

Wednesday, May 30, 2007

## **WE ARE WHAT WE SING**

“Our classic hymns reveal evangelicalism at its best.” Mark A. Noll 7/12/1999 Christianity Today“Evangelicalism at its best is the religion displayed in its classic hymns. The classic evangelical hymns contain the clearest, most memorable, cohesive, and widely repeated expressions of what it has meant to be an evangelical.”<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/july12/9t8037.html>

Posted by Cal in Church at 20:17

Tuesday, May 29, 2007

## **WRONG REASONS TO STUDY THEOLOGY**

The following quote is an excerpt from a CBD review of *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* by Robert Reymond. Robert Reymond deserves hearty thanks and congratulations from every Christian for this, his magnum opus, a 1210 page wonder of the theological world. This might well be a solid and useful text, but the title is incorrect, if the next sentence is true- Unabashedly Reformed in perspective, ... For the title to be accurate, one must equate "The Christian Faith" with "Reformed". I am Reformed, but I do not believe this is equation is valid. Reymond attacks each problem from historical, biblical, and systematic viewpoints, providing descriptions of the major positions and then unrelentingly demonstrating the superiority of his position. To a large extent he succeeds.

The reviewer values and seeks a "superior position" over alternatives. I believe this is wrong-headed. The purpose of studying Theology is not to unrelentingly demonstrate the superiority of one's position. The purpose of studying Theology is to understand God, His nature and works, as best as possible considering our limitations as sinful human beings. There is no room here for spiritual or academic hubris, let alone arrogance, especially in a Calvinist! There is enough ammo here to win any theological battle in which you might find yourself engaged. With Reymond on your side, you can easily proof text your opponent into oblivion! Is this what the study of God is about? What kind of Christian attitude is this? Using proof texts for any purpose is suspect. It is the worst kind of fundamentalism. The aim in theological study, again, is to know God, not to amass ammo for a battle in which to blow your opponent into oblivion- sounds more like a violent video game. This reviewer's point of view disturbs me. The reason I am writing this article is that I read such sentiments frequently on Reformed websites and Blogs. That is not good and a major reason I do not recommend many Reformed sites to Christians seeking to learn about the Reformed Faith. Learning of God properly leads to humility, brokenness and worship. That, in turn, leads to the pursuit of personal holiness. It does not lead to a sense of spiritual superiority or an Inquisition- a search and destroy mission, against those who do not share the Faith.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 19:39

## **WHERE IS GOD?**

Psalm 139 Lord, you have searched me out and known me; 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. Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, but you, O Lord, know it altogether. You press upon me behind and before and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; This is marvelous mystery- good news; but, here is Job's different take on it- Job 23 Job said: He [God] is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does. For he will complete what he appoints for me, ... such things are in his mind. Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me

Psalm 139- 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 take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there your hand will lead me and your right hand hold me fast. This is a wonderful statement of faith by the Psalmist; but again, Job has a different take- Job 23 Job said: Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! ... "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; on the left hand ... I do not behold him; ... to the right hand, but I do not see him. But he knows the way that I take; The Psalmist's experience is very different from Job's. Both are Believers, men of faith. How can that be? Is one of them wrong? Is God with us everywhere we go? How come the Psalmist sees Him, but Job does not? Neither of these men are describing God (although most of us are glad to agree with the Psalmist) Each man is describing himself, his personal experience with God at the time. Isn't it true and fair to say, when we are being honest, that we are like both men, at various times in our lives? The question is "Why?" If it is objectively and absolutely true that God is with us everywhere (and it is) why do we know that experientially only sometimes? Often we feel like Job, but are afraid to admit it and, instead, say what we think is expected of us as a Christian. We usually think it is only non Christians who say things like Job confesses here. That is a mistake. Like Job, we Believers sometimes have the same experience. When we do, we must honestly face our fears, confess our doubts, express our dismay and confusion- to the Lord we trust. "Lord I believe, help my unbelief!" That honesty is the beginning of change. It makes it possible for God to reveal Himself to us. He will make it clear what is blinding us. Usually, we already know, deep down; other times we have no clue. Job learned what had come between him and the Lord. [read the book] He surrendered to what God was doing in his difficult life. Job 42:1 Then Job replied to the LORD : 2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be

thwarted. 3 You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand things too wonderful for me to know. 4 "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak... 5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Instead of this making Job happy, he responds to this new awareness of God with shame. 6 Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." BUT-10 After Job had prayed ..., the LORD made him prosperous again... 12 The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. Be encouraged, friend, when you struggle like Job did. May the Lord grant that we know and see Him at work in our lives today!

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 16:42

## **POPE BENEDICT AND CHRISTOLOGY**

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

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

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 16:36

Sunday, May 27, 2007

## **DID YOU WEAR RED TODAY?**

Today, we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, given by the Ascended Christ, to permanently indwell His Body on earth, the Church. Every time we confess our Faith, using the historic Creeds, we declare we believe in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Today, Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate it's birth. We should be glad. The Church is not a building. We have heard that often enough- usually by people who like to believe they are the Church. Wrong. The Church is the corporate Body of Christ, in which dwells the real presence (the Holy Spirit) of the Risen Christ in His Word preached and Sacraments celebrated. We have eternal life, through the work of that Spirit, in that Word and Sacrament. Thus, in that sense, the Church is our Mother. There is no salvation (new birth and serious spiritual growth) outside of Her. **HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MOTHER!** PS This is all classic Protestant Doctrine

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:10

## **HONORING THOSE WHO SERVE GOD AND COUNTRY**

There was a couple on the news show this morning. They were serious, as they said that Memorial Day for them has always been a picnic and pool party in celebration of the Beginning of Summer. Not this year. They lost a son serving our Country in Iraq. Now, they said, they understand what Memorial Day is about. By far, the most memorable, special and patriotic Memorial Day weekends have been those spent with our daughter, Mindy and her family, when Norm was serving in the Navy, in his 20 year career, and we were able to visit them, where they were stationed. Around here, many are just doing the Holiday fun thing or they are busy protesting the war in Iraq. We constantly hear or read the outrage of many about this War and what sounds like sheer hatred for the Commander in Chief (certainly they have no respect for him whatsoever). This emotion and speech often translates into very derogatory remarks and accusations against America itself, as the aggressor Nation, even a "terrorist" Nation, hell-bent on oppressing and dominating other (usually "poor") nations around the world. It all becomes very depressing, as well as disturbing, to say the very least. I am constantly thankful for all those in uniform who are serving our Country (you and me), especially those who have paid to do that with their life or limbs. I have never prayed more often for any President, than I do for Mr Bush. That is Biblical, as well as patriotic. We can have honest debate about this War, but those wearing the uniform are sworn to obey and sacrifice and they do. We should honor them, no matter what, for doing their duty to God and Country. What can not be honored is demeaning their sacrifice or taking it for granted or benefiting from it without gratitude. What can not be honored is exploiting their suffering for personal and political gain and to win elections. Now all of that is something to be protested with outrage!

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 14:02

Friday, May 25. 2007

## **SPRINGFIELD TODAY- THE USA TOMORROW**

The majority of people who live here in Springfield are not "White" or native born anglophones. The majority of the majority are Hispanic. Spanish is the language most frequently heard. There are many Asians and African Americans, as well as a smattering of many other nationalities and ethnicities. Springfield today is what demographers predict all of the USA will be like in the next 40 years. On a personal note: When I walk or drive around the City, and last week at the major hospital here and this week at the doctor's office, I feel uncomfortable and like an alien in my own native country. It is a very different demographic and cultural world than the one I was born into and have lived in most of my life.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 18:53

## **BOORISH BEHAVIOR**

Andy Card, former Chief of Staff of President Bush was booed, jeered and protested against by large numbers of demonstrators on the UMass campus today during graduate school graduation ceremonies. The school, his alma mater, gave him an honorary doctorate. So much for free speech, civility and keeping alive the truly liberal traditions of the University.

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 18:46

## **PROFESSORS OR PASTORS?**

Dr. James White is the Pastor of a 5000 member church he founded in Charlotte N. Carolina. For less than a year now, Pastor White has also been the President of Gordon-Conwell Seminary here in Massachusetts. He resigned about 2 weeks ago (I just read about it). He gave "personal reasons" as the reason for the resignation. He never did move his family and home to the North Shore from Charlotte and has been commuting all this time. When Pastor White was appointed, I had serious reservations about it and that is why I am calling him Pastor White. He holds a Ph.D. and has written 13 books, but he is not a scholar like his predecessor, Walter Kaiser Jr. See <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/mayweb-only/121-33.0.html> The man is a Pastor, a very good Pastor, by all accounts. Apparently this could be the issue behind the issue. Are Seminaries schools to train and turn out scholars, who will go on to academic careers and, hopefully, thus serve the wider Church or Pastors, who will serve local churches and "practical" hands on ministries. Deciding that first goes a long way to determining the job-description and expectations of Officers and Faculty and of the school. Hopefully, it does not have to be either-or; however, there are strong proponents on each side and, until now, the academicians have been dominant at Gordon.

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:40

Thursday, May 24, 2007

## **INTRANSIGENT FACTS ABOUT ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS**

Here is a solid, realistic take on the immigration issue by George Will. Check out the links and the intransigent realities they document <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/23/AR2007052301417.html> <http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=MzFhZDE2Y2NiYzQzY2NiY2MxMjI3OWFhNzgZNTQ=> [http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/opinion/points/stories/DN-macdonald\\_21edi.ART0.State.Edition1.2975516.html](http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/opinion/points/stories/DN-macdonald_21edi.ART0.State.Edition1.2975516.html)

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 18:49

## **AN AWFUL LOST WAR (NOT IRAQ)**

The latest magazine put out by Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry, the conservative, evangelical Seminary affiliated with the Episcopal Church (TEC) came today. The Dean and President's column made an interesting announcement. If I understand Paul Zahn, the battle for TEC is lost and it is no longer worthwhile to fight it ("It is an awful lost war"). He counsels acceptance and moving on- not into another splinter Anglican group, but into local ministry. In his words, "Forget the horizon and the Big Country, the vistas and the mountains. Go local. This means focus on the local congregation, the local family of aspiring Christian people, the little group and the smallish band."

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:47

## **SALTY, SANE AND SANQUINE**

I would like to get into the routine of one post each day about some item in the news- just one. The problem is choosing just one. I have been reading our local paper, almost cover to cover, daily. The Washington Post emails me the latest news which I scan for items of interest. Then I read, on line, selections from the Boston Globe, the Christian Science Monitor and Wall Street Journal. Of course, we see various TV news broadcasts daily- 5 area stations (3 in Springfield and 2 in Connecticut, plus Boston and New England (Comcast). And there are several weekly TV panels that debate the issues. In addition, I peruse a variety of (mostly) conservative news magazines and read a variety of columnists and blogs covering the news. All of this is taking a lot of time. I consider it an obligation, as a citizen, to stay informed. I also consider it an obligation, as a citizen, to be well informed and not run off at the mouth or shoot from the hip when I discuss any subject. The result? Distrust, dismay, discouragement and depression [just to use words that begin with d.] I have become disturbed and am often dumbfounded. Mostly, I have become distracted from the Lord and my greater commitment to Him and His Word. We can not, we dare not stick our heads in the sand and become know-nothings. We certainly do not want to be pious pollyannas and recluse ourselves to become happy clappy Christians living in some conclave or commune (whether in a city or out in the country). God forbid. The salt is meant of get out of the shaker. But we must not lose our saltiness (which comes from Christ). So that is what I will be doing most now- working on becoming more salty and sane, while trying to remain sanguine!

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 17:13

Wednesday, May 23, 2007

## **THEOLOGY OF THE CITY**

Required reading if you are interested in Urban Ministry, written by Tim Keller, a PCA church planter in Manhattan NY <http://www.e-n.org.uk/1869-A-biblical-theology-of-the-city.htm>

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:21

## **BEING AN URBAN CHRISTIAN**

Here is an excellent article with strategies for reaching and transforming Cities for Christ. [http://www.christianvisionproject.com/2006/06/a\\_new\\_kind\\_of\\_urban\\_christian.html](http://www.christianvisionproject.com/2006/06/a_new_kind_of_urban_christian.html)

Posted by Cal in Church at 16:08

## **LOVING THE LORD WITH THE MIND**

I have been reading about God and Time. This is relevant to understanding the essential nature of God, especially His incommunicable attributes such as aseity (is He effected by contingencies or need anything beside Himself to be what He is?), impassibility (can He feel pain or any emotions at all?) , immutability (does he ever change?). Is God in Time or above Time? Does God have experience and personal knowledge of tensed facts (the past and the future) or does He exist in a timeless Eternity (everything is Now for Him)? These questions address whether God is a "Person" and whether He is involved in our daily lives and answers our prayers. Etc

This project requires the study of Scripture, exacting linguistic studies of Greek and Hebrew terminology related to Time, Systematic and Historical Theology, Philosophical Theology, Philosophy of Time (A-Theory and B-Theory) and Science, especially Theoretical Physics- Theories of Relativity and the Space-Time Continuum and Quantum Mechanics. It also requires a mastery of logic and sophisticated, terse rational argumentation. I do not want to give the wrong impression here. I am an autodidact and my knowledge of some of these subjects is quite superficial. All of this is far removed from typical sermon preparation or the usual, small group "Bible studies". I call myself "The Re/formation Institute" for a reason. Sadly, I know of no one locally that shares my interests, but maybe someday...I must also agree that all of this also seems, to most people, increasingly far from what Christianity, and being a Christian, is all about. Systematic Theology (let alone Theology proper: the study of God- Theos) is not in favor among Christians these days. During the Middle Ages, Theology was known as the Queen of Sciences. In the 19th Century, mathematics became Queen. (There have been other contenders since.) Before the Middle Ages, Philosophy reigned. A Liberal Arts education, until recent times, required courses in both Theology and Philosophy. By my undergraduate days, a Course in Ethics had replaced them (but optional in the 50's). Ironically, there is currently a new demand for Ethics courses (especially in Business schools) but not any for Theology or Philosophy. My college Minor (second Major) was in Philosophy and it was in its death throes due to the dominance of Logical Positivism, which has since, itself, died as a Philosophy (the latter had degenerated into a study of the rules of language.) The Big Questions were long gone as a subject for Philosophy, but not for me. I still am committed to rogation (from the Latin for asking or questioning) and loving the Lord with my mind. How about you?

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 15:49

Saturday, May 19, 2007

## **TRUMPETING TRIUMPH**

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

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:57

Thursday, May 17, 2007

## **TO BLOG OR NOT TO BLOG?**

I'm back. It has been almost a month since I worked on this Blog. Last week my wife was sick and spent four days in a local hospital with pneumonia, which she still has. I have been busy with a number of projects. One is a Paper on God and Time and I've been reading a lot of American History. But relative to this Blog, I needed to reconsider whether the time I put into it is worth while.

I have come to accept the fact that I am an analog man in a digital world. This is not simply a matter of age or aptitude. It is also a matter of choice. I do not like or approve much of what I see in both the secular and the Christian (and Church) world around me. Studying and analyzing these matters is almost a full time occupation for me, not a hobby, and I take it all very seriously. Reading and righting articles about current events and contemporary culture can be very disturbing, disheartening and depressing. After more than 50 years of preaching, I am convinced more than ever, the world (and the Church) needs to come to God. I have learned more about Him over the years and have more to preach and teach about Him and His Word now, than I did when I began; and the need is more urgent than ever. Our prime responsibility in the community is to represent God and to present Him to those around us, rich and poor, the up and outs and the down and outs. We are to call non-believers of every kind to faith in the God revealed in Scripture and found in Christ and to turn from all other gods in that process and then to live in His service alone. Believers are to be disciplined: taught Bible Doctrine [The Reformed Faith] and trained to obey the Lord and organize their daily lives according to His Word. They are to be baptized into a Community of like minded Believers, where they will worship God, as He has instructed, and be nurtured by His Word and the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Trying to teach others how to do any of this is what I am here for. Lord willing and enabling I will continue the Blog.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 18:16

## **GETTING SOMETHING STRAIGHT**

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

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

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 15:23

## **WHY ASCENSION DAY IS ESSENTIAL**

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

crowned with all authority in Heaven and on earth by His Father. Jesus is now the Risen Lord who has been functioning all these years as God's Prophet, Priest and King.

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

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:04