. Check out the Related Articles on this website. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/february/1.13.html?start=1>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:07

Friday, December 7, 2007

## **AMBROSE AND THE ARIANS: WAS JESUS CREATED?**

People today have been discussing the speech of Mitt Romney, given yesterday, about his Mormon Faith and the influence it might have upon him if he were to be our President. Interestingly, today the Church Calendar commemorates the life and work of Ambrose, who died 397 AD. He was a champion of the doctrine that Jesus, the Word (John 1:1) is fully God in the same sense that the Father is, against the Arians who taught that the Logos is a creature, the first being created by the Father. Mormons, on this major point, are Arians.

The most fundamental of all Christian Doctrines is that of the Trinity: God the Father is God the Son is God the Spirit. Biblical Christians are Trinitarians. Mormonism denies the Trinity. It teaches that Jesus was created by God. "The New Testament teaches that Jesus, God the Son, is eternal and has no beginning. However, Mormonism teaches that Jesus is a procreated being, the literal offspring of God the Father and one of His heavenly wives. According to Mormon theology, God the Father, Elohim, dwells on a planet with His many spirit wives producing numerous spirit children who await to inhabit physical bodies so that they too may one day ascend to godhood as their parents did. Jesus is believed to be the firstborn spirit child of Elohim. The Doctrine and Covenants, one of the four sacred books of Mormonism states, "Christ, the Firstborn, was the mightiest of all the spirit children of the Father. The Gospel Principles, which is the manual of the Mormon Church, states, "The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ." James Talmage, one of the early apostles of the church wrote, "[A]mong the spirit-children of Elohim, the firstborn was and is Jehovah or Jesus Christ to whom all others are juniors." "According to the Mormon view, Jesus is not unique from the rest of mankind. He is simply the firstborn spirit child. The Doctrine and Covenants states, "The difference between Jesus and other offspring of Elohim is one of degree not of kind." That is why Mormons refer to Jesus as elder brother. James Talmage wrote, "Human beings generally were similarly existent in spirit state prior to their embodiment in the flesh. . . . There is no impropriety, therefore, in speaking of Jesus Christ as the Elder Brother of the rest of mankind." "Mormon doctrine deviates significantly from the Bible, which teaches that Jesus is eternal and not procreated. Although Mormons teach that Jesus is eternal, what they mean is that He existed as a spirit child prior to His incarnation. Being an offspring of Elohim means He was created at some point in time." For the full article see <http://www.probe.org/content/view/772/65/>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:07

Thursday, November 29, 2007

## **BOOK BANNED IN BOSTON, Part 2**

A Reader, commenting on my post below, asked a good question. Here is my reply. I am posting it here so that more than he will read it. Are you saying God's wrath was expiated with only the physical punishment Jesus endured on the cross? God's wrath is the emotion of great displeasure: anger [controlled and directed, not irrational rage] directed toward sin; it also can mean punishment, as a consequent of the anger. Christ's offering of himself on Calvary was a propitiation of God's anger- it placated (appeased) Him. Christ's death also expiated the cause of the anger, our sin- it put an end to our sin and guilt, it removed it from His sight (thus we say, "our sins are covered by the blood of Jesus") Propitiate and expiate are used today interchangeably. However, there is an important distinction in both the Greek and in Theology. God hates sin. He abhors it. This concept is rejected by many today- it does not fit the popular concept of God as Love. That God is angry and must be appeased is also a concept derided by many. Thus the word (and doctrine of) propitiation is rarely used and expiation is deemed far preferable by many. Evangelicals are satisfied with the teaching that Jesus' death paid for our sins. Period. Propitiation requires an atoning sacrifice- a innocent substitute for the guilty. The death of Jesus was penal, ie- a punishment required to appease an angry God. That, too, is a repugnant Doctrine to many. Contemporary Christians are glad to believe that their sin has been forgiven by a loving God; but they do not want to probe deeper as to how and why such forgiveness is made possible. I am not saying that God's wrath was expiated with only the physical punishment Jesus endured on the cross. I am saying God's anger was propitiated and our sin was expiated by the offering of the perfect life of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice. Jesus' life was perfect in obedience and righteousness. And the offering of that life involved his suffering, which he experienced from birth until his last breath on the cross. All of that was the Sacrifice by which we are saved. If the punishment for sin is separation from God, True, the wages of sin is death and that "death" is spiritual separation from God. But that death (separation) does not await sinners when they die. That death is their reality from birth, the consequence of Adam's sin in the Garden. People are born spiritually dead, i.e.- separated from God and they live that way their whole life, unless they become saved. Rom 5:12-21, 1 Cor. 15:22 People who come to saving faith, receive life then and there and are no longer dead (separated) from God- Eph 2:4-5 et al. Jesus took our punishment upon Himself, doesn't this mean He suffered separation from God (ie Hell)? This is a common definition of Hell these days, but Hell is not separation from God per se. Hell involves eternal Torment. What sinners face in eternity is not an extension of their life-long separation (spiritual death), but Torment. Rom 2:8-9 Here are two texts of Scripture that teach that Hell involves everlasting punishment. Matthew 25:46 sums up the judgment on the "sheep and goats" with the words. "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." The same word aionion (eternal) is used to describe the punishment of the wicked and the blessing of the righteous. Whatever we say about the duration of "eternal" life for believers must be said about "eternal" punishment for unbelievers. Since "life" for believers is everlasting (John 10:28), so must be the punishment for unbelievers. In a second text, Revelation 20:10, John describes those in the "lake of fire" being "tormented day and night forever and ever." The expression day and night is used in Revelation to express the concept of "forever." The lake of fire is described in Revelation 19:20 as a place that "burns with brimstone." John declares that anyone whose name is not written in the book of life is "thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). The Bible certainly teaches us that there is very real and very terrible place of punishment for those who keep Christ out of their lives. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself probably had more to say about it than anyone else. This is what he taught: "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life halt, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Mark 9:43-48 KJV Mr Pynchon [in my post below] rejected the idea that after Christ suffered on the Cross, he then went to spend time in the place called Hell and suffered torment there for our sins. As I did say, I agree with him about this.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:04

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

## **THE FIRST BOOK BANNED IN BOSTON**

The Founder of Springfield (named after his home town in England) was William Pynchon. There is an Episcopal Church building here that is a duplicate of his home parish church [Anglican- he was a Puritan] and a statue of him is next to the main City Library. In 1650, he wrote "The Meritorious Price of our Redemption" in which he .. condemned especially the doctrine that Christ suffered the wrath of God and the torments of hell to pay man's debt to his Creator. The Massachusetts General Council members [the Legislature] read the book, considered it to be heretical, and ordered it burned immediately on the Market Place at Boston. It was the first book "banned in Boston".

Mr Pynchon's heresy was in writing that Christ had not suffered the wrath of God, paying a painful price to atone for our sins. He particularly denied that Christ spent 3 days in Hell, suffering the fires there on our behalf (which the Apostles Creed implies). Mr Pynchon denied what John Calvin wrote about this and what has been accepted by many Calvinists as true-...it was expedient for [Christ] to undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment. For this reason, he must also grapple hand to hand with the armies of hell and the dread of everlasting death. A little while ago we referred to the prophet's statement that "the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him," "he was wounded for our transgressions" by the Father, "he was bruised for our infirmities" [Isaiah 53:5 p.]. By these words he means that Christ was put in place of evildoers as surety and pledge — submitting himself even as the accused — to bear and suffer all the punishments that they ought to have sustained. No wonder, then, if he is said to have descended into hell, for he suffered the death that, God in his wrath had inflicted upon the wicked! -from Calvin's Institutes To deny all this was considered heresy. Rather than recant, Mr Pynchon returned to England. He had tried to make the case that what Christ offered for our redemption was his perfect life, particularly his perfect obedience. Many Calvinists today agree with this "heresy", connecting it with the requirement of the Covenant. Christ fulfilled, by his life, what was impossible for us sinners to provide- perfect obedience and righteous- not just sinlessness [Calvinists who are not Reformed or Covenantalist will debate this.] Covenantal Calvinists connect Christ's righteousness and obedience with the Doctrine of Justification in which sinners are reckoned to have Christ's Righteousness. It is said to be "imputed" to them. Strange as it will sound to many evangelicals, this Doctrine is saying we are not saved by faith alone, rather we are saved by the righteousness of Christ, imputed to sinners when they come to Christ by faith alone. It is actually saying we are not saved by works, but we are saved by merit- the merit of Christ's perfect life and obedience reckoned to us when we come to faith. Salvation is not simply by faith. It is by being "in Christ", which faith makes possible. The forensic and positional nature of Salvation is not commonly understood today, being replaced by a subjective and pietistic understanding. Was Mr Pynchon of Springfield really a Heretic? Yes and No. That Christ suffered the Wrath of God is true and Scriptural. His death was a "propitiation" [here is an example, by the way, of why literal translations of Scripture are essential. Paraphrases do not use this word.] "Propitiation" is a technical word and means a sacrifice upon which God vents His Wrath. In dying, Christ became sin- for us. Thus, he experienced the anger God has against all the sin of the world. Christ's death was also an "expiation", meaning that it effectively removed the sin that made God angry. In denying this Doctrine, Mr Pynchon would be a heretic. However, he is not a heretic in denying that Christ suffered the pain of Hell on our behalf. Christ's sacrificial death was a complete and full Atonement. It did not require that Christ had to suffer additional torment in Hell. The phrase in the Apostles Creed saying Christ "descended into Hell" is very misleading and should be removed. Finally, Mr Pynchon is not a heretic in teaching that Christ offered His perfect obedience and righteousness to atone for our sins, as well as his blood (death) That is Scriptural. I'm sure that none of these Doctrines have been preached at Old First Church for a long, long time. The pity is that they are not preached in many churches today.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:26

Monday, November 26, 2007

### **MARIE OSMOND'S TESTIMONY**

Marie Osmond may very well win this week's "Dancing with the Stars" competition because of her popularity, if not for her dancing skills. She comes across as a very likable, attractive person and as a good testimony for the Lord. She has gone through personal trials and tragedy. In interviews, she witnesses to God and His help. She prays often, as well as reads her Bible daily. She is sincere and her Faith is both real to her and a very practical help in her daily life. She could easily be seen as a strong evangelical Christian. Many may think she is. She is not. What we have here is the old issue of Doctrine and Definition. To what God does she pray? What Bible does she read? What difference does that make, if she "knows the Lord", talks to Him and receives help from Him? Aren't these the things that matter? Here is a very complete overview of Doctrines taught by the Church of Latter day Saints and believed in by Mormons. Marie Osmond is a Mormon. This overview is written by a former LDS member. Read his personal story, also found on this site. <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/michaeldavis/docs/mormonism/mormonism.html>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:38

Saturday, October 27, 2007

## **MOTHER NATURE? WHO IS MOTHER NATURE?**

With the recent fires devastating southern California, reporters are again making frequent reference to "Mother Nature". The word nature comes from the Latin- to be born. The word "nature" usually is a noun referring to any and all natural (as opposed to artificial or "man made") objects or phenomena. "Mother Nature" is a metaphor indicating the ultimate source of our natural life, that which mothers or nurtures us physically. Sometimes feminized Nature is deified and many people through the centuries, including ours, have worshipped Gaia (goddess of the earth). Much of today's Environmentalism reflects this deification and common rhetoric is replete with it. There is no such goddess. Mother Nature as an entity or force (a deity) in control of our destiny or the weather or wild fires does not exist. Seems obvious, but we read or hear of "her" daily. Why?

Maybe as a substitute for (and a refusal to acknowledge) the Deity that is in control- our true "Mother": God the Father, Maker of Heaven and Earth. Most Christians declare that truth at least once a week when we confess the Nicene Creed during our worship. The natural world in which we live is the handiwork of God. We care for that natural world because He has given us that responsibility and we honor Him when we do it. Instead of "Mother Nature", we should be hearing about the Father's Providence. Part of believing God is Creator is believing that God is continually involved in the preservation of what He has created. In that sense, creation never ends. He holds and keeps all things together. He guides the earth as it orbits the sun. He waters the earth and feeds the animals. He controls the seasons and the weather- not some Mother Nature (as deity or metaphor). That is one of the main reasons we worship Him.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:51

## **THE CURSE**

Classic (Christian) Christmas carols are filled with sound doctrine. The 3rd verse of "Joy to the World" includes these words- No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found... If this is our Father's world and He is involved in its day by day operation, how do we account for natural disasters? To start with, what we are inclined to think of as "disasters" are often simply natural phenomena- the earth acting according to how it was made. Hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes are not disasters in themselves. Neither are floods nor droughts. They are as natural as the changing seasons, with ice and snow replacing the hot days of Summer. Global warming and global cooling are natural, too. So is the accompanying extinction of certain species of animal and wildlife and the erosion of shorelines and the redirection of rivers.

But, for all of that there are "The Fall" and "The Curse" to deal with. The Fall is shorthand for what happened in the garden of Eden as a consequence of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Human beings became Sinners, spiritually separated from their Creator and henceforth in bondage to sin, driving them to live in selfish, greedy ways. People are meant to live in harmony with the earth as its caretakers. That includes where they live, the facilities they build there and how they treat and use all the natural resources around them. The sinful nature within them leads them to do foolish things and use poor judgment about all of that. Their propensity to selfishness and greed is often the real reason behind what they prefer to call Disasters blamed on Mother Nature. The Curse is another sequence of the Fall. The earth is not as God created it. It is still essentially "good", but it too is subject to bondage. It resists cultivation by human beings. It is often hostile to them. It is often not productive and it is constantly decaying. This, in combination with the sinful practices of people, also leads to great and frequent "disasters". Redemption offered in Christ, is meant to counter the Fall and the Curse. That Good News is joy to the world and we will sing of it often this coming Christmas Holiday.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:48

Monday, October 8, 2007

## **THE HEART OF THE TRUE GOSPEL**

I wrote of "mercy" in this morning's devotional emassage [QT Thots- ask for it if you do not receive it and want to]. When I pray for this City, my neighborhood and certain people I ask God to show mercy. That means I ask Him to spare us from tragedy and disaster and undue grief. I am appealing to God's goodness and love for all. But this same God is also just. His Law has been broken and His Justice must be served. The heart of the Gospel is that God the Son has satisfied God's justice by substituting Himself for us, taking the punishment in our stead. In truth, the offended God absorbs the offense Himself. He required righteousness of us and He himself provided just that. It is imputed or reckoned to be ours, when we come to saving faith in God the Son, trusting and committing ourselves to Him wholly. It is very sad and disturbing to hear so-called evangelicals replacing this Doctrine of Penal Substitution for other versions of the Cross and Gospel. The Gospel, they say, is all about servant and sacrificial love, especially for the poor. That is what the Cross demonstrates. The classic doctrine is said to be repulsive because it teaches a horrid, vindictive, angry God who practiced child abuse (killing his son)!

God's redemptive love must not be conceived - misconceived, rather - as somehow triumphing and displacing God's retributive justice, as if the Creator-Judge simply decided to let bygones be bygones. The measure of God's holy love for us is that 'while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' and that 'he...did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (Romans 5:8, 8:32). Evidently there was no alternative to paying that price if we were to be saved, so the Son, at the Father's behest 'through the eternal Spirit' (Hebrews 9:14), paid it. Thus God 'set aside...the record of debt that stood against us...nailing it to the cross' (Colossians 2:14). Had we been among the watchers at Calvary, we should have seen, nailed to the cross, Pilate's notice of Jesus' alleged crime. But if, by faith, we look back to Calvary from where we now are, what we see is the list of our own unpaid debts of obedience to God, for which Christ paid the penalty in our place. Paul, having himself learned to do this, testified: 'the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20). -J .I

.Packer[http://www.reformation21.org/Reformation\\_21\\_Blog/Reformation\\_21\\_Blog/58/vobId\\_\\_6193/](http://www.reformation21.org/Reformation_21_Blog/Reformation_21_Blog/58/vobId__6193/)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:33

Thursday, September 20, 2007

## **SOUND DOCTRINE MATTERS**

Over and over it is said that today's youth and young adults are not interested in Theology or Doctrine. And this is often said with resignation by seasoned Pastors with "Oh, well, therefore we should stop insisting on the importance of Theology and Doctrine and give the young people what they say they want." (This is usually a combination of subjective experiences and social activism, all preferably within "communities" which are often substitutes for marriage and/or families). I find this capitulation (surrender) by seniors, who should know better, to be very disturbing, to say the least. What is assumed about today's youth and young adults is mistaken. They are interested in Theology and Doctrine. When they say they are not, they mean they are not interested in the classic and traditional Theology and Doctrine they associate with an older generation. They are caught up and controlled by the zeitgeist. They firmly believe in contemporary Theology and currently popular doctrines. What makes this even more sad is that they don't really know much about the classic and traditional Theology and Doctrine that they denigrate and reject. I started to list some doctrines here that illustrate my point and ended up with a long list that covers just about everything. You name the doctrine, any doctrine, and there is now a "contemporary" take on it. The orthodox Christian Faith is at stake here. Thankfully, others are as alarmed as I am. The following is a good article, but I would add the word "good" or "sound" or "Biblical" before "Doctrine" in the title- [http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070918/29357\\_Why\\_Doctrine\\_Matters.htm](http://www.christianpost.com/article/20070918/29357_Why_Doctrine_Matters.htm)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:46

Thursday, July 19, 2007

## **ENCOURAGING WORDS ABOUT GOD'S PROVIDENCE**

There are many verses in the Bible that assure us that God, the Almighty, is in complete control of the world He has made. There is evil and sinful human beings chose to do terrible things; nevertheless, God, our loving Heavenly Father is in control of our lives and affairs. Yes, we are accountable and held responsible for our decisions and actions, but somehow these verses of God's Providence hold true. We often do not see how they can be true, but we trust Him to work out all things for the good as He sees fit. We may suffer unfairly, but He is our Perfect Father who knows best and we put our lives into His keeping and walk down the street of life holding His Hand. This has been bedrock doctrine for me for many years, but I confess I have struggled with it lately. I have found the following sections of the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism very helpful and reassuring. I recommend them to you today.

The Belgic Confession Article 13 The Doctrine of God's Providence We believe that this good God, after he created all things, did not abandon them to chance or fortune but leads and governs them according to his holy will, in such a way that nothing happens in this world without his orderly arrangement. Yet God is not the author of, nor can he be charged with, the sin that occurs. For his power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible that he arranges and does his work very well and justly even when the devils and wicked men act unjustly. We do not wish to inquire with undue curiosity into what he does that surpasses human understanding and is beyond our ability to comprehend. But in all humility and reverence we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden from us, being content to be Christ's disciples, so as to learn only what he shows us in his Word, without going beyond those limits. This doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort since it teaches us that nothing can happen to us by chance but only by the arrangement of our gracious heavenly Father. He watches over us with fatherly care, keeping all creatures under his control, so that not one of the hairs on our heads (for they are all numbered) nor even a little bird can fall to the ground without the will of our Father. In this thought we rest, knowing that he holds in check the devils and all our enemies, who cannot hurt us without his permission and will. For that reason we reject the damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God involves himself in nothing and leaves everything to chance. The Heidelberg Catechism Q. 26 What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"? A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father because of Christ his Son. I trust him so much that I do not doubt he will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and he will turn to my good whatever adversity he sends me in this sad world. He is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father. Q. 27 What do you understand by the providence of God? A. Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty— all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand. Q. 28 How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us? A. We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love. All creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:33

Wednesday, July 18, 2007

## **LEARNING ABOUT GOD IN VBS**

'The Lord is the true God' (Jeremiah 10:10). I substituted at VBS one morning recently and taught this verse, complete with hand movements and a song (that I didn't use) to four groups of wonderful, bright, grade school children. The lesson used the word "real" for "true". Is that the same thing? The only point of the Lesson was that God is real. We compared a counterfeit dollar bill with a real dollar bill. I just followed the lesson plan and it never explained who the true God is. Probably the writers assumed the children would know that the true God is the God of the Bible and the one we believed in as Christians, i.e.- the Lord. Is the Lord in Jeremiah 10:10 "Jesus"? Hopefully, the true God will be defined more clearly before the week is out. After all, other Religions teach about "God". Would the children assume that "God" is the same in them all? Do these children believe that Hindus, Moslems, Jews and Christians all worship the same God? If not, will they learn the differences and how to recognize the one God who is "true"?

Of course, the first place to search for the help they need is in the Bible. However, that is a big book and finding material about specific topics requires time, direction and prior knowledge. There are some time-honored resources to get them going: Confessions and Catechisms. (I have selected a few sections of each to illustrate. These documents usually include Scripture references. I have omitted them here.) One of the purposes of all Statements (Confessions) of Faith (expanded Creeds) is to spell out what the Church, in centuries past, came to believe the Bible teaches about many things, such as the nature and attributes of God. Written by scholars, they tend to condense a lot of specialized theological words (jargon) and terms into often very terse and dense sentences that are not easy for most laypeople of today to understand. The most famous and well know Confession is the Westminster Confession (written in England, 1646). It has historically been very important among Presbyterians and some Congregational and Baptist Churches. It is very thorough and complete, but I prefer another one, The Belgic Confession, written during the Reformation in Holland and very important among Reformed Churches with Dutch Heritage. It is far more easy to understand and has a much more conversational, pastoral style. In my view, it is far more appropriate and useful for children and newer Believers. Here is how it describes the true God-

THE BELGIC CONFESSIO [from the Latin word for "Netherlands" of today's Belgium, once a part of the Netherlands] adopted by national synods held during the last three decades of the sixteenth century. The text, not the contents, was revised again at the Synod of Dort [Holland] in 1618-19 and adopted as one of the doctrinal standards to which all office bearers in the [Dutch] Reformed churches were required to subscribe. The confession stands as one of the best symbolical statements of Reformed doctrine. [It may be noted that at the Synod of Dort, the Canons of Dort were also adopted. These set out what are now known as the Five Points of Calvinism (T.U.L.I.P.)] The translation [of the Confession] presented here is based on the French text of 1619 and was adopted by the Synod of 1985 of the Christian Reformed Church.

THE BELGIC CONFESSIO  
ABOUT THE NATURE AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD Article 1 The Only God We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God— eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty; completely wise, just, and good, and the overflowing source of all good. Article 9 The Trinity. The defining characteristic of the True God is that He is triune. This is a long section which describes the Trinity at length

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM The Synod of Dort in 1618-1619 approved the Heidelberg Catechism, and it soon became the most ecumenical of the Reformed catechisms and confessions. The catechism ... is the most widely used and most warmly praised catechism of the Reformation period. The English translation follows the first German edition of the catechism except in two instances explained in footnotes to questions 57 and 80. The result of those inclusions is that the translation therefore actually follows the German text of the third edition as it was included in the Palatinate Church Order of November 15, 1563. This is the "received text" used throughout the world. Catechisms are meant for exactly that: catechism- oral instruction, using memorized questions and answers, to teach the doctrines of the Confession. One of the serious criticisms against traditional, classic Doctrines is that they are meaningless or irrelevant to both the children and adults of our time.

(Actually, Confessions and creeds are almost non-existent in contemporary churches, but scholars and critics writing today refer back to what they think these Sources teach. (Witness current attempts to revise the classic doctrines of the Atonement and Justification) Whether the children in VBS will ever be catechized remains to be seen, but if they are, all the words in both the Confession and the Catechism will have to be explained with other words that children understand and use today.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM Q. 26 What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"? A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and everything in them, who still upholds and rules them by his eternal counsel and providence, is my God and Father because of Christ his Son. Compare the above with -THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSIO OF FAITH CHAP. II. - Of God 1. There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering,

abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him; and withal, most just, and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. 2. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself; and is alone in and unto Himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which He hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting His own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleaseth. In His sight all things are open and manifest, His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands. To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them. 3. [about the Trinity] WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM. 4. What is God? A. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Q. 5. Are there more Gods than one? A. There is but one only, the living and true God. Q. 6. [about the Trinity] WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM. Question 7: What is God? Answer: God is a Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Question 8: Are there more Gods than one? Answer: There is but one only, the living and true God. Question 9: [about the Trinity] Obviously, the Catechist (Teacher) will have to work to explain what is found in the Confessions and Catechisms. There has never been a more desperate need for just that work in today's churches.

\_\_\_\_\_ Some of the attributes of God mentioned in the above Confessions and Creeds that are currently being debated and will require special study are the following. eternal, infinite [a temporal?] almighty [omnipotent] immutable, unchangeable, without passions [impassible] knowing all things [omniscient]: in His sight all things are open and manifest, His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain. I plan on discussing them in future posts.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 20:51

Saturday, July 7, 2007

## **DEFINING SOME OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD vis-à-vis "FREE WILL"**

In these times when personal responsibility for choices and behavior is so often played down or denied (It is my family, the environment, society, the economy, community leaders and the government that are responsible) and when Christians commonly surrender to evil and suffering as God's normal will for them or others, I think we must seriously reconsider some basic doctrines. What follows are some of my recent ruminations, particularly about Free-will, Predestination, Providence and Omniscience. My mind is changing about some matters. I realize there is room here for debate and need for continuing reflection. (One helpful book is Predestination & Freewill, Basinger & Basinger, editors-IVP) People, as human beings, ideally have freedom to choose what they do. Granted, there are major influences on this "freedom": circumstances, other people, inner emotions and needs, mental or physical illness, the pressure of time constraint, knowledge or ignorance, even ability or lack of ability to reason and to make intelligent decisions. Nevertheless, human beings are not automatons or machines. They normally freely choose what they do. That is why they are accountable for what they do.

However, in one area, human beings have lost their freedom: freedom to choose in matters of God. As a consequence of Adam and Eve's freedom to choose, human beings have inherited a "Sin Nature"- in the very core of their being, in their heart, they hate their Maker and rebel against Him. Their will, regarding God, is opposed to Him (known as the antithesis). They cannot and therefore, will not, choose to worship and serve Him. They seek autonomy from Him in all things. Their will, in regards to God, is in bondage- not free- and they are helpless to do anything about this. This spiritual death is a consequence of the Fall. They are dead (separate) from God (although very religious) and will remain that way unless God Himself gives them a new heart- unless God acts on their behalf to save them. He chooses to do that with some. They are the Elect. Why He chooses any at all, let alone the ones that He does, is a mystery but is according to His Plan for His Glory. If anyone is saved, that is totally because of God's elective, prevenient, irresistible Grace. God calls some through the Gospel. He regenerates their heart. This leads to faith and repentance, union with Christ, adoption, imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believing sinner, justification, sanctification and ultimate Glory. The entire process is all of God. [I affirm the classic Reformed Doctrines of Grace- T.U.L.I.P. and the Gospel of Grace- Salvation by grace only, through Christ only, by faith only, to the glory of God only.] Human beings retain a free will in regard to all else. Conservative Calvinists believe that the Scripture has many texts that teach God is in control over literally all things. There are also, they acknowledge, many verses that teach free will. They seek to harmonize these seemingly contradictory texts by saying God somehow controls all that people freely choose, good or bad. The former does not prohibit the latter. Everything that happens is His will. (-see Systematic Theology, Chap. 16 by Wayne Grudem) I understand "freedom to choose" to mean "to choose freely", voluntarily, without external constraint or force, without someone else "pulling the strings". This is the way we are made to live by God, reflecting Him whom we image. Any attempts to restrain, suppress or deny this freedom (a common and never ceasing problem) is a sin against us as human beings. It is unthinkable and unacceptable to me that God would do such a thing in general, let alone constrain or influence someone to sin or commit evil (James 1:13). Conversely, we will and often do, freely choose to do what is right and good in our lives and in the world. God's "common grace" is active in human affairs to influence (not coerce) and motivate us to do this. (Ironically, common grace is sometimes interpreted to mean God's efforts in the world to restrain evil rather than to enable good). God is Sovereign, as is His Word. Absolutely! The Kingdom, Power and Glory are His alone. That God is sovereign does not mean there is no resistance to His Authority and no disobedience of His Word. It does not mean that such resistance and disobedience is impossible. People freely choose to sin and commit evil every day. Furthermore, because God is omnipotent does not necessarily mean He is in control of all things, every detail, always. He could be, but that is not the same as saying He is. He chooses to respect the freedom of choice He Himself has given people. In that sense, He chooses to limit His omnipotence. He chooses not to exercise His Sovereignty. This does not make Him less Sovereign or less powerful- a lesser God. In fact, our hope and confidence is that our sovereign God will exercise His power in our lives and that neither evil within or without will triumph over us. They will try. Conflict is a part of our existence. God has enemies. We have enemies as His People. There are Powers of Darkness at work in our world. We are to resist them by the power of God. We are to wage warfare in the Name of our Sovereign. We are to ceaselessly seek to extend His crown rights over all. We know the Victory is ours for the very fact that God is Sovereign and omnipotent and all other forces must ultimately surrender and submit to Him.

"Ultimately"- that is the operative word. We have freedom, as human beings, but with consequences, within boundaries and ultimately with limits. That God predestined some sinners to be saved, that He predestined that all of history would end at the Throne of the Risen Son, that His Creation would be redeemed and bring Him Glory- that God predestined all of this does not necessarily mean that God predestined every detail of every thing, literally, that happens along the way among billions of people around the globe. We know from Scripture, History and experience- from all we have said above about free will, this is not the case. Rather a sovereign, omnipotent God works in all things, good and bad, freely chosen and executed or not, to accomplish His good and perfect will in the End (Romans 8:28) Being omniscient, God

knows Himself, all things past and present and all things that He wills to come. In fact, He knows all of this now and at once. The past, present and future are all present to Him. This does not mean that God knows what is not knowable: the freely chosen acts by human beings before they chose and do them. God certainly can know what the consequences of those acts will be before they happen, because He knows "if this, than that" about everything. He knows all possibilities, but this is not the same as knowing all detailed actualities before the fact. Does this mean God's knowledge is limited? He is not truly omniscient? Can God create a rock so heavy He can not lift it? That is an old non-sensical play on words. Can God do what it is impossible for God to do? By definition, the answer is No, because this statement violates the rules of logic. Can something be here and not here at the same time. Can A and non-A both be true at the same time? This is a logical impossibility- the Law of Contradiction. We accept that Law. We use it in argumentation and consider it valid. God himself abides by it. Why then do we have difficulty accepting that it is logically impossible for God to know something that, by definition, is not knowable and consider this a denial of His omniscience? God knows all that can be known. The subject here is not God's ability to know, but what is knowable. When Scripture teaches that God knows everything, we agree. He knows everything there is to know and He knows it now. If something new happens and thus becomes knowable, God will know that too. Does this mean that God's knowledge is imperfect, limited. Does His knowledge change and increase? The content of it does, but to me, this does not mean His knowledge is not always perfect and complete. That would only be true, if there was something that could be known and God didn't know it. God knows all that has happened. He knows all that is happening. God knows Himself. He knows all that He will do in the future (thus we believe in prophecy and its fulfillment). He knows all that can possibly happen in the future, whatever choices are freely made by people and how He will respond to all choices made by people, to secure the ultimate outcomes He wills for all. He can do that because He is the omnipotent sovereign God. There is no other. I do not see this as limiting God Himself at all. I do not see this as saying He is open to change as God. He remains immutable in His nature, attributes, character and will. He is not "open" to process and change in any of these matters.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:28

Wednesday, June 27, 2007

## **UNDERSTANDING GOD'S ATTRIBUTES**

That God is Sovereign and omnipotent does not mean that God causes or controls every detail of everything that happens in life. 1That God is omniscient does not mean that God knows all that has not yet happened, but only that he knows all that has happened, all that is now and all that could happen [if this, then that] in the future 2 That God is immutable does not mean nothing about Him ever changes, that He is always the same in every aspect 3That God is said to be impassive does not mean that God has no emotions, feels no pain and does not suffer 4That God is self sufficient does not mean that God is untouched by contingencies or is indifferent to what happens in the world (or the prayers of His people) 5That God is eternal and transcendent does not mean that He does not act in Time or is not immanent, too 6

FOOTNOTES:1 There are angels and demons (especially Satan) that cause things to happen, as well as other Spiritual Powers. They are beings created by God, but they have their own will and may rebel against Him. Indeed, Satan is the Adversary of God and opposes Him at every turn. Although accountable to God, the Powers that rebel are not under God's control and what they do does not have His approval. They cause Evil. God does notHuman beings also were created by God but have their own will and are able oppose Him. Those who do that also cause evil. Consequent violence and suffering in their lives and in the world is not from God.Because God is the ultimate and rightful Ruler of All with supreme authority and power over all, He imposes limits upon these rebellious powers and human beings. They will be brought to judgment. How and when is determined by Him, although much of that will happen within time and history and will involve human, natural agencies.Evil caused by these fallen beings is to be opposed and never accepted. Christians are not called to passivity in the presence of evil (this includes Disease, as well as all forms of Injustice), let alone rationalizing it as somehow God's will and for our good. There is a Cosmic War going on, particularly between Christ and Satan. The Church is in the middle. Christ calls us to be militant, not acquiescent, in this Conflict. However, God's actions to rein in evil and bring it to an end are for His glory and our good and we may have to patiently suffer and passively endure the hardship which that may bring upon us. These are important distinctions.2 Allowing the reality of free will, both for the spiritual powers and all human beings, and all the possible consequences of their consequent choices and actions means God can only know, in regards to the future, all that might possibly happen. The issue here is not about God's ability, as God, to know all, but rather about what is available for Him to know. 3 The Nature and Attributes of God never change. He, as God, is the same always. His purposes never change. His will for History, ultimately uniting all things in Christ, never will change. What can change, and often has, is how God responds to the choices and actions of Men and Nations in order to carry out His unchangeable purposes for them. 4 The most cursory reading of Scripture demonstrates that God has emotions and experiences feelings, including compassion and suffering, as well as anger. This is certainly true of God the Father and God the Son on the occasion of the latter's crucifixion and all that involved. The Doctrine of Impassivity is best understood as saying God is not controlled by His emotions or feelings. 5,6 Again, there is ample evidence in the Biblical narrative to demonstrate the God is very much aware of, and involved in, the affairs of the world. He acts in History. He is present in Time, often transforming chronos [the routine passing of minutes and hours] into kairos [awesome moments of Encountering His Presence]. He certainly responds to the suffering and cries of His People again and again. God is Available and Accessible in our world. And it is because He remains Eternal and Transcendent as He does this, there is hope for us all.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:01

Friday, June 15, 2007

## **BEWARE THE SOCINIANS**

A spokesman for the Jehovah's Witnesses, who are having a major Convention here this week, was quoted in a TV interview today, saying they are Christians. They believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Sounds like they may be Christians, but are they? Here is a list of their major Doctrines. Compare them with what the Bible says. Many will be deceived by what the spokesman said. This is another illustration about how essential it is to pay careful attention to definitions. [http://www.beliefnet.com/story/80/story\\_8034\\_1.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/story/80/story_8034_1.html) Jehovah's Witnesses are misnamed. They are not Christians. They come to our door frequently. I do not let them in- see 2 John vv. 7-11 below (This text is a warning about many Clergy in today's "mainline" Denominations, as well. And many contemporary Evangelical Leaders need to be aware that their Doctrine of Christ may also be slipping into the same error: generally speaking- Socinianism and modern day Unitarianism) 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. 8 Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. 9 Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, 11 for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. NOTE: "the teaching of Christ" means the teaching about [the Doctrine of] Christ, eg- that He is the incarnation of God the Son (v.7); not the teachings given by Christ, such as the Sermon on the Mount

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:00

Tuesday, May 29, 2007

## **POPE BENEDICT AND CHRISTOLOGY**

I greatly admired Pope John Paul II. I also admire the present Pope, Benedict XVI. As with his predecessor, I admire him for his very public advocacy of Biblical social values (against abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage, materialism) as he recently did in Brazil against all odds. I also admire his proclamation of historic, Creedal Christianity against its cultured despisers. The following is taken from a review of the Pope's recent book about Christ.

"As JESUS OF NAZARETH unfolds, it is clear that its author has little patience for popular modern Christologies portraying Jesus as wise teacher on a par with the founders of other religious or philosophical movements, or as a preacher of tolerance and understanding, or even as a political revolutionary. ... For Benedict, however, the flaw with all these interpretations is that, no matter how well-intentioned, they end up detracting from the truth that "in the end, man needs just one thing, in which everything else is included," God...What did Jesus actually bring, if not world peace, universal prosperity, and a better world? ...He brought God, and now we know his face, now we can call upon him. Now we know the path that we human beings have to take in this world. Jesus has brought God and with God the truth about our origin and destiny..."Benedict, asks: "[W]hat can faith in Jesus the Christ possibly mean...if the man Jesus was so completely different from the picture that the Evangelists painted of him and that the Church, on the evidence of the Gospels, takes as the basis of her preaching?"<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week1037/exclusive.html>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:36

Saturday, May 19, 2007

## **TRUMPETING TRIUMPH**

Thursday was Ascension Day [see below] Tomorrow, Churches should be celebrating the ascension of the Risen Christ to His ThronePsalm 471 Clap your hands together, all you peoples; O sing to God with shouts of joy. 2 For the Lord Most High is to be feared; he is the great King over all the earth. 5 [Jesus] has gone up with a merry noise, the Lord with the sound of the trumpet.6 O sing praises to [our Risen Lord], sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. 7 For [He] is the King of all the earth; sing praises with all your skill. 8 [The Risen Lord] reigns over the nations; [He] has taken his seat upon his holy throne. 10 the powers of the earth belong to [Him] and he is very highly exalted.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:57

Thursday, May 17, 2007

## **GETTING SOMETHING STRAIGHT**

The following Post may explain why it really disturbs me to hear "Christians" say "All that matters is that Jesus died for my sin. I believe that and know He is my Savior. That is all that matters. All this other stuff [other Doctrines] is too much for me. I don't need to get into any of that." The Post below also explains why it "drives me up a wall" when I hear people say that the Gospel is just about "love", defined however the speaker wants. They insist Jesus is all about loving and serving others. Period. That is the sum and total- all that really matters. This is so not true!

There are those who cite the Second Command to support the idea that love is all that matters: Love your neighbors as your self (Matt.22:36-39) They somehow forget the First Command to love God or else they interpret that one to mean that we love God when we love our neighbor. Wrong. The two Commands are inseparable and essential and their order is important. Before we love our neighbor comes the love of God. Loving God gives us the motive and the ability to love our neighbor, many of whom may be very unlikable. And loving God is to be done with all our mind. We are to love His Word (which includes much Doctrine) and His Law (which includes very specific, practical moral and ethical guidelines for "love". We dare not claim we love God if we neglect or denigrate His Word or Law. And the latter are essential to show us how to love our neighbor. Neither Command (nor both together) is the content of the Gospel or even comes close to explaining the content of Biblical Christianity.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:23

## **WHY ASCENSION DAY IS ESSENTIAL**

For all practical purposes, for many who call themselves Christians, Jesus lived for only 3 hours- the ones he spent dying on the cross. Their primary interest in Jesus is his sacrificial death for their sins. What happened before or after is good, but extra. For many others, Jesus lived for 3 years- the ones he spent walking around Israel, teaching and healing. What happened after is extra. Actually, from his birth in Bethlehem, Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, has now lived almost 2000 years. All those years are important, none are extra. What has He been up to? Today in the Church Calendar is Ascension Day. 40 days after his resurrection, Jesus publicly entered into Heaven, into Eternity, to be crowned with all authority in Heaven and on earth by His Father. Jesus is now the Risen Lord who has been functioning all these years as God's Prophet, Priest and King.

The Risen Lord is the Jesus we believe in and obey. To confine who He is to whom He was during those 3 years spent walking around Israel, let alone to the last week or the last 3 hours of those 3 years, is to do Him a serious injustice and is to have a very incomplete understanding of who He is and what He is all about. Indeed, if faith in Jesus is essential for salvation, we must be sure the "Jesus" we have faith in is none other than the Risen and ascended Lord. John makes clear (20:31) that believing Jesus is the Christ is essential to having Eternal Life. The "Christ" is the Risen Lord- the Prophet, Priest and King of God. [This is what the title "Christ", "Anointed One", means] This is what Ascension Day commemorates. It is an important Day and the Doctrine it reminds us of is desperately needed. Setting aside issues of the when, where and how of His ascension, my focus here is on the 3-fold work being done now, and through all these years, by the Risen Lord. As Prophet, the Risen Lord has been teaching and guiding His Church in all Truth, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, whom He continuously sends to fill, empower and gift the Church. He speaks through His Word which He revealed to His Apostles after the Ascension (the New Testament Scriptures) and which (along with the Old Testament Scripture) the Spirit illuminates and applies to Believers and the Church. As Priest, the Risen Lord entered into the Holy of Holies (the inner Sanctuary in Heaven) and presented to the Father His finished Sacrifice of Himself for the Salvation of the Elect. Sitting next to the Father (not on His knees before Him) He continually intercedes ("pleading the Blood", not petitioning for every thing) by His very presence, on behalf of the Elect. It is this continuous intercession that enables the Saints to persevere in their faith. As King, the Risen Lord, from His position of authority and power, is managing, directing, protecting and providing for His Church. As King, He is governing the affairs of the world, battling His enemies and spreading and enlarging His Reign and Realm. He is doing this primarily through His Body on earth, the Church. Now remove all this Doctrine, set aside or ignore the work of the Risen Lord as Prophet, Priest and King and what is left? Certainly not the Biblical Christ or Biblical Christianity. There would be no New Testament, no presence of the Holy Spirit among us, no Salvation, Church or Kingdom. There would be no hope. Thank God for the Ascension and for the Day that reminds us of all this!

**Blog Export: DUTCH TREAT- Cal Fox's Blog, <http://www.calvinfox.com/blog/>**

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:04

Tuesday, April 24, 2007

## **THE RISEN LORD AND HISTORY**

Hallelujah! Christ Is Risen, as He said! This means a lot more than He lives. The Risen Christ is Lord of History. He explains it all. Apart from Him there is no explanation. Worse than that, apart from Christ, there are only bad and false explanations. Everything that happens in History must be seen in relation to the Risen Christ. Only in this relationship can we measure, understand and correctly interpret the facts of history. It is His story. Far from aimless, far from random, far from meaningless, far from cyclic, History is linear. It has a purpose, a goal- God's purpose and goal. More exactly, all will end, finally, at the Throne. All will lay their crowns and scepters at the feet of the Lord of History. That is the Omega Point toward which all is going. Life must be lived with that End in view. The expectation of the End Times (Eschatology) is meant to control how we live today. The Secularist does not know it, the Atheist denies it; but, the Future is the judge of the Present, as well as its proper guiding Light.

The entire Book of Revelation is about cosmic conflict: Christ versus Satan. [The Gospel of Luke is about this concept, too] When we emphasize the humanity of Jesus, confining our interest in Him to interest in his relationships with the poor and marginalized, we are missing this Cosmic Conflict. Jesus the Nazarene, the suffering servant is now the King of kings with all power in heaven and earth. When we focus on the death of Christ, his atoning blood, we, again, are missing this Big Picture. The crucified Man, who died for us, is not in the grave. He has risen and now sits above, in Glory. The Gospel is about the Cross and the Tomb. Both are now empty. The Gospel also includes the Cloud, i.e.- the Ascension. The Risen Lord now reigns. The Lamb is on the Throne. We see in the Book of Revelation that there are Beasts who fight the Risen Lord. Babylon wars against Him. The Nations line up to battle Him. The Risen Christ wins! All of this is the Gospel. Now what weapon does the Risen Lord use to conquer and rule? See Rev.19:15- a sharp sword, but it is not made with steel. It comes from his mouth. (It is a metaphor.) Christ conquers and rules His enemies with His Word. The Apostle Paul speaks of the sword of the Spirit. It is the Word of God (Eph 6:17) The "rod" is also used as an symbol of the Word, used for discipline and correction (2 Tim 3:16) The Risen Christ engages the "Powers" with His Word, with the Gospel, with the Law. He demonstrated this in His skirmish with Satan in the wilderness, at the beginning of His Ministry. We especially see the Risen Lord going forth to conquer, as His Church carries out His Missionary Mandate to preach the Gospel, make disciples, teaching Believers to obey all that He has commanded (spoken). In the Book of Revelation, the Church is seen as in Heaven. It "comes down" from there, but it does not land on earth. "Comes down" is a figurative way of saying the City originated from God (cf John 3:3,7 -born from above; also 18:36) The Holy City exists now, parallel with our time-space world. Throughout his letter, John is shown (and writes about) scenes in Heaven, including people and their activities there. At the end of John's book, the Risen Lord is not shown literally ruling the Nations on earth. The final scene transpires after the nations have been destroyed, after the destruction of Babylon, the False Prophet and the anti-Christ. Even Death has been conquered by then, with the dead being raised from their graves. When did Christ begin exercising His authority on earth as King of kings? Christ ascended to the Throne after His Resurrection and has been actively reigning in this world ever since. His Rule, the Kingdom of Christ, began then, more than 2000 years ago. (The Church celebrates that event on "Ascension Day", May 18) The popular, dispensationalist interpretation of the Book of Revelation, has tended to lead Christians to despair about this world and ever seeing it change. It has led Believers to become separatists, just waiting for the "Rapture". The more Biblical view is that the End Times have started in the Now Times. Satan is now bound (restricted, not destroyed) for a very, very long time (a "millennium"- not a literal number) according to Rev.20:2. Eventually he will be completely defeated and destroyed. The Risen Lord is operating now, by Spirit and Word, in the world. He bound the Strong man by His death and resurrection. Often the wrong seems so strong, but this is still our Father's world and His Son is on the Throne. Evil in the world is strong, but limited, and exists only by the permissive will of God in Christ. Satan's power is not unrestrained. Here and there, we see His victories, e.g.- the destruction of the Berlin Wall and of the USSR. The Church has a part in this. The Sovereign does His kingly work primarily through us. It is true, He also uses non-Believers and "secular" means to get it done, as well; but, Christ has made us a kingdom (1:6) We are to "rule" on earth (5:10 20:6 cf 1 Peter 2:9, Exodus 19:6) for this entire long, long time (the "millennium") We have kingdom work to do here and now. This does not mean we covet earthy power or use political or military coercion to accomplish that. We have seen, the Sword that the Risen Lord rules by is the Word of His mouth. He smashes the nations with the rod which is his Law. The Church engages the world and the nations and civil governments by proclaiming and living the Gospel in their midst. The Church does not need to defeat Satan and evil powers in the world. That has already been done. We go against institutions, structures and systems, even though strong and dominant everywhere, knowing that they are already vanquished. They control people who do not know that, who have been convinced the enemy is invincible. Knowing the truth is our first step toward overcoming them in our lives and society. Throughout History, and our lives, there will always be the experience of conflict and hardship until

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the day when the Risen Lord returns. Suffering and martyrdom are marks of the Church. We are not to despair. In the fray, the Risen Lord, through the Word, is slaying the Enemy. After the dust settles, at the End, He will have won and we shall share His Victory (3:21) For more, please read my Article on the Book of Revelation on my website (click on the link at the top of the column to the right ->)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:21

Thursday, April 5, 2007

### **NEW ARTICLE ON MY WEBSITE**

The 7-part essay that was posted below, my Position Paper What is Word of God?, is now on my website (where it is also available in PDF) This Article is about the nature of the "Word of God" and its relationship to Revelation and Scripture. It describes the "Two Books" of God and the necessity for Reformed and Evangelical Christians to recover and use General Revelation and Natural Moral Law. The noetic effects of the Fall [what can the unregenerate mind know] and the sufficiency of Scripture [Sola Scriptura] are addressed. Obviously, this is a very cursory survey, but I hope it will be read by many in this format. All website Articles can be reached from Links at the top of the column to the right  
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Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:36

Wednesday, March 28, 2007

## **NATURAL MORAL LAW**

Of all areas of General Revelation, arguably the most fruitful for common discourse, with the unregenerate, on the "Meaning of life" is Natural Law. Natural Law is a subset of General Revelation. It is defined as that Moral Law all human beings, universally, know innately and elucidate primarily through Reason. Because it is written on everyone's heart, the Bible is not required for people to know the Moral Law of God. Human beings have this innate moral knowledge simply because they are human beings. We are born wired for morality. It is part of the way in which we image God. God created us with "moral oughtness", along with rationality, spirituality, creativity and communality. None of these faculties were lost at the Fall. It is inconsistent to say we lost this Natural Moral Law or Moral Knowledge at the Fall, but not the other faculties. Possessing innate moral knowledge is part of what makes us human beings. All people, by nature, know there is an Other (the Supernatural) whom they should worship and spend time with. Our innate faculty for spirituality reflects the First Tablet. The morality, which we know innately, is fundamentally the same as the Second Tablet of the Decalogue. Our fallen nature causes us, as human beings, to deny, suppress, transgress or violate what we know, both spiritually and morally. We are constantly at war against the Image of God within (again, this is the Antithesis). This is also evident in the way we treat or use our other faculties of rationality, creativity and commonality. All human faculties must and can be redeemed in Christ. The regenerated heart, with the illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit, in conjunction with study of the Special Revelation found in our Bibles, enables individuals to develop a Biblical, Christian Morality and Ethics.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:24

Tuesday, February 6, 2007

## **WHAT IS A SQUARE?**

I frequently stress the importance of definitions. Here is a clever illustration of the importance of context to determine definition. It is written by Robert Brow <http://www.brow.on.ca/Articles/Wittgenstein.html> Disagreements are mostly due to a failure to agree on the meaning of words. How do we learn to navigate our way through a quarrel? First we need to know that words have no meaning apart from a form of life in which they have a use. What is the meaning of the word SQUARE ? In a geometry form of life a square is an invented figure with four sides of an equal length. In the naming of tools in carpentry a square is two pieces of wood or metal set at right angles. In an urban geography form of life a square is an area bounded by buildings on four sides. In a conflict form of life the two sides square off to assume a fighting stance. In an algebra form of life the square of a is the symbol a multiplied by a. In a slang form of life a square is someone who is old-fashioned. In an eating form of life a square meal is one that is amply satisfying. Once we have identified a form of life we can learn the language game for the accepted use of that word. In geometry a square is distinguished from triangles and circles. There are family connections between these different uses of the word square, but we make no progress by assuming that there is one meaning underlying them all. The meaning of a word is therefore the particular way it is used in an activity or form of life. And if we know the language we will use the word correctly. A disagreement will normally be dissolved if both parties agree to use the word in the same way.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 08:55

Thursday, January 4, 2007

## **IS THE ATONEMENT UNCHRISTIAN?**

Here is a favorite hymn I have loved to sing and the doctrine of which I have believed for more than 50 years—On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, The emblem of suffering and shame; And I love that old cross where the dearest and best For a world of lost sinners was slain. O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world, Has a wondrous attraction for me; For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above To bear it to dark Calvary. In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, A wondrous beauty I see, For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died, To pardon and sanctify me. To the old rugged cross I will ever be true; Its shame and reproach gladly bear; Then He'll call me some day to my home far away, Where His glory forever I'll share.

When I first came to saving faith in Christ at age 17, the Pastor of the Church we attended made fun of this type of hymn. He was one of many who have ridiculed the “old time religion”, especially the doctrine of the Atoning Blood of Jesus—“slaughter house religion” they called it. Surely, educated, sophisticated, modern people do not believe in such a primitive idea. That is still the attitude of the Lord’s cultured despisers. Sadly, it is also the attitude of many who claim His Name today. But they are not so crass in their criticism. They have rather redefined the Cross and substituted another doctrine for the classic, Biblical one. O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world, is now also despised by some who call themselves evangelical Christians. Case in point is the view of Brian McLaren, best known spokesman for the “Emerging” churches who are trying to make the Gospel attractive to young, alienated adults. [http://www.apprising.org/archives/2005/12/brian\\_mclaren\\_i.html](http://www.apprising.org/archives/2005/12/brian_mclaren_i.html) It is common for Left leaning, so-called “Progressive” Christians today to reject Capital Punishment as violent, cruel and barbaric—definitely not Christian. Christians should be non-violent and show love, mercy and forgiveness to evil doers. Witness the recent example in the news of the Amish, when 10 of their children were shot, who forgave the shooter. Could God Himself do any less? It would make sense that such Christians would consider the Doctrine of the Penal, Substitutionary, Atoning death of Jesus to be unchristian and unnecessary. The idea that God would require the shedding of human blood to atone for sin, the idea that Jesus died as a sacrificial Lamb for sin, would be repugnant to them. What the death of Jesus is about is, they say, the ultimate act of servant hood, laying down his life in love for others. It has the moral influence of a good example. Well, yes, but it is far, far more than that. The Bible makes it clear that the death of Jesus was exactly what the Church has always said it is: the Atonement for the sins of the world. Jesus shed his blood for the forgiveness of my sins. Yes, God’s Justice required such a Death; but, more marvelous, Jesus is God. So actually, it was God offering Himself for my sins. I believe the words of another old hymn as well—And can it be that I should gain An interest in the Savior’s blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain—For me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be, That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me? Amazing love! How can it be, That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me? And so I repeat To the old rugged cross I will ever be true; Its shame and reproach gladly bear; Then He'll call me some day to my home far away, Where His glory forever I'll share.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:38

Wednesday, January 3, 2007

## **IS THERE TRUTH IN ALL RELIGIONS?**

Can Christians believe in Pluralism? Is there Truth in all Religions? Are they all different paths to God? Definition of "Truth"- correspondence to reality Religious Truth- correspondence to absolute Truth, to ultimate Reality, to "God" Christian Truth- that which corresponds to the self-revelation of the Triune God (His nature, character, will and purposes) as contained in the Christian Bible; Those Creeds, Confessions of Faith, and Dogma which correspond to the Gospel and those Christian Doctrines, particular absolute, ultimate Truths, revealed by God in the Bible; Answers revealed by God in the Bible to the ultimate world view questions of reality, origin and destiny, human identity and nature, meaning, purpose, ethics, morals and values Definition of "Religion"- those answers to the world view questions that are considered ultimate, to which people give their allegiance [usually maintained in time-honored Tradition(s) and expressed in symbols and rituals] and around which they conform their daily lives. All Religions are usually manifest and perpetuated by organizations and institutions. However, Religion must not be identified or made synonymous with any particular institution or organization or Leaders, individuals or sectarian groups within it. Definition of "True Religion" - Historic Catholic Christianity in historic succession back to the Apostles; Christian Religion which is Orthodox, Catholic and Reformed. That Religion which embodies Christian Truth in its confessions, creeds, traditions, rituals (worship), customs, practices and values; Cults, unorthodox and heretical expressions of Christianity are not included as True Religion. Definition of "Other Religions"- any Religion which is not Christian. This includes the recognized World Religions such as Islam and Hinduism, including Judaism. It includes so-called secular Religions such as Buddhism and philosophies such as Naturalism and Rationalism (Atheism)

It is granted that some concepts and values of True Religion are found in varying degrees, unknowingly, within Other Religions- more among Monotheists than Polytheists than Secularists. Far more in Judaism than Islam. These concepts, such as the acknowledgement of spiritual reality or the supernatural or a Creator, and moral values such as mercy and compassion, should be recognized, respected and encouraged; that, however, does not change the definitions above in any way. They are truths within non-true or false Religions. If acceptance of Christian Truth (at the very least, acceptance of its core Doctrines, as contained in its foundational Creeds) is essential for Salvation), then there is no Salvation in Other Religions. Pluralism, defined as considering and respecting all Religions as different but equal in value or equal as paths to the same God, is not acceptable to Biblical Christianity. In fact, it is antithetical to it. Speaking of Jesus, the Apostle Peter declared, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The Apostle Paul stated, "There is one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:6) This is basic Apostolic teaching. The True Religion is that which officially continues in the teaching of the Apostles (Acts 2:42) If we desire, as God does, to see sinners saved, they must hear the Apostolic Gospel and convert from whatever their other Religion may be to the true Religion. Atheists, Naturalists, Buddhists, Moslems, Jews and Hindus must become Christians, if they are to be saved. Respect and love them as human beings, absolutely; but, how is it love and respect for human beings when we do not share with them the means to their eternal salvation, allowing them to perish?

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:58

## **DOES GOD REALLY LIVE IN EVERYBODY?**

One of the most popular concepts believed today is that God or Christ is located within every human being. (Actually, such a concept is ancient) What is actually meant by "God" or "Christ" is revealed by the other terms used interchangeably. "Divinity" or the "Light" has been popular for ages. A local college professor was given an entire full page in our local paper last week to explain her conclusions about "seeking the mystery within". The professor comes across as a very likable, humble, caring person, as she describes her life long studies and search for the mystery, which includes her efforts in the classroom to share and learn from her many students over 45 years. She holds 3 Master's degrees (French, Spirituality and Theology- Harvard) and a PhD in French (University of Paris). She has traveled the world and met and learned from many of the major Theologians and religious leaders in the major spiritual traditions.

"As I listened to these profound theologians", she says, "my heart opened up and my soul felt the breath of the Spirit". "I had often pondered the mysterious way in which God creates within people the very desire to know God. I saw spirituality as the discipline of 'paying attention' to that mystery within us that leads us to seek God." "There are as many

paths to God as there are people on earth. How true this is...“God meets each one of us where we are.”[After years of learning from and growing to respect people of every world religion] ‘I found myself in awe of the sacred journey of every person.’“As different as they were ..they all had one thing in common: God was real to them...” “...life is a continual journey into God”“one embraces over and over moments of conversion, transformation and consummation”  
“Consummation occurs when God and the individual become one, yet remain two.”The Professor is a Roman Catholic nun and this is basic Western Mysticism. At times in my life, I have felt its appeal. The operative word there is “felt”. I was drawn to the writings of Thomas Merton, now and then, over the years, until one day I realized that the same language of devotion and communion he had been using about God was being used about Mary. The same language. Was it the same relationship? How do we distinguish a profound mystical experience from the longing and union of two human lovers or from the ecstasy of any other “peak moment” of life? What is the criteria or measure by which we can know it is “the real thing”? What about those days when we have no ecstasy, but only emptiness or nothing and the “consummation with God” has evaporated? Did it ever really happen? Does our relationship with Him require it? And is that consummation possible for every one regardless of what one that person’s Religion may be? God, Jesus, Light or the Spirit does not dwell within all people! All people are made in the image of God. This means that all people are like Him in having the attributes of Rationality, Creativity, Morality and Communality. They also have the faculty for knowing God. Every person needs to express, utilize and enjoy these attributes. Not all do, certainly, not to the same degree. What cripples or misdirects these faculties is our innate sin nature, inherited from our ancestors (Adam and Eve) as a consequence of the Fall. Somehow, this Doctrine of our Fallen Nature or Total Depravity or Radical Corruption is overlooked in so many discussions of the journey to God, the seeking after of the Mystery. We are created with an ability to know God, but we do not. People confuse the indescribable yearning for Him, that we all have, with actually knowing Him. They confuse the need to know with the knowledge itself. More than this, they do not acknowledge that it is the God of the Bible, their Creator for whom they yearn. That God, they do not want to know. Thus, they misname the God they seek. We do not, in fact, know God because we can not, and that because of the corrupt condition of our heart. We actually hate and fear our Creator and run from Him, substituting other “gods” in His place. (See Romans, chapter 1)I believe the Professor’s education in this field have misguided her and she has misguided all those students. To know God requires a new heart (Regeneration) To enjoy the peace of God, a sinner must first make peace with God (be Reconciled) A new heart and peace with God are gifts from God to those who hear the and believe the Gospel and are then Justified. That happens in the moment of union with Christ, to which they are called by the Holy Spirit, through the Gospel. Having been thus justified (once for all), the Holy Spirit indwells the new Believers and they may, and will, enter into a life time of growing in grace (Sanctification) through the means of grace (Worship and prayers, Sacraments, teaching, discipline, mutual-ministry and support within the Church). The subjective experience of knowing and enjoying God daily requires the prior objective (forensic) position in Christ. (See Romans, chapter 3-8) Anyone who teaches the former, must have the latter. Anyone who would have the former, must also have the latter. Otherwise, “spirituality” is groping in the Dark by the Lost.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:52

Wednesday, December 20, 2006

## **MOVIE SUB-TITLES AND THE BIBLE**

We recently tried to watch a recommended movie from India. The dialogue was in Hindi. We have watched many foreign language movies with minimal problems (except when they put the sub-titles in yellow) This particular movie printed a surfeit of subtitles in black and ran them across the middle of the screen, making it very difficult to see the picture. We gave up about 20 minutes into it. Here was an interesting illustration of post modern doctrine: The story was literally behind the words. The words were in the way. They were just arbitrary anyway. To enjoy the movie, especially the cinematography and sounds, we would have to look beyond and behind the printed words. In fact, the words should be ignored. However, without the words we could not understand the story. The words were essential to understand the meaning of the story. They could not be ignored, if we were to grasp the intent of the movie makers. Do you see the connection between all this and the use of the Bible, as well as with preaching?

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:29

Saturday, December 9, 2006

### **INSPIRING MESSAGE**

Have you watched the Piper video yet?<http://www.god-centered.com/blog/2006/10/supremacy-of-christ.html>Dr Piper declares boldly the Supremacy of Christ over every thing!!

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:00

Tuesday, December 5, 2006

## **HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT**

Over and again, we hear that the true spirit or meaning of Christmas is charity, giving and loving and, yes, peace on earth. All admirable, desirable qualities. But notice, they do not include, or even reference, Jesus. The good has marginalized, even eradicated, the Best. Every year, I proclaim that Christmas celebrates the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Notice, this is not the same as saying it celebrates the Birthday of Jesus. Everybody has a birthday. There has been only one Incarnation of God. And the purpose of the Incarnation, was to enable God Himself to suffer and die, an atonement for sin. More than that, the Incarnation was part of God's conflict with Satan and the powers of darkness. The Incarnate God went about healing and forgiving and exorcizing demons- all incidences of encounters with the Evil One. [This was the topic of my Master's Thesis some 40 years ago!] God Incarnate had invaded Satan's territory in the land of Israel and was defeating him in hand to hand combat here and there; but, finally, the incarnate God entered into the Darkness of Death, into the Pit itself, there to conquer the Prince of this World with His own Death. Thus securing the deliverance of the Elect from the Dark Kingdom, He arose victorious and ascended His Throne in Heaven, from whence He now rules all. The Incarnation is about all of that. And the true spirit of Christmas is joy and celebration of the Incarnation. Pass it on.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:37

## **A THRILLING SERMON BY JOHN PIPER (VIDEO CLIP)**

The following 10 minute excerpt of a sermon by John Piper goes well with the last post (below) and it illustrates the power of good traditional preaching- enjoy <http://www.god-centered.com/blog/2006/10/supremacy-of-christ.html> The inspiration and power of this message derives from its strong Doctrine, as well as from its masterful delivery.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:03

## **CHRISTIAN VIEW OF HISTORY**

Many ancient peoples, some non-Christian Religions and some philosophers believe History runs in cycles. They talk of the rise and fall of civilizations. Both Marxists and Capitalists are convinced that economic forces drive the world. Some historians believe that history is determined by powerful men, the Napoleons, Ghandis and Roosevelts. Other philosophers believe that climate, geography or environment determine what happens to people and nations. These are all determinative factors, but not the most fundamental or ultimate causes. John was greatly troubled that no one knows where History is really going. He learns that Jesus has the answer By opening the Scroll, Jesus demonstrates that He can explain History. That is a huge claim. God makes the History. His Son, the Risen Jesus reveals the Father's Plan and administers it. (5:4-6) He can do this because He has triumphed over sin and death. He alone! The Risen Christ is Lord of History. He explains it all. Apart from Him there is no explanation. Worse than that, apart from Christ, there are only bad and false explanations. Everything that happens in History must be seen in relation to Christ. Only in this relationship can we measure and understand and correctly interpret what is. This truth applies to all Fields and Subjects and has serious ramifications for Education and Scholarship across the board. Far from aimless, far from random, far from meaningless, far from cyclic, History is linear. It has a purpose, a goal- God's purpose and goal. Life must be lived always with that End in view. Life today must be controlled by the expectation of the End Times (Eschatology). The Secularist does not know it, the Atheist denies it; but, the Future determines the Present. If we do not live, if Nations and earthly governments do not function with the Future in mind, they are doomed. All will end, finally, at the Throne. That is the Omega Point of History. All will lay their "crowns and scepters at the feet of the Lord of History. See <http://www.calvinfox.com/web/revelation.html>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 07:36

Saturday, October 21, 2006

## **246 VARIETIES OF COFFEE**

We live in a consumer society. The people who lived in a certain institution where I once worked were called "Residents". When they were moved into community living, they became known as "Clients". Today, they are called "Consumers". We are all consumers. Daily, we are inundated with offers and options to purchase things. Students are flooded with dozens of credit card applications and brochures about colleges, schools and the Armed Forces they could attend or join after 12th grade. Potential car buyers have dozens of brands and 100's of models to choose from. To be a consumer is to be someone who has choices. The number of choices about everything is overwhelming. Even when it comes to medical treatment- choices must be made. Even though we may complain about our consumer society in which everything is commodified and moneyfied (yes, those are real words), we value extremely the freedom of choice.

A new super market opened here this week. It offers over 246 varieties of coffees, 500 gluten-free products, over 96 varieties of oils and 40 kinds of vinegars, more than 375 kinds of cheeses and there are 40 different salads and side dishes on the salad bar. Besides the obscenity of this gross indulgence in a world in which millions are starving, we have here a prime example of just too many choices. I won't get into the plethora of choices when we go into an electronics store, a telephone store or a Starbucks- Beside the question of whether we need so many things, my question here is do we need so many choices? Absolutely not. All of this explains why we are conditioned to be consumers when it comes to religion and church. How could it be otherwise? It explains why we value the doctrine of free will. Free-will is about freedom to choose or not to choose. The great irony, and the even greater offense, of the Gospel is that it does not allow for this freedom. Our wills are bound to our Sin nature. In a world full of "Gods" (idols) we can not choose the God who is found in Christ. We "will" not make that choice. God must make it for us. How un-American! The Good News is that He does make it.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:20

Thursday, October 5, 2006

## **TRUTH MATTERS**

In case you missed it. The previous post was about Truth. It is not sufficient at all to say the only thing that matters is to love God, people and follow Jesus. Saying that will not do. We must ask: What God? How do we love Him? How do we love People? What Jesus? What is involved in following Him? In other words, we need definitions! We need Truth. We need Biblical definitions. Most Americans believe in God. "In God we trust." According to a recent Gallup survey taken for Baylor University, most Americans actually believe in one of four different Gods. The most popular "God" (31%) is "authoritarian", stern and vengeful. About 23% believe in a "benevolent", loving Spirit, who hovers about seeking to help those who seek help. Then there is the Prime Mover, who got everything started and then backed off and is not involved. Such is "God" to 24% of Americans. <http://www.voanews.com/english/2006-10-04-voa32.cfm> Which of these "Gods" are we to love and how are we to love (Him, It)? The "God" the Mormons in the previous post love is very different than the One I love. So is the Allah that Moslems believe in. And as to loving people, a prostitute we knew insisted that love was what she was offering to the poor, lonely men who came to her. She, too, claimed to be a born again Christian, having "accepted Jesus" in a Young Life group while a teenager. Is raising the minimum wage and offering universal health care loving people? Is legalizing same-sex "Marriage" loving the people who want it? How do we know what loving our neighbor really is? What standard is used? As to following Jesus, does that mean taking vows of poverty and chastity? Living like Mother Teresa? Obeying certain "Red Letter" sayings of Jesus, like "Turn the other cheek"? Does it mean becoming career missionaries, going, as He commanded, into all the world, preaching the Gospel? Does it mean obeying the Ten Commandments (not red lettered, but, nevertheless, His equally valid Word. In fact, his red lettered words endorse those black-lettered ones. See Matt 5:17-19)? Definitions are essential. Definitions are matters of Truth and Truth matters.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:07

Wednesday, October 4, 2006

## **LOVE GOD, LOVE OTHERS AND FOLLOW JESUS?**

There is another feature in our newspaper today about local young men who have just finished their two year service as Missionaries. They tell of learning to speak in Portuguese and Spanish in order to minister to the poor they lived among. They spent 13 to 15 hour days counseling and helping people with alcohol and drug addictions and illnesses. An example of a woman whose life changed for the better through their ministry was included in the article. The men have a sense of real fulfillment and purpose in their lives because of their missionary work and are eager to do more. According to the article, they are very serious about loving God and loving people and living for Jesus, the way He teaches them through His Word, the Bible. All of this is good and commendable, correct? I hear and read it over and over: the only thing that matters is love: love God and others. Follow Jesus. The problem? These two devout missionaries are Mormons. The woman, whose life was changed, is now a Mormon.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 21:42

Monday, September 18, 2006

## **THE ONLY WAY: JESUS**

For all of these discussions about Islam, with the attempt to be politically correct and very conscious of multicultural sensitivities, in this day of religious pluralism, let us be absolutely clear: "no one comes to the Father, but by Me".- Jesus

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:47

Wednesday, September 13, 2006

## **WHERE IS GOD WORKING TODAY?**

Acts 11.19-end Now those who were scattered because of the persecution ... spoke the word ..., proclaiming the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord. News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; ... it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians'. Someone recently asked how God is working in this city. In Acts 11, Barnabas visited the city of Antioch. We read he "saw the grace of God" there. What did he see that revealed the grace of God at work in that place? Conversions to Christ. A great number had become Believers, after hearing the Word about the Lord Jesus. That is possible only because of the prevenient work of God's electing, saving grace. These converts were called Christians. We see God working when we see unbelievers becoming Christians. If we change the definition of "grace" from "saving" to "common", then we can see God working in other ways as well. We see the common grace of God wherever and whenever Justice prevails and people are demonstrating compassion and charity toward each other. From this perspective, I see God everywhere throughout the City. There are multitudes of people, institutions and agencies working hard everyday to make this a healthy, safe, productive and beautiful place to live. That, too, is how God is working here. Of course, there is evil working here, as well, Sin is very evident and some days I can become very discouraged and depressed about that reality. I do not want to be in denial or escape and hide from the Dark Side. It must be faced and engaged. But we face it with the assurance that God is greater. He is on the Throne. With Him at work here among us, with both His saving and common grace, we have hope. We can be, ultimately, optimists.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:18

Friday, September 8, 2006

## **CHURCH AND KINGDOM**

Christ is Head of the Church, His Body. As His Body, He loves, nourishes, cleanses and protects it. He is its life, the Vine of which it is the Branch. No other sphere has this relationship with Christ. Neither civil government nor any Nation is the Church. He is Lord of all, but Savior of only the Church. It alone is in Covenant relationship with Him. For it alone did He die. It knows and confesses Him and lives to intentionally glorify Him. The Body exists within the Kingdom (see previous post below). The Kingdom is universal, without boundaries, and includes the Body, which is limited and local. True, its members are called a kingdom (Rev.1:6,5:10) But, as those verses, and Rev 20:6, make clear, the Church is meant to share in the reign of Christ. Believers are "in the Kingdom". How do we share in Christ's reign? When we intentionally function as He wants, according to His Word and by the power of His Spirit, in our marriages, families, local congregations and in the Public Square (our lives as neighbors and citizens) When we consciously are aware of His Sovereignty over all and we honor that Sovereignty in all the spheres of our personal lives. Thus, we reign with Him, as His agents or co-workers.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 17:05

## **PRO REGE? HOW DOES CHRIST RULE THE WORLD?**

God is the Governor of all Creation and Humankind. He has delegated His authority to Christ, who then exercises that Father-given authority through chosen instruments. God in Christ governs Nature through Creational Norms or "Laws" (such as Seasons on earth and gravitation in the Solar System, the circulatory system of our bodies or the nitrogen cycle, et. al.) Organizationally, Christ governs a Marriage through the Husband, the Family through the Parents, the Church through Elders and the State, at all levels, through (Rulers) Each of these spheres (cohesive circles of influence) has its God-given or creational role or function and boundary. They overlap, but are separate and distinct. Providentially, Christ governs each and all of these "governments" through His Spirit and according to His Truth (His Word). He raises up and brings down accordingly. He blesses or curses accordingly. He is directly involved in History and "Current Events". All earthly "governors" (including those at Home and in the Church), as well as the forces of Nature, are directly accountable to Him and serve at His pleasure and for His Name's sake. All of this describes what is meant by the Realm of Christ- the dynamic Kingdom. This is how He exercises the government that is on His shoulders (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:16

Monday, September 4, 2006

## **DOCTRINAL STANDARDS**

Although not a member, I am in agreement with the doctrinal standards of this Denomination (of course, I do not agree with every word)- <http://www.crcna.org/pages/beliefs.cfm>

The beliefs and doctrine of the Christian Reformed Church are based on the Holy Bible, God's infallible written Word contained in the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. We believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and that it is the supreme and final authority in all matters on which it speaks.

### **Doctrinal Standards**

The Christian Reformed Church subscribes to the following confessions:

The Belgic Confession The Canons of Dort The Heidelberg Catechism

### **Ecumenical Creeds**

The Christian Reformed Church subscribes to the following three creeds:

The Apostles' Creed The Athanasian Creed The Nicene Creed

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:03

Thursday, August 24, 2006

## **THE ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF NEOCALVINISM**

Jesus is lord over all of creation. Jesus' lordship extends through every area and aspect of life—it is not restricted to the sphere of church or of personal piety. The idea that all of life is to be redeemed. The work of Jesus on the cross extends over all of life—no area is exempt from its impact. Cultural Mandate. Genesis 1:26-28 has been described as a cultural mandate. It is the mandate to cultivate and develop the creation. There is a historical development and cultural unfolding. Some Neo-Calvinists hold that the Cultural Mandate is as important as the Great Commission. Creation, fall and redemption. God's good creation has been disrupted by the fall. Redemption is a restoration of creation. Sphere sovereignty. Sphere sovereignty insists that created boundaries should be affirmed and respected. A rejection of dualism. According to Neo-Calvinists dualism has been rife in Christian thinking. The most notable dualism is the dualism between nature and grace that dominated much of Scholasticism. Neo-Calvinists reject this dualism and maintain that grace restores nature. The role of law. For the Neo-Calvinists law is more than the Decalogue. It is the creation ordinances established by God. These laws provide the norms for living in God's world.  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Calvinism>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 08:54

Tuesday, August 22, 2006

## **TRUTH, UNTRUTH, ANTITRUTH- WHO CARES?**

There is a large photo in today's paper of a very handsome 18 year old who graduated from a local High School this year. The article, almost a full page with the picture, is the young man's testimony and his plan to become a Missionary. He writes eloquently of how important Jesus Christ and the Gospel is to him and that he is now devoted to spreading the Good News about Christ. The article is entitled **IN FAITH** (in bold type) with the words **MISSIONARY SERVICE** above the title. This young man is a "Mormon" and on his way now to join the 60,000 other young men and women serving the Church of the Latter Day Saints. 500 new recruits answer the call every year! He is so excited. His passion is almost palpable in his prose as he describes what he is about to do with the next two years of his life. This would-be "Missionary" describes what he believes the "Gospel of Christ" to be and tells how he became convinced for himself that is it TRUE. He repeats this claim several times. How did he come to this assurance? He prayed and "an overwhelming feeling of warmth and calm came over me ... and left me without a doubt". Doesn't that break your heart? His commitment is totally futile and a waste. His Gospel is false. The doctrines he writes about are not true. His missionary work will spread untruth (actually, antitruth) and deceive many. He calls himself a latter day saint; but he is not a Christian. But wait, who are we to judge, what difference does it make, if, as so many young Evangelicals seem to say these days : There is no such thing as ABSOLUTE TRUTH?  
<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=128> If it is all relative- a personal construct of a value system that is meaningful and helpful, who can get upset about a bright 18 year old devoting two years as a Mormon Missionary- he is simply promoting what is Truth to him. What is wrong with this picture?

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 21:03

Thursday, August 3, 2006

## **THE SERIES ABOUT THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE IS OVER**

I think I have written enough to introduce you to the Doctrines of Grace and some of the practical consequences that come from them. I hope so. Thanks for reading. I must move on to other matters. I hope my new website will be up next week. *Semper Pro Rege*

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:26

## **DOCTRINES OF GRACE AND CULTURE- Part 3**

Neocalvinists believe in the Cultural Mandate of Genesis 1 and 2. Human beings exist to serve God by developing and caring for His creation. This is why we were created in His Image. We are mandated to cultivate Creation- that means we are mandated to develop Civilization and all that involves. The unregenerate refuse this assignment. They say, "The world's riches are mine. I can do whatever I want with them". God has chosen a People who will not rebel this way. The Elect will set their regenerated hearts to obeying the Cultural Mandate. We are saved in Christ to do this. Christ enables us to be fully human by His grace. Fully human, we image God and fulfill our calling to be his representatives in the world He has made, working for His Glory.

A very important writer in this field is Hans Rookmaaker, PhD, a Calvinist from the Netherlands who was also a University Professor of Art History. His biography by Linette Martin (IVP) includes his struggles with other Calvinists in the 50's, 60's and into the 70's (died 1977). He collaborated with Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri. Probably his most influential book for Christians was *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*. Schaeffer, a Reformed theologian, wrote an excellent small book I recommend, *Art and the Bible*. Leland Ryken, excellent writer and Professor of English at Wheaton College (Ill) , wrote the very helpful *Culture in Christian Perspective* (1979) He also wrote *Worldly Saints: the Puritans as They Really Were*.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:10

## **DOCTRINES OF GRACE AND CULTURE- Part 2**

It is easily demonstrated that the Bible itself is full of examples of "useless, decorative", non-religious ("secular") Art. Study the descriptions of the Tabernacle and the Temples! One Christian took me to task for using a Service bulletin with a picture of Jesus on it- the same painting we have had prominently displayed in our home for over 40 years. She quoted the Commandment that seems to forbid making images or likenesses of anything (Exodus 20:4) She was very offended and accused me, her Pastor, of breaking the Commandment. She missed the point of the next verse. The Commandment was concerned with making idols and bowing down to them, instead of to God. It did not forbid the painting of Jesus (admittedly a conjecture) , the man from Nazareth, anymore than it forbid a painting of George Washington or of her own children. That is the major point that later Reformed Believers came to appreciate. Art is good, but it is never to be worshiped. God created and what He made, He pronounced good- the galaxies, molten lava, the delicate colors of wild flowers, or the designs of butterfly wings or snow flakes or the eye. Everything from fractals to fragrances to flexed muscles. You get the idea. God was an Artist and He enjoyed what He made for its own sake. He was glorified by His artistic creations. The Psalms declare this over and over. When I listen to Bach (well played) I am hearing God being glorified. This appreciation of Creation and of "good things" is a strong neocalvinist emphasis. It is called Common Grace. What about the Fall? What God made, including our bodies and sexuality and our minds that can solve abstract mathematical puzzles, are all essentially good. God in His sovereign power made them and He, as the saying goes, "does not make junk". None of that essential creational goodness was lost in the Fall. What was lost was the use of these gifts exclusively for good purposes. (I say exclusively, because occasionally God's gifts are used well, even by those who deny His existence) Fallen human being terribly abuse and misuse God's good gifts- our minds and bodies, our sexuality, our own ability to create and all the earth's natural resources. The good essence remains, but it is constantly and terribly misdirected to evil or selfish purposes.

Calvinists are transformers of Culture. We believe Redemption is of the entire creation. We mean that the good

creation can once again be used as God intended at Creation. This is possible in and through Christ. In Him, the new creation has come. Calvinists (at least neocalvinists) seek to enter every cultural activity- the Arts and claim it for Christ, by the power of His Spirit and Word. Why must we seek to do this? Because He is Sovereign. Everything belongs to him. How can this be done? By His authority and power, because He is sovereign. Nothing is beyond His care or out of His reach. Perhaps the most difficult thing is to persuade Christians of all this. It is a Dutch Reformed thing!

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:06

## **DOCTRINES OF GRACE AND CULTURE- Part 1**

The early Calvinists were reactionaries against much of the popular teaching and practice of Medieval Roman Catholicism. Their emphasis was on Biblical Doctrine about the Gospel, Salvation and the proper ordering of the Church. Many Calvinists through the years seem to have become stuck in those reactionary 16th and 17th Centuries. Thankfully, many have enlarged their understanding of the Reformed Faith and Christianity itself. Those very words, "enlarged their understanding", may indicate heresy to some traditional Calvinists. Whatever the original Reformers said, they say, is good enough- no more and no less. Well, we are concerned with what God has revealed in His written Word. The Reformers interpretation of that Word is sound and we abide by it; but, it is not exhaustive Truth. Those early Reformers, like the rest of us, had their limitations. There is room for new or greater understanding. This especially applies to the subject of Culture- the Humanities and Arts.

J. Calvin was concerned that Art (paintings, music, dance, sculpture, poetry), though a gift from God, could be corrupted by sinners or could corrupt Saints. Art (so-called secular art, in contrast to "Christian" art that you can see illustrating Bible stories in stained glass church windows or Bibles) was not considered spiritual and was associated with the world and depravity. Separation was necessary. The best known early exception to this attitude was Rembrandt, a Calvinist who marched to a different drummer, although his paintings reveal a Calvinist world view. These are the deeply held convictions that Rookmaaker encountered among 20th century Calvinists. They gave him a lot of grief over this. (I did not grow up around Calvinists. I encountered these views early on among Fundamentalist Baptists, as well as Calvinists I have met in recent years. )

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:03

## **DOCTRINES OF GRACE AND POLITICAL THOUGHT**

The articles I have posted in this series so far explain the relevance of the Doctrines of Grace to personal salvation and spiritual formation as well as to corporate worship. All that was, of course, primary to the Reformers. Their next major concern was the organization of their churches. This was originally developed by John Calvin, particularly in relation to the City of Geneva (Switzerland). Some have argued that Calvin's political thought (developed in this context) has been more influential in History than his theological thought. I have summarized this material on my website, but here is a simple review- The Church is the people of God (in contrast to the Roman Catholic concept that the Church actually, despite lip service to the "People of God" concept, is the Institution and its Hierarchy and Sacraments administered on their authority) .

The Reformed concept determined church architecture, turning Cathedrals into very plain and functional church buildings, preferably called Meeting Houses. The buildings were simply and only to enable the Church, the body of Saints, to literally gather around a pulpit and table [placed together] in order to easily hear the Word and to partake of the Lord's Supper. Officers and Leaders of the Church, associated with God and each other by Covenant (the "New Israel") came from the membership, voted into office by those same members. These new Reformed ideas in regard to church affairs were soon extended into the city of Geneva's civic affairs and led to Reformed Political Thought. That was to be developed in the next Century, especially by the Scottish and English Puritans. In turn, this Reformed Political Thought became very influential in shaping the government of the Colonies and the creation of the American Constitution. Doctrine does matter and is very important. The Doctrines of Calvinism and Reformed Thought, in particular, have been extremely important in modern History. It is a terrible thing when they are "dissed" and dismissed by younger "Evangelicals" today. I have written more extensively about a Biblical view of Government and published that on my Website. Here are a few highlights- Two Doctrines in particular influence Reformed political thought: the Sovereignty of God (of course) and the Doctrine of Radical Corruption (Total Depravity) God is sovereign over the State. The State is not of the People, for the People and by the People. It exists because God instituted it. It is from Him and for Him- His servant in a fallen world. The idea of a secular State, autonomous from God is totally not Biblical or Reformed. God gives the State (civil government) its purpose and holds it accountable to achieve it. Particularly, the State is subordinate to the will of God, i.e.- His Law. The State is not the Church. It is not a redeemed Community of

Faith. That is why America, by definition, can never be a Christian Nation. Christ is not the Head of the United States in the sense that He is the head of the Church, His Body. Nevertheless, the Country and its Leaders are responsible to serve God the Almighty and Judge of the Living and Dead. The State is responsible in its sphere. Neocalvinism makes much of "sphere sovereignty". Marriage, Family, Church and the State all have their God ordained roles and each is to respect the other and the boundaries between them. Our Nation is not to function as a Church. That is not its sphere. It is not to support an organized church or institutional Religion. It is responsible to maintain Law and Order and the Common Good. That includes protecting the rights of churches to do their thing, even while it does not forbid or interfere with churches doing their thing. The problem, in practice, is defining what "Law and Order" and the "Common Good" involve. This is where the Law comes in. A major reason, in my judgment, why Christians are so confused and conflicted in public policy is ignorance or rejection of what the Law of God has to say in such matters. Put another way, the function of Civil Government is Justice- justice as defined by the Scripture. That Justice is maintaining and protecting the Rights of the citizenry- "Rights" as defined by the Law of God, not by "secular" courts or legislation. Much of the Biblical teaching about Justice is really about Economic Justice. The Law of God is replete with principles that apply to economic policy and decisions making. I have written extensively about that and published my notes on my website. These functions are necessitated by the reality of the human sin nature (radical corruption). That is the reality that requires not only a legal system but law enforcement, courts and prisons [and the military] It is the reality that requires a system of checks and balances to prevent the abuse of power. Reformed political thought under girds the equal division of government into three branches, a system of checks and balances, to prevent the abuse of power [Sin]. The Reformers feared that abuse and resisted "big" or "imperial" government in any form. The further division of National government into co-operating local, county and independent states- all under officials directly elected by the citizens is further extension of that fear. The idea of all people, diverse and multicultural, working together in love because they are, at heart, good people, under the aegis of a benign and paternal (or maternal) big government [a welfare state] is totally unrealistic, naïve in the extreme, unscriptural and completely unacceptable to Reformed Christians. Totalitarianism, of any kind, seeing as it seeks to dethrone God and usurp His authority, is a great evil to be avoided at all costs. The Church exercises its authority through ordained Ministry of the Word (preaching the Law and the Gospel), the right use of the Sacraments and Church Discipline of its members in matters of personal righteousness or morality. Never does the Church use political power nor the State's instruments of authority to accomplish its function nor vice versa.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:44

## **REFORMED DOCTRINE OF WORSHIP**

Many Calvinists condense this subject into a so-called Regulative Principle. (I have written about this elsewhere on the Blog) There is a lot more to the subject- an entire ethos, involving the purpose and function of Worship, again controlled by the Doctrine of Sovereignty. WORSHIP- Focus is on GOD, His sovereignty and acts as Jehovah (the "I Am") the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, from whom come all things and for whom all things come. The greatest weight is put upon the immanent God, in all His transcendent Altogether-Otherness. "God" is Triune, Father and Son and Spirit. Focus is not on the life and teachings of Jesus, nor on the Spirit and charismatic teaching, nor on some "health and wealth, name it and claim it" teaching, nor on "How to be a better..." message. Focus is not on pumping people up or meeting perceived needs.

Worshippers Have minds full of the Knowledge of God, His sovereignty and His acts in history and the world. This requires a congregation well versed in Scripture and educated in Theology. It is not geared to non-Christian "seekers". Approach God with fear and with gratitude for His mercy, because they know they are sinners, totally indebted to His grace for their salvation. This sets the tone and mood at the beginning of the Service. Have hearts filled with thanksgiving for the acts of the Living God in history and in the world today. This adds joy to the Service and brings hope, encouragement and comfort to the worshippers. Sing songs that express this knowledge and these heart attitudes to God. Such songs are directed to God and are about Him. Want to hear the Word of the Lord and learn even more about who He is and what He has done and is doing. "Worship" is, literally, attributing and recognizing worth. Respecting God and His self revelation, waiting on His every word, is the heart of worship. "Shush, God is about to speak". Learning the Word, gaining fresh knowledge, is very important to Reformed worship, because it is essential to the life of faith and it enables ever deeper worship over time. Many Reformed Believers [including myself] also find, as did John Calvin, that Holy Communion is a time, always within the Worship Service (especially at its conclusion), for receiving the Word and feeding on it (really, Him) in our hearts by faith. It is that time when we can begin to inwardly digest what we have heard in the sermon, before we go out into the world.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:40

## **REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY & EDUCATION**

The last post about the sovereignty of the Word should be followed by the Topic of Epistemology (What do we know, How and When do we know it? ) Again and again we come back to this Topic- it is foundational. Please read what I have already written on the Subject in this Blog on April 21, May 5 and July 12 [use the search function or the calendar in the column on the right to access. Thanks] Reformed Epistemology, plus the Doctrine of the Antithesis, lay out the rationale for Reformed Christian Education. This is not at all the same as found in most "Christian" schools.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:38

Wednesday, August 2, 2006

## **SOVEREIGNTY OF THE WORD**

The Doctrines of Grace are all grounded in the concept of the Sovereignty of God. Of all the doctrines that Calvinism is known for, Sovereignty is the most important and fundamental. All the others are radiants from this Center. Probably all Christians profess belief in the Sovereignty of God. They love to confess and sing, "You are Lord." They usually do not understand the concept as Calvinists do. Usually, they limit the Sovereignty (Lordship) to spiritual matters and issues of personal morality. The Triune God claims authority over everything- everything belongs to Him and is to serve Him- everything. Everything includes Education and Work as well as Marriage, Family and Church. If not, how could God be sovereign over all? Everything also includes Government and Economics. If not, how could God be sovereign over all? Everything includes the Humanities and the Arts. If not, how could God be sovereign over all? Everything includes the Sciences and Technology. If not, how could God be sovereign over all? The corollary to the sovereignty of God is the sovereignty of God's Word- Scripture, all Scripture, including the Law. This application of all the Bible to all of life is another unique Reformed distinctive. I know that non-Reformed Evangelicals will claim they also use the Bible this way. Fact is, they do not- especially the Law, which gets lost under the slogan "saved by grace and not by works". To me, this issue is as much a divide as the Doctrines of Grace can be. Multitudes who claim Jesus is Lord, do not claim the Bible is Lord. How can God be sovereign, if He is divorced from His Word- if His Word is irrelevant? If what He has to say, what He has revealed, is dismissed? Reformed Christians, especially the Dutch Reformed, apply the sovereignty of the Bible, especially the Law, over Marriage, Family, Government, Economics, the Humanities, the Arts, Sciences and Technology- everything!

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:48

Tuesday, August 1. 2006

## **WHAT DIFFERENCE DO THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE MAKE?**

This Series on the Doctrines of Grace [below] introduced the five basic tenets for which Calvinism is commonly known. However, these Five Doctrines are not Calvinism or, better, the Reformed Faith, nor are they Neocalvinism or the Dutch Reformed Faith. Does it matter? What difference does it make. Many younger Christians say they do not care at all about doctrine. They quote Luke 22.24-30 "A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. ... I am among you as one who serves.'" That is it. Jesus is all about serving. We follow him as his disciples. We are to be ones who serve. Period. Simple. No theological system or denominations here. A Christian is a disciple. A disciple is a servant. That is what matters. That is all that matters. Actually, such Christians can be down right dogmatic about this doctrine! The one thing they can not claim to be is a Biblically, theologically educated Christian in any classic, historic Catholic or Protestant sense. Certainly not in the Reformed Calvinist sense. They may well say, "Good, don't wanna be!" Again- what difference does it make? A lot! I shall try to explain-

Those Five Chief Tenets of Calvinism lead to a world and life view. It is not simply, or only, a matter of correct doctrine (orthodoxy), something to debate or argue about. [Many "Calvinists" themselves miss this point] Calvinism or the Reformed Faith, especially Neocalvinism, is a way to live all of life every day. This is what I find so appealing about it and what I find most deficient in contemporary evangelicalism. The Reformed world and life view is desperately needed in today's world and by most Christians, who are ignorant of it. Key Concepts such as the Sovereignty of God, Grace, Common Grace, the Image of God, Radical Corruption and the Cultural Mandate, as understood by Calvinists, have great personal and social consequences. These Doctrines do make a big difference. They really do matter. I shall give a brief demonstration here in these notes. My Institute, Website and Blog are all dedicated to unpacking and teaching these matters at greater length. A full treatment of the Reformed world and life view is easily available elsewhere. I recommend chapters 1, 2, 8 and 9 in *The Doctrines of Grace* by Boice & Ryken, *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism* 6th edition by HH Meeter, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* by Henry Van Til and *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition* by John Leith.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:11

Thursday, July 27, 2006

## **DOCTRINE #5- PERSERVERANCE Part 2**

SanctificationNext, our legal position (being reckoned righteous by God, in union with Christ) becomes our experience. This is the necessary process of sanctification. "Necessary" because all who are justified will go on to actually be righteous, holy or sanctified. If this were not the case, our justification would be legal fiction. And that will not fly, because it is still true that practicing sinners have no place in a sinless Heaven. Darkness can have no fellowship with Light. Without holiness, no one will see God. The children must become like the Father. We must become holy, even as He is holy. The Holy Spirit of God lives within the regenerated, justified convert, transforming [his] character and actually making [him] holy. The Spirit will do this through what are known as "Spiritual Disciplines" [another Series] This is a life long process. It has its set backs and dormant periods. There is conflict and struggle. Spiritual warfare is real, but the life long trajectory is upward and sure. (This is why we must withhold judgment about who is saved or not, as any particular professed believer, at any particular time, may be in one of those difficult periods.) We still commit sins, but the truly justified will not make a habit of it. No one who has been regenerated will normally, habitually, live in sin or disobedience to God. If God has predestined someone to be among the Elect, Christ has died particularly to save [him], [he] has been regenerated and received the gift of saving faith and repentance and has been justified and is now indwelt by the Holy Spirit- all part of the irrepressible purpose of a sovereign God- such a person will be sanctified and eventually enter into Glory. God will see to it that such a Saint will persevere to the end. Such perseverance will be entirely the work of God. The entire process of Salvation, beginning to end, is the work of God. It is entirely God's doing. There is no room for pride- it is all, every step from beginning to end, of grace alone! It should be obvious that in this system of the Doctrines of Grace is embedded the four-fold "Gospel of Grace": salvation is in Christ alone by faith alone by grace alone to the glory of God alone. But this is theological short hand. The meaning of each term must be unpacked. That is another Series. Next- CONCLUSION: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES CALVINISM MAKE?

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:06

Wednesday, July 26, 2006

## **DOCTRINE #5- PERSERVERANCE Part 1**

In this Series, I have tried to explain, in short and simple outline, that God, in His Sovereignty, before Creation, pre-destined, unconditionally, particular sinners to be members of His Covenant People, the Elect, the Church and to ultimately share in His Glory. He effectively called these people through their hearing of His Word (the Law and the Gospel) and in so doing regenerated them, freeing their will from its bondage to their fallen sin nature. This begins the process of Salvation [have been saved, am being saved, shall be saved] There is an order to this, which must be learned-Regeneration=>Faith=> Repentance=> [Conversion] => Union with Christ, Justification=> Adoption=> Sanctification=> Glorification. Much frustration, failure, disappointment and discouragement with Christians and with the Christian Life comes from failure to know these truths and their concomitant experience.

Saving faith is not a spiritual feeling. It has an object and content. It involves the mind, heart and will-1.) Intellectual assent to the Message about Jesus, that he is the Christ (i.e.-the Prophet of God who reveals the Father, the Priest of God who offers himself as the Lamb whose death is a substitutionary penal atonement and the King who rules as Sovereign over all, on behalf of the Father) 2.) Acceptance of Him, i.e.- of his Revelation, Sacrifice and Lordship, (entrustment or commitment of one's heart and life to Him)3.) Decision to obey and follow Him, unconditionally. It will be easily noticed that what commonly passes for saving faith today is often far short of this definition. This, in turn, is the result of inadequate teaching on the part of those evangelizing. It should be further noticed that the object of saving faith is Jesus himself, unconditionally, and this is not to be identified or equated with commitment to any special Ministry, Program or Career. Repentance is the other side of saving faith. They are inseparable. Some place repentance before faith, but faith comes first. Repentance is literally "change of mind". It is not the same as regret or sorrow about sin. One can hear the Law and be convicted about sin. So what? When the Holy Spirit gives the gift of faith, that, logically, leads the sinner to change [his] mind about the direction and purpose of [his] entire sinful life. One turns to living for Jesus from living for self. One may deeply regret a particular sin (especially if caught at it) without ever turning one's life over to the Christ. This combination of faith and repentance (this turning) is the Biblical meaning of "Conversion". It is associated most often in the Bible with turning from the worship and service of idols to the worship and service of the true God. Union with Christ This step is often omitted. Upon Conversion, the Holy Spirit both enters the inner life of the convert and places the convert into a vital relationship with Christ and His Body, the Church. This entering and placing are what is meant by the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit". Everything, all of life, is to be lived out of this reality. Union with Christ is far more central and fundamental to Salvation and the Christian Life than Justification. (Check out the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesians) This union is both forensic and experiential. We have a "legal" standing before God, by virtue of our union with Christ. "In Christ", not only do we have the gift of forgiveness (release from the guilt and consequences of sins committed), we also have the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. Inasmuch as we are in vital union with Christ, God sees us as clothed in His righteousness. In His Son, God accepts us as his sons- He adopts us and we have all the privileges and responsibilities thereof. As human beings, we bear the image of God. That was our identity: persons, created to be like God. Now we are all that, plus we are the children of God as well. This is our identity now in Christ: redeemed human beings. The possibility of realizing (actualizing) this identity in practice, is very exciting and challenging- the most urgent need that everyone, has, rich and poor.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:50

Tuesday, July 25. 2006

#### **DOCTRINE #4- PARTICULAR REDEMPTION**

The theme of God's Sovereignty continues in the next topic- the Doctrine of Particular Election (traditionally, but misleadingly, called "Limited" Atonement) All evangelicals affirm that the death of Jesus was a substitutionary atonement for sin. It is commonly believed that this atonement was for all people, inasmuch as all sin. Sure, Jesus died for the sins of the world, but in what sense? Is the atonement actually limited? It is assumed that it is unlimited. In fact, everyone believes that the atonement is limited. Arminians (most evangelicals these days) agree that the atonement is limited in its results. Jesus died for all, they say, but only those who accept his sacrifice are saved. The results of Christ's death are thus greatly limited, as most people do not accept it. More than that, according to Arminians, the effectiveness of Christ's Sacrifice is actually determined by the (so-called) free will of sinners, most of whom "decide" to reject the Sacrifice. Where is the sovereignty of God here? Once more, unregenerate human beings are having the final say, passing judgment, yea or nay, on the work of God.

Reformed Christians (Calvinists) object to this scenario. As Sovereign, God's purpose will be achieved. His purpose is to be glorified. His purpose is to redeem a People for himself, who will serve Him in the world. That was God's design for the death of His Son: to redeem a People for Himself. It follows that the result of that death, as atonement, is not subject to any limitations put upon it by unregenerate human beings. God's design (purpose) for the Cross will not be thwarted. The Atonement would, in fact, redeem people, particular people. If Christ redeemed all people, it would be absolutely unjust for anyone to be condemned by God for their sins. How could someone go to Hell to pay for sins that God had already paid for? It would also be unthinkable that anyone who was actually redeemed would blow that redemption off and prefer to go to Hell. Calvinists agree that the Atonement is limited, but they mean limited in design. His Death was sufficient to cover (atone for) the sins of everyone; but, Christ died particularly for those who would accept the Sacrifice. He did not shed his blood, only to let it be ignored or rejected by sinners. Only the Elect, those who are effectually called, will accept the Sacrifice. Such people are from every Tribe and Nation throughout the world (see Rev.5:9- this is the meaning of 1 John 2:2) Christ died for them. The only alternative, of course, is Universalism, which we reject outright as unscriptural. It is proper and right, for anyone who has been truly converted to Christ, to believe and say, with the Apostle Paul, "the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal.2:20) This is the Doctrine of Particular Atonement. It is a source of great comfort and assurance, far better than the more popular idea that Jesus died for everyone and therefore, no one in particular. God's sovereign purpose was that the death of Jesus would actually and truly (not hypothetically or conditionally) atone for the sin, satisfy the justice of God, assuage the anger of God, reconcile and redeem particular sinners. Did Jesus accomplish this? Calvinists declare, Absolutely! Did Jesus really save a People for the sake of God's Name? Yes, He did!

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:49

Monday, July 24, 2006

### **DOCTRINE #3- Response to a Question**

A friend is struggling with the Doctrine of Reprobation and raises some important issues in his comments to what I have posted here. If you share these concerns I urge you (as well as him) to reread carefully what I have written. Carefully. I think the answers are there. My friend said-I struggle understanding/justifying what appears like God punishing people for what ultimately He causes them to do. James 1:13-14 is very emphatic. God does not, can not and will not cause anyone to sin. We sin because we are sinners and we can blame that on Adam, not God. God created man with truly free will. He used it to chose to rebel and disobey God. The direct result of that Act by Adam is our inheritance of the drive to do likewise. (See Romans 5) I have repeatedly said, God condemns no one. He allows guilty sinners to reap the consequences of their actions. He does this for His own sovereign purposes. He also sees to it that other guilty sinners do not reap those consequences. Again, for His own sovereign purposes. God does not have to save anyone. He could allow everyone to perish and that would be just. Justice would be served, because all are guilty. The Bible holds people accountable for their behavior, their choices.

From our perspective that may seem very unfair. Many things in life seem that way, but we accept that reality. We had no choice when and where and to whom we were born. Some of us are spared disease and tragedy when others are not. Millions are Christians and billions are not. All of this could be cause for the cry "It is not fair." We do not blame God for all of this. Life is full of pain and suffering, as well as pleasure and peace. Both. If we say we deserve the good, but not the bad, we are basing good on our merits. If we are saying we do not deserve bad, we are basing that, too, on what we believe to be our merits. Salvation is based entirely and only on the choice of God and that is based on what serves His Glory. Period. We are puny little beings. God is the All-knowing, All-powerful. In the midst of a fierce thunder storm, lightening strikes, two little boys are struck and killed and two others with them are not. Again we say, God giveth and God taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Who am I to understand that? Even less, who am I to demand that God explain that to me so that I can understand Him- me, understand Him! No, I can only trust Him. Read Job. And the rest of this Series. At the finish of this Series, I will add some links to sites and books and scholars with plenty of Scripture [e.g.-Wayne Grudem, John Piper, RC Sproul and James M. Boice] from which Calvinism is derived. Of course, there are many verses, trust me; but proving each point from Scripture is not my objective in these short posts. My objective is to lay out the main overall argument, the "big picture", the way I understand all the verses fit together ("Systematic Theology"). That requires an overview of the entire Bible, the wider context for each of the verses. Without that, they are but mere proof texts.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:07

Sunday, July 23, 2006

## **Reading the entire Doctrine Series uninterrupted**

If you want to read the series on Doctrines of Grace all together in one place, click on Theological Issues in the column to the right under Categories. They are still in reverse order, but other posts are not there to interrupt the flow.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:24

## **DOCTRINE #3 UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION**

When we talk about Effectual Calling, we are talking about being chosen or the subject of Election. Our next topic is "Unconditional Election", which, in turn, is part of the Doctrine of Predestination. We have tried to explain that those who chose Christ do so only because they have first been chosen (to do that) by God. Remember why this has to be: the bondage of the will to our Sin Nature. "Whosoever will may come" to Christ, but because of that bondage no one wills to do that. If it happens in anyone's life, it is only because God has made it possible by regenerating that person, setting their will free to chose. If the teaching of the will's bondage is an affront to man's assumption that his will is free and if the idea that we do not really have a free choice in the matter of salvation is a stumbling block to most people, the Doctrines of Predestination and Unconditional Election are really tough to swallow for many. This in itself is the prime evidence for the antithesis mentioned earlier and the nature of Sin as being rebellion against God with its autonomy of the Self and the Individual. We are now at the heart of Reformed Theology: the Sovereignty of God. God is God and it really is all about Him, not us.

I know there are Biblical arguments that support variations of Arminian Theology (the most common and popular of our day) and that Calvinism can seem hard and even contradictory. But at the end of the day, what persuades me most, that Calvinism is the best System of Sacred Truth over all, is that it alone truly magnifies the Sovereignty of God. I'll live with apparent paradox and with unanswered questions (it is shear human hubris to insist that there can be no contradictions or unanswered questions and that we will not "believe" in God, let alone Calvinism, while there are) because, over all, Calvinism, to my mind, brings the greatest glory to God. How does it do that? By saying that ultimately, everything about Salvation is by, from and for God. That is its greatest affront to the unregenerate mind and the deepest reason non-Calvinists reject Calvinism. Reaction to the current topic makes that clear. We think salvation is all about the individual (me, my loved ones and friends). It is not. Salvation, before everything else, is about God, the Almighty Maker of heaven and Earth, having His way with His entire creation and achieving the fulfillment of His purposes. Secondly, salvation is about God's creating a (global, catholic) People for Himself- a People (the Elect, the Church) who will live corporately, throughout history, for Him and seek His glory. Then, third, salvation is about the individual. Everything that happens in my life as an individual happens under God's control to further His sovereign will in the world and to benefit His Covenant People. God being God, can, and will, do whatever He wants. We draw comfort from knowing that whatever God does, in particular, will always be according to His nature and character. That means we can trust whatever He does to be good and the best. We may be tempted, but we will not shake our fists at him for what He does. Our conviction will always be, "God giveth and God taketh away, blessed be the Name of the Lord". We will never understand or accept the Doctrines of Predestination and Unconditional Election until and unless we grasp and accept all of this prologue. Predestination merely means that God has decided (chosen or elected) , in advance, who is destined to experience Glory. Remember if He did not do this, no one would see Glory. The last reality explains the Doctrine of Reprobation. Obviously, if God choose some to be saved, He allows everyone else to go on their way into a Christ-less eternity. True. This is reprobation. Critics insist God, at His merciless whim, sends sinners into Hell. This, they claim is what is meant by "double predestination": some to Heaven, some to Hell. Not so. This is an unfair misrepresentation of Calvinist teaching We have already stated clearly why people go to Hell: they sin. Hell is not God's punishment for people who are not Christians. God doesn't punish or condemn people because they do not know Christ. People perish because they transgress God's Law. They do that, because they are sinners. Their only hope is the unconditional Election (predestination) of God "Unconditional" means that God has done this choosing apart from any conditions whatsoever. If it is true that the heart has reasons of which reason does not know, so does God. He has His reasons, though unknown to our reason, for choosing one person rather than another; but his choosing is not predicated upon any human behavior. Our salvation is always and only "for His Names" sake. His reasons have to do with His glory. Arminians are those who can not let go of the idea that some merit in them, something they are doing or will do, is the necessary condition for God's election of them. Usually, they will say, "God chose me to chose Him

because He knew in advance (foreknowledge) that I would chose Christ when the opportunity came.” How could this be salvation by grace alone, if this were the case? Besides, this argument ignores the bondage of the will and the impossibility an unregenerate sinner choosing Christ in the first place. Thankfully, God’s choosing or electing or predestining is unconditional! Many evangelicals today are actually “calminians“. They want to claim conditional election, with free will, when it comes to getting saved and claim unconditional election when it comes to staying saved. Why? If I am responsible and able to accept Christ of my own free will, am I not also responsible and able to keep Christ of my own free will? If I do not need God to get the process going, how come I need Him to finish the process? I know, Arminians will insist that they need God at all times, beginning, middle and end. That’s the point- they need God’s assistance (grace, help) to carry out their free will. Ultimately, even with God’s help, they believe in saving themselves. How does this doctrine glorify God or claim to be salvation by grace alone? The Calvinist believes, if anyone comes to Christ, walks with Christ through life and finally enters into Heaven to be with Christ for Eternity, it has all, from beginning to end, been the work of God alone. The clay has no right or business to be arguing with the Potter! God doesn’t have to save anyone. How dare we fallen sinners complain or accuse Him of being unjust. God chose and justified me. He certainly did not need to do so because I deserve it. Woe to me, if I got what I deserve. Rather, He did it, unconditionally, for His own purpose and glory. I am eternally grateful and gladly acknowledge my debt to His grace. Amen

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:49

Saturday, July 22. 2006

### **DOCTRINE 2- EFFECTUAL CALLING- Part 3**

What are the means God uses to do His effectual calling? The Law and the Gospel. Visiting an impoverished town in Haiti or rural village in Mexico or a squalid slum in an American city may well bring about revulsion and determination to “do something” about poverty, but the emotions and conviction to do something about sin requires visiting the Ten Commandments. We hear about people using “bad judgment” and inappropriate behavior. We hear about hate crimes and racism and illicit drugs and illegal immigration; we almost never hear about the real problem: sin (In fact, to use the word “sin” is a sin in many circles) But it is sinning that leads to condemnation and Hell, not some politically incorrect behavior of the month. Society’s norms for behavior change constantly, as some kind of fad or fashion. God’s norms have been written in stone for thousands of years: the Ten Commandments. God uses His Law to bring sinners to Christ. But preaching the Law is not enough; sinners must also hear the Gospel about forgiveness and redemption (to neocalvinists, the Gospel is about Creation, the Fall and Redemption). To preach the Law without the Gospel is not only inadequate, it is cruel and unfair to the sinner. We will unpack the content of “Gospel” in another part of this series. Obviously, it is about the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Hearing this Gospel leads to saving faith for the sinner convicted through the Law.

It does not happen that way for everyone hearing it. Many hear the Word with no response. God works the miracle of regeneration in those whom He chooses. If He did not, no one would respond to the Gospel. All may listen, but only a few will hear. Some critics of Calvinist fear it undermines evangelism and missions. If only those respond whom God has called, why bother to preach and spread the Gospel? For two good reasons: One, sinners must hear the Gospel in order to make the calling possible. How can anyone hear, if no one preaches? Two, since we do not know which sinners will respond, we preach to all of them. Calvinism actually motivates evangelism and missions, because it guarantees results. Those whom God calls will respond and come to Christ. Our work spreading the Law and the Gospel, taking it everyone we can, will reap a harvest, over time. Regeneration is not conversion or salvation. Regeneration sets the will free to chose Christ. This saving faith [“Forsaking All I Take Him”] leads to repentance. These also are gifts from God. Faith and repentance is Conversion and results in baptism into union with Christ. This is the once and forever moment of Justification, which is the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness. Thus begins the process of Sanctification (growth in Christ-likeness or holiness) and that culminates in Glorification. This is all clearly laid out by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. I will unpack these steps later in this series.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:52

Friday, July 21, 2006

## **DOCTRINE #2- EFFECTUAL CALLING (part 2)**

When critics say they deplore Calvinist teaching that God chooses some to be saved and allows (or causes) others to be damned, they are implying that God is responsible for damnation and, if it were not for His Meanness, all would be saved. Such a God is repulsive, hateful and undeserving of anyone's love or loyalty. In other words, these critics are saying everyone would go to Heaven, except that God decides to send some (many) to Hell. Wrong. This is a totally unwarranted criticism. We live in a moral universe. Yes, the moral God who created the Universe designed it that way. The Biblical truth is that if anyone goes to Hell, it is because they have sinned. Hell is the wages, the earned consequence, of sinning, of breaking the Law of God (you know, those Ten Commandments) Someone may ask, "What about babies? They have not broken any Laws. Do they go to Hell?" Good question. Good question. Remember the root reason we sin: we are sinners. The root cause of our sinning is our Sin Nature within. Babies are born with that Sin within. Actually, their early behavior manifests it- Sin at the heart is Selfishness and no one (as cute and precious as they are) is more selfish than a new born. I have done funerals for babies. The reality of physical death (mortality) is part of the wages of sin and proof that babies have a Sin Nature. [Please note, I am not trying to explain any particular incidence of dying of a particular person or the circumstances or reasons leading up to it] It is a given that babies will soon begin breaking the Law and certainly children do so. Part of being human is having an innate faculty for moral oughtness. Children early on know the difference between right and wrong and are accountable for their behavior. The reality is that unless God steps in and saves someone, anyone, everyone will be damned because everyone sins. The good news is that He does step in. Our goal is not to get people to change their behavior- to make it more socially acceptable or normal or constructive or productive. It is not to alleviate poverty or disease. We are not committed to making sinners more educated or cultivated. We could cooperate with non-Christians and work for the end of violence and war- a "Great Society" But none of that is our goal. None of that is the greatest or most important need that humanity has, nor that of any one person among us. The first and greatest and most important need is for people, rich and poor and of every ethnicity, to seek and know their Creator and to be right with Him. The greatest need is for people to chose God as He is revealed in His Son, Jesus. But they will not do that. Critics of Calvinist teaching insist that the Bible says "whosoever will may come" to Christ, to Salvation. Just give them the opportunity. Just persuade them. Just wait until the right moment. Just sign the right Hymn- and they will come. But they won't. Sure, whosoever will may come, but no one will. Remember what I said in Part 1. Everyobnes will is in bondage to Sin. They can only will to chose to obey their Sin nature. They hate the Light and will not come into it, just the contrary. What is absolutely essential is for God Himself to work a miracle- to intervene and set the will of sinners free from its bondage, so that those sinners may chose to come. This God does and this is known as Irresistible Grace. I prefer Effectual Calling. God draws individuals to Himself. He calls them with a voice that not only can be heard, but can not be denied. God sets the will free. This is the moment of regeneration. Contrary to common teaching, regeneration does not follow repentance and faith and the decision to chose Christ. The dead-in-sin, unregenerate heart can and will not do that. The decision to accept Jesus is made possible by, and is a consequent of, regeneration by the irresistible or effectual calling of God. He who is born again (rengenerated) by God the Holy Spirit believes. Everyone whom God calls or draws comes.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:27

## **DOCTRINE #2- EFFECTUAL CALLING**

Every Doctrine we will be discussing builds upon the other. [We are dealing here with a logical theological system] Before we go on to the next Doctrine, it is important that what I have written about "Radical Corruption" sinks in. What comes next will not make sense without it, especially the part about the bondage of the will. That is what makes the next Doctrine absolutely essential. The Scriptural teaching about the bondage of the will is also the most objectionable for many in today's culture. Both Christians and non-Christians today value "freedom" more than anything, particularly freedom of choice, which is freedom of the will. We are, from infancy, children of a consumer society. Thus the emphasis in evangelism, as well as in the supermarket, is on choice. Ironically, conservatives (who often disparage the emphasis on choice in evangelism) constantly emphasize freedom of choice when it comes to social issues. Certain people, conservatives say, chose to not work ( "They are lazy" ), chose to get pregnant out of wedlock, chose behavior that brings on AIDS, chose to drop out of school, etc. While Liberals tend to go the other extreme on social issues, emphasizing the influence of environment or society ( "They are victims" ). All of this makes the Biblical teaching of the "bondage of the will" very relevant. It is especially important that we define it correctly. Please reread Part #1.

A common misconception is that Calvinists believe that every person is wicked, "totally depraved". They do not believe that. Certainly I do not, even though some sermons and classic hymns make it sound as though we do. Again definitions are necessary. God created human beings in His Image and pronounced them to be "good". Being "human" is good. Human Being-ness is essentially good. The qualities that makes us persons, the God-like qualities of rationality, creativity, morality, communality and spirituality are all good qualities. This did not change at "the Fall". Some Calvinists seem to have misunderstood this and dishonor the Creator and what He has made. Neocalvinists have it right. Human beings are essentially good. Emphasis on "essentially". They are also fallen sinners. Emphasis on "also" All Human beings, Christian and non-Christian, share their humanity in common and can and should exercise all the characteristics of God's image within them. The problem is in motive and purpose, values and goals. Having a Sin Nature, the creational characteristics are misdirected. Neocalvinism makes much of this concept: While what God has created remains essentially good, it is misdirected and misused, or not used as God intended, as a result of the Fall. That is how the corruption within manifests itself. And fallen humans "will" have it no other way! Most important is the fact that human beings, as humans beings, are in rebellion against God and seek to use all of their God-given faculties apart from God, autonomously, and for them selves or for Idols, which they have made to take God's place. This is what it means to be spiritually dead: totally cut off and separated from God. More than separated, human beings act as enemies of the God who made them. This animosity in their hearts, hidden and denied as it is in most, is known among Neocalvinists as "antithesis". Its consequences are found in every aspect and dimension of our culture. Now we proceed to God's solution. It is not the cross, it is "Irresistible Grace" or "Effectual Calling"

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:20

Thursday, July 20, 2006

## **DOCTRINE #1- RADICAL CORRUPTION**

Invariably, when Christians return from a very short term "Mission Trip", because they have chosen an impoverished area to visit, their strongest impression is the poverty they saw. The plight of the Poor really shocks and upsets the typical middle class American, on one of these trips, and thus, they are motivated by a desire to help eradicate that poverty and care for those who live in it. The great Commission becomes, "Go and make..." improvements in the living conditions of the Poor. This psychology works here in the States as well. Doing an inner city plunge, young (usually white and affluent) college students are touched (upset) by the living conditions (existence) of the (usually poor and non-white) residents of "ghettos" and they are motivated (convicted) by that to do something hands on to help the residents.

Meanwhile, in more affluent suburbs, there are (usually white) people whose lives are filled with ennui and meaninglessness, although they are super busy. Often their marriages or their children are in trouble. Churches and some Christians, worlds away from the ghetto or Third World Nations, are convicted by their neighbors' emotional, marital or family dysfunction and are motivated to share "The Answer" to their problems.

In all these cases, evangelism or projects and programs to help people are based on the perceived economic, physical, emotional or social needs of those people. People who respond favorably to this "evangelism" or the programs and projects are motivated by belief that their needs are economic, physical, emotional or social and that God or Jesus or the Gospel and the Church does indeed answer those needs. It is all about love and service and practical, hand on, help for folks in need.

However, this does not jibe with what the Bible says is the true need of all these people- in Haitian hovels, subsidized apartments or in landscaped suburban mansions. Their problem is sin against God, themselves and others. Their problem is personal, willful transgression of God's Law and their greatest need is forgiveness of their guilt and its eternal consequences.

Eventually, sinners must be taught and come to the realization that the root cause of their sins ["Why do I keep doing this stuff. I hate it, but I still do it!"] is their Sin (capital "S"). Sin (capital "S") is their corrupt, innate Nature- we are all born with a drive to rebel against God and His law- to transgress. We inherited this from our ancestor, Adam. And he got it when he and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden. This change in their original human nature dates to that act of disobedience and since then it has been passed down "in the genes" to their descendants. Every single baby born ever since suffers from this defect. This corruption is called "Original Sin"- not a reference to Adam's act, but the consequence of it. We sin, because we are constitutionally sinners. There is absolutely nothing we can do about this condition. We can try to discipline and control or suppress it. We can try to educate or cultivate and sublimate it into good work. We can simply deny it or blame it on our circumstances or the abuse or bad influence from our parents or other people. Nothing works in the long run. Our corrupt Nature will out itself. It will make us do things we hate doing. Every single thing we do, every act, and all our best intentions are affected by it. This corruption effects us totally, through and through- intellectually, emotionally and physically. Our very will, our volition, is under its control. We are in deepest bondage. This rarely is visible. This is not something that visitors to our homes or neighborhoods are going to be upset by seeing. It is not something that usually motivates any one to "do

something" about. But this bondage is a far more serious and grievous condition than those who are suffering the worst of disease and poverty.

Our deep need is to be delivered from its power and control. Being forgiven for our sins is not enough. That is temporary relief. We will fall back into the same sins. The root must be attacked. Our Sin must be faced, decried and confessed. The most terrible fact of all is that only God can help us. Only He can free us from this bondage of our will to the presence and power of Sin within; but that very bondage precludes and prevents us from coming to God for that help, that deliverance. We can not, and will not, chose Him. To the contrary, this Sin Nature makes us hostile to God. At the deepest level, we hate Him. We will not seek Him.

All of this is what Calvinists (and Scripture) mean by "TOTAL DEPRAVITY" I prefer the term Radical Corruption, because this corruption (Sin) is "rooted" in the core of our being and radiates outward into every fiber of our being. All our efforts to "change the world" must begin by addressing this reality in ourselves and all others.  
NEXT: What God has done about this reality

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:04

### **DISCLAIMER ABOUT THE NEW SERIES re DOCTRINE**

Disclaimer: I am very reluctant to delve into the new series announced below about the Doctrines of Grace, as well as the subject of Neocalvinism. This is because many people who are serious about these topics can be very self-righteous and arrogant because they believe they have all absolute Truth. They seem to love to argue about every fine point of doctrine, often using very disparaging remarks and names about those with whom they disagree. All such attitudes and behavior dishonors the Lord and contradicts our profession that we are saved and live by Grace. I do not want to get involved with any of that. I am almost loath to introduce anyone new to these subjects. (Yes, some of the websites and blogs are that bad) I have studied Reformed Theology and Calvinism for years. I know it is not a perfect system of thought, or at least my understanding of it is not perfect and is far from exhaustive; but, I am persuaded that it is the best and most comprehensive System of Biblical Truth, that it honors God more than any other and that knowledge of it is greatly needed among Christians today as a worldview for daily living. I will not defend the Doctrines in this series. I do not want to argue with anyone about them. If you want to ask questions or offer positive response, great. If you want to attack or be negative or debate anything, please just go somewhere else. This is not the venue for that. Thank you. Neocalvinism and the Reformed Faith are a given here- the perspective from which I will write. These posts are my personal interpretation of the Doctrines. There are many other sources on the internet for all the Scripture and thought that under gird the System. Having said all of that, if I have not scared you off, I will begin the Series and hope you will read and benefit from it: A Dutch Treat!

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:26

Wednesday, July 19, 2006

## **INTRODUCING THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE**

When I was in High School, I was on the Debating Team and a member of the National Forensics Society. I don't know if high schools still have such teams, although colleges do. My partner back then is now a professor of political science at Barnard College (Columbia). We traveled to different schools for the debates and had to be able to debate both the "Pro" and the "Con" sides of the selected Topics. It was enjoyable and we did well, except when we debated a Team that did not know the subject. Our arguments were all geared to the published material handed out in advance. We had to know it cold. When we went up against a team that did not know the material, we literally were handicapped and found it difficult to debate. It has occurred to me why I have a difficult time communicating with many younger Christians today. I go into the discussion thinking I know the topic and only belatedly realize they do not. More accurately, they do not know it in the same way I do. When they talk of their experiences with churches, I realize now they are talking about different churches than I have known. Same with Evangelism. And Conversion and even Salvation. Listening, from my experience and perspective, I am hearing babble and confusion and ignorance. It dawns on me that they often are from Roman Catholic and mainline churches and a few are suffering from exposure to some rigid fundamentalist church. That experience influences their perspective. Even more serious and maybe because of any or all of the above, these younger Christians are not grounded at all in the Doctrines of Grace. They think they know what Paul taught, but to my ears they do not. None of them are Reformed or Calvinist. What they do know very well is the teaching of Leaders of the "Evangelical Left" and Emergent Church Pastors. So I am entering into the "debate", having prepared by learning material I was given, while they are entering it using different material given to them. These are very serious and sincere Believers who are convinced they are following Jesus. I am really sad about this because I care for them and think they have been seriously misled. I hope and pray they will read the next few posts here, introducing the Doctrines of Grace and Reformed Theology, related particularly to the topics of Social Action. I hope evangelicals generally will study them, as well. The typical evangelical, in my experience, also does not know the Doctrines of Grace and those who do, usually keep them to themselves, for the sake of "getting along", valuing most of all [what they believe is] peace and love.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 18:46

Tuesday, July 18. 2006

### **"Dutch Treat"?**

"Neocalvinism is not just some idiosyncratic sectarian movement rooted in 19th-century Holland. It is one manifestation of a broad strand of catholic Christianity which goes back to such church fathers as Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, and Augustine of Hippo. To be sure, neocalvinism as a distinct cultural movement has its roots in The Netherlands, and the work of such men as Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck, but its religious antecedents are much earlier and more catholic than that. In theological shorthand ... "grace restores nature." This means simply that the new life brought about by redemption in Jesus Christ does not (A) stand in opposition to created reality, nor does it merely (B) supplement or (C) parallel it, but rather (D) seeks to penetrate and restore the reality of creational life. Redemption is a comprehensive salvage operation, the goal of which is nothing short of recovering all of life as it was meant to be lived according to God's creational design from the very beginning. On the question of the relationship between grace and nature (and thus Christ and culture, church and world, theology and philosophy), historic Christian orthodoxy has chosen for options A, B, C, or D. In my opinion, neocalvinism is a particularly strong and consistent manifestation of the D option in a modern western cultural context. It is characterized by both its strong allegiance to Scripture and its critical relevance to modern culture. In my opinion, these matters are especially clearly laid out by Herman Bavinck. I would also like to emphasize the value of retaining a connection with its Dutch roots." my emphasis written by Dr. Al Wolters October 2005 - Comment Magazine V. 24 I. 8

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 18:09

Wednesday, July 12, 2006

### **Elegant Universe**

Last night I watched a fascinating program on NOVA. If you missed it, it may be seen here <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/elegant/program.html> I found this glimpse into the Mind of God to be fascinating. That is why I put it in the Theological Issues Category. The graphics and commentary made very complex concepts understanding, even entertaining. I'm not "stringing" you along- it is worth a look.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 17:05

### **Math, Logic, Theology and my Website**

As I study more about the Philosophy of Mathematics, which will be on my website, I fully realize that very few Christians see the practical application of the topic and that few will bother to read what I have to say. I admit I am not a mathematician- far from it. I am not in the least interested in doing math. I want to talk about math. Most people who do math are not in the least interested in talking about it. However, Math effects everyone's daily lives in hundreds of very immediate and practical ways. Folks should be very interested in the subject. One of the most striking conclusions I have come to is this: The ideas that influence most people doing math today are the same ideas that everyday influence the beliefs and values of Christians in contemporary and emergent churches. That's correct. Trends in Theology and Practice in today's Churches go hand in hand with trends in Modern Math. I put a paper about changing concepts of God on my website some time ago. Salvation itself, as well as the Christian life, requires a Biblical understanding of God, His nature and character. A proper understanding of Math requires exactly the same. I am realizing that these changing concepts of God reflect the ideas behind modern math. I wonder if the latter actually have caused or influenced the former. My study in Math convinces me, more than ever, that the really essential and truly foundational subject for Math, as well as Theology and Ethics, is Epistemology- the study of what can be known, how can we know it and how can we be certain that we do. Actually, this applies to the study of all subjects. Again, most Christians will not get to excited about something called Epistemology [e piss to what?]; but, it is far more relevant to their daily lives as Christians than they realize. My paper on Epistemology is also on my website. And then there is the subject of Logic. This, too, is not in fashion. Yet, it is indispensable to all human communication, let alone to Math. I hope you will read what I have written about Logic, also posted on my website. Note: These articles, as well as the website, are all "Under construction"

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:11

Friday, June 30, 2006

### **Treating lobsters humanely**

When we go to Maryland, we enjoy eating crabs and clams and oysters. We also enjoy lobster. Some restaurants around Baltimore have stopped offering these delicacies because they have been convinced that the crustaceans are not being treated "humanely". Think of that- "human-ly", ie- the lobsters are not being treated as humans! Hundreds of embryos and fetuses are not treated as humans either. I wonder if these same folks protest that? In the Peanuts comic strip last Sunday, Snoopy the dog, was "feeling very dejected" because, "he" said, "I'm less than human." Well, yes, Snoopy you are less than human. Humans are animals like canines, but unlike all other animals, humans are, in fact, "humans". They, unlike all other animals, are created in the Image of God. They are like God, ie- they are "persons" with capacities for rationality (abstract thinking), creativity, morality and communality. They are conscious of "Self" and act as free or intentional change agents, with responsibility for their decisions. Furthermore, they have the capacity for a personal relationship with God. All of this is the meaning of "Soul". No other animal, including Snoopy, has all these faculties or capacities. No other animal bears the Image of God, is a person or has "soul". (This, by the way, is why I dislike calling animals by human names.) Throw the lobsters in a pot, boil till edible and bring them to the table! Yum Yum

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:57

Friday, June 16, 2006

### **The Rot within**

During the heavy rain storms in the last two weeks, two trees on our street, 3 and 5 houses up, have fallen- one into the street, bringing down power lines; the other smack on top of the neighbor's house. Both looked fine, but were rotten on the inside. That became apparent only after they were down. There is an obvious parallel to certain church denominations. But the latter are more complicated. If anyone had tested the trees, taking a core sample, the decay would have been obvious. Some of us have tested and found rot in the mainline Denominations, only to find that one person's decay is another person's "Gospel". Many evangelicals who are determined to communicate with the younger generation or to co-operate with main-line churches and so-called secular agencies are forgetting or ignoring the Doctrine of the Fall and the Antithesis. Unless truly regenerate, people are rebellious against God and therefore, His Word. There is innate hostility and conflict between the two. This is deeper decay than doctrinal and moral deviation and requires far more than any Resolutions that may pass. Many who struggle with the fact of natural disasters overlook both the Fall and the Curse that attends it. The Creation is rational and good. The Creation became cursed in the Fall and that explains the irrationality and chaos that confounds us. The hope is Redemption and Re/formation in Christ for all.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:29

Thursday, June 15, 2006

### **For You and Me?**

There is a poem, published on the Obituary page today, written by the deceased being remembered. In it he says, "Jesus died for everyone, not a precious few. This has been a constant throughout the ages, one I know is true." I do not want to disrespect the man in any way. However, these words in his poem represent what many "know is true", but which a Calvinist would have to say are not true. How would anyone know any theological statement (Jesus died for everyone... ) is true? Only from the Bible (otherwise, by gut feeling- I just know it is true. )The Calvinist [like me] is convinced from the Bible that Jesus died for the Elect, not for every single person. When verses say Jesus atoned for the sin of the world, they mean that the sacrificial death of Jesus was an atonement sufficient to cover all the sins ever committed. That is not the same thing as saying Jesus died for for you and for me- for every single person who ever lived. In the post below this one, many who argue against "Designer Genes" and "Custom Eugenics" will say that they do so because they believe who is born and when and how is God's business. It is not up to us to chose. If God gives a couple a baby with Downs Syndrome or no baby at all, that is His choice. He is God. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord. If this is true, then it must apply also to salvation. It is not our choice. It is God's choice. Having stubborn, selfish, sinful natures, no one would or could ever chose to commit to Christ anyway. Their will is in bondage to Sin within. If that is the case and if Jesus really died for everyone, then his death would have been in vain, because every sinner would reject it. To a Calvinist, that possibility dishonors Christ and his Sacrifice. The idea that sinful Man can vote, as it were, on the value of the Cross and veto God's Plan to save people is outrageous. The Elect, on the other hand, are folks who will not (by definition) reject Christ and His atoning Sacrifice. God regenerates their hearts, freeing their will from sin's bondage so that they are then freely able to chose Christ. It is His choice who does this, not ours. It must be that way, if anyone at all is to be saved. Who that will be remains up to Him, not us, the same as with babies. The poem writer, apparently knew and loved the Lord. If so, he is one of the "precious few" (who actually are innumerable from every tongue and tribe) for whom Jesus really did die. All of us who have saving faith are debtors to God's electing grace.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:43

Sunday, June 11, 2006

### **Trinity Sunday**

One of the attractions to me of Worship in the Catholic/Anglican Tradition is that it is so very Trinitarian. Some Churches and Believers emphasis the Father, others the Son and still others the Spirit. The need is for balance. The Church Calendar today calls for celebration of the Triune God and worship of the One God who is Father, Son and Spirit  
Te Deum  
We praise you, O God, we acclaim you as the Lord; all creation worships you, the Father everlasting. To you all angels, all the powers of heaven, the cherubim and seraphim, sing in endless praise: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. The glorious company of apostles praise you. The noble fellowship of prophets praise you. The white-robed army of martyrs praise you. Throughout the world the holy Church acclaim you: Father, of majesty unbounded, your true and only Son, worthy of all praise, the Holy Spirit, advocate and guide.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 07:39

Tuesday, June 6, 2006

## **Which Jesus? Part 2**

In the post preceding this one (below- read it first) I wrote of an interpretation of Jesus that is popular in some circles. Here is what I understand the Classical and more Scriptural view to be- A cardinal Doctrine of our Faith is the Trinity. God is three Persons in One: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. All that can be said of each can be said of all three. They share the same nature and are indivisible. Each is as important as the other. Each is to be worshipped and glorified equally and together as the One True Triune God. (see the Nicene Creed) We also believe the historical Jesus is the incarnation of God the Son- but not of God "in toto". The Son preexisted in Heaven. On earth, he prayed to the Father, who remained in Heaven. The Holy Spirit, remaining with the Father, had not yet come to dwell within the Church, although He was active in the earthly life and work of the incarnate Son. After his resurrection, Jesus returned to Heaven, being given all authority in heaven and earth by the Father and began to reign from His Throne in Heaven. This Sovereign is the Jesus who is our Lord. This is the Jesus we love and obey. His character is the same now, as when He was on earth and when He was in heaven before the incarnation. He has always been God, with all the attributes and character of God. The compassion and care Jesus demonstrated in his ministry was the same compassion and care that the Triune God has always had. What was new for Jesus was His role as Savior. He did not come to earth to be the Model of Compassion and Service to the Poor and Marginalized. He came to earth to defeat Evil, Sin and Death. He demonstrated His right and power to do that with His exorcisms and miracles, during his 3 year Ministry. That was all prelude to the Great Event: His death and resurrection. Jesus, in obedience to His Father, laid aside His glory, privilege, status and power as the Son of God; He did that in order to offer Himself on the cross as the Sacrifice that would be the full atonement for the sin of the world. Having finished that work, He returned to the Father and resumed His position of glory and power, as the now Risen Son of God. This is the Jesus I have known and served for more than 50 years, not some Che Guevara type Marxist revolutionary. What is radical is the Lord's call to us to do as He did- not to be a social activist among the marginalized of society- but to obey God the Father's will at all costs, being willing to set aside one's personal position and privilege in order to be faithful to the Father. It is to this that He calls us. Being like Jesus is being obedient to the will of God as He was. What ever that may turn out to mean for each of us, it will be revolutionary in the affairs of the world. The major reason why the Classical View of Jesus is different than the "Leftist" view is that the former is derived from Systematic Theology based on the entire Bible, as well as almost 2000 year old Church Tradition. So-called leftist evangelicals may even take pride in that. To them, being grounded in [their interpretation] of the Gospels and the historical Jesus [as they understand him] is what they want to be known for. The problem is with the Classical View, not with them. Ah, there is the rub.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:32

## **Which Jesus are we talking about?**

"Johnny, we hardly knew you." So many revelations have come out through the years about JFK regarding his personal life and health, that many have been prompted to say, as in the title of a book and stage play, "Johnny, we hardly knew you." Many biographies had been written about the former President that created and sustained a different image of the man. The man people thought they knew was different. "Jesus, we hardly knew you" can now be said by many of us who hold the classic view of who he was- if the newer views are true. What I have read and heard from many, I would gather Jesus was a populist revolutionary, almost like Marxist Che Guevara - "Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, a middle class Argentine doctor, has become an icon of the late Twentieth Century. A chance photograph taken in the first days after the Cuban revolution, has been reproduced for decades as a symbol of dissent and revolution. This biography of Che provides an overview of the Cuban revolutionary struggle and the early days of the revolution. Students studying Revolution, Cuba, USA and Cold War history will find useful and interesting material in this program." From the Introduction to a History Channel program-(<http://www.foxtel.com.au/700.htm>)

Actually, this Jesus has been popular for some time in what has been called Liberation Theology, especially in Latin and South America. He was popular among young Christians (the "Jesus freaks" ) in the 60's and 70's. He seems to still be popular among some Christians today, in what is called the Evangelical Left. He seems to particularly appeal to affluent, privileged, well schooled, white, young adults who are disaffected with American society and the Church as they know it. When they read the Bible, they look for and find this Jesus in the Gospels. This Jesus, in turn, becomes

## Blog Export: DUTCH TREAT- Cal Fox's Blog, <http://www.calvinfox.com/blog/>

their Model for what it means to be a Christian. We are to become like him and follow the example he demonstrated for all. This Jesus is their prime authority for how to live. What would this Jesus do? We must do that if we are to be his true disciples. What could be wrong with this?

This is not the Jesus I knew 50 years ago or the one I know today.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:55

Sunday, June 4, 2006

### **The Silence of God**

"WHERE WAS God in those days?" asked Pope Benedict XVI as he stood in Auschwitz last week. ``Why was he silent? How could he permit this endless slaughter, this triumph of evil?" Far more destructive of Faith, or an obstacle to having Faith, than the falsehood in the DaVinci Code, is the reality of Evil in the world. An article in this morning's Boston Globe by Jeff Jacoby takes on the Problem of Evil and God (known as Theodicy). It is a powerful piece and includes a very important observation and lesson from Pope

Benedict [http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial\\_opinion/oped/articles/2006/06/04/the\\_silence\\_of\\_god/](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2006/06/04/the_silence_of_god/)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 07:02

Friday, May 5, 2006

### **Last of Posts about Christian Epistemology [begin at the beginning-below]**

Fifth Pillar of Christian Epistemology: Foundational Knowledge over all other Knowledge Although Revelation in Scripture is TRUTH, it is not exhaustive Truth. It is Foundational and spiritual. There is always more to know about Reality and the world God has created. This is knowledge gained apart from the Bible. However, revealed TRUTH precedes all other Knowledge (Truth). Our presuppositions, about what the Bible is, set the rules for how we proceed. TRUTH is foundational for all other knowledge. This, for example, determines our approach to Origins and Cosmology. We can not be philosophical Naturalists. We do not need to prove, posteriori, that there is Intelligent Design in the Universe. We know that a priori. This is another absolutely crucial characteristic of Christian Epistemology. Much of our real world knowledge will be inductive, a posteriori. The Christian goes on, beyond Revelation, to use his or her mind (Reason, Logic) and experience to know as much as s/he can of Reality. Both the manifestation of that Reality, and our understanding of it, will be in flux. Our real world knowledge will be constantly changing and growing.. It will not be absolute or static. It is important to understand this relationship between Knowledge which is based in Revelation and all other knowledge. They are not separate. They are not equal. They are not to be contradictory. Many Christians fail to see this relationship. There is to be no separation between Faith and Reason, Value and Fact. Nothing is neutral or autonomous. The Knowledge (FT) that comes by Revelation takes priority over Knowledge gained by inductive and deductive reasoning, by the "Scientific Method", by personal experience and by intuition. While Revealed Knowledge [TRUTH] is primarily spiritual, we need it to in-form our intellect. Our intellect must con-form to it. Revelation (Scripture) is the ultimate authority and gives us the ultimate purpose and meaning of all things- the "Big Picture", our World View. It gives us understanding of our nature and structure and of all the world in which we live. Public and private Schooling can give us real world knowledge by which we can reasonable function; but apart from inscripturated Revelation, it can give us none of the above. Thus what is usually considered "Education" is sorely lacking and deficient in the most important matters. Worse than that, the autonomous mind is an enemy of God and true Truth. [This is the Doctrine of Antithesis.] This means that the education provided by autonomous minds will not only be deficient, but itself inimical to God. This is why Dutch Calvinists maintain their own school

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:42

### **Continuing Notes on Epistemology**

This is the third post using some of my draft notes from a personal position paper on the subject of Christian Knowledge. The latter is, more specifically, the Dutch or Neo-Calvinism understanding of the subject-The Third Pillar: Revelation is inscripturated: the Bible Why do we believe the Bible is this Revelation? There are four possible answers. 1. Pragmatism- The Bible works, it helps solve problems 2. A posteriori Reasons- We have evidence that can be tested to prove it 3. A priori Reasons- We just know it is. It is self-evident 4. The Holy Spirit within the mind of a Believer. The Spirit illuminates. Faith (also a work of the Spirit) receives the Illumination. In this way alone [Scripture, Illumination, Faith] the Believer "knows". S/he begins to recognize the Voice of God (John 10:4,16, 27;18:37) at the moment of saving faith, in which the Holy Spirit comes to abide within the Believer. Reread that carefully and note how it is very different from the third answer above. This fourth answer is correct. Again, we are not evidentialist Rationalists nor pragmatists. If the latter, the Authority of Scripture would depend on our subjective and changing needs. If the former, the Authority of Scripture would be -damaged if not destroyed if any of the so-called evidence became unreliable or bogus. The Authority of Scripture comes from its divine authorship, from within not from without. God's Word does not need our attempts to prove it to be true. That would make the Man the Measure of the Book.

Fourth Pillar: the priority of a priori Knowledge

The Revelation of TRUTH comes to us through thousands of words. The Universal is known through many particulars. Their meaning, often one by one, must be unpacked. They must be related and connected in some way. The Bible is not a systematic book. It has a number of literary genres. Knowing, by faith, that these words, all together, are the TRUTH of God, guides us in our understanding of the words. We read them all in that Light.

That faith in us is crucial to how we approach the words of the Bible. We do not approach it as though it is a human book like all others. For example, inasmuch as it is the revelation of God's Mind, it can not be self-contradictory.

Inasmuch as it is His Truth, It must be without error. We accept miracles and fulfilled prophecies because God is capable of them and He is revealing Himself to us. We use an a priori approach to Scripture. We deduce many things from our presupposition, on faith, that the Bible is, indeed, the Word of God.

However, studying all the words (the particulars) will lead us to posteriori induction as we seek to go deeper into what the Word of God means for our lives today. While the priori sets the main rules of interpretation, we will use all the tools available under those rules for posteriori inductive Bible study.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:16

### **Continuing the paper on Christian Knowledge (Dutch Reformed Epistemology)**

The First Pillar of Christian Epistemology: God's Knowledge  
The unchanging and perfect God knows. He has perfect and complete knowledge of everything. What he knows is Truth: Absolute Truth, Unchanging Truth. Because He knows, there is [such a thing as] Knowledge. We can have Knowledge because God does. Any Knowledge we may ever gain originates in His Knowledge. The body of Knowledge [outlined above] is FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH (FT) It originates in the Mind of God. It is part of what He knows. This is the starting point to Christian Epistemology  
This Knowledge or FT is knowable. The oft heard plea that we can not know answers to the big questions about Life ["Who knows? Nobody can really know." "It is all a crap shoot." or, at the very least, "We can never be sure"] is hereby rejected. So is despair and cynicism. We are to learn what God already knows. We are to discover His Truth. The Second Pillar: Revelation  
Dutch Reformed or Neo-Calvinist Epistemology is not Modernist, a product of the Enlightenment. (In contrast, much Conservative Evangelical Epistemology is)  
The discovery of TRUTH (FT) is not arrived at by Reason (deduction or induction), by Experience (empirical data) or some kind of intuition, i.e.- we do not come upon or discover FT by· evidence that can be tested · concepts that are self-evident, self-justifying or innate · trial and error: concepts that work, they solve problems  
RATHER- We know our beliefs [as listed above] are true because they are justified by Revelation. Foundational Knowledge (TRUTH) comes directly from God. It is revealed by Him. God reveals what He knows. He reveals His Mind (the Logos) for example-  
Matthew 16:16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 1  
Corinthians 2:9 as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"-- 10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. Galatians 1:11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.  
The Knowledge that comes from God , Foundational Truth, true Knowledge, is spiritual. It is God centered. It enables us to know God experientially. This is beyond propositional knowledge "that" and functional knowledge "how". This is knowledge "of" the immediate, personal experience of God. This Knowledge begins at the moment of regeneration. From that moment, "We know the Lord." This is also moral knowledge, leading us to become like God in our relationships and way of living. It is meant to shape our character, to make us Christ-like. In fact, becoming like God, like Christ, is the test as to whether we have True Knowledge. Even these criteria or "tests" of Knowledge are a matter of revelation. They are not designed by human minds. There is a place for reason, as we shall see later; but it is not the measure of true Truth. This Revelation is inscripturated in the Bible. This concept is absolutely critical. It is another major distinctive of all Christian Epistemology

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:51

Friday, April 21, 2006

### **Absolute Truth: How do we know it?**

The belief-statements posted below, among others, are the basic content of our Knowledge. It is static, unchanging and absolute. We believe it is Justified and True. I shall call it Foundational Truth (FT) or TRUTH. It is not a priori, i.e.- known by deductive reasoning alone, apart from all experience. It is also not posteriori, known by inductive reasoning from evidence or experience. The First Pillar of Christian Epistemology: God's Knowledge. The unchanging and perfect God knows. He has perfect and complete knowledge of everything. What He knows is Truth: Absolute Truth, Unchanging Truth. Because He knows, there is [such a thing as] Knowledge. We can have Knowledge because God does. Any Knowledge we may ever gain originates in His Knowledge. The body of Knowledge [outlined above] is FOUNDATIONAL TRUTH (FT) It originates in the Mind of God. It is part of what He knows. This is the starting point to Christian Epistemology. This Knowledge or FT is knowable. The oft heard plea that we can not know answers to the big questions about Life ["Who knows? Nobody can really know." "It is all a crap shoot." or, at the very least, "We can never be sure"] is hereby rejected. So is despair and cynicism. We are to learn what God already knows. We are to discover His Truth.

The Second Pillar: God's Knowledge is Revealed. The discovery of TRUTH (FT) is not arrived at by reason (deduction or induction), by experience (empirical data) or some kind of intuition, i.e.- we do not come upon or discover FT by evidence that can be tested. Concepts that are self-evident, self-justifying or innate. Trial and error: concepts that work, they solve problems. RATHER- We know our beliefs [as listed below] are true because they are justified by Revelation. Foundational Knowledge (TRUTH) is revealed by God. God reveals what He knows, His Mind, His Word. Primarily, the Truth, true Knowledge, is spiritual. It is God centered. It enables us to know God experientially. This is a third type of Knowledge, beyond propositional knowledge "that" and functional knowledge "how". This is knowledge "of"- the immediate, personal experience of God. This Knowledge begins at the moment of regeneration. From that moment, "We know the Lord." This is moral knowledge, leading us to become like God in our relationships and way of living. It is meant to shape our character, to make us Christ-like. In fact, becoming like God, like Christ, is the test as to whether we have True Knowledge. This Revelation is inscripturated in the Bible. This fact is absolutely critical. It is another major Pillar of Christian Epistemology.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:00

### **Absolute Truth: What is it?**

In today's QT Thoughts [below], I mention absolute Truth. Here is a portion of a paper I am working on [rough draft] about Christian Epistemology. The Content of specifically Christian Knowledge (Absolute Truth) We know that... A. There is an objective (real) physical (material), albeit changing and temporal (created, not eternal), time-space Reality (Heavens and Earth) B. There is an objective, spiritual (immaterial), non-temporal Reality, independent from the other objective physical (material), changing, time-space World. Specifically-- God exists. His Mind and Thoughts exist. (The Logos exists.) God's character and actions are manifest in the time-space world. He is Sovereign: He rules and has a Realm. His will and purposes are being carried out, in our History. God created the objective, material, and immaterial, time-space (as well as the immaterial) World. This created Reality has Purpose- a Goal (Omega Point) This Purpose will be achieved. Intrinsic to the created Reality are God-given "Natural Law", Moral Norms, Mathematical (logical) and Physical and Spiritual "Laws", all reflecting the Mind of God.

Furthermore, we know that-- Humans bear the Image of God- they are invaluable "Persons" [Note: human beings begin as human embryos from the moment of their conception] As Persons, human beings, like God, have spirituality, rationality, creativity and communality. These personal attributes are collectively known as the "Soul". It exists in union with the physical body (including the brain), yet has an independent existence upon the death of that body. Human beings are "fallen", i.e. - the Image has been totally corrupted (but not eliminated). Humans are born "spiritually dead" (separated from God) and live as enemies of their Creator (this is known as the "Antithesis"). The consequences of this "Human Condition" is Death for Eternity. The historical person of Jesus was and is the [only] Incarnation of God, the Creator. Jesus was sinless and his death was an effectual atonement for human sins. Jesus was raised physically from his grave and ascended into Heaven. Jesus now rules the affairs of the world as the Sovereign God. Jesus will return to the earth to complete His reign. Human beings are loved by God and can be

redeemed by Him [alone] through the life, death and ascension of Jesus on their behalf. God the Spirit regenerates human beings of His choosing, giving them a new heart- one that loves and wants to obey God and a new mind- one that can have acknowledge God and Truth . The human being who knows God shall do so increasingly into Eternity. This is Life. The people who know God, collectively, are His People. They live in a Covenant relationship with Him, with the Rights and Responsibilities that He mandates. The above belief-statements, [among others] are the basic content of our Knowledge. It is static, unchanging and absolute. We believe it is Justified and True. I shall call it Foundational Truth (FT) or TRUTH

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:39

Saturday, April 8, 2006

## **Armin what?**

In the post below this one ["Contradiction"], I wrote about the importance, the necessity, of being logical and consistent, particularly in our Theology. The post was not about Calvinism or Arminianism as such. I used them to illustrate my main point about the Law of Contradiction. I gave a brief outline of what Calvinism [generally] includes when the topic is the process of personal salvation. There are many related doctrines. I did not give a similar outline for Arminianism. Here it is- Arminianism [generally] begins with Human Ability ("Free Will") and goes through Conditional Calling, Saving Faith, Regeneration, Justification and concludes with Conditional Assurance. [There are important related doctrines] Calvinism begins with Predestination and goes through Effectual Calling, Regeneration, Saving Faith, Justification, Sanctification and concludes with Perseverance, which includes Glorification- (there are several variations of this chain of doctrines).

These two systems are based on different doctrines about the Fall and the Nature of fallen Human Beings, particularly regarding "the will". This means they also hold different views about the role God plays in the process of Salvation. [I will try to explain this in the most simple way, instead of using the usual, classic terminology] Arminians [generally] believe that, because of the Fall (Genesis 3) human beings are indeed sinners, but their will is only weakened. With the help, the grace, of God, they are able, if they want, to repent of their sins and choose Christ as their Savior. Sound familiar? The typical evangelical agrees with this. S/he is an Arminian, even if s/he has never heard the name. Calvinists believe that, as a result of the Fall, human beings are not able at all to repent and choose Christ, nor do they want to. If anyone does come to Christ, it is only and completely because God made it possible. God worked the miracle of regeneration, thus setting the sinner's will free to repent and choose Christ. He alone, for His purposes alone, decided what people He would regenerate. Having decided, the process is irresistible. The Elect are saved. To those those who will respond that this is not fair, let me say- because of what we Calvinists believe about the fallen human nature, ie "Total Depravity", absolutely no one would be saved, if God did not choose to save some. If you say that is still not fair, be careful. Your logic will lead you to say it is not fair that God limits salvation only to believers in Christ. That will logically lead you to relativism and universalism. You can see why these two systems differ about Assurance. Since the Arminian system rests on the free-will of sinners [albeit, aided by God], it must logically conclude that a believer is responsible for persevering to the end. In contrast, since the Calvinist system rests on the will of God alone, it must logically conclude that God is responsible for the perseverance of the Believer. It is illogical and contradictory, to combine these systems. It is inconsistent to want to have the cake of eternal security and eat it with the fork of free will. I know that Scripture verses can be marshalled to support either System. The tipping point for me comes from the question: Which system gives God the most Glory?

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:16

Friday, April 7, 2006

## **Contradiction**

"The law of contradiction means that two antithetical propositions cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. X cannot be non-X. A thing cannot be and not be simultaneously. And nothing that is true can be self-contradictory or inconsistent with any other truth. All logic depends on this simple principle. Rational thought and meaningful discourse demand it." Read the rest of this article by Phillip

Johnson-<http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/articles/lawofcon.htm> Christians increasingly reject (or maybe simply do not know) that our Faith is a system of Truth- a system, a theological system. That means that there are various doctrines and they all hang or fall together. Our doctrines are held together logically. Christians today seem to be satisfied to pick and chose between beliefs. They even sincerely hold beliefs that contradict each other. They are pragmatists: "Hey, this works for me." Some balk at the very idea that we have doctrines at all (What matters is "Love" ) and definitely choke at the idea that, if we must have them, they must cohere logically (Strangely, coherence is the most popular test of truth these days- that is another matter.)

We not only do have doctrines, they must, indeed cohere logically. They must especially obey the Law of Contradiction [above] eg- "God is Triune and God is not-Triune" can not be true at the same time, in the same sense."All Christians are baptized in the Spirit and all Christians are not baptized in the Spirit" can not be true."The Perserverance of Believers [Eternal Security] requires Irresistable Grace and the Perserverance of Believers does not require Irresistable Grace" can not be true.This latter contradiction is complicated because the Perserverance of Believers (more correctly, -the Elect) is the last step in a chain of doctrines in the system known as Calvinism [no relation]. It begins with Predestination and goes through Effectual Calling, Regeneration, Saving Faith, Justification, Sanctification and concludes with Perserverance, which includes Glorification- (there are several variations of this chain of doctrines). The point is that the last doctrine is a necessary and logical outcome of all doctrines that precede it. Most contemporary evangelicals might be labeled as Calvinian, because they reject the doctrines of Calvinism [above] except for the last one (Eternal Security) . They combine it with all the doctrines of Arminianism, while rejecting the one that calls for conditional security. Problem is that this is a logical contradiction. All the points of Arminianism, including the last one, completely contradict all the points of Calvinism. These are two tight doctrinal systems. All the parts hang together to make one whole. To mix and match makes no logical sense. Logically (and Scripturally) , a Believer must be either Calvinist or ArminianIf you say you do not care about all this logic stuff, you have moved into building your own personal faith and are giving it a subjective and irrational base (often dressed up as "Spirituality" ) Suffice it to say here, that base is sand. Read the linked article above. There can be no true, meaningful discourse apart from the basic laws of logic. There are then only feelings, miscommunication, misunderstanding and broken relationships.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:46

Monday, March 20, 2006

**So what Jesus was married and had a child.**

What difference does it make if the historical reliability of the Bible is rejected? What difference does it make if the historicity of the Incarnation is repudiated? What difference does it make, if history and historical facts are not important and true?

What difference does it make, if the DaVinci Code (book) undermines the Deity of Christ, if Doctrine is not important? What difference does it make if Jesus married and had a family, if the most important thing about him is that he demonstrated love for the poor and marginalized? For a helpful website about the coming movie, see-<http://www.thedavincialogue.com/experts.cfm>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:03

Tuesday, February 21, 2006

### **Should a Roman Catholic teach at a Protestant College?**

Wheaton College (Ill) recently terminated one of its professors because he became a Roman Catholic. As such, he could not, in the College's opinion, subscribe to the school's Statement of Faith. This professor has since joined the faculty of a RC college and, apparently, has no problem with what Wheaton did. He knew it would happen and he respects the school's right to do it. In fact, he respects that they were trying to remain faithful to their Heritage as a strong evangelical Protestant school. OK, but wow, the flack Wheaton is taking over this from the public. Comments from critics of the school reveal more about the state of today's common contemporary anti-theological, a-historical and subjective brand of Christianity. "Why can't we just all love each other. We are all Christians, why be dogmatic or doctrinaire?- that only divides us." Particularly, the people disturbed by all this reveal a serious ignorance of the differences between Reformation Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Wheaton has not said Roman Catholics are not Christians. It has said that they are not Protestants. I have gotten into trouble over this myself. The difference matters. A good explanation of the differences at stake in the controversy have been spelled out by the President of Wheaton. Study, especially, his second statement here-<http://www.wheaton.edu/welcome/response011006.html>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:43

Wednesday, February 1, 2006

### **Using Philosophy and the History of Science for Christ**

An excellent academic level website that covers topics under the umbrella of Philosophy is <http://www.galilean-library.org/home.php> Among many interesting articles is an excellent one rebutting the Judge's decision in the recent case in Dover re Intelligent Design. This is a non-Christian argument about the nature of Science and scientific theory. It is the kind of educated approach Christians should use. What is said here undermines the false claims made for methodological Naturalism [http://www.galilean-library.org/blog/Note](http://www.galilean-library.org/blog>Note) the article after the one above about "Dangerous Ideas". Discussing what it says could lead to an opportunity to effectively share the Gospel with anyone who agrees with the article

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:36

Tuesday, January 17, 2006

## **The Measure of Good Work**

What yardstick can we use to determine if "Work" is as it should be? Work (the noun) itself has inherent value. The essence of it, its "structure" if you will, is good. But Work can be abused and misused and taken in a "direction". If you will, that is evil. God Himself is a worker. That is the first thing we learn about Him in the Bible: "In the beginning, God created", i.e. God worked". Working is intrinsic to who God is. We are created in His Image, to be like Him. It follows that working is intrinsic to what it means to be a human being. God has 5 characteristics which are manifest in us, in our DNA, as it were. We image God in these 5 ways. It follows from this that the external standard we have by which we can measure work, any work, is this 5-fold Image. If our work is in harmony with this Image it is good. If it violates any of these 5 characteristics, the work is not good.

5 Standards for Work as God intends it to be

1. The Personal- the "person" All that we do must value and respect "persons" above all. not simply "people", but all that is meant by "person" as defined by the ways in which God is a "person", particularly as someone who is knowable, someone who communicates meaningfully and can share in "personal" relationships; a change agent who has a will and makes considered judgments. Work of any kind which demeans, exploits, neglects, injures or destroys persons, human beings, is evil
2. The Rational- rationality All that we do must be reasonable, logical, orderly- the way God thinks and makes decisions. All of creation reflects these qualities of its creator. Work of any kind which is essentially unreasonable, illogical or chaotic is not acceptable
3. The Creative- creativity All work should seek, in appropriate ways, to be creative, artistic and beautiful, as is the natural world God has made. Work which is uncreative, boring, repulsive or ugly should be rejected
4. The Moral- morality All work must be moral, righteous and just, as God defines those terms in His word. Work which is immoral, sinful or corrupt, according to God's word-law, must be rejected
5. The Communal- community The work of cultivating and of culture must be done in, of and by the community ("community" could simply be one's co-workers, the team or unit. It could be the company. Community could be neighborhood or town. etc.) Work must seek to promote the welfare and good of all members of the (appropriate) community. We are our brothers & sisters keepers, accountable for the welfare of all. Work which is done for selfish purposes or for self aggrandizement is not good. Work that harms the community or violates personal relationships in the community is sinful.

SUMMARY Allowing the image of God concept to guide us, requires these 5 principles. All employment, every project, should be evaluated on these terms. Work that respects and protects persons and it is reasonable, beautiful, moral and good for the community is good work [obviously all terms need definition] Work that is dehumanizing, unreasonable, ugly, immoral and selfish is bad work. I realize these are general principles. Details remain to be determined. BUT, we must have a Norm to go by, to begin with lest we sink into relativism or pragmatism.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 18:17

## **Church as Industry**

"Welcome to The Church Report.com, the online resource for Christian leaders, pastors and parachurch executives. On this site, you can view a complete issue of the magazine; communicate with other people in the industry on our Church Chat forum; subscribe to the magazine; log on for a monthly live chat with a noted industry expert; and much more. Founded by Jason T. Christy, himself a sought-after industry expert and speaker, as well as the former publisher of several other industry publications, The Church Report is a nationally heralded publication that features the monthly columns of such award-winning authors as Dr. Robert H. Schuller, Bishop Harry Jackson, Charles Colson, Dr. Jack Hayford, Tommy Barnett and Jay Sekulow, just to name a few. This collection of experts, along with our editorial commitment to publish the most thought-provoking business news magazine in the market, makes The Church Report the most-read publication by Christian leaders across the country. Having received acclaim in Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, The New York Times as well as on CBS News and Trinity Broadcasting Network, The Church Report is recognized as the industry leader and leading information source for the religious community." Do you notice anything odd and disturbing (at least to me) in the above quotation? What does the writer call the church community? The "Industry" ! At least 5 times. And the articles are by industry "experts" with "business" advice for those who work in this "market". It claims to be the "most-read publication by Christian leaders across the country". God have mercy.

FINIS

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:08

Thursday, January 12, 2006

## **How the Kingdom Comes**

The current issue of Christianity Today begins a series called "The Christian Vision Project" The first article is by a writer I greatly respect, Michael Horton. His topic is, "How the Kingdom Comes". It is not yet posted on the web. Dr Horton's basic thesis is that the Kingdom comes by the preaching of the Word and the ministration of the Sacraments and through the nurturing ministry of the Church. In the world, God works through Common Grace and Providence. This is a good and traditional approach to the subject. With all due respect, I believe it falls short and is inadequate. What is missing is the Cultural Mandate. When I mention this topic, the usual response is something about social action ministry. Increasingly, evangelicals are combining evangelism and ministries of mercy. This is excellent, of course. This is not the Cultural Mandate. That is far more than preaching the Gospel, planting churches and handing out nets to protect people from mosquitos that carry malaria. The Mandate is about developing and organizing the world to be as God created it to be. God is glorified when the world He created runs according to His intentions and norms. That means all education must be grounded in Christ and His Word. The Sciences and Technology must be made to serve God. The Fine Arts and Pop Culture must be pleasing to Him. Marriages and Families must function by God-given principles. Business and the entire economic endeavor must be organized around Biblical principles. This is how the Kingdom comes! I am determined to help it happen.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:51

Tuesday, January 3, 2006

### **Antiquing Saves**

Tis the season for dieting. The ads on TV tout many success stories, not only about weight-loss. These stories are testimonies to changed lives. People say they have become new people (born again). They have found peace and joy and purpose in life- a second chance. These are the same claims that new Christians make. If diet products can do the same thing as Jesus does, what's the difference? Are we offering the world just another weight loss plan? I heard the most astounding conversion story last night on The Antiques Road Show. An older woman claimed joyfully that antiquing had healed her of cancer and saved her life. It is what she now lives for. It gives her life meaning. We usually say that about Jesus. Two thoughts here: 1. Subjective, experiential testimonies about what Jesus has done in a person's life should be taken with a great grain of salt (doubt). It could be nothing more than something a diet or an antique could do. Our testimonies need to be based first on propositional revelation (Scripture) and then on objective changes in daily living (righteousness) Both 2. Our evangelism is not about helping people find peace and purpose. Weight-loss and antiquing can do that. That is not what we are going for. Evangelism calls sinners to faith and repentance toward Jesus Christ with the objective being the making of His disciples. That, in turn, will lead to those sinners finding the peace and purpose God intends for them to have.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 19:11

### **When is a Violin a Violin?**

Electric violins can make beautiful music when played well. The violin itself, ie- the body, does not contribute to that music. This piece of plastic simply serves to hold the strings and thus help the violinist to play music with them. The traditional wooden body, however, contributes significantly to the music. Stings, player and the wood instrument together make music and it is a different sound than that made iwth the electrified plastic. Which sound is truly violin music? The same question could be asked of the electronic piano. The latter, too, has a different sound than its wood counterpart. And then there is the different sound made by an organ that uses pipes than the one than does not because it is all electronic. By definition, the electric or electronic instruments and their music are not the same as the non-electronic/electronic. If our bodies were entirely replaced by artificial parts, would we still be human beings?

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 07:52

Thursday, December 15, 2005

### **When is a Pizza not a true Pizza?**

In discussions about Truth in years past, and still, in some circles, the debate was "Whose truth?" Truths were compared. Which one was not true? You say you have Truth and I say I have Truth. Who has true Truth? In discussions today, usually about Post Modernism, the debate is about the very existence of true Truth at all. Christians who insist that there is such a thing as true Truth (ie- Absolute Truth- something which is true for all people at all times in all places) tend to disdainfully dismiss what they think is the PoMo position. This is another case of confusion caused by changing definitions. The Absolutists define "Truth" as "correspondence" with reality. The statement " $2+2 = 4$ " is absolutely true because  $2+2=4$  is reality and the statement corresponds to it. To insist  $2=2=4$  is reality is a matter of faith. To say that the statement " $2+2=4$ " is true because it corresponds to reality is to say that the statement " $2+2=4$ " is true because it corresponds to a matter of faith. We believe that God exists. God is real- that is our faith. Therefore, the statement, "God exists." is absolutely true because the statement corresponds with my belief that God exists. My faith that God exists does not depend on the statement. Exactly the opposite. What does my faith that God exists depend on? That is another post, a different matter. Many people today use the coherence test to define truth, rather than correspondence. This is where the discussion gets bogged down. It is not a matter that there is no true Truth. It is a matter of defining what that is. If I order a "pizza" by phone, I expect what is delivered to correspond to what I think a "pizza" to be. If what is delivered is very different, I am upset because it is not a pizza, meaning it does not correspond with my belief of what a pizza is. (eg- thin crispy crust does not a pizza make, neither does a white pizza) However, what is delivered coheres with the idea of a pizza in this neighborhood- it fits the local context. Therefore, by that definition, it is a true pizza. One hundred miles from here, in a different neighborhood with a different idea of what makes a pizza, there could be another true (but very different) pizza by this definition of truth, ie- coherence. The debate about "Truth" will proceed if the debaters clarify up front which of the definitions of "Truth" they are using. One could say true truth is that which corresponds to all reality, determined by what is personally believed to be universal, empirical evidence. Another could say true truth is that which coheres to reality, determined by one's personal experience or terms or reference. Is one definition better than another? How do we decide? Clue: If there was only one Pizza Maker and he wrote and disseminated the official recipe for pizza, including a photograph of that pizza, then we would know, by that standard, whether what is delivered to our door is a true pizza, ie- whether it corresponded with the Original Recipe or not. Ideally, that pizza would also cohere to local expectations. If the latter are different, the original Pizza Maker would expect the local expectations to change and cohere to his. Of course, this last paragraph is loaded with faith statements. How do we know for sure that there was an original Pizza Maker, How do we know for sure he is still around and in charge? How do we know for sure that he cares how pizza is made today? What difference does it make if he does? What's the harm if you prefer thin crispy crust and I prefer thick and chewy? Can I insist that you stop calling your idea of a pizza, "pizza". Is the difference between the two only in a name?

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:44

Wednesday, December 7, 2005

### **One God: Three Faiths?**

PBS is currently running a documentary comparing Islam, Judaism and Christianity. These, they say, are the three branches of the Abrahamic Faith. True, they each have historic roots in Abraham. I read all about the production on the local PBS website. I did not watch the show because I do not agree with the premise: We all believe in the same God. The Faith Families have their differences, but they all lead to the same God. Pluralism is good. Our children, especially, should value pluralism. We all should respect each other's religion. We all pray to the same God. Christians are about to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The Biblically orthodox among us believe that the baby being born is non other than God Himself. We bring our gifts to the Manger and worship the new born King, God Incarnate. Jews and Muslims will not be kneeling there with us. Why not, if we all worship and pray to the same God? For the record- The seed of Abraham, collectively, is the Church. Abraham is the Father of Christians. (read Galatians and Romans) While we must, absolutely, respect Jews and Muslims as human beings, they are not Christians or members of the Church. The Good News is that they can be.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 07:29

Monday, December 5, 2005

### **Is the Reformation Over?**

Mark Noll, a Wheaton College professor of History, is co-author of a book that asks the question. Is the Reformation Over? There has been growing rapprochement between evangelicals and Roman Catholics over the last decade, at least, with several seminars and resultant books indicating that great progress has been made. In fact, the authors of this book say, "In sum, the central difference that continues to separate evangelicals and Catholics is...the nature of the church." The definition of "Church" determines the understanding of Clergy and Sacraments. Evangelicals are glad that salvation is by grace alone, but where is saving grace found? How is it communicated? If a Church teaches that saving grace is communicated through Sacraments and that the Sacraments that are efficacious are those administered by ordained Clergy and that ordination is only valid if done in Apostolic Succession and if that Apostolic Succession can be traced only to the Bishop of Rome, then, in my understanding, the Reformation is not over.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:55

Saturday, December 3, 2005

### **Bread and Blood**

Today the Church Calendar commemorates John of Damascus, a theologian respected in the Eastern Church. He is particularly remembered for his defense of the use of Icons, for which the Orthodox Church is famous. Many evangelicals still decry the use of "images" as idolatry [even though they worship many real life idols- but that is another story] Supposedly, Biblical Christianity is all spiritual. John's main argument rested on what we are about to celebrate at Christmas: God the Spirit became flesh. God took on a very physical body. God is found in that body, He is revealed by the body. He is known through that body. It was that body that was sacrificed for our salvation. The forgiveness of our sins required the real physical blood that came out of actual wounds in that very physical body. We are saved by grace alone, but that grace was brought to us through these very material, physical means. So argued John of Damascus. The same argument applies to the use of real wine and bread and water by Churches, when they observe the Lord's Supper and Baptism. And it makes them more than Ordinances- it makes them Sacraments- means of that Grace by which we are saved.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:16

Friday, November 25, 2005

### **Is God good only when He helps us?**

Psalm 91 will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing to your name, O Most High. When my enemies are driven back, they will stumble and perish at your presence. For you have maintained my right and my cause; you sit upon your throne judging right. ... the Lord is enthroned for ever; he has set up his throne for judgment. It is he who rules the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with equity. The Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in time of trouble. Those who know your name will put their trust in you, for you never forsake those who seek you, O Lord. Sing praise to the Lord who dwells in Zion. Of course, I join in joy with those friends who experience healing, for which they rightly thank the Lord. They are glad to tell all that God is good and they praise Him. What about those Believers who suffer and die from disease or tragedy. God never intervened- never came to the rescue. Is this the same God? Is He fickle with His favor? Do our thanksgivings and our praises require experiencing Divine help? Can we, will we, praise and thank Him by faith when we go through valley's of darkness, when prayers seem unanswered, when loved ones suffer in pain like unbelievers do? Even Jesus was forsaken in his trials. The Psalmists often cry: Why, God, why? Has God stopped being good then? Do we then refuse to praise Him? "Nah, Nah. He didn't help me. He's no good anymore! I don't praise Him no more!" With a broken heart and tears streaming down, Faith still stubbornly declares- For you have maintained my right and my cause; you sit upon your throne judging right. ... the Lord is enthroned for ever; he has set up his throne for judgment. It is he who rules. Most of the original Pilgrims died at sea or in the wilderness, yet they continually said. "It hath seemed right to the Lord..." It's all about God, not us. Blessed be His Name. "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord."

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:37

Wednesday, November 23, 2005

### **Common Grace- Special Grace**

Luke 1:51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. Matthew 5:45 your Father in heaven...causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Acts 14:17 he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."The phrase, "Common Grace", is not found in the Bible; but, the concept is everywhere, such as in these verses. It is a very important concept. God is good. His Creation, as created, is good (Genesis 1-2) . It is essentially still good after the Fall and Curse of Genesis 3. God is providentially active in His Creation, ie- in its physical, material operation. He is providentially involved in the care of the creatures He has made. This includes human beings. God is providentially involved in history, which after all, is His Story. All of this is what is meant by Common Grace and it is something that has not changed because of the sinful nature or acts of Humankind. In fact, this Common grace works to contain the effects of evil (Luke 1 above ) The latter benefits daily by this Common Grace. All creatures share in common this grace (these gifts ) of God. Special grace is the effectual calling and keeping of specific persons, ie-the Elect (Rom 8 ) This special grace is spiritual and eternal, compared to the common grace which is physical or material and temporal. Common Grace is a witness to God (Rom 1) and the context, and often the means by which, Special Grace works. Both Common Grace and Special Grace serve the purposes of God. Both are intended to bring Him Glory. On Thanksgiving, and always, even the most strident atheist, as well as agnostics everywhere, have reason to thank God for His Common Grace upon which their daily lives depend (Acts 17 ) In addition, Christians thank God for the Special Grace which has chosen, called, regenerated, generated saving faith, justified, is daily sanctifying and keeping them and which one day will glorify them.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:21

Friday, November 18, 2005

### **Structural Evil**

In my current study, I am trying to get more of a handle on the concept of systemic or structural or institutional evil. As a rule, conservative evangelicals reject, or at least do not like, the concept because they believe it is used as an excuse for unacceptable behavior and the shirking of individual responsibility. It is a given: God holds each individual accountable for their behavior. No matter what the extenuating circumstances may be, we are each responsible for our actions. That is absolutely Biblical; but so also is the Reality of the World, the Flesh and the Devil. The Bible clearly says that we are born into this Reality and it influences and controls the choices and behavior of all human beings, including Christians of every kind. It also clearly tells us the Good News that forgiveness and deliverance from the influence, control and power of the World (Cosmos), Flesh (Sarx) and the Devil has been made possible by the work and ministry of Christ for us and in us. That being the case, evangelicals should have no problem accepting the reality of systemic or structural or institutional evil. There is a confluence of these realities. The World, Flesh and Devil are manifest in the systems, structures and institutions of the society or culture into which we have been born and through which they influence and control the decisions and behavior of people, including Christians of all kinds. Likewise, the Good News is that there can be forgiveness and deliverance from the influence, control and power of systemic or structural or institutional evil. The beginning of that is the recognition of its existence.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:24

Tuesday, November 8, 2005

### **Examples of Different orders of Worship**

Using the Regulatory Principle, this is a typical Worship Service in the Presbyterian Church of America-DoxologyInvocationConfession of SinsPardonLord's PrayerHymnPastoral PrayerScripture ReadingsSermonOfferingConfession of FaithCommunionHymnBenediction

The Christian Reformed Church also uses the regulatory principle. Here is what that leads them to do-Call to WorshipPassing the PeaceHymnConfession of SinsPardonReading of the LawHymnScripture readingsSermon HymnConfession of FaithPrayersOfferingCommunionHymnBenedictionThe Anglican Church does not use the Regulatory Principle- that everything in Worship must be specifically commanded in Scripture or is not allowed. Rather it follows a Theological Principle, actually constructing [historically] its Liturgy to convey the Gospel and this is done three times in each Service:3 cycles of the Gospel:Confession, Grace, Response [This formula has been modified in the newer Prayer Book Liturgies] HymnConfession of SinsPardonLord's PrayerHymnPsalms (Confession)Gospel (Scripture Readings)Confession of FaithSermonOfferingHymnPrayer of ContritionPrayers for GraceThe CommunionProtestant Evangelical Services have traditionally been preaching services, usually evangelistic, now more inspirational and therapeutic, increasingly informal and "free". They follow the Pragmatic Principle: use whatever is effective to accomplish desired results.Greetings Opening PrayerHymns/ChorusesAnnouncementsPastoral PrayerOfferingHymnA Scripture ReadingSermonHymnClosing Prayer

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:49

Friday, November 4, 2005

### **How Wide is the Ocean?**

The issues raised in the previous post are relevant on other topics. One of the major objections to what I was saying yesterday about redeeming the culture is raised by those who insist our concern must be, not with culture, but with individuals. Culture and Civilization (which includes institutions) are hopeless. They can not be redeemed. God is not interested in redeeming them. Redemption is only about the salvation of individuals. The Kingdom of God is not about His Rule and Realm over the entire world, but is limited to His spiritual work in individual souls. This view is not Scriptural. This argument is made by people who are also concerned with seating a pro-life candidate on the Supreme Court and who advocate for a Constitutional Amendment to define Marriage. These same Christians also usually have strong opinions about Social Security and Tax Reform and Government policies on everything from prescriptions for the elderly, health care for the poor, FEMA and disaster Relief and the war in Iraq. Apparently, for such people, God has nothing to say about any of these cultural matters or the institutions involved. Instead, our opinions and actions are determined by our "secular" political philosophy or whether our personal ox is being gored or our nest feathered-anything but the Word of God. Such is the "dualism" I have written about before and it is not Scriptural. The King of kings and Lord of all is very much interested in culture, institutions and civilization.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:50

### **The True Church?**

I value being part of an institutional Church with a rich history and tradition extending back, past the Reformation of the mere 16th Century, to the Apostles. At least I value the idea of such. In reality, there is no such Church- or at least no agreement as to which church on the scene today this might be. There have been so many splits and schisms. There is a River, continuous from the beginning; but, it is often dried up in places or has overflowed its banks in others and it has an ever increasing number of tributaries and streams. Which is more important: the elusive River or the very real stream in which we may be standing? Strangely, the people to whom this is a very pressing issue and of great importance are the people whose career is at stake: Clergy whose ordination is validated by claims to Historic (if not direct) Apostolic Succession. Should this be an important issue to the rest of us? If so, what are the signs or marks of the institutional Church of the River? The option is to replace or minimize any institutional Church and go for a spiritual church with an ad hoc organization, here and there, as necessary for the times.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:54

Monday, September 12, 2005

## **Disdain of Doctrine?**

Someone questioned my use of the word "disdain" in reference to Doctrine. Here are only 4 out of 10 definitions-4) scorn. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth

Edition Contempt or disdain

felt toward a person or object considered despicable or unworthy. The expression of such an attitude in behavior or speech; derision. Seen often in editorials and political cartoons toward people who believe in the Doctrine of Creation or in the theory of Intelligent Design. or towards people who oppose Homosexual "Marriage" 5) duh. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth

Edition Used to express disdain

for something deemed stupid or obvious, especially a self-evident

remark. Imitative of an utterance attributed to slow-witted people....same as above #4- the common response to those who advocate sexual abstinence for unmarried people as prevention of pregnancy and disease 8) disdain. The

American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth

Edition. To consider or reject as beneath oneself. A

feeling or show of contempt and aloofness; Heard from many who blame doctrine for church divisions or hate crimes, et

alAlso heard from those who insist that Doctrine will turn off "seekers" and non-Christians- "they will not come to

Church" This is often accompanied with the insistence that the Gospel is all about love- love the Lord and love people, love yourself. Doctrine supposedly makes that impossible. "We just want to be Christians"

10) shrug. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth

Edition.

To raise (the shoulders), especially as a gesture of doubt, disdain, or indifference. To raise the shoulders,

The

reaction I have gotten from many, especially youth, often with glazed eyes, when I

bring up the subject of Doctrine or Theology and from many when I

propose a class to study same. Theological sermons get this

response. from Christians in the pew. I get this same response from Pastors, too

Actually, all of this is mis-leading. Our culture is saturated with doctrines. People strongly believe and defend all kinds of doctrines. Post Moderns insist on many doctrines. Multiculturalists do. Moral Relativists do. Activists on the Left do. Doctrines are everywhere. In that sense, I can not say that all doctrine is distained. More accurately, it is Classic Confessional, Creedal, [traditional] Biblical Doctrine that is distained and, most particularly, but by no means exclusively, Calvinism.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:10

Saturday, September 10, 2005

### **Changing Ideas about God**

Here are four major factors influencing how many young adults today define "GOD"<sup>1</sup>. Barren, sterile, rigid academic Doctrine- Dogmatism- repulses them. It is arrogant and elitist. They prefer humble submission to mystery and paradox. This also is more compatible with their enthusiasm for diversity and relativism<sup>2</sup>. Power is associated in their minds with oppression and violence. They are particularly interested in the experiences of the marginalized and powerless in the world. Thus the idea of God as Almighty, all-powerful, is offensive. God must be a Model Servant- One who comes along side to help us.

3. Suffering is everywhere, thus they want a God who suffers- a God who "feels our pain". They can not relate to a God who is absolute, perfect, unchanging and thus untouchable, unapproachable.<sup>4</sup> Freedom is very important, especially the freedom to make personal choices. Therefore, any idea that God is Sovereign, and that anything about Him is absolute, is totally threatening and unacceptable. God must respect our freedom of will and never coerce anyone to do anything. He may influence our choices us by His encouragement, but that is all. Where did these young adults get these ideas about God? Most of them claim [in the many polls taken] to have grown up in evangelical churches. Hmmn Where will they learn what the Bible says about God? Remember, "the study of God" is the definition of Theology. Will the sermons preached, and the Sunday School classes taught, offer solid Theology tomorrow at your church? It is our most urgent need.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:21

Thursday, September 1, 2005

### **Why some Christians have redefined "God"**

The old problem of Theodicy: if God is Good and All Powerful, how come He didn't prevent Katrina? He must not be Good or He must not be All Powerful. The classic understanding of "God" simply does not cohere with the experience many have in the world. There is too much unexplained evil. The Providence of God does not seem evident either. The world seems to be getting worse, not better. Where's God's sovereign hand in all of that? Thus, God must be different than the God people, who are now older, were taught about, growing up in the Church. Instead, He must be a very personal God, who feels our pain and cares. One who may not be all powerful or perfect, but nevertheless, a God who can comfort and guide us- not in charge, but encouraging like no one else. A God who is with us, especially in the tough times. A God who loves and accepts us no matter what. However, the classic Creeds may define God, this is the God that increasing numbers believe in today and why they do.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 20:09

Sunday, August 28, 2005

### **More than the Camel's Nose is under the Tent**

15 years ago, an evangelical theologian wrote, what turned out to be, a very controversial article, published in Christianity Today magazine. It is on his website, along with a lot of other very interesting articles <http://www.brow.on.ca/>[reader beware] Entitled "Evangelical Megashift", it sketches an outline of a new "Model" for understanding our Faith. He said it was already becoming accepted by evangelicals of that time and he was hoping for honest debate about it. He got the debate. The major shift in Theology was from the Law Court Model to the Family Model when thinking and talking about God. In turn, that shift leads to others. These are the characteristics of the New Model, as Rev. Dr. Bob Brow saw them 15 years ago. Note that while words remain the same, definitions of them are changed.

1. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit: a God of loving relationships, a Family Model, rather than God as Judge in a Court of Law
2. When the Bible speaks of God as a Judge, it means a "judge" as in the Books of Judges and Kings- one who acts on behalf of his people, settling their disputes and defending them from external threats.
3. Since God is not a Law Court Judge, he doesn't send people to Hell as a judicial sentence. Some people will end up in Hell, but not by a legal decree from God.
4. We are saved by faith, but faith is not a decision, but "a constant looking in the right direction", known to God alone, as He knows people's hearts and intents.
5. The Wrath of God is better thought of as the bad consequences that people bring upon themselves or that happen as a result of terrible tragedies in their lives.
6. Sin is not some kind of crime that requires penal punishment, banishment to Hell. Sins are acts that require discipline or correction by a loving Father for his child's good.
7. "Church" is a fellowship of Believers whose function is to love and enjoy God and neighbors. It is not a ship (an institution) people must enter in order to sail to Heaven (to have salvation)
8. Missions is obeying the Great Commission to teach people to live God's way
9. As the Son of God, Jesus has always, from eternity, suffered for our sin and its consequences. The Cross is the visible demonstration in history of that sacrificial love for Humankind that has always been a part of the eternal character of Jesus.

Dr. Brow said that if only 3 or 4 of these shifts have occurred in our thinking, or in the preaching at our church, the Megashift, the New Model, has already become a reality, replacing the Old Model.

I will be examining this "New Model" and more on my all new website in the weeks ahead.

<http://freewebs.com/reformationinstitute/> or [www.npgpro.com/cal](http://www.npgpro.com/cal)

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 17:48

Friday, August 26. 2005

## **Jesus or Christ?**

There has been debate for centuries as to whether Paul corrupted the original Gospel and turned the simple Jesus of Nazareth into the Christ of Christianity. There are Evangelicals who insist we Christians have no Religion: we have only Jesus. Religion can not save, only Jesus saves. This is true in one narrow sense, but nonsense in the larger scheme of things. Religion can be defined as a set of time-honored Sacred Writings, Doctrines and Rituals handed down over the years, which people believe in to find salvation and life's meaning and by which they are guided and helped in living their daily lives. Christianity is one such Religion. And "Jesus" would be nothing apart from this Religion. What we know about Him and who we believe He is and what we believe His connection is with our Salvation and daily life is all determined by the Religion of Christianity with its Scripture, Doctrines and Rituals. Saying "We just believe in Jesus, that's all" is ignorant or extremely naive- and meaningless. And foolish. To believe in Jesus is to believe in many things about Him. They must be defined.

Many in the media define "Jesus" as simply the Teacher and Model of Love and Peace. W.W.J.D.?, they ask? He would be pro-choice, pro-gay marriage, anti-war, anti-capital punishment, pro-welfare state, pro-affirmative action. Of course, he would. He is pro-love and pro-peace and that is what all these positions are about. Shame, they say, on you who are anti-abortion, anti-gay marriage, pro-capital punishment, pro-justified war, anti-welfare state, anti-affirmative action. You are against Love and Peace. You are against Jesus and yet you have the audacity to call yourselves Christians. You are hypocrites. Secular writers hit us over the head with this argument constantly. We ask for it. We evangelicals often say, "We just love Jesus" "We just believe in Him" and then refuse to define who Jesus is, because we don't like DOCTRINE. That creates a vacuum that liberals love to fill with the argument above. Eternal Life comes from believing in Jesus as the Christ (John 20:30-31). To understand who "the Christ" is, we must know the basics of Biblical and Systematic Theology and at least the major themes of 2000 years of Christian Tradition.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:10

Monday, August 22, 2005

### **Is Infant Baptism valid?**

In churches that promote Adult Baptism, Believers who have been baptized as infants are some how considered as not full-class citizens. The pressure is on to reject that Infant Baptism in favor of being re-baptized by immersion. I have used both methods and can see valid arguments for each. I know folks who have been immersed who show no evidence whatsoever that they are saved. (This would mean they were not actually "believers" when they underwent "Believer's Baptism" ) I know other folks who have been sprinkled as infants who demonstrate constantly that they really do know the Lord. I know people who believe that Immersion in the Tank is absolutely essential to salvation, even while they ridicule others for believing that Sprinkling at the Font was essential. Interestingly, folks baptized as infants put far more emphasis on salvation by the grace of God alone (the infant has done nothing) than many who are immersed and consider their obedience, following the steps of Jesus into the River, to be what actually makes their salvation possible. ( Hey, look at me, I am saved because I chose to accept Jesus and my baptism is a public testimony to this smart move on my part. Not much emphasis there on grace). The bottom line is that, if anyone is a Christian, it is by saving faith in Jesus Christ. And that faith is a gift of grace given by God to those whom He chose to receive it. In fact, regeneration itself is totally a gift- the work of the Spirit in the heart of an unbeliever. (Regeneration, Faith, Repentance, Union with Christ, Adoption, Justification, Sanctification, Perseverance and, finally, Glorification- all of it is the work of God alone. All of it is by His Grace.) We should not be judging anyone about the mode of their Baptism. The only essential question is: "Are you relying today, totally, upon the work and righteousness of Christ alone for your complete salvation?" If you were baptized as a child of a believing parent, your resounding "Yes" now is confirmation of the Covenant Promises made on your behalf those years ago.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 20:12

Sunday, August 21, 2005

## **Blowin' in the Wind**

Truth is found somewhere at the intersection of God's story, my story and your story. This is according to an increasingly popular theory among younger, self-identified evangelicals. Truth is not objective or external to us, but within us (plural)- within our stories, where they intersect. We discover, uncover, that truth as we share these stories. Truth is not intrinsic to the content (words) of Scripture or in the meaning of the writers of Scripture. Truth (meaning), according to this newer generation, is assigned to Scripture as we read and interpret it in light of our collective experience as a community of faith (church). Thus, that "truth" or meaning can change over time or be different to another community with a different collective experience. This is absolutely not the classic, historic evangelical understanding of Truth or Scripture and the traditional historical-grammatical method of interpreting the written Word, that goes with the classic definition, *is passe'*.

We are told that many younger adults do not have a sense of personal significance. They feel alienated and lost in the midst of today's world. It has let them down, disillusioned with "Progress". Materialism doesn't satisfy. They want to develop their inner person. Jesus offers acceptance and affirmation. He offers authenticity and worth. He can give meaning and purpose to people's lives. Salvation comes from embracing what Jesus offers: accepting his acceptance. All you need is faith. Do not think or analyze this. Do not try to be logical or use your reason in this- simply trust and accept (something we use to call "blind faith" ) Such "faith" is not based on Scripture, the sure promises of God; it is response to the stories of God's love (especially the stories in the Gospels of the love Jesus showed to outcasts) There is no sin here, no repentance is required, either. All of this describes the increasingly popular message heard from self-styled evangelical Teachers. This is absolutely not the classic, historic understanding of Salvation. The tragic and very disturbing thing is that most people in the pews do not recognize these theological errors. But then, denigration of Doctrine is also increasingly common among younger Preachers in these post modern times.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:32

Saturday, August 13. 2005

## **Reconciliation**

The June issue newsmagazine of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts features coverage of a local workshop about Reconciliation. The quotes of attendees indicate they thought it was helpful and they want to implement what they learned on the local church (parish) level. A major concern of the ECUSA is maintaining unity as it is with the ELC. The first vote of three dealing with the ordination of practicing homosexuals in the Evangelical Lutheran Church at their annual convention this week had to do with maintaining unity, no matter what the delegates would vote on the remaining motions. Ultimately, the ELC delegates, by a very narrow margin, did not change their present position against such ordination. Guaranteed: the topic will not go away.

Proponents of gay ordination (and of gay marriage) in both denominations keep talking about the Gospel and about listening to the Holy Spirit speaking through people. What is at stake here, is the authority of Scripture, as well as 2000 year old Tradition. More than that, what is at stake is the definition of the "Gospel". The latter, to them, is no longer what has been proclaimed in Scripture or by the Church (Roman, Protestant or Orthodox) for centuries. It has been completely redefined: the Gospel is about Love. This is defined as being open, accepting and affirming of all peoples, particularly of "gay" people. This is the "Gospel". Period.

That is not the Gospel, any more than Marriage is the union of homosexual people. It simply is not. Period (Obviously, I could document that; it is not necessary. We know this to be true)

Back to reconciliation. In order for people or groups of people to be reconciled to each other, there must be a giving up (a letting go) of anger and a mutual forgiveness between the offended parties. That, in turn, requires what ever is between the parties, causing the anger and alienation, to be removed. (In the original, classic Gospel, this is expiation by way of propitiation, i.e. the anger of God towards those who have sinned against Him is placated by the atonement which secured the removal of the offending sin. He, Himself, of course, provided that atonement.) Without the propitiation, there could be no expiation. While the cause of the rupture between people remains, there can be no reconciliation. (There can be no reconciliation between a husband and wife while an alienating affair is on-going. He or she must repent and make a complete end to the affair first.)

In the case of the ECUSA and the ELC and others, the cause of the rupture is the rejecting of the authority of Scripture and Tradition and of the very Gospel itself. These are the most basic issues, the root causes of the divisions, not the ordination or marriage of homosexual persons as such. As long as the basic causes are not removed, there can be no reconciliation. No unity. These workshops that try to get people to listen to those with whom they disagree are futile- more moving of furniture on sinking ships.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 12:06

Monday, June 20, 2005

### **Kabala, J. W.s and Truth**

There was a long piece on Date Line or 20-20 last week about the rapid spread in America and around the world of a form of Jewish Mysticism known as Kabala. The meetings taped for the program looked and sounded like many contemporary evangelical-charismatic meetings. The testimonies to how Kabala has changed lives sounded very similar to Christian testimonies.

The annual conventions held by JW's [I do not like to say their name, as they are not true witnesses to Jehovah] have begun this month. There will be seven of them held at the Convention Center on the UMass campus in Amherst with an expected total local attendance of 35,000 - 1.5 million across the USA. Testimonies quoted in the paper tell about changed lives through the teachings of this cult. Is there a message here for us? People are changed by Christ. Praise God. BUT- changing lives is not what Christianity is about. Many religions change lives. The Gospel is about Truth. Truth will change lives (and set people free). Only lives changed by Truth are changed the way God intends them to be changed. All other "change" is just a matter of rearranging the same old furniture in the same old room. Same with those meetings- just because a group of people get all excited, sing loud, clap hands and praise "God" does, not mean that what they have is according to the Truth. This must be of God, they say. Kabala is not according to Truth. It is, therefore, not of God, even though it has meetings that make many people think it is. And how do we know what Truth is? Jesus said it: "Thy Word is Truth" (John 17:17) He himself incarnates it. If a preacher or a congregation or a young JW convert coming out of the water of a "Baptism" [as pictured in the paper] sincerely believes they have found God, but do not have Christ according to the Scripture, they are sincerely wrong. The lesson here for all the post modern, contemporary Christians among us who put down the very concept of absolute Truth [with a capital T], beware: Truth still matters!

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:54

Wednesday, June 15, 2005

## **Who are the Evangelicals?**

An informative article by the always interesting writer, Philip Yancey, in the current Christianity Today tries to identify "the Evangelicals". Often mentioned in the media as a monolithic group, stereotyped as the Religious Right, Yancey makes it clear that Evangelicals are really a variegated mosaic. He calls them "quirky". Using a very apt metaphor from author Randall Vander-Mey, Yancey says evangelicals can be described, not as one large ship (which is the ancient metaphor for the One Holy Catholic Church) but as a fleet of small rowboats, with each one seeking a personal experience of God. Through the years and in different parts of the world, Evangelicals have been conservative and liberal, political and apolitical, high church and low church, intellectual and anti-intellectual, rich and poor- you get the idea: quirky. There is no one model of an evangelical Christian or an evangelical church. The label is almost as amorphous as the phrase "born again", which has become almost meaningless. Yancey settles on four distinctive descriptors, which he takes from British Historian, David Bebbington:

1. Conversionism- believe that people need the experience of being "born again"
2. Activism- support missions and social reform
3. Biblicism- regard the Bible as ultimate authority
4. Crucicentrism- put primary emphasis on the Cross and Christ's Atoning Sacrifice

Yancey finds these four distinctives, especially #3, helpful to describe what all, who call themselves "evangelical", have in common. He is probably correct; but, each one of them absolutely requires much clarification. As they stand, he agrees, members of mainline Protestant Churches, Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians can describe themselves as evangelicals. His personal summary of the essential tenets of evangelicalism are three statements-"This is our Father's world. As an expression of love for the world, God entered its history (the Incarnation) and gave the Son's life as a sacrifice for its redemption (the Atonement). Through the power of the Spirit, followers of Jesus advance God's Kingdom in the world." - p.39 I agree with these three tenets as I understand the meaning of these words. But what would that be? Some secular critics of Christians assert that we believe far too much. The truth is that we believe far too little. We can not settle for simple, shallow, superficial, spiritual-sounding slogans.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:00

Monday, June 6, 2005

## **How Comic book heroes and God have changed for many**

I hate getting bogged down in arguments about contemporary Christian Music. It's not about Music- how fast or loud or syncopated or repetitious or shallow it may be. It is about Theology. This post is not about contemporary Music, it is about something deeper, the theology behind contemporary Worship. It has gradually dawned on me that there has been a major shift in how evangelicals in the pew understand "God". The classic view of God Himself has also been exchanged for another. I understand even comic book heroes have changed. They used to be, like Superman, champions of Truth, Justice and the American Way. The story line in Comics used to be about the battle between good and evil with good winning in the end- all very black and white. Same as classic westerns and science fiction. No more. Now all those heroes are human and conflicted, subject to self-doubt and temptations to go over to the dark side. Some have actually become evil. The old-time comic book heroes are no more.

It really puzzled me why Christians who are intelligent and well educated generally seem to disparage being intelligent and well educated in their Faith. They accept the concept and the necessity for a received body of knowledge (Truth, if you will) in their career fields. They want to be sure the doctors who operate on them really have the latest knowledge and technology, same with those who pilot the planes they fly and build the bridges over which they drive or the high rise towers in which they work. But- when it comes to their Faith they want no Lectures (Truth, if you will) from authorities. They do not want to learn Systematic Theology (although certain doctrines are very important to them) let alone Philosophy. They do not care about denominational distinctives and are wary of a cerebral or academic faith divorced from real life. Most of all, when it comes to being a Christian they want to avoid Rationalism or Modernism (even though they are thoroughly modern and rational in most other areas of their life.) I think I have come to understand why all this is so. In contemporary evangelical churches, The Faith- God- is all about relationships and community. Evangelicals have Statements of Faith, expressing the core evangelical doctrines. But, their working theology is something else. The most important thing to typical evangelicals (like most Americans) is relationships. The evangelical is defined now as simply someone who has a personal relationship with God or Jesus- whatever that means. Then, because they are evangelicals, they earnestly desire that every one else also have such a one-on-one relationship with God or Jesus [the distinction is usually very blurred] If anyone has trouble in their marriage or family, it is because of problems in their relationships. God can, they believe, help them with that problem. That is why most of them entered into a relationship with God in the first place- for His help with their problems. During the week many attend small groups for support in their relationships with God or Jesus and with others. When it comes to Sunday, its the same thing- they attend a Service to see people with whom they are in relationship and to do things which they believe will help with their relationship with God. This is usually through singing songs that work for them in doing this and listening to messages (preferably stories with video clips) on this very subject. If these personal needs in their relationships with God or with others is not met, many move on and try another church. Simple as that. Its all personal and practical. What about "Post Modern" evangelicals and evangelicals on the Left? Post Modern evangelicals often focus on these convictions- God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit- the Trinity. The Trinity is Love in Community. The very nature of God is relational. This is our basic working model of God and how we experience Him. God is Immanuel-

present with us: immanent. God is especially with us when we are in Community: where two or three gather...God is in our midst, in our relationships. The important thing is to be open and aware of His presence. That happens when we are engaged in certain kinds of music. That also happens when we open up and share what He has told us or what He is doing in our lives. God reveals Himself to us in this Community as we share. No one is an authority. Truth is not Content to be delivered, but reality to be discovered and experienced. No one has all the truth. So we share and discuss what He has shown each of us. Together we learn and experience spiritual growth. For evangelicals on the Left, the emphasis is on God's Love, which is inclusive and affirming of all. This is the primary presentation of God that they make to neighbors and friends. The working theology for Christians on the evangelical Left is simply this-God is Love and He affirms and accepts everyone. Jesus is the Incarnation, the manifestation of God's Love. Jesus' life and death, the cross, reveal God's acceptance and affirmation of everyone. God wants us to love everyone, ie- accept and affirm everyone: to practice inclusion. God especially wants us to include people who are marginalized by oppression. Inclusion of the oppressed is Justice. The Gospel of God's love is the Gospel of Justice. The Mission of the Church is to pursue this Justice. This chain of thought comes from Philip Turner, "An Unworkable Theology" found in First Things June/July p.10

Mr Turner is speaking of the "working theology" of the liberal

Episcopalian Church. Many members of the Evangelical Left will see that they share a lot of these convictions.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:17