

Wednesday, January 31, 2007

## **MORE ABOUT MISSIONAL AND EMERGENT**

The current issue of Christianity Today has a very helpful article written by Scot McKnight in which he describes five characteristics ("streams") of the emerging church. They cover and synopsise my own observations. He writes from within the "Conversation", but in a very irenic and humble style. Indeed, the first of his Themes is that many writers within the emerging church movement are given to very provocative rhetoric and he implores them to cool it. He discusses the ties with academic Post Modernism, which is where a lot of critics of the movement focus their attention, especially on the subject of "Truth". McKnight insists "the vast majority of emerging Christians and churches ...don't deny truth, they don't deny that Jesus Christ is truth and they don't deny the Bible is truth." That seems true of most emergers I have read or talked with. However, the proof of that pudding is in definitions of those phrases. There are many in the movement, McKnight affirms, that "embrace the idea that we cannot know truth, or, at least, that we cannot know truth absolutely". Added to that is the serious skepticism or outright rejection of "propositional truth", which I find essential, among Leaders of the Movement. He quotes, with seeming approval, a very controversial Theologian, LeRon Shults

"...fixation with propositions can easily lead to the attempt to use the finite tool of language on an absolute Presence that transcends and embraces all finite reality. Languages are culturally constructed symbol systems that enable humans to communicate by designating one finite reality in distinction from another. The truly infinite God of Christian faith is beyond all our linguistic grasping, as all the great theologians from Irenaeus to Calvin have insisted, and so the struggle to capture God in our finite propositional structures is nothing short of linguistic idolatry." The third major characteristic of the Movement is the one that is most prominent among the emergers I know: "Praxis-oriented". Indeed, McKnight agrees "what most characterizes emerging is ... praxis- how the faith is lived out" He says they are convinced "how a person lives is more important than what he or she believes [orthopraxy before orthodoxy] Focus is almost exclusively on "the way of Jesus" and that seems to be most often encapsulated by Matthew 25. Foremost is the concern of emergers to be "Missional". McKnight says this means, first, participating with God in His redemptive work in the world. Second, participating in a community where this work is occurring [being done] and, third, participating in holistic redemptive work in the world, understood primarily as ministry to and with the Poor and Needy. The latter concern leads into another characteristic of the emergent movement- it's political activism, which means "progressive", Left and [in practice] Democratic. McKnight is worried, however, that this trend could simply lead to "the social Gospel". He further decries the lack of interest in traditional evangelism. But, that could be connected with the last Theme McKnight mentions- a disinterest in, if not a rejection of, "systematic theology". [This is connected with the jettisoning of Absolutes and Truth and propositional Revelation. McKnight doesn't connect these dots, I sure do] Truth is primarily personal. Jesus, a person, is truth. We know "truth" when we know him personally. Truth is discovered in narratives and it can not be captured and confined to some System [such as Calvinism] At the very most, we can say to another, "This is what I believe, but I could be wrong. What do you think? Let's talk." To me, this is what many evangelicals in contemporary churches have been saying (feeling) for years. For a long time, I have been dismayed at those who simply want a simple experience with Jesus ("mere" or core "Christianity") I have heard so often, among such folks, "doctrine divides, we should just love each other". This was before such notions went public in a "Movement". The logical step from this is seen in a strong unwillingness among emergers to draw lines indicating who is in and who is out, i.e.- who is a Christian and who is not. Everyone is on a journey. What really matters, they say, is how we live. Being a Christian is ultimately loving God and loving our neighbor. McKnight ends his essay expressing his belief that the Emerging movement is not going away. He really likes its emphasis on praxis and its missional orientation and believes these will be its greatest influence on evangelicalism over time.

Posted by Cal in Church at 08:36

Tuesday, January 30, 2007

## **WHAT ABOUT AN UNJUST GOVERNMENT?**

This approach to Government [below] assumes that it practices Justice and not injustice. That is the ideal. When Government denies people their Biblical rights, then it has become evil and Christians do not have to obey it. To the view of the Apostle Paul, we must add the view of Apostles, Peter & John. Acts 5:27 Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28 "We [Rulers] gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." 29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! i.e.- Rulers/Government] This is not a call to civil disobedience. Rather, it is a call to passive or non-violent resistance. Christians must not cooperate with, blindly obey, Government, if it is promoting injustice [defined below as transgression of God's Law]. We should refuse to go along with its policies, but not attack or try to overthrow it. Rather, we would accept the consequences- suffering as a Christian for obeying God and pursuing Justice. 1 Peter 3:17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 4:14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. Rev 13:7 [throughout history, governments, on occasion, have been] given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. 9 He who has an ear, let him hear. 10 If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. [read Book of Revelation] Heb 10:32 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. 33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. 35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 13:15

## **BEING SUSPICIOUS OF GOVERNMENT**

There is never-ending debate about specific government programs and line items in the Budget as to whether they are justified in "the war on poverty" and myriads of related subjects from Health to Education. It is very easy to get caught up in the debates and, personally speaking, very confused about details. There are so many projections and so much data, how is the "average" citizen to make informed and intelligent decisions? I need to step back and reaffirm some basic principles and start from there, rather than the more common pragmatic approach, that usually involves the tyranny of the urgent: perceived immediate personal needs that must be met now! As a Reformed Christian, I think what influences my thinking and action about "welfare" and the State the most, of many related ones, are the following four basic principles 1. God is God. The Bible warns, in the most urgent way, about idolatry; especially the worship of the State. Above all, we must be concerned about totalitarianism and, therefore, government intrusion and control over our lives. 2. Human beings are selfish and will always be inclined to serve their own personal (or group) interests. Thus, they not only do not love God with all their hearts, neither do they love their neighbors as they should. Sinners sin. Greed, corruption, crime, violence are an inevitable part of life at home and in the civic community. The first duty of the State is negative: to restrain sin and evil and to protect citizens from each other: Law and Order. Even then, because Government officials themselves are sinners, I tend to suspect or mistrust all that Government does and am cautious in my compliance. 3. The importance and absolute necessity of productive work. This is every person's God-given responsibility for the support of self and extended family, as well as for the good of the civic community (including church). 4. The corollary to the above is the responsibility of extended family and community (including church) to care for its needy and dependent members; especially, true victims of tragedy and hardship, literally those unable to work or care for themselves. These are absolute, Biblical Principles. Everything involving the State is evaluated in their light. If it can be demonstrated that a particular State program or "benefit" will have the long range consequence of compromising these Principles, at the very least, its suspension and endorsement of it by Christians should be very reserved.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 13:07

Monday, January 29, 2007

## **JUSTICE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL GOVERNMENT**

What does God expect of any and all nations? What are the God-given functions of all Nations and of their Rulers and Citizens? Justice. Most simply put, there is Justice when people, animals and the Land are able to enjoy their Rights, as defined by Biblical Law [see previous posts] Injustice is the denial of those Biblical Rights. Isaiah 1:17 seek justice, correct oppression. Isaiah 30:18 the LORD is a God of justice. Isaiah 56:1 the LORD says: "Maintain justice and do what is right" Isaiah 61:8 I, the LORD, love justice Micah 6:8 ...what does the LORD require of you but to do justice Amos 5:15 Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice. This is God's world. He created it with a Plan and Purpose. He created it with Norms and an Order of His design. He wants this world and the people in it to live according to His will. In this way, He is glorified and People experience Life as their Creator intended. Simply put, God is glorified when His Creation and all creatures in it function or live according to His Design. Human Rights are not possible or desirable on any other basis. We must not and will not approach this subject apart from God.

Isaiah 28:17 I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line. God judges a nation, as a nation, by its record and practice of Justice. The issue is not whether a Country is Christian. That is the wrong issue. The right issue is, simply, whether or not a Country is Just. That is the issue in choosing, by vote or appointment, all Leaders: Is the candidate (for any position) just? Is a proposed Program, Policy, Budget or Bill just? Isaiah 59:1 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. [This is addressed to the Nation, not individuals] 3 For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things. 4 No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil. 6 ... acts of violence are in their hands. 7... they are swift to shed innocent blood. ...ruin and destruction mark their ways. 8 The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace. 9 So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. 11 ... We look for justice, but find none; for deliverance, but it is far away. 14 So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. 15 Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. 16 He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene. Inasmuch as God judges a nation, a people, by the yardstick of Justice, we must know- "What is Justice?" The following is the Biblical definition of Justice. There are two aspects. I.) Justice is God providing and securing those rights that He has decreed for all people, the environment and animals; but, especially for His Covenant People. II.) Justice is God punishing those people, groups and nations who deny or deprive people, the Land animals or, especially, His Covenant People the rights and responsibilities He has given them. The Hebrew word translated as "Justice" is "ts@daqah" [sed ah kah]. It is most often translated as "righteousness". The Righteousness of God is God acting rightly. God acts rightly when He is just. God is just when He keeps His Promise, especially His Covenant with His People, that He will defend their Rights and punish those who deny them those rights.

<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Dictionaries/BakersEvangelicalDictionary/bed.cgi> Why is Justice so important to God? This is God's world. Injustice ruins it. God had a Design for His Creation. It can not be what He intends it to be as long as there is injustice. Injustice is a violation of God's Norms and Laws. Those reveal His character and will. Injustice contradicts and assaults God's character and denies His will. God is Sovereign of this world. Injustice say He is not. Injustice is an insult and affront to all God is. God establishes Justice directly by His action in history. Seen often in Old Testament Luke 1:51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. Daniel 2:20 Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, ... 21 ... He removes kings and sets up kings; Psalm 75:7 it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another. Psalm 107:40 he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes; 41 but he raises up the needy out of affliction. God establishes Justice indirectly through Government [Rulers, Judges, Courts] We must have freedom to exercise our rights, as well as have them safeguarded and preserved. This is the function of government 1. to provide for social, economic, political and religious freedom and the protection of such persons. 2. to protect and restrain all that which demeans, exploits, neglects, injures or destroys persons. RO 13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 3 ... rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Rom 13:6 This is why you

pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. What that means and how it works out in practice is explained in the Articles on my website [Biblical Principles of Civil Government](http://www.calvinfox.com/web/civilgov.html) <http://www.calvinfox.com/web/civilgov.html> Government and Justice (coming soon)

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 22:34

## **BEING MISSIONAL- Part 3 CONTEXTUALIZATION**

Missional churches and missionary agencies that want to be missional [as described in previous posts] are concerned with "contextualizing". That simply means to express or fit a concept, in this case, the Gospel, into a particular or local cultural context (like a word into a sentence or a sentence into a paragraph, etc) The current issue of the International Bulletin of Missionary Research has an article by Francis Adeney, Professor of Evangelism and Global Mission at a Presbyterian Seminary, entitled "Contextualizing Universal Values: A Method for Christian Mission". [Note the singular "mission"] The Professor has some valuable suggestions and good illustrations for this process; she also has serious errors that undermine her argument. She states, "The translatability of the Gospel into various cultural forms is one of the special features of Christianity. Understanding different cultures and translating the Gospel into forms that are indigenous to or compatible with those settings is a crucial task of contemporary mission." This is contextualization and it is fundamental to being missional.

First error, and my most serious misgiving about this whole missional, contextualizing effort, is demonstrated by the professor moving on to saying, "the Gospel message...is embodied in certain universal values that need to be identified and translated into diverse cultural forms. If the values are not articulated and practiced in fitting ways in a particular culture, Christianity will remain a foreign religion..." Notice here that she is seeking to contextualize the "principles" and not the Gospel itself. That is the error. The ever present temptation in all efforts to be missional is to reshape, even to the point of perverting, the Gospel into "forms" that fit the local pagan culture. The Professor's Gospel becomes values. In this case, the values become "Gender Equality". What drives Professor Adeney is what she perceives to be the woeful oppression of women around the world. She gives good examples of this oppression. This is her great concern and the burden on her heart. In turn, it influences what she understand Scripture to say, the meaning of the Gospel itself and the purpose of "Mission". It is all about the liberation of oppressed women. Other Christians talk the same way about the "Poor" (the majority of whom are, in fact, women and children) "Reflecting on the woes and oppression of women and girls throughout the world may strengthen our resolve to uphold gender equality as a value that is at the core of Christ's compassion for the world." Is this really "at the core"? We have here a reworking of what the Gospel is about. This is further indicated by the author's conviction that "the power of the Gospel [is, she says,] to change cultures, shift values, reorganize structures and modify traditional practices". The Scripture says the Gospel is the power of God unto personal salvation (Romans 1:16) and is, first of all, about personal redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7 cf Luke 24:47). Out of this, out of regeneration and saving faith, come the changes in society. The many practical suggestions made, and examples give in the article, from the author's experience of several years in Indonesia (Java) for contextualizing this value are applicable to efforts to contextualize any value anywhere. These methods or strategies would work for secular values, as well as Christian ones. Mostly, they involve various ways of learning to understand the host culture and for dialoging with, mostly asking questions and listening to, the people of that culture. She sees not doing that as the greatest failure of Westerners and the greatest skill they have to learn. There is danger in this as well. The conversation either starts out with multiculturalism's values or leads to them. I have written elsewhere of the errors of multiculturalism and its cousins, moral and religious pluralism and syncretism. Another article in this same IBMR is the autobiographical account of a career missionary to India. After years of dialogue and growing appreciation for his Hindu "hosts", the Missionary says he now considers himself to be a Hindu-Christian! "As communities are reformed by the Gospel, questions about women's worth, status and roles will arise." How does Dr. Adeney come to her conclusions about the Gospel and Gender Equality? Now we come to the another serious danger in matters missional. I find that this subject (and others associated with emerging-missional churches) are often based on a particular approach to Scripture. Everyone tries to claim the authority of Scripture for what they believe and do. The claim that the root problem with old-line church denominations is with the authority of Scripture is not really accurate. I have made that claim myself, many times. I have come to realize that. Listening to them, they claim to be following the Word. My left-leaning evangelical friends make the same claim. "The Bible says..."- "no, the Bible says..." Yada, yada, yada. The real issue is hermeneutical. Dr Adeney insists strongly that, when we come to the Scripture, we absolutely must "lay aside one's own prejudices, becoming open to the 'foreign text'- in this case- another culture- as a way to acquire knowledge [of what it means]." We must do our reflection on the text "from within their culture", as well, in this case, study it in dialogue with actual oppressed women and formal studies in gender and ethics (known as "Women's' Studies" in academia). When we study the Scripture, we must do so within communities which share the same concerns, in this case, Gender Equality; with a knowledge of history and tradition, especially as to the place and

roles of women in Society- ours and those of the hosts; using the newer Bible translations and the latest Biblical scholarship. Most of all, "rather than basing a theology... on difficult Pauline passages, we would do better to focus on the cultural setting in which the apostle operated, which might illumine passages in a new way." Compare this with the following statement-"We oppose appeals to isolated texts and outmoded traditions. Scriptures which were written in different times and in the context of a very different culture may reflect that culture more than they reflect Divine intent. For example, we believe those texts which absolutely forbid divorce, or require women to be subservient to their husbands, do not express the will of God for our culture." [www.lmfct.org](http://www.lmfct.org) This is from a Petition signed by perhaps a hundred Pro-Gay Marriage Clergy in Connecticut. The key arbiter as to what is the will of God for our culture (any culture) is "our culture"! Old-line denominational leaders and clergy insist they follow the Scripture, approaching it in this way. Our problem is with their hermeneutics. Unfortunately, many evangelicals do not have any problem with them. Eventually, it will become clear that the debate is about something deeper. More than different principles for interpreting the Scripture, the debate will reveal that there is a different understanding of the very nature of the Scripture being interpreted. The graduate school, on whose staff Dr Adeney serves, is an official theological seminary of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. The Mission Statement of Louisville Seminary declares this:"We confess the Scriptures to be the unique and authoritative witness to God's redemptive love for the world." Notice, Scripture is "unique and authoritative" - not ultimate or final or inerrant authority. Furthermore, the Book is a "witness to"- not the verbal propositional revelation of ... and "witness to God's redemptive love"- not to the Gospel or God's Plan of Redemption. Truth is not even mentioned."As an institution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Seminary has a particular responsibility to preserve and develop the values and insights of the Reformed tradition." To me, claiming to be Reformed, this statement is an embarrassment. The school does have that responsibility, but I do not believe it has kept it. People who approach the Bible as God-breathed (verbally inspired) from beginning to end, the inerrant propositional revelation of God, will understand its meaning very differently than those who approach the Book with any other understanding of what it is. Hermeneutics are essential; but they are grounded in presuppositions that, by definition, precede hermeneutics. Such presuppositions, in turn, are grounded in Theology, particularly the nature of God and how He makes Himself known and the nature of fallen Man and how he knows. Reformed Christians, by definition are Calvinists. To claim to be Reformed and not be Calvinist is a contradiction [The way non-Calvinists get around this is by changing the classic definitions of such Calvinist basics as the 5 Doctrines of Grace (T.U.L.I.P.) I have written about them in previous posts.] The approach to Scripture taken by Dr Adeney is based, ultimately, on the idea that people are good and are capable, using natural processes, of judging what God has said. In effect, they are saying human beings and their culture determine what the Word of God means for today. They sit above the Word. And, yes, this brings us back to the topic of authority: God or Man? I guess in the end, that is what it is all about. Missional-minded people, beware!

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:49

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

### **AN INSPIRING, ENCOURAGING HYMN**

HYMN Words: William Cowper, 1779 Sometimes a light surprisesthe Christian while he sings;it is the Lord who riseswith healing in his wings:when comforts are declining,he grants the soul againa season of clear shining,to cheer it after rain.In holy contemplationwe sweetly then pursuethe theme of God's salvation,and find it ever new;set free from present sorrow,we cheerfully can say,let the unknown tomorrowbring with it what it may,It can bring with it nothingbut he will bear us through:who gives the lilies clothingwill clothe his people, too:beneath the spreading heavensno creature but is fed;and he who feeds the ravenswill give his children bread.Though vine nor fig tree neithertheir wonted fruit should bear,though all the fields should wither,nor flocks nor herds be there;yet, God the same abiding,his praise shall tune my voice;for, while in him confiding,I cannot but rejoice.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 08:14

Saturday, January 20, 2007

## **BEWARE THE MEMES**

My QT Thots passage, yesterday, was based on a part of Romans 12. We are told there not to conform to this age (world). As I think how very much conformed we all are, I wonder that we make any progress at all in being transformed, learning and doing the will of God. Off hand, I'd say there are at least 7 memes of our times or age that greatly affect (or infect) Christians and how we read our Bibles. [Meme (rhymes with gene): "A unit of cultural information, such as a cultural practice or idea, that is transmitted verbally or by repeated action from one mind to another"] INTERCHANGEABLENESS OF WOMEN (WITH MEN) PRIORITY OF RELATIONSHIPS esp. COMMUNITY REJECTION OF PUNISHMENT IMPORTANCE OF FREEDOM OF CHOICE REJECTION OF AUTHORITY SUSPICION OF WORDS AND REASON IMPORTANCE OF ENTITLEMENT Obviously, all of these concepts and current cultural values need to be defined and explained. They are very influential, in play everywhere. They are indispensable in understanding American culture. They are all seriously problematic to Christians seeking to not conform to this Age.

They certainly effect how we interpret Scripture, because we come to that task under the influence of these memes. For example, if we reject the concept of capital punishment, considering it to be cruel, dehumanizing and oppressive (unchristian), we will then reject outright the doctrine that the death of Jesus was a just punishment for the sins of the world, a penal substitution of an innocent person for the guilty ("His blood was shed for me" Horrible!) If we value freedom of choice, when we read the Bible we will not find doctrine of the bondage of the will to Sin within nor the doctrine that all are lost unless God Himself chooses to set them free from that bondage. Indeed, we will find in the Bible texts that teach a God who is open, responsive and controlled by our freedom of will, conforming His to ours. He will not be a God who is Sovereign over all and who predestines anything. (He, too, values our freedom over His own) You see where I'm going here? If we are not to conform to this Age, we must not act under the influence of the memes of this Age. If we are to find God's will in the Bible, we must not only not read it in terms of Enlightenment, Modernist presuppositions; but also not with the conceit and self-deception that we have no presuppositions of current coinage. We do and they must be recognized.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 17:07

Friday, January 19, 2007

## **QT THOTS**

My wife and I have been sick and confined to bed most of the last 3 weeks, but are gradually coming out of the cave of coughs and congestion. Thus, I haven't been doing much writing; but I expect to resume over the weekend. We have not stopped praying. Romans 12:1-8 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your [gifts] as a living sacrifice, ... to God, [this] is your spiritual worship. How can I best serve [worship] God? By discovering and using the gifts he has given me. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: We have gifts! Each one of us has at least one gift. Some many have more than one. None of us have "nothing to offer". Here is one short list. There are other lists and other gifts. Each is from the Lord and given to us in God's plan for our lives. Note that none of them is a Profession in itself nor are they gender or age specific or confined to a church box Preaching, proclaiming, communicating, pastoring (shepherding), teaching, mentoring, exhortation, counseling, generosity, hospitality, leading, organizing, compassion, works of mercy, be transformed by the renewing of your minds, ... to think ... according to the [gift] that God has assigned. Many of us would be transformed, if we learn to think about ourselves, our lives, according to our God-given gifts and abilities, our aptitudes and strengths. This means not measuring ourselves in terms of others or of their expectations of us. Our assignment today is to be what God has assigned us to be

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 09:10

Thursday, January 18, 2007

## **BEING MISSIONAL- Part 2**

This article continues one posted below about "Being a Missional" Church on 12-22-06. Along with the serious changes today in the world of church, are serious changes in the world of missions. Of course, they are inseparable. Most of these changes are driven by the conviction that the Gospel must be communicated cross-culturally, if it is to be communicated effectively. What works in rural, white Appalachia will not work in the inner city Hispanic barrio or in Silicon Valley, CA. The Gospel must be contextualized, while remaining true to itself. It is a big topic. For many years now the word "missional" has been used by all kinds of missionary agencies and denomination as they seek for innovative methods to be effective communicators of the Gospel in today's many and diverse worlds (cross-culturally). Here are two links that are helpful. The second one is a long, but good, article that connects "missional" with "emergent". That is significant. <http://www.mliweb.net/index.html> [http://www.mliweb.net/newsletter\\_june05.html](http://www.mliweb.net/newsletter_june05.html) The meaning and use of "missional", for many, has moved from methodology to ecclesiology. This is a major shift in the use of the term. Missional is now about the nature of the local church. Its life is missional. The original focus on how traditional agencies and churches can learn new methods by which to communicate the Gospel has become a focus on how churches themselves change in order to communicate the Gospel by who they are. The meaning and use of "missional", for many, has moved from methodology to ecclesiology. This is a major shift in the use of the term. Missional is now about the nature of the local church. Its life is missional. The original focus on how traditional agencies and churches can learn new methods by which to communicate the Gospel has become a focus on how churches themselves change in order to communicate the Gospel by who they are. Here is what I gather to be a fair description of what is happening--...the "Emergent Movement," [is] a fast-growing group of large, moderate-to-left evangelical churches passionately committed to practicing "church" as mission (i. e., the church = mission) in today's postmodern context. For too long (in the view of the Emergents), churches have viewed mission as a special vocation of the few, who have been trained and commissioned for a unique task. Rather, the church must be the mission in its very essence; it must be the incarnation of evangelism, discipleship and spiritual formation. In other words, mission is not the unique task for the few, but the life God designed for all Christians in community. This re-orientation toward reaching out to unbelievers at almost all costs has led to the questioning by some Emergents of older evangelical certitudes like the strict infallibility of the Bible and even the exclusivity of the Christian Faith; instead, it draws unbelievers into the story of Jesus' Gospel lived out in the Christian faith-community. The Emergent churches have been dramatically successful in their "missional" objective — the church is not merely to practice missions but rather to see itself as the mission: the church incarnates the reality of Christian life to a lost and dying world. This incarnational approach to the Faith squares neatly with a postmodern age little concerned with rational arguments and truth claims but alert to communal life and authenticity.--Andrew Sandlin 12-6-06 <http://www.christianculture.com> From my reading, this newer meaning of missional is becoming the dominant one. Here is how one such emergent and missional group explains itself--"We value the adoration of Jesus Christ and worshiping him through obedience, and through musical and artistic expression. We live with the prophetic call of scripture to go higher in our consecration and devotion to Jesus and his gospel. We are willing apprentices of Jesus so we can learn how to live for God, as though all we are and all we have are for his sake." Inner Traditions Ministries exists to: cultivate adoration of Jesus; fuel initiatives that encourage becoming apprenticed to Jesus Christ; facilitate caring for the poor; pioneer and encourage authentic missional community house-to-house around the world; encourage family life and the value of children; promote dialogue about community and faith in a postmodern world; re-enfranchise weak and ordinary people in faith communities; We purpose to make the daily choice to esteem: God's kingdom over religion; relationship over program; authenticity over excellence; meals together; the risk of faith over personal comfort; art and music over power; point ordinary people over experts; Jesus over all. <http://www.innertraditionsministries.com/visionandvalues.htm> Here are important quotes from influential writers in this field--"The churches shaped by the Reformation were left with a view of the church that was not directly intended by the Reformers, but nevertheless resulted from the way that they spoke about the church. Those churches came to conceive the church as 'a place where certain things happened.' The Reformers emphasized as the 'marks of the true church' that such a church exists wherever the gospel is rightly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and (they sometimes added) church discipline exercised. . . . Over time, these 'marks' narrowed the church's definition of itself toward a 'place where' idea. . . . This perception of the church gives little attention to the church as a communal entity or presence, and it stresses even less the community's role as the bearer of missional responsibility throughout the world, both near and far away." -- (Huntsburger in *Missional Church* 1998: 79). "The calling of the church in every culture is to be mission. That is, the work of the church is not to be an agent or servant of the culture. The churches' business is not to maintain freedom or to promote wealth or to help a political party or to serve as the moral guide to culture. The church's mission is to be the presence of the kingdom. . . . The church's mission is to show the world what it looks like when a community of people live under the reign of God" (Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 2002, 133). Incarnation means that

God enables divinity to embody humanity. Christians, like Jesus, are God's incarnations, God's temples, tabernacling in human flesh (John 1:14; Phil. 2:3-8). Christians, spiritually transformed into the image of God, carry out God's ministry in God's way. Frequently incarnationalists relate to seekers from other world religions personally and empathetically (as Jesus taught Nicodemus). Sometimes, however, they declare God's social concerns by shaking up the status quo and "cleaning out the temple." The end result of incarnation in a non-Christian world is always some form of crucifixion. (Gailyn Van Rhee, *Engaging Trends in Missions*, 2004). "The early church apologetic may be rightly called an 'incarnational apology.' The church is the continuation of the incarnation. It is the earthed reality of the presence of Jesus in and to the world. Herein lies the ancient apologetic. The church by its very existence is a witness to the presence of God in history (Eph. 3:10). There is only one actual incarnation of God and that is in Jesus Christ, but the church, being his body, sustains an incarnational dimension. The church is a witness to the presence of Jesus in the world as it embodies and lives out its faith" (Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, Baker, 2002, p. 95). "Unfortunately, evangelicals in mission still tend to proceed as though their major problems are methodological. They are not. They are theological. It would be to their everlasting credit if evangelicals would devote themselves, their organizations and their conferences to frequent and thorough studies of the Christian mission as set forth in the biblical text. By its very nature, biblical mission entails clear biblical priorities. When we set agendas in accordance with human preferences and interests, the idea that we either have, or obey, a Great Commission is belied. When we redefine mission so as to encompass anything and everything the church and believers actually do, or even ought to do, we surrender the distinctive priorities of the Christian mission and risk assignment of the word to the terminological dustbin. Rather than setting still newer agendas as some are already doing, evangelicals should first set the boundaries of evangelical mission." -- (David J. Hesselgrave, *Evangelical Mission in 2001 and Beyond--Who Will set the Agenda?* Pre-publication of TWF article, email attachment, April 5, 2001). And this next writer moves the subject from ecclesiology to Theology proper--"Mission [is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It [is] thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world." (David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, N.Y.:Orbis, 1991, 390.) All of this is indeed a major paradigm shift that must be reckoned with. A good summary can be found at [http://www.urbana.org/\\_articles.cfm?RecordId=993](http://www.urbana.org/_articles.cfm?RecordId=993) Note this is on the Urbana (IVCF) website

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:30

## **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY FOR ME FROM ROCKY BALBOA**

My wife and I have really been under the weather with sinus infections, acute bronchitis and conjunctivitis (all at once). It will be 3 weeks this weekend. Thus, I have not been able to function well and have done nothing on this Blog for awhile (as you know) Hopefully, we are now on the mend and will be back- including new articles on my static website. I appreciate your prayers and patience. This quote for the day is from an interview of Sly Stallone by CT movie critic. I like it! What do you want audiences to take away from Rocky Balboa? Stallone: That life is full of peaks and valleys, and when you reach a certain age you have to make some strong decisions on how to live the last of your life. You may feel as though your worth has come and gone, that you don't contribute that much to society any more. But that's not true. This is about fighting for respect, the ability to go on and be a constructive and useful citizen to yourself and to the people you love. It's a story about symbols and metaphor, and how older people wonder, "Has the best of life come and gone?" I believe it hasn't. I just want to show that the heart is the last thing to age in somebody. You still have that fire inside, and it needs to be released. But often society goes, "No, you had your moments, so just move on and watch the parade go by." I'm not ready to watch the parade go by. And what Rocky has lost in skill, he's made up in will." <http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/interviews/sylvesterstallone.html>

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 10:43

Friday, January 12, 2007

## **QT THOTS**

The Oremus page is down today- it can not be reached. I am down today, too. This is our 11th day feeling miserable. Both my wife and I have very bad head and chest colds. I do not feel up to singing and praising the Lord this morning. Actually, with our sore throats we can not. I just want to go back to bed. Ever have a day like this? Sure you have. And there's the lesson. We don't have to always be up and atem for the Lord. The Lord knows when we are sidelined. He is still ok. He is still here whether we "feel" His presence or not. He is still in control. We walk by faith, not by feelings anyway. Right? On these days, we just need to let go and rest in His keeping, while He does His thing. Sometimes, that is the reason He allows us to be down, so we have to look up.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 08:01

Monday, January 8, 2007

## "WHY WE LEFT THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH"

The following are excerpts from an article of that title by The Rev. John Yates and Os Guinness, January 8, 2007... we believe it is time to set the record straight as to why our church and so many others around the country have severed ties with the Episcopal Church. The core issue for us is theological: Some leaders expressly deny the central articles of the faith -- Episcopal leaders openly denying what their faith once believed Episcopal revisionism negates the authority of faith. The "sola scriptura" ("by the scriptures alone") doctrine of the Reformation church has been abandoned for the "sola cultura" (by the culture alone) way of the modern church.... the Episcopal Church today is either its own authority or finds its authority in the shifting winds of intellectual and social fashion -- which is to say it has no authority. Episcopal revisionism severs the continuity of faith. Cutting itself off from the universal There is so little that is distinctively Christian left in the theology of some Episcopal leaders, Episcopal revisionism obliterates the very identity of faith. the great truths of the Bible and the creeds are abandoned These are the infidelities that drive us to separate. We remain Anglicans but leave the Episcopal Church because the Episcopal Church first left the historic faith. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/07/AR2007010700982\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/07/AR2007010700982_pf.html)

In 1976, having gone through great personal crisis as a Pastor, I turned to the 1928 Book of Common Prayer of the, then, Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. God used the contents of that Book to comfort and sustain me as a Christian. In 1982, I knelt before a Bishop of that Church (then called The Episcopal Church U.S.A) and became a confirmed member of it. That was a major spiritual moment in my Christian life. I found the Liturgy and, especially, the Communion Service (the Eucharist) to be a real means of grace to me. Learning more, I came to greatly value the History and tradition of the Church and was glad to be a part of a Church extending back, through the Church of England and the Reformation, through the Roman Catholic Church, back to the Orthodox and Catholic Church of the first Centuries to the Church of the earliest Christians. That historical continuity is important to me, as I believe Christ did indeed institute His Church (established it as a formal organization with a Ministry (Clergy), Sacraments and Discipline, as well as a Mission as His Body on earth) with the promise that it would never be destroyed. That Church still exists and has a glorious future. It's nice to be a member of it, especially appreciating and identifying with its historic, Protestant and Reformed "wing" associated with such men as C.S. Lewis, John Stott and J.I. Packer. I sought ordination in the Church, but was denied as unqualified. Having been ordained by Baptist churches in 1961 to The Gospel Ministry, I continued, after Confirmation, to preach and be an interim Pastor for several Protestant congregations. Unable to be an Episcopal Priest, I was glad to simply Minister in any way I could, respecting whatever Church that gave me the opportunity. When I accepted a call to be a full-time pastor, in my last church, I knew it was neither Episcopal nor Reformed. It was a very middle of the road mix of contemporary evangelical and conservative, traditional Baptist type Church with some Plymouth Brethren influence. I tried to work within what it was and did not try to make it Episcopal or Reformed. I was simply glad to have the opportunity to preach and teach the basic Gospel and Bible material ("Mere Christianity") every week and to be an old fashioned, real Pastor ("Shepherd"); visiting and caring for "my flock", seeking to build it up, in the traditional Baptist type way in which I had been ordained. (Half a loaf is better than none.) There were blessing in doing this, I was there 5 years and that was 3½ years ago. I am glad to be free now to pursue my long time theological interests. That includes again being a Reformed Anglican. That leads me back to the original topic. The ECUSA, now called, simply, The Episcopal Church (TEC) has changed for the worse and is in great conflict. Where do I fit in to it today? We decided not to get involved with that conflict when we moved back here and so began attending a small Presbyterian (Reformed) Church. We like the people there, who were very welcoming, as well as the young Pastor, serving his first church. We soon realized that though officially Reformed, this church in practice is a mix of liberal mainline characteristics, a small and conservative congregational culture and contemporary evangelical faith and practice. None of this is what I want. Meanwhile, the Episcopalian parish we used to attend, after a painful split, now has a quiet, older and mature man of God, who is evangelical and they offer the Liturgy and Eucharist, which I value greatly. There, we would be back in the Church, in which we were confirmed, exactly 25 years ago this month. But then there is the statement, quoted at the beginning of this post. These men are solid, mature men of God. Why should I now get involved in the Church, when men like them are leaving it? Most of the evangelical Episcopalians we knew from the local Parish (St David's) left it some time ago and are now active in a variety of other non-Episcopal evangelical churches. One thing: evangelical is not enough! I am again flying my Reformed banner and do not want to lower it now. And evangelical is not Reformed by any stretch (although Reformed can be evangelical) St David's is not really Reformed, but the Episcopal Church, in its history and heritage and Prayer Book is. There is the problem. Many of the major players in the Church (TEC) are definitely not conservative, evangelical or Reformed. In fact, many of them, including the new Presiding Bishop, are heretics. Many of the other leaders (Bishops), in my mind, are simply middle-of-the-road, compromising for the sake of unity (and their jobs) Managers ("Churchmen"). It is significant that no

one in this Diocese seems to admit of any conflict in the wider Church at all, or at least nothing to worry about- it will all blow over. Let's just do our thing locally. But they all still observe the Liturgy and celebrate the Eucharist and function according to the Prayer Book. This means that the two writers quoted above are mistaken. They can not say that the Episcopal Church as such, officially, has left the Faith. It has not. Certain top Leaders definitely have. There are many other Leaders in the Church who uphold the orthodox and Reformed Faith of the Prayer Book and the Church's official Standards. These Standards have not yet been revoked, even while some of the Leaders ignore them or personally do not agree with them. They are 'bad apples' in the barrel. There are still good ones in there, too. To declare the entire barrel to be rotten is not true or fair. If the hand that serves me Communion at the Altar does not belong to an orthodox Priest, the bread is still the Body of Christ, the wine is still the Blood of Christ. Thankfully, the latter is not contingent upon the former, but upon the Scriptural Words pronounced over them and the saving faith within the heart of those receiving them. Besides the theologically and Biblical stalwarts still in the Church, including our son and his Bishop (an old college friend) there is the Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry (TESM). The Board, Staff and Faculty of this Seminary, from which our son and his colleagues graduated, are all committed still to the historic, reformed Anglican Faith and this is the largest Seminary affiliated with TEC. It is also the major training ground for the leaders and clergy of the growing Church of the Global South (especially Africa). As long as it remains and continues its present work, there is good, and reason for hope, in TEC. In addition, there are several solid evangelical missionary organizations, and their workers, affiliated with TEC, active throughout the world. The battle is not lost yet. So, I guess we remain for now and have a go at it, again. We do not know, my wife and I, what this will actually involve in practice. If we lived somewhere else, we might consider Parishes affiliated with other expressions of the world-wide Anglican Communion, such as the Reformed Episcopal Church in Maryland, to which my webmaster and his family belong (one of our daughters and her husband and their children) and another longtime friend in NYC; but, there are none anywhere around here in Western Mass or Connecticut.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 12:54

### **THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUOTE**

"It is a great blessing to have the way to the past barred, to be unable to make peace with the present and to have no where to go but forward." Leander Harding, TESM

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 12:49

### **QT THOTS**

My wife has had a bad cold for several days, feeling miserable. Others in our family are struggling with "stuff" and it is raining out. So I was hoping for something uplifting and inspiring, even comforting, from my Devotions this morning [same as you, right?] What I found were these three readings, which I have abridged-Psalm 21 Why are the nations in tumult, and why do the peoples devise a vain plot? 2 The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed: 3 'Let us break their bonds asunder and cast away their cords from us.' Sorry, but the news headlines and the condition of our world appears the same today as it was last week. Pagans and Secularists and myriads of sinners are still all arraigned against their King, Jesus Christ. There is but one verse in the Bible where it says God laughs. This is it-4 He who dwells in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision. 5 Then shall he speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury: 6 I [have] set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.' 7 I said ... 'You are my Son; this day have I begotten you. 8...I will give you the nations for your inheritance This is the Word of the Lord to all those with power in our world-10 Now therefore be wise, O kings; be prudent, you judges of the earth. 11 Serve the Lord with fear, and with trembling kiss his feet, lest he be angry and you perish from the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Psalm 110 This is one of the most quoted Psalms from the OT in the NT. It is about Christ-2 the Lord [shall] stretch forth the sceptre of [his] power; 6 In all his majesty, he shall judge among the nations, smiting heads over all the wide earth. And then I read this wonderful prophecy-2 Though night still covers the earth, and darkness the peoples; 1 Arise, shine out, for light has come, the glory of the Lord is rising Let that sink in: though darkness still covers the earth and its peoples light has come, the glory of the Lord is rising Hallelujah! That is encouraging today. We are on the Lord's side and that is the winning side. I don't know if the Patriots will beat the Chargers next week, but I absolutely know that the Lord will defeat the Devil and his minions! Truth shall prevail. Faith shall rout Unbelief. Our work is not in vain. "Stuff" will not get us down! 3. Above you the Holy One arises, and above you God's glory appears. Repeat that: Above you the Holy One arises, and above you God's glory appears. 4 nations will come to ... light, and kings to ... dawning brightness. Isaiah 60.1-3, 11a, 18, 19, 14b

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 09:28

Sunday, January 7, 2007

## **IS THERE A CHRISTIAN CULTURE?**

In the right hand column of this page, there is a box that says "Quick Search". You may use it to find articles about topics of interest that I have posted on this Blog. One year ago, I posted the following one about Christian Culture. I had asked if there is such a thing. Saturday, January 14, 2006 ... the answer depends on how we define the word "culture". I will repeat here, what I said about this in posts last August...In defining Christian culture [I am greatly simplifying here], it is essential to distinguish it from "Civilization". The latter involves government and economics and such subjects as the arts, literature, philosophy, the sciences and history. It is also very important to distinguish between Core Culture and Peripheral Culture. The former has to do with those core beliefs, morals and values that bind a group together. The latter has to do with preferences and tastes in manners, food, clothing, decorative arts, customs and traditions such as Rites of Passage (coming of age rituals, weddings, anniversaries, birthdays). There is, and should be, a lot of diversity in all of these peripheral cultural matters. When I say that there a Christian Culture, I refer to core beliefs, morals and values which are Biblical and essential. Core Christian Culture (CCC) ideally includes the following: Life- CCC highly values and honors creation and life. It is very pro-life in every sense. Marriage- CCC honors marriage, defined as a life-long, committed relationship between a man and a woman. Divorce is generally considered a sin. Virginity and Chastity are greatly valued. Sexual intercourse [between anyone] outside of marriage is a sin. Unwed mothers are unheard of and single parents are those who have lost their lawful spouse to death. Family- In CCC, children are desired and valued; extended, cross generational families are the norm; honor (respect) of parents by their children, and of the elderly, by everyone, is expected. Work- CCC places a very high value on work: everyone who is able works throughout life, for the welfare of the family and community. [Social, Economic, Political] Freedom to do this is highly valued. Welfare- People who become poor (particularly widows and orphans) in the CCC are the responsibility-first, of the extended family and then, of the church [and local community] Individual Responsibility- CCC holds individual persons accountable and responsible for their decisions and actions Religion- CCC, above all, is religious. It is centered on the worship and service of the God who has revealed Himself in Creation, Scripture and, particularly, in Jesus Christ. CCC is Christian. People who share CCC see themselves as the Covenant People of God. This is their primary identity, no matter what their ethnic origin [language or nationality] may be. [To repeat, Core Christian Culture is different than Christian Civilization. The latter includes Education, Civil Government and an Economic System, the former being based on Biblical Epistemology and the latter organized along Biblical principles.]

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 21:03

Saturday, January 6, 2007

## **AN ENJOYABLE AND WORTHWHILE THEOLOGICAL READ**

This afternoon, I have enjoyed reading these articles about, and by, renowned Bible Scholar, N.T. Wright. If you like very serious Biblical exposition, written in an engaging and very accessible manner, full of practical application with a twist of controversy that will make you think, I recommend these articles and others found on the Wright website. You won't go wrong.  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/january/22.38.html>  
[http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_New\\_Perspectives.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_New_Perspectives.htm)  
[http://www.trinity-pres.net/essays/bombing-theologians\\_Wright-review.pdf](http://www.trinity-pres.net/essays/bombing-theologians_Wright-review.pdf)

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 16:01

## **GETTING IT STRAIGHT**

It is not about us, about people. Our Mission is about GOD. It is not about eliminating poverty. It is not about saving souls. It is not about helping people with personal problems. Our Mission, as Christians, as the Church, is about lifting high the Name, making Him known, declaring His Glory to all. We have it backwards. Our Message is: "Behold your God!" Read Isaiah 40:3-10. When we get this straight and we publish the Good News about Him and what He has and is doing in the world, then, but only then, will we see souls saved and society really changed for the better.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:13

## **BEING MISSIONAL**

I thought the largest sector of the local work force in Greater Springfield was Insurance, Health and Education. Turns out that the largest sector is actually "Trade, Transportation and Utilities" -Wholesalers, Warehouse Workers, Retail Sales Automobile Dealers, Bus, Taxi and Truck Drivers, Gas Station Attendants, Airport workers of all kinds, Oil, Gas, Electrical Power, Water and Sewage Workers. Next major job sector is "Education and Health". After that, in descending order, comes Government, Manufacturing, Legal, Accounting and Computer Business services, Leisure and Hospitality ("Financial Services", which include banking, insurance and securities, is a small percentage of total). Jobless rate remains flat at 4.8% - That has been considered normal for decades. Imagine, more than 95% of eligible workers have jobs!! If we want to pay our bills and be "missional" Christians, living for Christ in the work world- these are the "mission fields" to go into around here.

Posted by Cal at 10:00

## **CELEBRATING THE DAY WHEN KINGS SHALL BOW**

Psalm 97:9 For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. 1 Chronicles 16:26 For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Psalm 96:3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. Psalm 113:4 The LORD is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens. Today is Epiphany, the end of the Twelve Days of Christmas. It is the day on which we move the figurines of the "Three Kings" into the Manger scene. A time of great celebration for many Christians, a day to give gifts to each other. But Epiphany is not about gift giving. It is all about Missions. These figures symbolize the Gentile Nations, coming to bow before their new King, the King over all Kings and Nations. This is prophesied. This shall happen! Epiphany anticipates that Day and so should we!

Posted by Cal in Church at 08:56

Friday, January 5, 2007

## **TESTING A TEENAGER'S DECISION**

Many Denominations are embroiled in debates which come down to the issue of Authority, especially the authority of the Bible. Many conservative Christians also argue about issues and they, too, come down to the authority of the Bible. The next major decision I made as a teenager, after coming to saving faith in Jesus, was to accept and live by the authority of the Bible. I was a new Christian being buffeted by non-Christian professors my Freshman year at Drew University (one Philosophy teacher in particular). Walking around campus one day, I made that decision and have kept it (by the grace of God) to this day. It has been greatly tested through the years. In recent years, the test has come from within Evangelical circles. What difference does holding to the authority of the Bible make? I have made the following list of beliefs I have (among many). I hold them ultimately because I believe they are authorized by the Scripture:

The existence of God and the reality of the supernatural; the reality of Absolutes Creation by divine fiat, as well as ex nihilo; the original goodness of that Creation and the universal Mandate to care and cultivate it as intended by God Human Beings as created and bearing the Image of God- the sacred value of the human Person An actual, historic "Fall" involving Adam and Eve and the consequent Original Sin and Curse: the Total Depravity of Human Beings. The absolute need of Regeneration by every human being and that it is necessary before righteousness is possible. The necessity of Civil Government as the servant of God to maintain Law and Order, according to His Word (including the use of Capital Punishment); rejection of the State as God (i.e.- the totalitarian State, Left or Right) Marriage as a life-long covenant between a man and a woman and God. The sin of fornication Conception as the beginning of human life; therefore, the evil of abortion The Decalogue as summary of God's Law and of God-given universal human rights and responsibilities Justice as the establishment of those God-given Rights and Responsibilities in Society; the rejection of the ideology of Multiculturalism The reality of Judgment, Eternal Heaven and Hell The Orthodox, Catholic and Reformed Christian Faith is the one true Religion, in which alone is Salvation. The True Church as that which embodies and preserves True Religion; the deficiency of all other churches and religions; the rejection of the ideology of religious Pluralism; rejection of the identification of the Church with America or modern Israel The historical events of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension as well as the ancient, classic meaning and purpose attributed to those events by the Church; the Gospel as that which encompasses and traditions these events and meanings; rejection of the reduction of the Gospel to the "Example or Teachings of Jesus". I hold these beliefs or convictions primarily because I hold to the authority of the Bible. That is how essential that authority is. This begs a question: what about those who hold different views of any or all of the above and insist that their authority is also the Bible? Many who consider themselves to be evangelicals, even Reformed, make this claim. How can this be? My decision as a teenager, I later learned, was to accept the entire Bible as Special, Propositional Revelation: the God-breathed, written, verbal Word of God. As such, it was inerrant and infallible- totally reliable in all it taught. This is why it must be the highest authority, among several, in faith and practice. As such, it must trump all contemporary, social, cultural influences and considerations. This is a watershed. Many who claim the authority of Scripture hold a different view of what the Book is. That leads to different conclusions. As such, this Book (or collection of 66 "Books", accepted by the ancient Church as canonical) is, I believe, to be read and interpreted according to normal grammatical rules, ie- by common sense, seeking the original intent and meaning of the writers. That intent and meaning, thus derived, is authoritative today. Here is another dividing line. Many who claim the Bible as their authority use other rules for interpreting it or they do not seek "original intent". (All this reminds me of how the Constitution of our Country is interpreted. Conservatives seek "original intent". What did its Articles mean to the Founders? Liberals see the Document as "Living"; thus, what do we see its meaning to be for us in our times? The difference in these two approaches has had enormous impact on the course of our history as a Nation. Likewise, these two approaches to the Bible greatly effect the use of the Bible among us.) I realize, original intent and meaning can sometimes be difficult to determine, even while we all claim the illumination of the Spirit within and among us. Thus, it is imperative to me, to consult Churchmen, Theologians and Scholars of years past, as well as those of today. What has been the Tradition, the Wisdom, of the Church throughout its entire history? Here is another divide. There is a growing interest, currently, in the Church of the first 5 Centuries. Others give great importance to the Reformers of the 16th and 17th Centuries. Still others, are enamored with the Anabaptists or "Radicals" of the same period. The latter, while avowing commitment to the Bible, give particular importance to the Sermon on the Mount and the history of the very first Christians in the early part of the Book of Acts. This leads them to a strong interest in "community" and "social activism". Some passages from the Prophets are used to bolster this interest, especially verses about the "Poor". Contemporary evangelicals, on the other hand, tend to be ahistorical. They give particular importance to select verses they consider to be a "Plan of Salvation", as well as other verses selected to give assurance of that salvation and to help them in their "personal relationship" with Jesus. Contemporary Charismatic and Pentecostals also

consider authoritative those verses that are about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially the “sign” or miraculous ones. I hereby reaffirm that decision I made as a teenager, more than 50 years ago.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 12:37

## **RAISING THE FEDERAL MINIMUM WAGE IS BAD IDEA**

The signature legislation of the Democrats is not a good idea. I have linked to other articles proving this, especially by Thomas Sowell, but here is one from today's paper by George Will. His main point is that labor is a commodity and government does not do well setting the prices of commodities. The market does it far better.<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/03/AR2007010301619.html?sub=AR>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 12:30

## **PERSONAL POLITICAL RANTS AND RUMINATIONS**

A article in today's Washington Post says, “Mindful of their one-vote margin of control in the Senate and keen to retain the House and capture the presidency in 2008, Democrats say they are anxious to avoid appearing shrill or excessively partisan.” For all of that, my reaction this morning to the news is when did Nancy Pelosi become President? The new Speaker comes across to me as not just jubilant, but gloating- not just as the “first woman”, but as the first Democrat. To judge by today's papers, still President and Commander-in-Chief, Mr. Bush seems to have disappeared, as he has in so many Doonesbury cartoons. He is off in some oval office conducting his own war against who knows whom for his own personal reasons (as well as gathering a new legal team to deal with the expected investigations of his administration by the Democrats) while the “First Woman” is taking over and running the Country, at least for the next 100 Hours. Meanwhile, here in Massachusetts, the Messiah has come. Apparently, the recent Advent was not about Jesus, but about Deval Patrick.

The new Governor is another liberal Democrat (who sounds very much like Barack Obama) and who shares the same agenda as Ms Pelosi. Politicians, Religious, Business and Community Leaders of all kinds are falling all over him with adulation and very high expectations that he shall “save” Massachusetts. In Washington, and here in this State, hope is high for the return of the New Deal days of FDR. It might take more than 100 hours (FDR called for 100 Days) to eradicate all poverty (raise the Federal minimum wage is the signature issue- we [the Democratic Legislature] just did that here in Massachusetts), provide jobs and housing for all and achieve a host of other economic and social goals (our new universal health insurance program is already coming into effect); but hopes are high among those who passionately believe that all this is the role, no, the responsibility, of State and Federal Government. As a white male, I might have feelings of being marginalized by the new African-American and female leadership; but, what really counts is the agenda that our Leaders promote. Gender and “Race” are irrelevant to me. What I am concerned about is where the new Leadership will take us as a Nation. Will it be in harmony with the Law of God? God is no respecter of persons (gender or skin color, etc) He is a respecter of our values and morals, how we live and what we stand for, as human beings

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 10:16

## **QT THOTS**

I struggle with the state of the Church [define that as you will]; I see its walls crumbling and wonder if its foundation will last. Then comes this reassuring prophecy in today's Readings-Psalm 481 Great is the Lord and highly to be praised, in the city of our God. 3 On Mount Zion, the divine dwelling place, stands the city of the great king. 4 In her palaces God has shown himself to be a sure refuge. The Church is the dwelling place of God. Yes, He may be found everywhere in the world, but His unique and special presence is in the Church, His House, His Body. 2 His holy mountain is fair and lifted high, the joy of all the earth. This is not true yet, the Church is not “the joy of all the earth“. Most of the Nations and the world's 6.5 billion people do not consider the Church of Christ to be where God (and Salvation) is found. But one day, they shall! 5 For behold, the kings of the earth assembled and swept forward together. 6 They saw, and were dumbfounded; dismayed, they fled in terror. 7 Trembling seized them there; they writhed like a woman in labour, The Nations, the Peoples of other Faiths, the Atheists, Scoffers and Sceptics, the Cultured Despisers of Orthodox, Catholic and Reformed Christianity, the Church, shall be dismayed and come to ruin. 8 As we had heard, so have we seen in the

city of the Lord of hosts, the city of our God: God has established her for ever. Yes, God has established His Church. As Christ said, He would build His Church and the gates of Hell would not prevail against Her! 10 As with your name, O God, so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is full of justice. 11 Let Mount Zion rejoice and the daughters of Judah be glad, because of your judgments, O Lord. This is the Justice and Judgment of God. 12 Walk about Zion and go round about her; count all her towers; consider well her bulwarks; pass through her citadels, 13 That you may tell those who come after that such is our God for ever and ever. Consider well the Doctrine, Tradition and Heritage of the Christian Church- her towers, bulwarks and citadels. She shall stand! She shall overcome and persevere because of Who inhabits Her. It is he that shall be our guide for evermore.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 08:32

Thursday, January 4, 2007

## **IS THE ATONEMENT UNCHRISTIAN?**

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

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

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:38

## **BRUTALLY HONEST REVIEWS OF APOCALPYTO**

<http://weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/013/075khpyp.asp> <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/12525>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 14:45

## **WALKING A TIGHTROPE**

We must recognize in today’s society, that there is a real distinction made by many between Faith, which is private and subjective and Fact, which is public, objective, verifiable by scientific method and Value, such as the decision by the new Congress to take money from oil production and put it into development of alternative fuels and Ethics, such as the handling of various scandals involving members in that same Congress. We see these distinctions played out daily everywhere. What is the Reformed Christian to make of this? For us, Christ is Sovereign. All we do must be united and in harmony with His Word and with each other. The bifurcation of our lives into two, let alone four, parts is not acceptable. Granted this is difficult in the real world; but our Faith and Values and Ethics can not be separated or pitted

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against each other. None of them are private. All are public and interrelated. And Facts, no matter how "hard" or scientific they may claim to be, are not neutral. They are selected and used according to Faith, Values and Ethics. Witness, for example, the current debate about stem cell research.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/03/AR2007010301857.html?referrer=emailhttp://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/03/AR2007010300778.html?referrer=email>

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 14:05

Wednesday, January 3, 2007

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

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

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

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:58

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

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

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

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

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:52

Monday, January 1, 2007

## **PRAYER FOR THE NEW YEAR**

HYMN - Words: Meaux Breviary, 1713; trans. Francis Pott, 1861 The year is gone, beyond recall, with all its hopes and fears, with all its bright and gladdening smiles, with all its mourners' tears. Thy thankful people praise thee, Lord, for countless gifts received; and pray for grace to keep the faith which saints of old believed. To thee we come, O gracious Lord, the newborn year to bless; defend our land from pestilence, give peace and plenteousness. Forgive this nation's many sins, the growth of vice restrain; and help us all with sin to strive, and crowns of life to gain. From evil deeds that stain the past we now desire to flee; and pray that (this new) year may be spent, good Lord, for thee.

Posted by Cal in QT Thots at 11:09