

Wednesday, May 31, 2006

Spiritual Formation: Becoming a Mature Christian

The Pastor of the church, where I was Baptized 50 years ago, in his sermons frequently addressed the congregation as Saints. Even the invitation to bring Tithes and Offerings was prefaced by him, saying, "The Ushers will now wait upon the Saints". The Roman Catholic use of the title "Saint" (eg- the current move to canonize, make a Saint of, the last Pope) obscures the New Testament use. In it, Believers are called "Christians" 3 times. They are addressed as "Saints" maybe 60 times (depending on Translation). Every single believer in Christ is a Saint. I wonder what neglect of this Name reveals about the contemporary church. Does it reveal the same thing that neglect of the word "Holiness" does? We change concepts when we assign different meanings (definitions) while keeping the original names. We usually indicate we have jettisoned the concept entirely when we discontinue using the original name. In the simplest terms- A "Saint" is a "holy" person. The concept of "Holiness" is from the Old Testament and the word has several meanings. God is described as holy, meaning altogether Other (than His creation). Human beings can not share in such holiness. Anything set apart for God, for His use, is called holy. And "holiness" sometimes is interchangeable with moral righteousness, the opposite of wickedness. Any person or thing to be separated unto God's service must first be separated from sin. This two-fold concept is what we mean when we talk about Christians being holy. Sanctification is the process of making a Believer separate from sin and separate to God's service. Every day, I personally pray, "Lord cleanse and claim my mind, cleanse and claim my emotions and cleanse and claim my lips- make me holy."

A person who has come to saving faith and justified will have both this desire and daily surrender (i.e.- this process of sanctification) It is the Holy Spirit's work to make it happen. He does the cleansing and He does the enabling. This is a life long process. It has its set backs and periods of seeming dormancy; but it never ceases and always is making, over the long term, process toward maturity in Christ. Now, about the "Disciplines" or "means of grace". According to Willard and Foster and Leaders of the Spiritual Formation Movement, these are as follows- meditation, prayer, fasting and study simplicity, solitude, submission and service confession, worship, guidance and celebrations silence, frugality, chastity, secrecy and sacrifice, fellowship. I have explained above that if there is such a thing as spiritual formation it is the formation of mature Christians. We define that as a justified sinner, by virtue of being "in Christ", becoming sanctified, developing the following characteristics- Christ-like rationality: having the mind of Christ, thinking "Christianly" (Scripturally) about all things Christ-like creativity: making and developing works of beauty and grace (of all kinds in all fields) in harmony with the Creator of all good things Christ-like morality: living by the same Kingdom values and principles as Jesus did Christ-like communality: living in relationships with others as Jesus did Christ-like spirituality: praising God, waiting on Him (in prayer), trusting and obeying (to the death) God the Father, as Jesus did. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He has one primary means of Grace: the Truth. The Spirit uses the Word of God to build up and make Believers into mature Christians. Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; 2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. This means that there is one "Discipline" above all- the study of Scripture with the object of submitting to it in all matters. Implicit in this Discipline (per this very verse) is a high view of Scripture as inerrant, propositional revelation, using an historical-grammatical (plain sense) method for interpretation. The John 15 passage about the vine and branches teaches us that God will prune the branches to make them more fruitful. What does He use to do the pruning? His Word, the truth- v.3 and 17:17 Psalm 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. AGAIN- 2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is ... profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (- i.e. a mature Christian!) The second major means of grace follows: This study of the Word should be more than individual. It should ideally be done in a community of Believers, united with this same purpose - a community of the Word. (I am not talking here about the typical small-group Bible study or Sunday School class) The third major means of grace should be obvious: This study must be more than private. What is learned is meant to be obeyed and practiced publicly. If we learn about forgiveness, we must forgive. We have not really learned until we practice. If we learn about mercy or compassion, we must practice being merciful and compassionate. This is how we are fruitful. This is how we really grow in maturity and see God working in our lives. Of course, all through this process of being sanctified there will be worship and prayer. The worship will be God centered- singing about Him, His attributes and work. It will also, as in the Psalms, include affirmations of our faith and love for Him. Prayers will be, as in the Psalms, verbal. Praying has content; it is not word-less contemplation. Praise, Thanksgiving, Confession, Intercession and Petition all are done with words. The Scriptures do teach us to meditate; but, Biblical meditation is pondering the names, attributes, character and works of God. This means that, primarily, Biblical Meditation is meditation on the meaning of passages of Scripture. The test of

whether we are on the right track: Are we becoming like Christ in the 5 ways outlined above, i.e -are we becoming holy? are we becoming more separate from sin in our lives and becoming more committed to serving God?

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 19:49

Pulling weeds and doing other good things

We do more yard work here than we ever did in Vermont. Our place is a lot smaller, but there are far more shrubs, flowers and trees, as well as the lawn, that need never ending care, at least in this Season of the year. It may be more than we can handle. We like it here, though, and our neighborhood is far more quiet than where we lived in Derby Line. Nice. I relish peace and quiet. We just came in from working outside on this hot day, so I am now cooling off before a fan, before I commence writing more. Walking and yard work are good for meditation on the Word, praying and thinking through things. So I guess I will get to it- the writing, that is. I pray you are having a blessed day.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 11:30

Tuesday, May 30, 2006

You know you are Old or "Traditional" if you know these Hymns

The Dentist's Hymn.....Crown Him With Many Crowns The Weatherman's Hymn....There shall be showers of Blessing The Contractor's Hymn.....The Church's One Foundation The Tailor's Hymn.....Holy, Holy, Holy The Golfer's Hymn.....There is A Green Hill Far Away The Politician's Hymn.....Standing on the Promises The Optometrist's Hymn.....Open My Eyes That I might See The IRS Agent's Hymn.....I Surrender All The Gossip's Hymn.....Pass It On The Electrician's Hymn.....Send the Light The Shopper's Hymn.....Sweet By and By Now, for those who speed on the highway : 45 mph.....God Will Take Care of You 55 mph.....Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah 65 mph.....Nearer My God to Thee 75 mph.....Nearer Still Nearer 85 mph.....This World Is Not My Home 95 mph.....Lord, I'm Coming Home over 100 mph.....Precious Memories Thanks to Melissa and www.2hearts.org.uk/smileschurch.htm

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:47

More on Spiritual Formation

Spiritual Formation must be built on solid Biblical grounds. That means, grounded in Reformed, Pauline Theology. Being formed into a mature Christian begins with forensic position, not experience. (Very few Christians these days seem to know this distinction) The emphasis on experience is misplaced. Experience must, and will, follow position. Our basic, essential and fundamental position is "in Christ". All else derives from that. Miss this truth and the understanding of Spiritual Formation is hopelessly muddled. Being "in Christ" is a relational concept, but not mystical or subjective or "personal". Paul uses forensic language. The phrase refers to being in a legal relationship with Christ, as in a Marriage between husband and wife. It refers to the Believer's standing before God. God sees (declares) the Believer as standing in the Covenant, in the Body, in Grace- "in Christ". In that judicial, legal relationship, the Believer has Justification, i.e.- forgiveness and acceptance as well as Adoption (in Christ, we are declared to be children of God). As a result of that, the Believer is given the Holy Spirit, to dwell within. Becoming a mature Christian begins with, and requires, certainty and assurance of this position. Many Believers are on a never-ending search for what they already have. Many turn to the mystical and experiential [often in liturgical practices] to find or increase their sense of union with God, of His forgiveness and acceptance or of the indwelling Spirit. This is totally unnecessary, as well as futile. All of this is a gift from God to those whom He has chosen and is based entirely on the work of Christ and is our possession, based on our forensic relation to Christ, which begins the moment saving faith is received. At that moment, once and forever, we are in Christ and, therefore, justified, et al. Sinners are commonly encouraged these days to seek the peace of God, particularly through certain disciplines such as silence, fasting and contemplative prayers- often with Gregorian chant in the background. Wrong. Whatever relaxation and reduced stress, they may experience, such folks have not found the peace of God, if they have not first made peace with God, "in Christ". This must be made clear: The peace of God is a gift directly from God to Believers who have made peace with God in Christ and know that they have. Spiritual Formation, becoming a mature Christian, begins with this and not without it.

After Justification, which is a once-forever moment, the process of Sanctification begins. They are made sequential only for explanatory purposes. They can not be separated theologically. Sanctification begins the moment Justification does; but, while the latter is complete, the former progresses. A justified Believer can not, and need not, be justified again and again or increasingly. However, the justified Believer will, and must, seek to grow and progress in the process of Sanctification throughout life until Glory, the last stage of Salvation. Once this process of sanctification has begun, at the moment of justification, it can, and necessarily must, continue. If a sinner has been justified in Christ, s/he will be sanctified. If there is no evidence of progress in sanctification, there is no reason to believe that there was ever any justification. I consider such a person to be, for practical purposes, not a Christian, not "in Christ". Instead of "Spiritual Formation", we would be far more Biblical to say we are pursuing Sanctification, other wise known as Holiness. -----More to follow

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 10:06

Common Sense

Recovery of one of the flood ravaged cities in northeastern Massachusetts, Lawrence, is being greatly hindered by language: the majority of the folks affected speak Spanish and many of the rescue workers [including those from FEMA] do not. The concept that English be declared the official language of this Country has been ridiculed by many as unnecessary. Of course, they say, everyone does or will speak English. Not in Lawrence- or dozens of other cities around the Nation. We continue to hear and read that many of us are against immigrants. We are all immigrants or children of immigrants, it is said. Welcoming immigrants is one of the factors that has made America great. We are indebted to immigrants. Yes, yes, all true- but besides the point. The debate is not about immigrants. No one is against immigrants as such. The debate is about illegal immigrants, particularly those crossing our border with Mexico. Our new neighbors here are having a dispute about a fence with the folks whose property adjoins theirs, so they are having it surveyed. We backed out of a deal to purchase a house here when we learned that the neighbor's driveway and fence was 3 feet on what would have been our land. Even if we agreed to that, the bank would not, because it was illegal. Another neighbor had large limbs of one of our trees cut off, because they extended over his property. That was his legal right to do. These are common occurrences and no one objects to the principles involved. We are a Nation. We have legal boundaries. We have laws. Is it really too much to expect people, who want to reside here, to obey them? [That, of course, applies to everyone, including our political leaders] I am sure it works the other way for any of us who would want to move to another Nation. I object when people, such as one of the local College Commencement speakers, insist that requiring immigrants be legal means being against immigration. Being against illegal immigration is just common sense. Do such speakers have another, hidden, agenda?

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 08:46

Monday, May 29, 2006

Two Sons

In the post preceding this one (AWOL), the co-author of a new book is Frank Schaeffer. Once he was known as Franky Schaeffer, son of Francis Schaeffer, one of the most influential apologists for Christianity of the last Century (he passed away in '84- I wrote of him here recently) Here are good places to learn about him and his work-<http://www.labri.org/history.html><http://www.rationalpi.com/theshelter/sitemap.html><http://www.worldmag.com/articles/10452>One of Francis and Edith Schaeffer's daughters, Susan, has been very influential in promoting her fathers' work and the current work of L'Abri. Many current Christian leaders were greatly influenced by Schaeffer and L'Abri. Among them is Os Guinness, whose books I recommend <http://www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr08/os1.html>For all of that, what is of special interest here is that Francis' son, Frank, has totally repudiated the Reformed Faith and Apologetics of his father. He remains a conservative Christian, but converted to Eastern Orthodoxy in reaction to the allegedly strait-jacket, dogmatic, legalistic Calvinism of his family. (That is his perspective- I know nothing about it) He says he is now more comfortable with the "mystery and paradox" of Orthodoxy.If you google his name you will be able to read his many statements about this. He makes no bones about wanting nothing to do with Fundamentalist Christianity. He has written 3 novels that explore the (supposedly fictionalized) struggles he says he went through growing up in the Schaeffer household. If at all true, this is a very sad turn of events. In contrast, think of Billy and Franklin Graham.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 19:30

AWOL

I was impressed by the number of parades and programs today in area towns that honored those who serve our Country in the military, especially those who have given their lives doing that. Massachusetts remains one of the most liberal states and many here feel very free, nay, compelled, to damn our President, as well as "his" war in Iraq. Hearing people interviewed, including many active duty soldiers, talking about patriotism and the honor and privilege it is to serve in the Military was very rare, as well as inspiring. One Memorial Day weekend, we visited the Viet Nam and Korean War Monuments in Washington, DC. It was truly awesome and deeply moving.Today's Military is volunteer. A new book, co-authored by Frank Schaeffer, is called AWOL It discusses how few children of the privileged sign-up. Children from wealthy, elite, well-educated families, like most of those graduating this weekend from the prestigious colleges in this area do not, generally, enlist. Mr Schaeffer and his co-author wondered what difference it would make in their voting and policy making, if future lawmakers and legislators had military and war experience. Apparently, increasingly few of them do.

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 18:24

QTThots- Prayer for Today

God of Power,may the boldness of your Spirit transform us,may the gentleness of your Spirit lead us,and may the gifts of your Spirit equip us to serve and worship you now and always. Amen.I meditated on the Benediction from Oremus [above] and thenchanged the words to make it read as follows-God of Love,may the gentleness of your Spirit transform us,may the compassion of your Spirit lead us,and may the gifts of your Spirit equip us to worship and serve you now and always. Amen.God of Justice,may the holiness of your Spirit transform us,may the fearlessness of your Spirit lead us,and may the gifts of your Spirit equip us to worship and serve you now and always. Amen.God of Peace,may the mercy of your Spirit transform us,may the serenity of your Spirit lead us,and may the gifts of your Spirit equip us to worship and serve you now and always. Amen.God of Truth,may the light of your Spirit transform us,may the revelation of your Spirit lead us,and may the gifts of your Spirit equip us to worship and serve you now and always. Amen.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 09:05

Saturday, May 27, 2006

The Silent Ranks

"I wear no uniforms, no blues or army greens. But I am in the military in the ranks rarely seen. I have no rank upon my shoulders. Salutes I do not give. But the military world is the place where I live. I'm not in the chain of command, orders I do not get. But my husband is the one who does, this I can not forget. I'm not the one who fires the weapons, who puts my life on the line. But my job is just as tough. I'm the one who that's left behind. My husband is a patriot, a brave and prideful man And the call to serve his country, not all can understand. Behind the lines I see the things needed to keep this country free, My husband makes the sacrifice, but so do our kids and me. I love the man I married. Soldiering is his life. But I stand among the silent ranks known as the military wife." I do not know who wrote this Poem, but it's message is to be taken to heart on this Memorial Day, and always- not only for the wives of men who serve, but (these days) for the husbands of women who serve as well. Let's keep them all , and our country, in our prayers.

Posted by Cal at 10:24

Babel redux?

Libraries are a place to find many stories. So is Taipei, capital city of Taiwan. There we find a building with 101 stories- the world's tallest. The building planned for the space occupied by the trade Towers in NYC will be only 70 stories. A skyscraper in Chicago will be 124 stories. There is one being built in Dubai that will be 160. Why? The main reason does not seem to be economic. According to an article in The Week, such tall buildings often go with much space unrented. Architects and cultural observers seem to agree that the major force behind the drive to be the "tallest" is about "reaching Heaven", impressing others, being noticed, in a world where the majority of people live in cities. Sounds like human hubris. Sounds like Babel redux. The Biblical story of Babel is not primarily about the babble of human languages. It is an extreme demonstration of rebellion against God.

Genesis 11:1 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." 5 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 6 And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." 8 So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth. Human beings are created in the Image of God. God's Plan was for people to disperse around the globe, bearing that Likeness every where, as they obeyed God's Mandate to cultivate and care for Creation. Doing this requires faith that God would protect and provide as people obeyed His Mandate. The story of the Tower of Babel is about human beings rejecting God's plan and disobeying His mandate to spread over the earth. They settled down in one place and there built a city, Babel. It would be a tribute to their independence and self-resourcefulness. It would contain a watch tower, serving to make the city safe from enemies who might come later. The entire endeavor was all human hubris- Pride. The babble of language is a side-bar. The bottom line is that God had His way and the people were dispersed. But the sorry episode, with the same motivations, has been repeated over and over, to this very day in today's news. Babel redux! When will we learn?

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 10:07

Networking

"It's who you know". That has been standard truism for years about what it takes to get a job or promotion. Well, there is obviously more involved than that. However, "networking" is the major approach urged by employment agencies to finding a career position. According to an article in this week's The Week newsmagazine [a very helpful one, by the way], 70% of human resources chiefs depend on personal recommendations to fill upper level positions. It is strongly suggested that job-seekers spend a lot of time every week "net-working, ie- visiting and talking with all kinds of people in their life. People getting to know people leads to people getting to know more people, which eventually leads to contacts, referrals and recommendations for open positions. Seems reasonable to me. Also seems like a really effective

way to share the Gospel: Networking for Jesus!

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 09:33

Friday, May 26, 2006

"Spiritual Formation" ? Is it in the Bible?

Earlier this week, we began a study of the Spiritual Formation Movement, which is becoming very popular among many Evangelicals [see the post below] Is this a good thing? I see yellow flags. Certainly, becoming like Christ is good! How does the Bible define that concept? The key text every writer on Spiritual Formation uses is Romans 8:29. There we read we are, indeed, to be "conformed to the image of his Son". Good, but what is meant by "the image" in this text? The context is about glorification. Compare v.29 and v.30 Romans 8:29 those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son 8:30 those whom he predestined he also ... glorified. To be "conformed to Christ" in this text means to be raised from the dead as he was and have a glorified body like his. Philippians 3:20 our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body 1 Corinthians 15:49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. Philippians 3:10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that ... I may attain the resurrection from the dead. [and a glorified body like his. See the next verse-] Romans 8:16 The Spirit himself bears witness ... that we are ... fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. 18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:23 [we] groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. This brings us back to the context for Rom 8:29. "Becoming like Christ" is not growing in "deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all of creation" or "intimacy with God and growth in Christ-like character... to live as he would" "Becoming like Christ" in this text is something other than "a matter of developing patterns of lifelong fellowship. ... not doing things for God but of being with him. It is aligning ourselves with his will, listening to his voice, being beneficiaries of his grace.... to lose ourselves in the glory of God."

These definitions of Spiritual Formation, common in the new Movement, sound to me like what has been traditionally known as Mysticism- Denying the intrinsic difference between Creator and creature, Mysticism is an effort, through various "disciplines", to seek communion and, finally, union with God, in which the human becomes absorbed in the Divine. Such Mysticism is not Protestant [Reformed], let alone, Scriptural, spirituality. Thus, the yellow flag for the Spiritual Formation Movement. Becoming like Christ (in Paul's letters, particularly Rom 8:29) is something God does for us in the resurrection. It is not the result of any "spiritual disciplines" such as fasting or contemplative, non-verbal, content-less Meditation or walking through a labyrinth. Chapter 15 of John is the standard Scriptural support for defining the process of spiritual formation as seeking deep intimacy with God, placing ourselves in the loving arms of God, being with God and losing ourselves in Him, etc- all this happening periodically, through the use of certain spiritual exercises. Many believe that this is what Jesus meant by the phrase "Abide in me". (I remember being attracted to this teaching at one time in the writings of Andrew Murray and others who were part of the Keswick Movement, which started in England around 1875) John 15 is the classic passage about the Vine (Jesus) and the Branches (Believers). Abiding is absolutely essential to bearing fruit. The problem is that the word "abide" (Greek-meno) does not have the meaning read into it by today's advocates of Spiritual Formation. Meno is used 127 times. It means 'settle down and live in a place', 'dwell', 'remain', 'stay' or 'last'. That is all the word "abide" ever means. It does not mean the process or experience of spiritual formation as defined here. [I'll write more about that later] What is the Scriptural definition and process of "Becoming like Christ"? We must begin at the beginning. We learn in the Book of Genesis [see my Notes elsewhere], that we human beings are animals and have bodies and physical needs. However, unlike all other creatures, human beings are created in the image of God. This is what gives us our unique dignity and value. It means that we are like God and reflect our Creator. Being like God, we humans are "Persons". That means we have the capacity and need for rationality, creativity, morality and communality. Together, these attributes are known as "soul". No other animal is a Person or has a soul. We also, as human persons, have the need and capacity for communion with God. That makes us, like Him, spiritual beings. All that we are as Persons was negatively affected by "the Fall"- the Image has been fractured. Redemption in Christ involves the redemption of the Human (body and soul). In Christ, there is a new creation. The work of Christ is to restore the Image of God in us to what God intended (and more) before the Fall happened. The work of Christ is to redeem our rationality, creativity, morality and communality. It is to restore our spirituality- our communion with God. And it restores our bodies, as well (in this life and ultimately at the Resurrection). The phrase "Spiritual Formation" [like the word "Trinity"] is not found in the Scripture. The closest expression is found

here- Gal 4:19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! What does that mean? If there is any "Spiritual Formation", it involves formation of the fully Human. Jesus is the Image of God incarnate. To be like Jesus, is to be like (image) God. If Spiritual Formation involves becoming like Christ, it involves becoming fully Human. The audacious claim, and amazing promise of the Christian Faith, is this: To be fully Human requires becoming a mature Christian. Becoming a mature Christian results in becoming fully Human. The mark of a mature Christian (and thus, of being a fully human person) is Christ-like rationality, Christ-like creativity, Christ-like morality, Christ-like communality and Christ-like spirituality. If the Bible talks about "Spiritual Formation" it is achieving all this. Ephesians 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 ... for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain ...to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, Colossians 1:28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ Christ-like rationality- having the mind of Christ, thinking "Christianly" (Scripturally) about all things Christ-like creativity- making and developing original works of beauty [in all fields] in harmony with the Creator of all good things Christ-like morality- living by the same Kingdom values and principles as he did Christ-like communality- living in relationships with others as he did Christ-like spirituality- praising God, waiting on Him (in prayer), trusting and obeying God the Father as he did (to the death if need be) This is what being a mature Christian is like. This is what it means to be fully Human. This is what it means to be "like Christ". This is what it means to have Christ "formed in you. (to be continued)

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 19:13

Two milestones: 5000 hits and a domain name. Praise the Lord

Greetings, faithful readers. This Blog has had over 5000 visits now, in 15 months. I am truly thankful for your interest and God's blessing on this Ministry. I am also delighted to see interest increase in the studies I am posting on my website and to hear from folks who are blessed through my QT Thots on Monday and Friday. My son-in-law, Norm, has made it possible for me to now have my own domain name. You may see all my work now by visiting the following URL. Thank you, Norm. You have been a great help. <http://www.calvinfox.com>

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 16:56

Remembering those who are gone

When we visited the cemetery this week (see post below) and walked around looking at gravestones, almost all were strangers to me. They were but names engraved in stone. But they all have stories. Someone must remember who they were, what they did. How sad if no one remembers who we are, after we are gone, as though we never were. At my grandmother's grave, her name evoked many good memories of a wonderful woman. Nearby is the grave of Gram's brother, Oliver. I vaguely remember a few things about him from my childhood. But that is it. All the others, besides my folks, are nobodies to me. I trust they are somebody to families and friends. We must remember our loved ones, after they have passed on (while they are with us is nice, too). This is the weekend when multitudes of us do just that, especially those loved ones and friends who served our Country. Most wonderful and comforting is the knowledge that God knows and remembers each one whose remains are buried. He never forgets. The word "cemetery" means sleeping place. I do not believe any one is actually sleeping under the blanket of green turf. Every one of them is more alive than ever, living elsewhere in one Place or the Other.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 12:23

QT Thots

One of the strangest and most unwarranted claims made is that the God of the Old Testament is a God of Wrath, while the God of the New Testament is the God of Love. Here are some verses from today's Psalms (in Oremus) that reveal the tender mercies of the God of the Old Testament to us- Psalm 138 I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart; ...because of your love and faithfulness When I called, you answered me; you increased my strength within me. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe; Though the Lord be high, he cares for the lowly; The Lord will make good his purpose for me; Psalm 147:1-12 Alleluia! How good it is to sing praises to our God! He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. The Lord lifts up the lowly, the Lord has pleasure in those who fear him, in

those who await his gracious favor. Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; Alleluia! We may (and should) seriously study great Theology about God the Almighty Creator and Sovereign who works His purposes out in History; but sometimes, it is just good to pause and know, "Jesus loves me".

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 08:33

Thursday, May 25, 2006

Pro Rege

"Pro Rege" means "for the King". It is the purpose of living. As mentioned Tuesday, on this Blog, today is the commemoration of one of the great events in the life of Jesus: His Coronation as King of all kings. Ascension Day is the occasion upon which Jesus was crowned with all authority and power in Heaven and on Earth. "Long live the King" and may we all be his loyal lieges!

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:45

Wednesday, May 24, 2006

Spiritual Formation

"What Is Spiritual Formation? This is the definition by the Office of Spiritual Formation, PCUSA website" Spiritual formation is the activity of the Holy Spirit which molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This likeness is one of deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all of creation. We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through practices that make us more open and responsive to the Spirit's touch..." The following material is taken from Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship's website-Spiritual Formation -- "We cultivate intimacy with God and growth in Christ-like character through personal and corporate spiritual disciplines, empowered by the Spirit." What is the primary purpose of our lives? Our ultimate desire should be intimacy with the Lord. At its core, true spirituality is a matter of developing patterns of lifelong fellowship. True Spirituality is not doing things for God but of being with him. It is aligning ourselves with his will, listening to his voice, being beneficiaries of his grace. "The aim of life is ... to lose ourselves in the glory of God." As we cultivate intimacy with the Father, we seek to develop Christ-like qualities and to live as he would. Our goal [is] becoming "conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Romans 8:29) By what means do we grow close to God and become more like Jesus? meditation, prayer, fasting and study simplicity, solitude, submission and service confession, worship, guidance and celebrations silence, frugality, chastity, secrecy and sacrifice, fellowship -The Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster -The Spirit of the Disciplines, Dallas Willard ...spiritual maturity does not simply happen to us ... To grow in intimacy with God and to develop Christ-like qualities requires our active participation. Our role in this divine-human dance is to place ourselves - with intentionality and regularity - in the loving arms of our Lord. He has promised to do the rest. These concepts and the promotion of them are becoming increasingly popular- a "Movement" - among a broad band of Evangelicals, including many Seminaries, Organizations such as IVCF, National Leaders and well-known Pastors. Foster and Willard are among the key speakers/writers in this Movement. Consider the second national Conference for Spiritual Formation. Notice the sponsors and speakers- http://www.spiritualformationforum.org/sff_event.html

Is this Movement a good thing? Certainly, becoming like Christ is good! How does the Bible define this concept? More later.....

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 20:32

Thoughts in a Graveyard

My wife and brother and I visited the cemetery yesterday, where the remains of my parents are buried. We were checking to see if the engraving, that we had done on the stone, was correct, before paying for the work. It was and we paid. That was the last detail, one year later. There was a poignancy about it and a closure. We do not expect to visit the place very often. They are not there. We will remember and honor them in our hearts. We have yet to buy a plot for ourselves, not knowing where we will be living in years to come, but we did go to the Office at the Cemetery to inquire details. There are some nice spots available and the remains of a number of relatives, besides my parents, are there. We walked around and looked for their stones in the oldest sections. These are my ancestors from England and Ireland- my father's side. My mother's family is Italian and Swedish. Their remains "rest" in New Jersey. I am an English-Irish-Italian-Swedish-American. The Swedish side has never been a part of my personal culture (although I was baptized and ordained in a Swedish Baptist Church) I have fun with the Italian side. I guess my temperament and cultural proclivities are mostly English. The strongest influence on my culture is Christ. I intentionally seek to be Christian before anything else. How about you?

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 12:12

Podification

Our local Sunday paper carried a major article from the Denver Post by Sheba Wheeler. Ms Wheeler quotes many experts on the subject, as well as interviews with users, about MP3 players, especially the iPod version. More than half of all households have some version of MP3 players. Among teens, the iPod is a "must-have", a "requirement", a "status symbol", owning one means peer acceptance. "It is seen as extreme lack of status if they do not have one". Somehow [having the latest technology] proves power. Adults value them for the same reason. It makes them feel hip, in-the-know and youthful. Are Christians, people who are called to deny self, pick up their cross and follow Jesus, supposed to think and feel this way about some thing? Does it mean that Christian kids who affirmed in Church

yesterday, "Jesus is Lord", today are singing "Our iPod reigns"? You will please note I am not knocking the technology involved with MP3 players. I am questioning the social meaning and use of them in people's lives. Ms Wheeler makes two very important observations. First, "the iPod has become a cultural phenomenon because society deemed it so. Society takes a created concept...and gives it power by choosing to use and be identified with it." Whoa, wait a minute here. Read that again. That is exactly how the Bible defines a "Idol" and idolatry is one of the greatest temptations facing God's People in every age. Are your teens worshipping an idol they carry around attached to belt and ear? Talk with them about that. Ms Wheeler's second observation is even more serious-

She quotes a marketing consultant. He says "Apple's marketing success and cultural appeal is due to 'podification', the current longing among Americans to insulate themselves from the outside world and demand experiences that are unique to them and their own tastes." Where do we see evidence of that? Are any Christians you know, teens or adults, podified? The marketing consultant makes another sharp observation, "Apple delivered the perfect tool: it shields us from the outside world, but at the same time...it allows us to keep up with the Jones". Are Christians, who say "Jesus is Lord", interested in "keeping up with the Jones". Wouldn't that make the Jones, Lord? As to the consequences of being shielded from the world by gadgets like the iPod, There was a teen killed here recently because he was walking on the railroad tracks. He didn't hear the train coming up behind him. Friends said, he was always listening to music. Could there be a connection?

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 11:22

Tuesday, May 23, 2006

Days of Celebration

Yesterday (Tuesday) was Rogation Day. We were introduced to this observance at the Episcopal Church we attended here in Springfield, more than 25 years ago. The congregation made a procession around the Church building, stopping several times to ask God's blessing on Spring time growth of trees and flowers and the gardens that would soon be planted. The word "rogation" comes from a Latin word for asking (praying). This quaint custom began in England in the 6th Century. You may or may not be interested in such an observance. I know some of you do talk to your plants, so you might talk to God about them too. Another annual observance happens this week. This one should not be missed. Observing it could go a long way to correcting and improving the life of the Church. Tomorrow (Thursday) is Ascension Day. If we observe the birth of Jesus (Christmas), the death of Jesus (Good Friday) and the resurrection of Jesus (Easter), what good reason do we have for failure to observe the ascension of Jesus? It is equally as important as the other Days. After Jesus arose from the grave, what happened? He went to Heaven. But that does not mean, simply, that He was alive. It means that He ascended to the Throne to rule, with all power and authority, as Sovereign over all. His Kingdom had begun. The world would never be the same. Ascension Day celebrates Jesus' enthronement as our King. In two weeks (June 4th), we will celebrate the first official act of our Sovereign- He poured out His Holy Spirit upon His Church, His Body on earth. That Day is Pentecost. Wear red.

Posted by Cal in Church at 23:21

Chickens do come home to roost

One of the most stupid arguments, offered frequently, in support of making so-called "Gay Marriage" legal in Massachusetts is "See, the world did not end!" in the two years since that happened. Supposedly nothing changed. But it did! More than 2000 couples have had their relationship declared a legal Marriage with all the benefits thereof. Supporters of the concept have been encouraged and emboldened and the drift away from the traditional and Biblical definition of Marriage, as involving the union of a man and woman exclusively, has increased. Who said the test of the rightness or wrongness of Gay "Marriage" would be demonstrated by the "end of the world" and that within months of the State Supreme Court decision? As every thinking person knows, all ideas have consequences and social change as a result of radical ideas, happens over time, perhaps one or two generations. Certainly our society is different today than it was in the 50's and that change is directly related to the social upheaval of the 60's. Here is an example of social change over time-

"More than one in three children in Europe are born to unmarried couples... . The figure represents a sixfold increase over the past 35 years and points to far-reaching effects on children and social policies. Within the European Union the number of births outside marriage varies wildly—from 56 percent in Sweden to 4 percent in Greece. In between come France with 48 percent, Britain at 42 percent, and Germany at 28 percent, according to the EU's official statistics branch, Eurostat. In Germany, a recent Federal Statistics Office survey found that only 38 percent of women and 30 percent of men see marriage as a necessary part of living together. In Britain, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) found in 1999 that cohabiting couples accounted for 24 percent of the men and 25 percent of women living in any kind of partnership—double the rates in 1986. Demographers point to the contraceptive pill, social acceptance of working mothers, and the decline of religion as contributing factors. In France, for example, there is no longer any legal distinction between married and unmarried couples."-----Christian Science Monitor, April 17, 2006

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 22:56

Hymns vs Choruses?

An old farmer goes to the city one weekend and attends the big city church. He comes home and his wife asks him how it was. "Well," says the farmer, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns." "Praise choruses," says the wife, "What are those?" "Oh, they're ok. They're sort of like hymns, only different," says the farmer. "Well, what's the difference?" asks his wife. The farmer says, "Well, it's like this - If I were to say to you: 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' well, that would be a hymn. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you: 'Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh Martha, MARTHA, MARTHA. The cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows the COWS, COWS, COWS are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, are in

the corn, the CORN,CORN, CORN.' Then, if I were to repeat the whole thing two or three times, well that would be a praise chorus." The same Sunday, a young, new Christian from the city attends the small town church. He returns home and his wife asks how it was. "Well," says the young man, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang hymns instead of regular songs." "Hymns," says his wife, "What are those?" "Oh, they're ok. They're sort of like regular songs, only different." says the young man. "What's the difference?" asks the wife. The young man says, "Well, It's like this - If I were to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' that would be a regular song. If on the other hand, I were to say to you: Oh Martha, dear Martha, hear thou my cry Inclinest thine ear to the words of my mouth. Turn thou thy whole wonderous ear by and by To the righteous, inimitable, glorious truth. For the way of the animals who can explain There in their heads is no shadow of sense. Hearkenest they in God's sun or his rain Unless from the mild, tempting corn they are fenced. Yea those cows in glad bovine, rebellious delight, Have broke free their shackles, their warm pens eschewed. Then goaded by minions of darkness and night They all my mild Chilliwick sweet corn have chewed. So look to that bright shining day by and by, Where all foul corruptions of earth are reborn. Where no vicious animal makes my soul cry And I no longer see those foul cows in the corn. Then, if I were to do only verses one, three and four and do a key change on the last verse, well that would be a hymn." -----submitted by a regular Reader of this Blog

Posted by Cal in Church at 22:31

Monday, May 22, 2006

The New Super Spirituality

Francis Schaeffer had a tremendous ministry for Christ among young people disaffected with Church and World from the 1950's into the early 80's. He founded, what is known as, L'Abri in 1955 and wrote books that have changed minds and lives ever since. They are somewhat dated now, but still very valuable. I recommend you check out some of the websites about his work. In 1972, Dr Schaeffer wrote a short book about The New Super Spirituality that is relevant to the growing numbers of Evangelicals pursuing "Spiritual Formation". (I will soon post a paper about this) Schaeffer noted the move from drug induced "highs" among young people into another kind of trip induced by various forms of Mysticism often mixed with occultism. Among youthful Christians this move in the 70's was into "new Platonic spirituality". The most notable characteristic of this "spirituality" was its anti-intellectualism and rejection of Reason. This included all efforts to do Apologetics- the rational defence of the Faith. There was a growing emphasis on asceticism and separation from the consumerism and materialism of the world. There was no concern about social justice or cultural problems. Remember, these were young people burned out by the "radical" movements of the 60's. Prophecy and the Rapture was a "hot topic" for discussion. There was much interest in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and charismatic worship. This was increasingly contentless spirituality with downplaying or rejection of propositional Truth and the authority of Scripture. Experience and emotion were more important. This was in the early 1970's- 30 years ago! Is "Spiritual Formation" the new super spirituality of today? There are similarities and differences, as follows-

"Schaeffer noted the move from drug induced "highs" among young people into another kind of trip induced by various forms of Mysticism often mixed with occultism." "There was a growing emphasis on asceticism and separation from the consumerism and materialism of the world." I see similarity to this in today's Emergent Church, the so-called "New Monasticism" and aspects of "Spiritual Formation" [more on this later]"Prophecy and the Rapture was a "hot topic" for discussion." I personally see no interest in these matters today among young adults" There was much interest in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and charismatic worship." There are emotional and physical expressions that remind me of charismatic meetings and worship. But many younger Believers are not traditional Pentecostals or Charismatics at all [this is not true of many immigrants and minorities] "The most notable characteristic of this "spirituality" was its anti-intellectualism and rejection of Reason. This included all efforts to do Apologetics- the rational defence of the Faith.' 'increasingly contentless spirituality with downplaying or rejection of propositional Truth and the authority of Scripture. Experience and emotion were more important.' 'The most notable characteristic of this "spirituality" was its anti-intellectualism and rejection of Reason. This included all efforts to do Apologetics- the rational defence of the Faith.' I definitely see all of this today, but with differences. There is now a very different take on what "Truth" is compared to 30+ years ago, as well as what being a Christian is all about. Among youthful Christians this move in the 70's was into "new Platonic spirituality". There was no concern about social justice or cultural problems. Many of today's young Christians are dualists (Platonists) as much as the last generation, but with different compartments. There is the search for contentless, subjective spiritual "highs" at the same time there is serious interest and commitment to social action and ministries of charity and mercy. This is dualism with a difference. Schaeffer would be even more alarmed today than he was in the 70's. Me, too. On a positive note: One subject that Dr Schaeffer encouraged was "orthodox community" - the importance of genuine fellowship and relationships that are a working out of Truth in practice. Many of today's young Christians could not agree more. Likewise.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 14:50

A-Pre- or Post- ?

A friend mentioned that he was starting to read my notes on the Book of Revelation. <http://www.freewebs.com/reformationinstitute/> I said my interpretation is not traditional, meaning Dispensational. He replied that is not the "traditional" view. My friend grew up Roman Catholic. I changed the word to "popular". If anyone has grown up in a fundamentalist Protestant church, the Dispensationalist interpretation of Revelation is both traditional and still popular. It has been around for more than 150 years in America. That means those Christians have known no other view for maybe 5 generations. That makes it "traditional" to them. Though less well-known today, it is still very influential, especially in shaping American politics and foreign policy. It provides the main ideological driving force behind American support for Israel. For maybe 200 years prior to the Civil War, the dominant

view of the Second Coming of Christ was "Post-Millennial". After a great movement of the Holy Spirit and much successful evangelism and world missions, the Millennium, ie- Christianity, will be established on earth. Then Christ will return. This view is on the ascendancy

For approximately 1200 years prior to the settlement of the Colonies (5th -16th centuries), the Church was considered to be the Kingdom of God on earth. Eventually, as in the early Creeds, Christ would come again along with the Resurrection and Judgement of the "Quick and the Dead". There would be no other Millennium before or after the Second Coming, only Eternity. Hence this view is known as "amillennial" The earliest or "Classic" view (first three and half centuries) is also called Pre-Millennial, same as in Dispensationalism; but with significant differences- there would be no Rapture (the teaching of a secret, sudden Rapture of the Church was new in 1830) . Christ's return would be after the Tribulation and then would come the 1000 year Millennial Kingdom on earth. Of course, proponents of all these views believe they have Scriptural support. The only one I am persuaded does not is Dispensationalism, although that was the position I was taught as a new Christian, 50 years ago. Any "Millennium" will be this side of the Lord's return, not after. See my notes on my website.

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 12:31

Holy Food on the Fly?

Another report came out last week indicating that, in general, Americans are reading less. We are increasingly an audio and visual culture. Is there a connection between that and the decline among Christian Americans of serious Bible study (which requires time spent reading words) ? We have historically been "People of the Book". Many reports also document the obvious- Americans seldom eat meals around a table as a family. Increasingly, we eat fast food or we eat take out and bring home or delivered to the door food, fast. Often we just skip a meal- and the family time that could go with it. Is there a connection between that cultural reality and the attitudes and practices of many Believers and churches toward the Lord's Supper?

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 10:21

Going through the Motions?

I wrote below of the concert last Saturday at Whitinsville School. It was an interesting comparison to the First Communion we attended at a local RC Church three weeks ago. I had said how impressed I was with the latter. Some 50 second graders solemnly lining up to receive [not "take"] Communion for the first time, observed by 700 reverential family and friends. There had been a big build-up to the First Communion- 2 years of once weekly Classes. They dressed in their Sunday finest. They were about to receive, they had been taught, the very Body [not the Blood] of Christ. You'd think this would be a very special, "mystical" experience for each child. I doubt it. The wafers were given quickly and most of the kids just popped them into their mouths as they hurried away, going back to their seats. They were followed by most of the adults present, doing the same thing. That was it? All the preparation and formality led up to just that? That is all that receiving Christ amounts to? I gather that "receiving Christ" for those folks, is a mechanical thing. Put the wafer into your mouth and it is done. Christ has been received. Automatically. All done. At Whitinsville, the youthful musicians were consciously putting their thoughts and feelings into what they were doing, as they did it. There may have been a few, out of the hundred players, that were on auto pilot, playing mechanically. But most assuredly, most were caught up and passionately involved in making beautiful music. They were using knowledge and skills, acquired over many years, during the actual concert. Participation in the performance itself was the "means of grace", not a care-less, mechanical after thought to all that preceded it. Which is like the way you take Communion?

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 10:04

QTThots

I read and meditate on the Psalms more than any other part of the Bible. The one this morning (from Oremus) is very appropriate after a very loud, violent thunder storm last night and today is going to be very windy- Psalm 104 Bless the Lord, O my soul; O Lord my God, how excellent is your greatness! you are clothed with majesty and splendor... you make the clouds your chariot; you ride on the wings of the wind. You make the winds your messengers There is nothing like a fierce storm to put the fear of God in you. Those winds do speak of God's awful power and our weakness Beside them the birds of the air make their nests and sing among the branches. I sit writing this by an open window and the music of songbirds, from the trees in the yard, fills the air. Beautiful. You make grass grow ... and plants to serve us all;

For sure- they seem to grow by inches every day. Color everywhere. The trees of the Lord are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which he planted, In which the birds build their nests, Leaves from tall oaks are are forming canopies over the streets in the neighborhood You appointed the moon to mark the seasons, and the sun knows the time of its setting. You make darkness that it may be night There is a rhythm of life, with the seasons and the days. The older I get, the faster it goes; but it is comfortable- a good thing The laborer goes forth to work and to toil until the evening. I have a lot to do today; but now, "retired", it is on my own schedule. But many of the neighbors are rushing to their jobs- all on the clock. Will they enjoy the avian music and lush foliage on the way? O Lord, how manifold are your works! the earth is full... All of this is evidence of God. We can see His Hand in what He has made. The sights and sounds speak a non-verbal word to us of our Creator. Will rushing people make time to listen to the word of God? Bless the Lord, O my soul. Alleluia!

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 07:55

Sunday, May 21, 2006

Music to the Glory of God

Friday after lunch, we left to visit our daughter, Melissa, and her family. One of our grand daughters, an accomplished violinist, was in the last concert of the year at her high school. It took us 4 hours of crawling, bumper to bumper driving to go the 75 miles to get there. We were traveling the Mass Pike. It was closed, near Boston, due to the turn over of a tanker truck. We were tired and somewhat frazzled when we got there. No worry. The wonderful concert of classical music by 5 orchestras was excellent, grabbed our attention and picked up our spirits immediately. What made it extra inspiring and encouraging was the fact that the very talented and disciplined musicians were elementary, middle and senior high students- children and teenagers intense, committed and passionate about learning and playing classical string orchestral music. The 2 hour performance concluded with Peter I. Tchaikovsky's Serenade in C Major. There are some one hundred youth in the school's string music program- amazing! It can be done. It is being done, at Whitinsville Christian School, to the Glory of God.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 15:49

Friday, May 19, 2006

Study in the Book of Revelation is done

I did not put a lot of new material on this Blog this week because I have been busy writing for my Website. Just now I finished posting there my notes for the Book of Revelation that are relevant to the earlier study about Government. I hope you will check them out. If the print is too small, just click on View in the task bar and increase the text size for your eyes. Thanks and God bless <http://freewebs.com/reformationinstitute/ProRegeCal>

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 12:35

QT Thots

More than 45 years ago, my (then) girl friend, Millie, and I dropped by the Parsonage to visit our Pastor at the time. He was talking with his two very young sons about Samson. In my daily Devotions, we have been going through the Book of Judges. This morning we came to the end of the story of Samson in Chapter 16. Our Pastor was stressing to his boys how very, very important it is to be sure that whomever they marry someday be a Christian. Millie and I were impressed that Pastor was trying to impress this lesson on his sons and at such a young age. They were less than ten. We are eternally grateful that each of our four children took that same lesson to heart and that all of them married Believers. I can not imagine myself married to a non-believer. Impossible. My entire life is rooted and grounded in Christ. How could I have a wife who does not know Him? Millie and I are, in the deepest sense, "soul-mates" and one in the Spirit. I know many Believers are married to unbelievers. That is often due to one of them becoming a Christian after the wedding. As a pastor, I refused to perform wedding ceremonies for couples who did not share the Faith. The "unequally yoked" have many heartaches, but most important they miss out on sharing all that the Lord would do in and through them as a couple. They are not "one in the Lord" or one in faith, in prayer, in worship, in values, and ministry and even in friends. They do not share the hope of eternal life or the grace God gives in crisis and sorrow. They not only miss out on the joy and meaning of Christian Marriage, but of Christ-centered parenting and family if God should gift them with children. These are reasons to teach our children the lessons learned from the story of Samson. Not only do not marry an unbeliever, do not get romantically involved with an unbeliever for fear you will give your heart (and even body) to them, let alone marry them some day. Two of my cousins became grandparents this week. I pray that the faith that is in my cousins will abound in their children and their children's children and that this circle will never be broken.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 09:32

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

Remembering Lowell

Watching the news coverage of the current flooding of the Merrimac River, and the cities built on it, in northeastern Massachusetts brings back good memories of my first full-time church. We served the Lord at Immanuel Baptist Church in Lowell, on the river, for four years, more than 40 years ago. Our daughters were born in that City and we have gone back occasionally to visit friends. Most of them have gone on to the Lord now. We have very fond memories of those days. Being the Pastor there was a very positive experience, for which I am grateful. The City itself, as well as the population, has undergone great changes. But, that church, those Saints of yesteryear, remain as they were, in my heart and memory.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 08:39

Monday, May 15, 2006

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

This afternoon I added more material, covering Chapter 6, to my study of the Book of Revelation found on my website <http://freewebs.com/reformationinstitute/> Some have written to me, saying they have found this new study helpful. For that I am grateful. I also continue to appreciate the help of my son-in-law, Norm, as webmaster (trouble shooter) It is all Pro RegeCal

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 18:22

Facts? What Facts?

I could scream! For several years now, Christians I know have made it very clear, they do not want to learn Theology or Church History. Boring. Irrelevant. Doctrine is divisive. We do not want sermons or Sunday School classes to study such stuff. Being a Christian is all about relationships- with God and with others. Period. Just yesterday, we heard a guest speaker, an ordained Presbyterian Minister, who operates a ministry for the homeless, tell us emphatically that the Gospel is about LOVE. Period. His favorite dictum: Preach the Gospel, but use words only if you have to. ACTION- that is all that really counts, he said. Doctrinal Statements do not "cut it". What did we hear about during Announcements? We saw a promotional film for an upcoming series to study the DaVinci Code, a book that raises all kinds of questions about Theology and Church History. All of a sudden, Christians every where are hitting the panic button about the book and the movie that comes out this week. How do we answer it? I hear Pastors moaning that their folks do not have the knowledge to intelligently respond to the issues being raised, both in their own minds and in the minds of non-Christian friends. Duh! I guess the "personal relationships" of these folks are not enough to withstand the assault of the nonsense in this book (Jesus married Mary Magdalene and they had a baby. Come on!). Now this rush to do a crash "study" of Theology and Church History. I guess that could be good- motivation and opportunity to get folks to learn something they should have learned years ago. BUT, there are some problems with this.

I was asked to sit in on one of these 4-week study groups. Ah, we Americans. If we must study, make it fast and simple. We are going to get a good grasp on the issues that professional theologians and historians have taken years to study and which have been around for centuries, in 4 short "classes". But then, the way I hear it, these "Classes" will not have a teacher. We will discuss the issues together. Every one will be able to express themselves and make up their own mind. That sounds like a "bull session" to me, where everybody shares their ignorance. It is also kind of funny to me, ironic, that Christians who could not previously be bothered with learning the facts of their Faith [because they are into LOVE and personal relationships] are now all shook up by the purported "facts" in this novel. The author has said that while the story, the plot, is fiction; the persons, places and events are factual. Christians who have read the book have felt challenged (threatened?) . If all this is true, then, churches should be offering, and members should be motivated to actually commit to do, serious study over an extended period of time. Or will this just be another passing tempest in a tea cup? It is also strange how "Modernist" all this current rush to "study" is. Younger Christians these days are eager to ridicule the traditional Church for being "Rationalist" and all about dry intellectualism and relying on evidential proofs for the Truth of the Faith. Supposedly, they are beyond [above?] all of that. Out comes this book and these same folks are among those who are rushing to "defend" the faith intellectually by marshalling evidence and using rational argumentation. Does this mean there really is Absolute Truth? Anyway, I do not want to put money into Dan Brown's pocket. I have a long list of books I want to buy, the DaVinci Code is not one of them. I have studied Theology and Church History. Far from a threat, what Mr Brown has to say is of no interest to me. It is, after all, fiction.

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 11:35

Hindus here

Our Country's population is now 33 % non-white. Within the next 25 years, the Census Bureau estimates minority groups will have become the majority and the majority of them will be Hispanic. This is already the case in many cities throughout the USA. We have many "minorities" here in Springfield. These include people of non-Christian Religions. There are a number of Muslim Mosques. Over this past week end, the first Hindu Shrine was dedicated. There are 1000 members. I think the registered pharmacist at our local Walgreens and the family that run the nearest

convenience store might be Hindu- or else Muslim. Hmm. Mission Field in my back yard?

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 10:35

QT Thots

Last week I posted a meditation on my Blog about Mary as a mother who experienced a lot of anguish. Today's OT Scripture (Judges 13:1-7,24) is a story with significant similarities-The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. God works through people. Sometimes, the people God uses to accomplish His work are very flawed people. In order to deliver the Israelites, God raised up a Savior, Samson. But there would have been no Samson, no Savior of Israel, without the woman who would be his mother. The woman God chose for this important role was barren, having borne no children. As in the case with Mary, the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, 'Although you are barren, having borne no children, you shall conceive and bear a son. She was not a virgin and nothing is said here about the Holy Spirit coming upon her, as in Mary's case; but, conception was a miracle nevertheless. Actually, the consistent teaching through out the Bible is that all children are a gift from the Lord. In the natural scheme of things, He gives them to some, while withholding them from others. If we have children, we should consider them to be gifts from the Lord, to be dedicated back to Him for His service. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines.' Samson's service was to deliver Israel from bondage. Every child is born with a promise and purpose. Then the woman came and told her husband, 'A man of God came to me, ...an angel, ... he said to me, "You shall conceive and bear a son. Like Joseph, this story must have really dumbfounded the woman's husband. He would need to cooperate with God, if his son was to be the man God intended. As it turns out, he was an obstacle and made foolish decisions for his boy. The woman bore a son, and named him Samson. The boy grew, and the Lord blessed him. Samson's mother was thrilled. Her baby was an answer to prayer. She was assured by the Lord that her baby would grow up to do mighty things for her Country. That happened. Little did she know that her boy would also have great personal problems, struggle with his own inner demons and suffer terrible torture and die a horrible death. God does give and keep His promises to us. He does love our children and has plans for their lives. That does not mean they will not have problems or that parenting will not involve heartache for our children. We must "keep the faith" and work at not making the same mistakes Samson's parents made along the way. (read the whole story) Check out the meditation about Mary on my Blog from last week

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 10:01

Friday, May 12. 2006

The Debt Slayers

So many Christians are in unhealthy debt that there is a growing need for the ministries of the Debt Slayers. That is the title of an CT article featuring three of them-<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/005/23.40.html> There is no one, simple fix and different people have different problems with money management. Usually, there are underlying problems, too, as there is on the topic of sexuality. When couples come for counseling about either money or sex, money and sex are not the most important issues they have. Money management is often about values and power or control issues. Those, in turn, are often directly related to early childhood and family issues. A couple will need to get a real handle on both income and spending, keeping records for a long period of time, probably over a year- holidays can be serious budget busters. Every expense must be recorded. Needs must be separated from wants. And all of those must be prioritized and budgeted for. Mutual agreement between husband and wife must be reached- room here for lots of discussion and compromise. Then, there will be need for serious discipline, mutual support with "temptations" and mutual accountability. Mutual is important. Money management in a marriage must be mutual, a cooperative effort. Cutting up all but one credit cards may be essential. All of that is the easy part. Getting at the values and control issues are harder. Why do we want what we want? Why do we spend what we spend? Why is even talking about such things so hard. especially for men? All this means it will be usually be a good idea to get the help of a good financial counselor. Finally comes what must actually be first. Where is the Lord in all this? Certainly our values and goals are matters that the Lord wants to be involved with. Prayer and the Holy Spirit will be necessary for wisdom and strength to make and keep decisions. The Bible is full of principles to guide us in making money and being good stewards of it. And faith, as well as sanctified common sense, is an absolute essential. If the Lord speaks to you about major changes, like tithing or changing jobs or moving, faith will absolutely be required to obey.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 19:00

New Material on my Website: Book of Revelation

I have just added new materials on my website <http://freewebs.com/reformationinstitute/> The notes about Government are still there. I have selected material relevant to that subject from the Book of Revelation. There is an "Introduction", explaining my approach to the Book. I am not a "Left Behind" Dispensationalist. Also sections about the "Center of the Universe" and the Christian Philosophy of History. I earnestly hope you will visit the Site and give the material a chance. It is under construction and as time goes along I shall add much more.

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 14:34

QT Thots

This is one of the most famous and beloved hymns of all time, written by Charles Wesley in 1740 There are two more stanzas
Jesus, Lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly, while the nearer waters roll, while the tempest still is high: hide me, O my Savior, hide, till the storm of life be past; safe into the haven guide, O receive my soul at last. Other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on thee; leave, ah! leave me not alone, still support and comfort me! All my trust on thee is stayed; all my help from thee I bring; cover my defenseless head with the shadow of thy wing. Plenteous grace with thee is found, grace to cover all my sin; let the healing streams abound, make and keep me pure within. Thou of life the fountain art, freely let me take of thee: spring thou up within my heart, rise to all eternity. Charles was an Anglican priest, but came to saving faith after he had been in Ministry for a few years. That was in 1738. It changed him and his preaching. That, in turn, brought him into trouble with traditionalists in the Church. He had fierce enemies and he was forced out of the Pulpit. He wrote this hymn during those early turbulent days. I know a lot of Pastors who could echo the prayer of the first stanza. Certainly many lay Christians can as well. Perhaps you. But, God did not answer Wesley's plea. It was not in His plan to call the disheartened Pastor Home at that time. Rather this tough time of trial was the beginning of a fruitful non-parochial [para-church] Ministry that would last for over 45 years. God finally granted Wesley His desire in 1788

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 08:49

Wednesday, May 10, 2006

Lares and Penates

An interesting article in the current AARP Bulletin has a lot of wisdom. The writer talks about the process of cleaning out her old house, as she moves into a place better suited to her advancing years. The new place actually has more floor space, but she brought almost nothing to it from her former home. She describes the process as sorting and separating her lares from her penates, ie- her "must haves" from her "don't needs". Lares and Penates are the Latin names for ancient Roman household gods. Usually the names together simply mean "household gods". Many of us Christians have household gods, not only household goods, cluttering up our lives. These would be things- things someone convinced us we absolutely need (must haves) to serve us. Over the years, they increasingly control our lives and need us to take care of them, serving them after they no longer serve us. These gods become "don't needs". The AARP writer describes how wonderfully free and liberated she came to feel, as she divested her life of these "don't needs". She makes the important distinction between divestment and downsizing. The latter is about pinching, cutting back, restricting. All of that can be painful and make you dread it. Divestment, she says, is about expansion, space freedom and redefining oneself. She will enjoy memories of people, experiences and places (nostalgia) while not being pained over loss of things. She intends to let old dreams go, while creating new ones.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 20:23

Thinking about a mother who had a lot of heartache

I've been thinking about Mary as a mother this week. She had been real excited as a pregnant young woman to know that God had a wonderful plan for the baby she was carrying. God being good, I'm sure she believed that the plan was good, too. From what the Angel had told her she expected her baby would grow up to be a great man of God, whom the Lord would use to save the world. How proud and happy she must have been about her son's bright future. He was going to be the Messiah- a King. The Angel from God had said she would be the most blessed woman on earth. How strange it must have been to hear the old man, Simeon, predict that her son's life would bring her great pain. How could that be? Then there was that whole thing of him running away when he was 13, causing his parents to become very worried about him. When found, the young teen tried to explain what he had done, but they did not understand him. What was that all about? Instead of going into the family business as expected, he becomes unemployed and homeless. Later Mary hears her son has become a street Preacher. People cheer him at first and then increasingly jeer him. After three years wandering around, her precious baby, her first born, becomes a wanted criminal and is arrested. His brothers and sisters try to tell Mary that he is not only homeless- he is mentally ill. The Angel had not said anything about any of this. What was going on here? Life was not turning out as she expected- as God had led her to believe it would be. How can this be happening? What about God's promises? She had trusted God to keep those promises about her baby. Had he betrayed her trust? She had sacrificed a lot to carry that baby as an unwed teen. She hadn't asked for that. This wasn't fair. All she did was obey what she believed God wanted of her. Was she wrong? Had she been naive and foolish? Had she misunderstood God? Why was being a mother so hard? Was this in God's Plan for her, too? Instead of becoming a King, she sees her beloved son falsely accused of crimes and condemned to death. She watches from afar as her son suffers, abandoned by his friends and the rest of his family. He hears him ask God, "Why?" and she mumbles the same question. Little did she realize then, that all of this was indeed in God's good plan for both mother and child. He had not abandoned either of them. Things are often not what they seem to be. She later came to believe all this grief was in God's permissive will, God was in control, it was all worthwhile. His work as Messiah did indeed require her son to suffer and be killed. But after all that, God vindicated him and placed him on the long promised Throne, from which He now rules the world. Finally, realizing all of this, the worry wrinkled and tear worn face of Mary reflected that she was indeed, the most blessed woman who ever lived. The simple faith she had as a young woman was not for nothing. Her tough experiences as a mother turned out to be all worthwhile.

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 19:53

Tuesday, May 9, 2006

Megachurches

I have been surprised that only 4 readers of the Blog have checked out the King of the Hill video about megachurches- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qtl2pa2m5cg>The current issue of Your Church magazine came today. There is an article about megachurches, defined as churches with weekly attendance over 2000. Average attendance is 3585. Only about 1 in 270 churches is that size but five to seven percent of all church goers attend them. The numbers are growing, nearly doubling in the last 5 years. Megachurches are overwhelmingly "evangelical" and the majority are affiliated with a denomination (26% Baptist) , as are most churches

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:46

Monday, May 8, 2006

Liberals Claim the High Road

Why is it that advocates of gay marriage are following Jesus, obeying the Gospel, honoring the true meaning of Marriage, being loving and compassionate; while those who oppose gay marriage are not following Jesus, not obeying the Gospel, not honoring the meaning of Marriage and not being loving and compassionate? The post below this one explains how Gay Rights Advocates come to such pronouncements.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 15:31

A Perverse Propensity

The Episcopal Church remains roiled over the issue of homosexuality: marriage, ordination. The big Convention that may settle the issue once for all comes up next month. Actually, all agree that the roil is not primarily about sexuality. It is about Authority- Who or what has it. And as to the Authority of the Scripture, it is about the authority of interpretation: whose. Post Modern "Christians" have a real problem with "Authority". They rejected the classic correspondence definition of Truth in favor of the newer coherence theory of Truth. But that, apparently is hard to get a handle on. Growing in favor is the idea that Truth is subjective and always changing. The most reliable way to determine Truth about anything is in Community. Let the Community share and discuss all possible viewpoints, pray, listen to the Spirit ("God is still speaking") and seek a consensus. In other words, Authority is in the Community. Somehow, that is better than following the common sense meaning of Scripture, Creeds and time honored Tradition and universal practice in the Church. And somehow the results of such a Community effort turns out to be "open and affirming" policies favoring diversity and moral relativism. Read: approval and support of Gay and Feminist agendas. The more traditional approach does lead there. The post modern propensity for "Community" is perverse.

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:20

oh, What a Pill

I went to the drug store just now and picked up a prescription. There has been a rash of bad reactions from meds reported in the news lately. They were all from mistakes made by CVS pharmacies. So I was dismayed when the registered Pharmacist handed me the bag today, without any comments. I said to her, "Aren't you supposed to go over the directions with these pills?" Oh, she replied, with a smile. "Take one pill twice a day." I couldn't resist: "Do you mean I take the same pill two times each day?" No, she said, repeating the simple direction she had given to me and went on with other business. The adverse reactions mentioned in the news were from careless packaging by pharmacists: inaccurate counting, wrong meds or wrong directions for usage. All the news spots said to be sure to ask Pharmacists exactly what you are getting and how to take it. I guess Walgreens missed the memo.

Posted by Cal at 14:56

Coffee and Gasoline

We had lunch at McDonalds today, after another doctor's appointment. Senior coffees were 70 cents (and it was literally senior. Coffee in an open carafe should be thrown out ever 20 minutes. Coffee held in a tightly closed pot stays fresh about one hour and then should be replaced) We had coffee recently at a regular slow food restaurant and were dismayed to see a cup cost us \$2.00. Of course, popular specialty coffees can cost \$4.50. Hmm, that is more than gas at the pump. Why is no one accusing the coffee makers of gouging? I understand that gas prices, adjusted for inflation, are less expensive now than they were 30 years ago. Meanwhile, in England drivers now pay at least \$6.50 for an equivalent gallon. We all could get fuel at lot cheaper, if we really wanted to by changing our lifestyles. I'm sure there is something in the Bible about that. My points are they we Americans are spoiled and indulgent. We also think the world revolves around us, when in fact, like the oil market, we are part of a global economy. That reality greatly effects what happens at the pump, as well as just about everything else in our lives.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 14:12

Building on Sand

Rebuilding New Orleans has become a favorite "cause" for many churches and celebrities. I confess I do not share the burden. Hundreds of millions of tax dollars have already been lost due to waste and fraud. Hundreds of millions more are needed. For what? to rebuild a city on a swamp that is doomed to be flooded again? Many of the Insurance Companies are pulling out of the area. That should tell us something. Every celebrity and most crusaders for this cause, that I have heard, tell us how important New Orleans is to our history and culture as Americans. They do not really mean the City, they mean the entertainment district of the City. Interestingly, when people here in Springfield talk about revitalizing this near bankrupt city they also talk first and foremost about its entertainment district. I never go there. I have no interest in the bars and niteclubs. Why should any Christian? Rebuilding the City must first mean the housing, hospitals, schools and businesses (besides the ones on Bourbon St) Etc. But that brings us back to the original issue: why do any of that if the City is built on sand (Hmmm, that reminds me of something Jesus said) and the dikes will not hold if another Level 5 Hurricane hits. If folks say, "but it is my home" Well, let them rebuild and pay for it themselves, at their expense, not mine. There are a lot of beautiful places I would like to live. I can not afford it, so I don't. I'm sure many of the citizens consider themselves to be Christians. Christians are called to be wise stewards of the the Land and of their money

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 13:51

Back to the Beginning

In the story from Acts mentioned in today's QT Thots, two additional observations come to mind-The man who was miraculously healed was poor. He did not ask for healing. He asked for money (3:3) The Apostles got his attention and Peter said forcefully to him, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the Name of Jesus...walk!" I have been an inner city Pastor. I have been an inner city social worker. I have brought needy people home and washed and clothed them, giving them food and a place to sleep. I have worked with street people. Coming back to Springfield, I have felt the pressure to do more of all that. I want to support friends who are doing that; but now, in my older age, I am back to the beginning. What I must say to the physically needy is the same as Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the Name of Jesus...walk!" What I have is the Gospel, the Word of Truth. People everywhere need to hear Truth and walk according to it. I am glad there are many people and agencies providing direct care to needy folks. But their need is far deeper than food and shelter. After many, many years in direct care ministry I am more convinced than ever that much more serious needs exist and must be met. Peter and John wanted the street person in the story to know the Risen Christ. It is significant that after his healing, the man is brought into the church. His ongoing, daily needs are met there (see chap 4-5). That is the Biblical Model: Evangelism and immediate assimilation of new Believers into the local body of Christ. Leadership in the local church is shared accordingly: Ministry of the Word and Ministry [same Greek word] of the Table (chap 6)

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 10:06

QT Thots

Acts 4:13-22 Peter and John were determined to continue to courageously preach the Gospel in the face of opposition. Threats could not stop them..Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed Somehow, their enemies, Leaders of the Church of that day, were more struck by the Apostles lack of credentials than by the abundance of their faith. The only thing that was not ordinary about Peter and John was that they had been disciples of Jesus And [then they] recognized them as companions [of the despised troublemaker] Jesus. That worked against them. The only thing working for the Apostles was the living evidence of their faith- When they saw the man who had been cured standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. Are there people walking around today who have found Life and healing because of our witness to them of the Gospel? That is what really matters in the long run. The threatened and fearful Church Leaders ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Can you imagine such foolish blindness? These were god-fearing religious men ordering the Apostles not to preach the Gospel!!! They were just to shut down their Ministry! The criticized and rejected Apostles respond with supreme sarcasm-Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; Can you imagine Church Leaders who would say that God wants their followers to listen to them, instead of listening to God? The maligned Ministers of the Gospel declare simply, in effect,

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

"Hey do whatever you wanna do, but as for us-we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.' And so a new week begins for you and me. I do not know about you, but for me- I can not help but to keeping on keeping on for Jesus.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 09:05

Saturday, May 6, 2006

Tradition Lives

This morning we went to see the daughter of a friend receive First Communion at a nearby Roman Catholic Church. I keep hearing about the need for churches to use "seeker friendly" methods to attract today's generation. Well, it was a real pleasure to sit among at least 700 parishoners, mostly young or middle age contemporary families, participating in a very traditional Mass. Some 50 second graders, dressed in their very best clothes, behaved beautifully. Who says kids can't sit still in church. The Pastor delivered well a very heart felt and carefully articulated message. The focus was on Christ, the meaning of Communion and the children. The children sang and some did readings and prayers. They proceeded in and out very seriously. The building itself is a beautiful and spacious sacred space. People in the pews were very reverent and participated appropriately. It was a wonderful Service well done and without the slightest evidence of proclivity to post modernism. Imagine that!

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:20

Justifiable Racism?

An outstanding local high school senior was just awarded a scholarship from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It covers complete expenses for him to attend MIT and Stanford grad school in California for his PhD in chemical engineering. That will come to about \$500,000. The Gates give these scholarships every year to minority students. That is great and the local Hispanic student sounds like an exceptional, bright young man who should do very well. This is a case of both racism and discrimination. Of course, there is discrimination in every case when schools decide whom they will accept. That is necessary and acceptable. It is rational (and reasonable) discrimination based on individual merit. What is not acceptable is discrimination based on group identity rather than individual identity. Affirmative Action programs are established to help members of racial groups because they are members of that group. By this definition, that is racism. In the case of the local student, we have both racism ("Minorities Only" could apply) and rational discrimination, based on individual merit, among all the minority students who did apply.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 15:34

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 KnowledgeThe 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 FOUNDATIONALTRUTH (FT) It originates in the Mind of God. It is part of what He knows. This is the starting point to Christian EpistemologyThis 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: RevelationDutch 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 problemsRATHER- 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." 17And 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

Would Moses be welcome in today's Church?

I was struck by how politically incorrect today's OT Reading is-Exodus 24:1-18 (NRSV) There was one central authority. It was not in the Community. God was giving orders about what he wanted- The Authority was in Him. No Community was involved in any decisions He was making on behalf of the Community1 [God] said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship at a distance. God decided who was to approach Him in Worship. Some would be allowed and others would not. 2 Moses alone shall come near the LORD; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him." Moses' responsibility was to only pass on, faithfully, what God revealed. 3 Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; The Community was not involved in any of the above matters: They were not involved in determining what God said to Moses or to them. They were not involved in who would lead in Worship or what they would do. The Community had only one decision to make: to obey or not to obey what God revealed.and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." What the Lord wanted was written down. What the Community was to obey was the written Word, The Law, the Scripture4 And Moses wrote down all the words

of the LORD. And he led in a Worship Service, which included the consecration and commitment of the Community to those words. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar ... 5 Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." We have come a long way from Sinai to today's contemporary, post modern, emerging Church. What we read above would never happen today. What does that say about today's po mo church?

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:12

QT Thots

Psalm 105 1 Give thanks to the LORD and call upon his Name; 2 Sing to him, sing praises to him, and [sing] of all his marvelous works. 3 Glory in his holy Name. Every morning begins with a call to worship, especially a call to sing praises to the Lord for all His wonderful works in the world and in our lives. Every morning begins with an invitation-3 ... seek the LORD 4 Search for the LORD and his strength; continually seek his face. It is possible to do the singing without the seeking. That would be a shame. Beyond the words about the Lord, we want the Lord Himself. There is great reward for those who take the time to do this and persist in the effort [seeking and finding the Lord does not normally happen on the fly] For those who make the effort there is this promise-3 ... the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. More than a promise, this is also the experience of the Faithful. Seek the Lord while he wills to be found; call upon him when he draws near... turn to the Lord, and he will have compassion. Every morning begins with a surprise. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

-- -----Isaiah 55:6-11 Every morning, we have our agenda, our To Do List; but we often learn "Man proposes, God disposes." Our thoughts and plans about things are often not God's thoughts and plans on the subject. As we search His Word and listen in prayer, He reveals what He wants for us or of us. That may call for radical change in what we expect of our day- the wise Believer will not stubbornly blow off the wisdom of the Lord.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 09:19

Thursday, May 4, 2006

Looking for a new church? Check out this video

Twice today, I've run into articles about the band, Mercy Me. They contain other interesting material about contemporary Christian Music.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/music/artists/mercyme.html><http://www.christianitytoday.com/music/interviews/2006/mercyme-0506.html>For the record [no pun intended], I've been reading Christianity Today since it began publication in 1956- every issue! It is the one that I consider essential to keep up on what's happening in the world of Evangelicals. That world and the magazine have changed a lot over these 50 years. An acerbic and funny (actually, sad) look at some of the changes can be seen here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtI2pa2m5cg>

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:34

Tuesday, May 2, 2006

Mercy Me

A friend forwarded this link to me. It features what the writer calls "one of the country's most popular evangelical bands". I do not listen to rock music, Christian or otherwise, so I would not know; but some of you do and this might be of interest to you. Mercy
me.<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/27/arts/music/27sann.html?ei=5090&en=5b27e76f13df9f71&ex=1303790400&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&pagewanted=print>

Posted by Cal at 14:21

Code Cracked

Every reviewer I have read, secular and Christian, has severely criticized the book *The DaVinci Code*. It is poorly written and full of inaccuracies and holes in plot and fact. It is being easily debunked by historians and theologians. It is a sieve that holds no truth. So why is it so popular. Many churches are having classes to study the issues. I'm wondering, "Why bother?" I doubt the facts will change anyone's mind. This is another case where something deeper and irrational is at work. I suspect that the popularity of the book [47 million hard covers sold] indicates the growing anti-Catholicism in America. Many people, almost gleefully, have been putting the screws to the Church over the pedophile scandal. The latter was terrible. It is even worse when that tragedy is exploited for the purpose of bringing down the Church. [I write as a Protestant] *The DaVinci Code* feeds into this desire to suspect dark secrets, cover-ups and conspiracies within the history of the Church. I suspect the book and movie also finds a ready audience among Feminists who have their own additional axe to grind with the Church over what they see as suppression of them in the Church (particularly the refusal of Ordination) No amount of study groups learning to refute Dan Brown, the author [actually, a simple thing to do] is going to counter these deep prejudices, fears and personal agendas. Of course, there will be many who simply like a good read and a Tom Hanks movie.

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 09:03

W.W.J.D?

When we woke up a few months ago there were several people, strangers, hanging around in our back yard. It is fenced, and posted clearly with "Private Property. No Trespassing" signs, but they had climbed over. They asked if I had any work around the yard or house to do. I thought of a few odd jobs that no one else in the neighborhood wanted, because I couldn't pay much. Friends of theirs continued to jump the fence and joined the growing number camping on my property. They needed to use our facilities. We said ok. Then they wanted to use the kitchen to cook, then the living room to relax. There were so many, they ran out of room and asked to sleep in the house. They asked us to take care of their children. They were not paying us for any of these things. In fact, I kept paying them to do work around the place. We thought we had become dependent on them. We thought they were saving us money we needed for other things. Today, they all came in and asked us to leave the house we own. They insist it is their right to have it. They refuse to leave and want to settle down here permanently. What should I do? Some of my Christian friends say that I should let them have it- that is the compassionate, Christian thing to do.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 08:39

Monday, May 1, 2006

QT Thots

Psalm 139I can never say I am forgotten: nobody knows, nobody cares; becauseLord, ... you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You trace my journeys and my resting-places and are acquainted with all my ways. God not only knows and cares, He is involved with me, constantly seeking to shape and direct my life-You press upon me behind and before and lay your hand upon me. In all my circumstance He is present. There is nothing I will go through that He is not going to be with me in it- the dark and hard times, as well as the "mountain tops"-Where can I go then from your Spirit? where can I flee from your presence? If I climb up to heaven, you are there; if I make the grave my bed, you are there also. If I ... dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there your hand will lead meand your right hand [will] hold me fast. What I read next is mind-boggling-If I say, 'Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night', Darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike. We are effected by everything: weather, traffic, the boss, accidents, good news and bad news. Our emotions constantly change. We are up. We are down. Sometimes, way down. God "feels our pain", but has this marvelous long range perspective. He remains the same, all the time: always on top of things, in charge, unintimidated by threats of any kind: He is God.He stills storms. They can not drown Him and He knows that. He has peace. And He promises to give His peace to us today.Search me out, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my restless thoughts... and lead me in the way that is everlasting.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 08:20