

Saturday, September 29, 2007

MORAL AUTHORITY?

We must wonder why people of good will and well-meaning hearts, in the current leadership (and membership) of old line Denominations like the United Church of Christ and The Episcopal Church, are so committed to being “welcoming, affirming and inclusive” of people who are homosexual into their Churches [this means they approve of, even celebrate, homosexuality as both a sexual orientation and a lifestyle and believe gay and lesbian people should be welcome into positions of leadership, the same as heterosexual people, and not subject to any negative discrimination whatsoever on these matters] and willing to pay whatever price necessary to do so when there are other people of good will and well-meaning hearts in the same Denominations who are not committed to being welcoming, affirming and inclusive of people who are homosexual into their Churches. What explains the tenacity (obduracy) of each group, especially when each insists and sincerely believes it is being faithful to Christ? Why do some believe a policy of inclusion is absolutely essential to a Christian Church and are (ironically) willing to exclude those who disagree? Why are feelings so rampant on both sides of this issue? It is not going away. Neither group of (at least nominal) Christians is going to back down or give in to the other.

I believe the issue is the nature and source of Moral Authority, not sexuality (in spite of incessant reporting in the media to the contrary). Moral Authority was found in the Bible in all Denominations, well into the middle of the 19th Century. By the beginning of the 20th Century, scholars, seminaries, clergy and laity (in that order) had come to be skeptical and seriously doubt (reject) the Scripture as God’s inspired and inerrant Word and, thus, as their Moral Authority (Eve had the same problem back in the Garden). Various Philosophies about the nature of reality and knowledge and language (Rationalism, Logical Positivism, Naturalism) were causing serious doubt among the faithful. What became known as “Higher Criticism” was leading to the downgrading of the Bible text (sources, composition, editing, dating) from supernatural to very natural- a flawed human book. Physical and Social Sciences were very influential (Darwinism and Freudianism). There was a reaction to all of this. Many Christians in all the Denominations, seeing the changes, at first resisted and fought for the traditional, classic Doctrines, including the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, but the battle was lost. A series of books written to defending what were considered absolutely essential- the “Fundamentals.” Advocates came from all major denominations. Many eventually separated into new Denominations and became known collectively as “Fundamentalists”. The conflict raged from at least the 1920’s through the 1950’s. Regrettably, today’s generation does not remember the conflict, nor would they fight it. During the 1950’s, many Fundamentalists were concerned their movement had gone too far. It had become very separatist and had intentionally become very much out of touch with developments in the world, as well as very ingrown. It was, they said, “no fun, all damn and no mental”. Some began a new movement that wanted to engage the intellectual, theological and social developments of society while still holding on to the fundamentals. These Fundamentalists became known as Evangelicals. Their Moral Authority remained the Scripture. They were found in the new Denominations and independent Churches. Some remained in the Old Line Denominations to carry on the fight there with the “Modernists” who were gaining ever more control. Major Wars and Social Upheavals (especially the great Depression and later the “Sixties”) changed accepted values, big time. Revolutions in Society concerning Civil Rights (especially for Women and African Americans and for “The Poor”) captured the minds and passions of Americans everywhere. A revolution in sexual morality and practices also took hold and its consequent effect on traditional marriage practices. As the Century entered its third quarter, several intellectual movements (known collectively as Post Modernism) came to the fore. Among other things, PoMo theories greatly influenced how books, including the Bible, are read and how meaning (and “truth”) are understood. Diversity and Multiculturalism became dominant values in American culture. Add to that the growth in global travel, multinational business (a global economy) and inter-national relations. Now Americans everywhere have a strong belief in the importance of pluralism, with a consciousness and appreciation of peoples (and diverse moral values) everywhere. Many people in the Old Line Denominations have bought into all of this. (Why? is a good question, but that is a given now). Their current policies and practices as Churches reflect these influences and values. (We also can increasingly see the results of these influences and changes among Evangelicals. They have come a long way from their Fundamentalist origins). It is counter productive for Conservatives to criticize, let alone condemn, “Liberals” for choosing to reject the Bible and its Morality, understood in the traditional, classic sense. Accepting all the aforementioned influences makes it impossible for them to do other wise. For them, all of these factors together are what collectively provide the Moral Authority for what they do. They also value relevancy. They are determined to be in fashion and connected with today’s world. This is seen especially in their adoption of the latest trend in hermeneutics. Determining the Word of God (“God is still speaking”), i.e.- what is the right and righteous thing to do- is best done in community. They believe that truth (the right thing) is not absolute or timeless. Truth and what is moral certainly are not bound up in written propositions, bound within the Bible). Truth and what is moral, they insist, is constructed or determined now by a local community listening to the voices of culture around them and to each other in dialogue with one another. Conservatives (Fundamentalists and Evangelicals alike) need to grasp all that. Surprisingly, we still tend to ignore or downplay the zeitgeist and simply take

our stand on the Morality (and Theology in general) as it has been taught and believed by the universal church for hundreds of years, even millennia. Period. Thus we lock horns with people who disagree and do not understand why they do. "The Bible says... Why don't they see that?" The Bible is our Moral Authority on topics such as Marriage or the subtopic of sexual practices. It is not the Moral Authority for the folks in the other group (whatever label we chose for them). We Conservatives, if we are going to debate (what we used to call) Modernists, must confront all of the influences catalogued here and more. I have not seen much evidence of that on the popular level. Actually, if they have not kept up, this will be a daunting task for most lay people. It is too late to turn back the clock. Mainline Leaders are not going to repudiate all of these influences. They are totally and hopelessly controlled by them. It is a fait accompli. (Actually, it has been that for more than 50 years.) There is another very important matter. That is the absolute determination of people who are homosexual to find legitimacy in our society. I am persuaded the profession of faithfulness to Christ and the Gospel made by many of them, within these Old Line Denominations, is a cover up for that objective- a means to achieve validity in our Society. What better way? Not just ordination, but consecration as Bishops in the Church is great affirmation. If that is openly approved and accepted, then why not Marriage? And that is not the end. I strongly suspect both Ordination and Marriage, for the gay community, is not about ordination and marriage. Those are means by which they believe they will gain full validation as homosexuals in straight Society. Mainline Denominations, by virtue of their commitment to the popular values and mores of Society as their authority for Morality, as well as their disavowal of the Bible as Moral Authority, give people who are homosexual a natural haven and ally. Thus many members of that group have settled in there. I am convinced well-meaning non-homosexual people in these Churches are being duped and used because of their faulty understanding of what the Gospel is, as well as their substitution of a false foundation for their Moral Authority. Conservatives in these Denominations need to accept that reality. If they can still serve the Lord faithfully in their own congregations, great. They may well be called to be a Light in the Dark, shining where they believe God has put them, faithful witnesses. Otherwise, they should move on.

Posted by Cal in Church at 20:16

CHICAGO SEMESTER

Many college students spend a semester studying abroad. Some go to Chicago. This Program there is informed by the following Neo-Calvinist Principles: "Rooted in the Reformed Christian tradition, we believe that the world exists as God's great handiwork. The world is not therefore merely a commodity, but has ultimate and intrinsic value in and of itself. As God's creation, the world is a living, breathing organism. It is a world that manifests itself in diversity which reflects the "multifaceted wisdom of God," unfathomable and present everywhere." "We believe in the concept of "common grace," that all people possess the image and likeness of the wisdom of God, and, regardless of one's faith perspective, each person has the capacity and obligation to contribute to the well-being of our society and the ecosystem." "We believe in a cultural mandate: that it is our job and calling to penetrate all aspects of life, including human institutions, to bring hope to the hopeless, to include the excluded, and to do our part in working for the redemption of the whole of society. Just as it is our duty as adult learners and as Christians to develop our own personal faith and to cultivate a high character as individuals, it is also our obligation to pursue social justice and to seek ways to counter and alleviate the world's pain as our pain. As one of the prophets said, we are called to seek the peace of the city, because our peace, security and prosperity in the city are bound up with the peace of others. We are all interconnected and linked with each other." "The colleges that sponsor Chicago Semester include Calvin College, Central College (Iowa), Dordt College, Northwestern College (Iowa), Hope College, and Trinity Christian College, which is also the program's administrative and fiscal agent. These colleges are joined by Aquinas College, Briar Cliff University, Cornerstone University, Luther College and Spring Arbor University." <http://www.chicagosemester.org/ask/director.htm>

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 16:18

Wednesday, September 26, 2007

RON SIDER'S CLAIMS ABOUT EVANGELICALS AND SOCIAL ACTION

"Today almost all agree that faithful mission must also include social ministry. More and more prominent evangelical voices—think of Rick Warren!—now embrace ESA's [Evangelicals for Social Action] longstanding call to empower the poor." "And even the National Association of Evangelicals' official public policy framework embraces what ESA has long promoted—namely, a pro-poor and pro-life, pro-peace and pro-family, pro-creation care and pro-marriage agenda." -Ron Sider ESA current website article But, what do each of these topics mean and involve? Does "pro-poor" mean increased pro-welfare- food, housing, health benefits, etc provided by tax payers for all people who's income is below the Federal Poverty level? Does "pro-life" mean anti-abortion on demand? Does it mean anti-capital punishment? Does "pro-peace" mean anti Iraq War? All war? Does "pro-creation" mean support of the Kyoto Agreements and blaming America for global warming? Does "pro-marriage" include the marriage of homosexuals? Does the NAE official policy embrace all of that? I am definitely pro-poor and pro-life, pro-peace and pro-family, pro-creation care and pro-marriage. But vague generalities aside, we must have definitions of these key terms and explanations of the means to achieve these goals, clearly spelled out. Only then can we see whether we are talking about the same things and work together.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 22:05

Friday, September 21, 2007

FAITH AND POLITICS: A DIFFERENT TAKE ON THIS TOPIC

What is the connection between Faith and Politics? Very broad question! I assume the question means my personal faith and my personal politics. To start with, what is "Politics"? Let us say the word refers to all that is involved in organizing and facilitating what is necessary or desirable for the efficient and productive local, state or national community, i.e.- civil government. What is meant by "Faith"? I am a Neo-Calvinist Christian. Does the question mean "Do the doctrines I hold as a Neo-Calvinist influence what I believe about politics and political activism? Do they influence what I believe about the purpose of Civil Government? Do these Doctrines determine how I act as a citizen and how I vote? Does the question mean do the values or morals I hold as a Neo-Calvinist effect or determine any of these matters?" The answer to each question is "Absolutely, yes! Read more below to find out how. This is not the usual take on this subject.

The question becomes for me: What are the Neo-Calvinist Doctrines and Values that influence my Politics? The following is a short, broad sketch. The Concept of Sphere Sovereignty is crucial to Neo-Calvinist Political Science. The Bible teaches that God created people in His image. They would be like Him. They would represent Him. He gave them a mandate, as His representatives, to care for and cultivate all that God had made. This is known as the Cultural Mandate. As part of this plan, God ordained three institutions. These are Marriage (defined as the life long covenant commitment of a man and a woman) with the consequent extended family. They would all work together to keep the Cultural Mandate. God created the Covenant Community, which became the Church, and God created civil government. Each of these three institutions, known as Spheres, is autonomous under God, responsible to Him and His Law. One is never to interfere with, or usurp, the authority or sovereignty of the other. This is known as Sphere Sovereignty. There are extensions of each Sphere which become other, secondary institutions in society, i.e.-voluntary social associations of individuals for work and the production and distribution of goods and services. Other voluntary associations will naturally arise for Education, Communications, the Arts and Recreation. None of these Spheres, extensions of the original Marriage-Family and Church Spheres, are autonomous, but cooperate with each other and function according to the Law of God, accountable to Him. There are serious consequences of this Doctrine of the Spheres and Sphere Sovereignty. For example, the education of children is the right and duty of their parents. The State can never rightfully (in God's eyes) claim that those children belong to it or that it is the State's right and duty to educate children against the will of their parents. Parents are not to acquiesce to this claim by the State or relinquish their privilege and duty to educate their children. Furthermore, the State has no right to take money from the parents (taxes) for such education. That would be compounding error with the sin of theft. In practice, this Doctrine leads to the support of Home Schooling, Parochial Schools and the use of Vouchers to use tax money for school choice. At the very least, this Doctrine should lead Christian parents to become involved on local school boards and in the selection of text books, as well as becoming professional educators, who will promote and teach Biblical values in State schools. The Family, as part of their duty to educate their children, has the responsibility to teach work or vocational skills, as well as the Biblical work ethic. People who do not work do not eat; but more than that, working is a God-given duty, a commandment, laid upon all to support themselves and their extended family, including the truly poor in it. It is also a major way to carry out the Cultural Mandate and thus serve God. The State has no business to interfere with this duty or to care of those who shirk it. This Doctrine gives the responsibility for welfare and the care of the sick, the widowed and orphaned, the unemployed and the homeless to the Family and Faith Community. The State has no business to interfere with or usurp these God-given responsibilities not to take money (taxes) from citizens for programs that do that. Calvinists oppose the concept and practice of the "welfare state" and the liberal ideology behind it and are very suspicious of all entitlement programs and oppose the popular entitlement mentality. The voluntary civic associations are not to forego their independence and look to the civil government for support. These groups, whether for business or the arts, are extensions of the Family and Church. The State has no right to interfere with them in any way. In practice, this Doctrine leads to a rejection of "tax breaks", as well as government funding and subsidies. In our Society, it means advocating for privatization of just about everything. The Faith Community or Church also has its God-given privileges and responsibilities which include public corporate worship and evangelism, as well as its ministries of charity. The Civil Government has no lawful right to abridge or interfere with the Church in its duties. The only legitimate, God-given responsibility for Civil Government is maintenance of Law and Order (a system of Laws in harmony with the principles of Biblical Law), Law enforcement, Courts and a legal system guaranteeing due process- all to maintain peace and to protect citizens from harm and danger from any quarter. Taxing the people for this is not theft. It is the obligation of citizens to pay for such services. But always, civil government, as with the other Spheres, is not autonomous. It serves God under His Law and is accountable to Him in all things. While the State is not to interfere with the life and work of the Church and the Church has no business doing the work of the State or seeking to get the State to do the work of the

Church for it, such as enforcing morality (all of this is the original intent of the First Amendment), the Church, in its prophetic (preaching) and teaching ministry, has the duty to remind the State of its responsibilities under God and of His judgment upon it when it fails in them. More fundamental than the Doctrine of Sphere Sovereignty, Neo-Calvinists, being in the Reformed Tradition, also hold to other Doctrines which greatly influence their politics. Prime among them is the Total Depravity of Human Beings. This leads to the emphasis on the negative role of the Civil Government. Because people who rule are also fallen sinners, there is among all Calvinists a serious mistrust of all those in power and in any particular government. One consequence of this is the strong advocacy of a division of powers, wherein there will always be a system of checks and balances to inhibit the government from becoming an instrument of evil. Finally, because we hold to the infinite value of the person, Calvinists also believe in the necessity for freedom of expression and choice and the necessity of the consent of the governed to be governed and the right to rebel when such freedom is denied and human beings are enslaved. This means the Reformed Christian is very much concerned with the possibility of totalitarianism, in which the State becomes God and takes over total control of the minds and lives of its citizens. Thus, we are very much opposed to an ever growing government and in favor of an ever decreasing government presence in our Nation. This, of course, is revolutionary as it flies against all the current trends and practices of our Government and the desire and beliefs of most of our politicians and citizens today, especially the so-called Progressives and Left-leaning Liberals among us. I realize that implementing any of this would take a lot of teaching (when have you heard a sermon or Sunday school class or small group get into all of this?) and then gradual implementation here and there over time, as well as a lot of willingness to make major changes in most of our lives and in our contemporary Society. All of this is my brief answer to the original question.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 20:24

MY BI-WEEKLY DEVOTIONALS (QT THOTS)

I am thankful to receive positive email feed back about my devotional QT Thots, which I write and email twice a week to many people. I am very thankful to the Lord that He is blessing this ministry and that many apparently are being blessed by reading the QT Thots as well as passing them on to many others. They come from my own daily quiet time in the morning, as I mediate on the Scripture of the day- usually a Psalm. The one I sent out this morning follows this paragraph. I send these QT Thots only to those who ask for them, but gladly to those who do. If you are not receiving them now, but would like to receive my QT Thots yourself, please email your request to me at cfoxinstitute@verizon.net I would love to hear from you about that, as well as about the posts on this Blog. Thank you and God bless!

Psalm 89:1-9,11-14,18-21, 24-29, 52 [adapted] Your love, O Lord, for ever will I sing; from age to age my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness. Our never ending privilege and responsibility is to witness and testify to the love and faithfulness of God (singing is one way to do that). There is a difference between witness and testify: to witness is to share what you have experienced personally of that love and faithfulness. No one can deny what you experience. To testify is to tell what you know in your head (or at least believe) to be true. This truth may be disputed, but hopefully you have done your home work and can defend what you say. Our subjective experiences come and go. It is good that we can see the work of the Lord in our lives. There are days when we do not. Thus, it is even better to have a sure objective knowledge upon which to base our faith. We do and it has a two-fold foundation. There are two basic sources for reasons we can be sure God loves us and He is faithful- Creation and Scripture [General and Special Revelation]- CREATION: It assures us of God's existence, of his wisdom and power I am persuaded that your love is established for ever; [because] you have set your faithfulness firmly in the heavens. The heavens bear witness to your wonders, O Lord, and to your faithfulness. O mighty Lord, your faithfulness is all around you. You rule the raging of the sea and still the surging of its waves. Yours are the heavens; the earth also is yours; you laid the foundations of the world and all that is in it. You have made the north and the south; Tabor and Hermon (mountains) rejoice in your name. SCRIPTURE: It goes deeper and reveals God's plans and the purposes of our lives 'I [God] have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn an oath...' Righteousness and justice are the foundations of your throne; love and truth go before your face. ... You spoke and said to your faithful people: 'My hand will hold (you) fast and my arm will make (you) strong. 'My faithfulness and love shall be with (you), and (you) shall be victorious through my name ... 'I will keep my love for (you) for ever, and my covenant will stand firm . Surrounded by His Creation and with His Word and promises hidden in our hearts, we can go forth today saying, Blessed be the Lord for evermore! Amen, I say, Amen.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 13:36

STANDING IN THE GAP- REALLY?

The list of economic and social problems in our Country and Society are well known, being repeated continually in the

media and especially by local and national political candidates. I do not despair over them. Christ is still King. I am still glad to be an American and I see and appreciate multiple blessings every where around me and in my life and Country. Among things about which I do despair are people, who call themselves Evangelicals, living lives that are idolatrous (Idolatry being the most serious sin in the Bible) Our Country is awash in Materialism, Consumerism and Greed- the never ending addiction to wanting and then needing more and more money and things. This is behind much of what troubles our Nation. Seriously! Evangelicals are very much caught up in this, as much as pagan unbelievers. And they pass on these "values" to their children, even while they take them to Sunday School and "Acquire the Fire" Rallies or send them on "Mission Trips" for a week. Christian men are being urged to attend another mass demonstration in the Nation's Capital next month to witness to their Faith and publicly renew their commitment to be the men, husbands and fathers God want them to be. Certainly, these are worthwhile goals. Many will find this a wonderful experience. BUT- Will their commitment include repentance and a turning away from these false gods, these idols? I confess I am cynically dubious. Yet, if one of the goals of the Rally is to change America (let alone the lives of the men and their families), this rejection of Materialism, Consumerism and Greed is absolutely necessary. Without it, there will be a huge "gap" in the event. I made that commitment many, many years ago. I do pray other men will do so, whether they go to the DC Rally or not. <http://www.standinthegap2007.org/pages/>

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 13:04

Thursday, September 20, 2007

SOUND DOCTRINE MATTERS

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

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 10:46

RACISM RAISES ITS UGLY HEAD- THE JENA SIX

I have been dismayed to read of the Jena 6. The story sure sounds like an example of true old time racism, with 6 African American teens being treated very unjustly by the white power structure of a small southern town and County in Louisiana. The news about what is happening there has been spread by Black radio talk shows and DJ's and on the internet by Black bloggers. More than 40,000 people are due to converge on Jena today to protest the very unfair treatment of these boys. One of them has been in jail for a year now, although the original charges against him have been dropped. My concern here is why I never heard of this story in our local news. For that matter, I only heard of it in the national news yesterday. And today's Washington Post carries the story. It was repeated in the Boston Globe <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/19/AR2007091900769.html?wpisrc=newsletterHow> many other serious stories go unreported in the media, although they report constantly the woes of certain celebrities (ad nauseum)?

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 10:34

Tuesday, September 18, 2007

LIGHT IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH DARKNESS

Many evangelicals I know question why we attend (actually, we are confirmed members of) the Episcopal Church. We worship in a local Parish that is conservative and has an orthodox Pastor (Rector). There are many such Parishes in the National Church. One of our sons is the Rector of one in Florida. But most Parishes and Clergy in TEC do not seem to be even remotely conservative or orthodox. Many, including Bishops, are outright heretics. There is a major announcement expected next week from the Bishops of TEC which will indicate whether the National Church wants to remain in the predominantly conservative world wide Anglican Communion (the third largest Christian Body in the world, behind The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches). Very possibly it will not. Individual Clergy, Parishes and Dioceses will then be on the spot as to their future loyalties. Some will, as others have already done, leave TEC to seek affiliation with conservative Anglicans elsewhere [long, complicated story] I myself am not committed to TEC, but I do want to continue to be Anglican, in solidarity with men such as John Stott and J.I. Packer and our son, Loren. One major bright light in this dark picture is Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry (TESM) It is in Ambridge, PA (near Pittsburgh). Our son is a graduate of this Seminary. The School is solid Reformed and Evangelical. Every year faculty and Staff reaffirm their commitment to its Statement of Faith. You can read it here. I thank God for TESH. Millie and I have been helping to support it from our tithe for many years. Please pray for TEC and the faithful remnant within it in these days of decision. <http://www.tesm.edu/sh/2007-5/Seed%20and%20Harvest%202007-5.pdf>

Posted by Cal in Church at 12:21

GOD IN A TOOL BOX?

Here is an arresting comment taken from a review of the latest CD from the rock band TOOL "The Holy Spirit is the giver of all gifts. If someone elects to use those gifts in the service of God, good. But those gifts are not rendered dormant or defunct by virtue of our intent. An artist who explicitly rejects God, as many have done, nevertheless remains a "sub-creator," as Tolkien said, a creator in the Creator's image. We should be suspicious of our tendency to insist that God only shows up in the right places. Sometimes, pagan sources can most accurately reflect back to Christians the power and lasting impact of genuine witness. You never know when and where God might reveal himself." <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2007/005/12.34.html>

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 11:14

VERSIONS OF THE GOSPEL

The Popular Version today: You have messed up your life or you have an addiction that is ruining your marriage or you are filled with fear or guilt or you are empty and your life has no purpose and meaning, etc. The good news is that Jesus is the answer to your problems. He can save you from all this and change your life. Ask him into your heart. Turn your life over to him. Allow him to be in control. Learn to do this daily in the company of others who have done the same. Build up your personal relationship with Jesus and others. Enjoy it and share what you have found with those around you who need the same. An increasingly popular Version today: The good news is that God loves the poor or marginalized and has come in the person of Jesus to demonstrate that love. He calls us to social and economic justice for all and can make that possible as we follow his example.

A more classic popular Version: "God has a [Plan] for your life, but your sins have come between you and God and the Plan can not be realized. The good news is that Jesus died for you. He took the punishment you deserve for your sins. Repent over your sins. Believe the good news about Jesus. Confess your sins to God and ask Jesus to come into your heart to be your Savior and Lord. You will be born again and be a child of God. You will have assurance of Eternal Life. Learn more about all this in a small group or church where others have the same experience. Enjoy and share what you now have with others. Reformed Version: [includes teaching the TULIP doctrines and also the Solas: By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, etc] [Usually begins with the same: God has a Plan for your life, but-] All have sinned. Total Depravity The wages of sin is spiritual death and eternal separation from God; but, the good news is- Christ has died- a substitutionary atonement for our sins making reconciliation with God possible. Unconditional Election, Limited

Atonement, Christ is risen- Lord and Savior of all who come to Him Irresistible Grace, Perseverance Christ will come again, with and for His Saints: His Kingdom will be realized in Eternity. Dutch Reformed Version: CFR Creation -what God has formed "In the beginning, God created...Heaven and Earth". That includes all human beings, whom God created to be His Image bearers, like Him in many ways, representing Him on the earth He had created to cultivate and care for it to His glory and for the good of all. This is called the Cultural Mandate. The structure, the essential nature and characteristics, of all that God created is good. Everything as created is good, including human beings. Our faculties for rationality, creativity, morality, communality and spirituality are "Good". These are the five characteristics by which we image God. Every human being has them [in varying degrees] They make us human. They are what all people have in common. This is "common grace". The Fall did not change that. We all, sinners and saints alike, share the Image and the responsibility to use these faculties to fulfill the Cultural Mandate. Fall -Sin has de/formed what God created. Then comes the Fall, Curse and Antithesis. The Fall [the results of Adam and Eve's disobedience] fractured the Image and makes true fulfillment of the Mandate impossible. The Curse is God's judgment on fallen humanity and creation itself- we shall live our lives apart from God's Blessing, separated from Him, ourselves and others. And within us there is the Antithesis- enmity toward our Maker. Because of this animosity within us toward God, we refuse to fulfill the Mandate and instead work against it. Our fallen ("unregenerate") nature makes us take the good Creation, into directions not intended by God for it, e.g. sexuality. The world is still God's, the Creation is still essentially good; but, we are literally hell-bent on destroying it, taking it in directions never intended by God. This includes misuse and abuse of our rationality, creativity, morality, communality and spirituality. This is Radical Corruption ("Total Depravity"). Redemption -Christ re/forms what Sin has de/formed Finally comes the Redemption of an Elect, Covenant People who will seek to fulfill the original Cultural Mandate. The original creational structures remain. Those who are redeemed in Christ, will seek to see all the Creation re/formed, redirected, redeemed to the Glory of God. Christ's life, atoning death, resurrection and ascension to the Throne, from which He actively reigns as Sovereign of all, makes all of this re/formation possible. This is the good news. The Kingdom of Christ is not purely spiritual and confined within Believers. The Redeemed are to seek to work with Christ the King to extend His Kingdom, His Sovereignty and the sovereignty of His Word, over all spheres of life on earth, here and now! Redemption in Christ involves regeneration of our faculties as human beings and that regeneration restores within us the desire and will to redirect our Father's world (at the very least, our place in it), in keeping with the Norms He established for it at Creation. These Norms are included in both His General (Natural) Revelation and His Special (Written) Revelation, beginning with the Torah (the First Five Books of the Bible) Redemption involves the sanctification of our rationality, creativity, morality, communality and spirituality. It means seeking to redirect every sphere of our daily lives, particularly our marriages and families, our education and scholarship, our work and recreation, our lives in civic communities and civilization itself around us, cultivating and enjoying all that God has made. Redemption means human beings and all of creation being all they can be for the glory of God!

Posted by Cal at 10:08

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The Church is the Covenant People of God gathered for corporate worship and edification and scattered as the soldiers of Christ to extend His Kingdom in the world. Specifically, the Church is marked by its celebration of God's Holy Name on His Holy Day, assembled to partake His Holy Meal ("food for the journey"), studying His Holy Word and going forth to live as His Holy People in the world.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:04

Saturday, September 15, 2007

MORE ON THE WAR- TO PROTECT THE UNBORN

The previous post is about serving Christ the King. In all the current political debates, the subject of Abortion is almost never mentioned. The War in Iraq, The Economy, Health Insurance and Immigration Policy garner most of the attention. Yet, the Issue of Abortion remains and should not be ignored or made insignificant. It came to the fore last week when President Bush used a rare veto to block Federal funding for the work of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on the grounds that this NGO is pro-choice and promotes abortion around the world. The lead editorial in our local paper yesterday insists the Agency does not promote abortion. It slams Mr. Bush for not only being against science and research that would find cures for many diseases with his veto of a bill to fund embryonic stem cell research, but now he proves, by this latest veto, that he is also opposed to the well-being of women and women's health! I would say, Mr. Bush has served Christ the King by both of these vetoes and he should be applauded for both, not condemned.

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programs to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect- Mission Statement on the UNFPA website UNFPA makes it clear in many official statements that it does not do abortions or help women have them. It definitely states that it does not advocate abortion for family planning. However, digging deeper, UNFPA does promote and vigorously advocates abortion as a woman's right. Furthermore, it is very active around the world in trying to lobby and influence various governments to change their laws against abortion, replacing them with laws that legalize abortion and "reproductive freedom". Here are a few articles that should be read by Christians about UNFPA to help in their war to protect the unborn (and actually, to protect women, as well).

<http://www.weeklystandard.com/content/public/articles/000/000/003/645rcjyc.asp?pg=1>http://www.c-fam.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=10&Itemid<http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewNation.asp?Page=/Nation/archive/200709/NAT20070914d.html>http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=5457

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 11:36

JESUS THE WARRIOR

Jesus the Nazarene carpenter is all in vogue now. Being a Christian is following his example as a servant of the marginalized, That is the popular image of Jesus for many: the suffering servant who loved others. That Jesus died (to atone for others). He is no more. That Jesus was vindicated by God and raised to His right Hand. That Carpenter was resurrected (transformed) and now sits on a Throne with all God's power and authority having been given to him. He now is a King who reigns, but He has enemies and they must be conquered. (All of this is clearly portrayed in the Book of Revelation and I explain the relevant passages here on my Website <http://www.calvinfox.com/web/revelation.html> The Jesus we believe in and serve is a Warrior King, such as David was. Psalm 18, that I used devotionally for Friday's QT Thots, describes This Warrior and He says of God-

He trains my hands for battle and my arms for bending even a bow of bronze. You have given me (Jesus) your shield of victory; your right hand also sustains me; your loving care makes me great. You lengthen my stride beneath me, and my ankles do not give way. I pursue my enemies and overtake them; I will not turn back till I have destroyed them. I strike them down and they cannot rise; they fall defeated at my feet. You have girded me with strength for the battle; you have cast down my adversaries beneath me; you have put my enemies to flight. You deliver me from the strife of the peoples; you put me at the head of the nations. A people I have not known shall serve me; no sooner shall they hear than they shall obey me; strangers will cringe before me. The foreign peoples will lose heart; they shall come trembling out of their strongholds. The Lord lives! Blessed is my rock! Exalted is the God of my salvation! He is the God who gave me victory and cast down the peoples beneath me. These words apply to Christ. See Psalm 2 et al You rescued me from the fury of my enemies; you exalted me above those who rose against me; you saved me (Jesus) from my deadly foe; see Col.2:15, et al. Therefore will I extol you among the nations, O Lord, and sing praises to your name. He multiplies the victories of his king; he shows loving-kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants for ever. In Romans 15:9, Paul teaches the words of v.49 refer to Christ. Followers of Christ are called to be warriors like Jesus. We are part of His Army, fighting to advance His reign everywhere. Onward, Christian Soldiers! For the King!

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 00:26

Thursday, September 13, 2007

DO NEWSPAPERS HAVE A LIBERAL BIAS?

...“conservatives retain a clear advantage over their progressive counterparts on a national level. When American newspaper readers turn to the op-ed page of their local newspaper each day, the syndicated columnists they see there are more likely to be conservative.”“The top 10 columnists as ranked by the number of papers in which they are carried include five conservatives, two centrists, and only three progressives.” “The top 10 columnists as ranked by the total circulation of the papers in which they are published also include five conservatives, two centrists, and only three progressives.” The most published and influential syndicated columnist by far is George Will, a conservative. The other most popular and widely published syndicated columnists include Kathleen Parker, Ellen Goodman, Leonard Pitts, David Broder, Cal Thomas, Charles Krauthammer, Thomas Friedman, Maureen Dowd and David Brooks. That is a mix of conservative, middle and liberal. Do you know who is which? “In 38 states, the conservative voice is greater than the progressive voice -- in other words, conservative columns reach more readers in total than progressive columns. In only 12 states is the progressive voice greater than the conservative voice.”“In three out of the four broad regions of the country -- the West, the South, and the Midwest -- conservative syndicated columnists reach more readers than progressive syndicated columnists. Only in the Northeast do progressives reach more readers, and only by a margin of 2 percent.”

These are some of the unexpected findings of a very extensive survey done by a liberal media watchdog group, Media Matters for America, especially to those of us who believe the Media generally has a Liberal bias. Search the entire Report here- <http://mediamatters.org/reports/oped/report>What is not reported is the bias of the local papers' Publisher or Editors and the choice of stories covered in the news and living sections, including choice of Titles and vocabulary and the page or section where they are placed. And then there are the photographs and editorial page cartoons chosen and the selection of letters from readers published. Even advertizing can show bias. Bias is every where. Reader beware!

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 16:01

GETTING PSYCHED AT COLLEGE

A Christian father we know is concerned about his child majoring in psychology in a “secular” college. Other subjects and majors are apparently “safe” and won't mislead his child. I appreciate his concern, however I wonder why concern only about Psychology and not all the rest of the Social Sciences and all the Humanities. The reasons for concern about the one apply also to the others. No subject is neutral. Parents should be very wary of all of them. Every single field of study is based on assumptions and presuppositions. They are all religious. They are all grounded in some Faith, including Philosophical Naturalism and its cousin, Scientism. [This is why I put quotes around the word secular.] None of them, in so-called “secular” schools and in many so-called Christian schools, are grounded in a Biblical Epistemology, which begins with God and His General and Special Revelation [See my website article on this Subject. <http://www.calvinfox.com/web/epistem.html> I asked a recent math major grad from a prestigious private college if she had a Christian Philosophy of Mathematics. She had never heard of any Philosophy of Math. See my Article on that, too http://www.calvinfox.com/web/philos_math.html]

This is the argument for Reformed Christian Schools; however the reality is that most students, millions of children, are never going to attend such schools but will be attending the “secular” ones. This means that these state school children must get a Christ-centered education in all subjects (including all the Social Sciences and Humanities) at home and church. Christian Teachers in State schools must find creative ways to present Biblical truths and not teach material that is unbiblical. A very difficult assignment. We must pray for such teachers and support Education which is truly Biblical wherever it can be found. My Institute is here to help. There are many other resources.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 15:46

Wednesday, September 12, 2007

HOW CAN MUSLIMS KILL OTHER MUSLIMS?

As the Nation remembers 9/11, here is a review of a recommended book about possible causes of that event not heard about in the media. The book reviewed (which I have not read) discusses the concept of takfir and that is relevant to Christians. Islam forbids killing of Muslims by Muslims. Many of the victims in the World trade Towers were Muslims and of course the victims of bombings by Muslim terrorists in Iraq are Muslims. How is this possible? takfir Certain groups of Muslims decide that they alone are the true Muslims and others who claim to be are not. It is permissible for the true Believers to kill the false ones. Hmm. Through the years, Christians have made this same pernicious judgment about other Christians (e.g.- in our War Between the States)<http://www.christianitytoday.com/books/features/bookwk/070319.html>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 10:04

ISLAM 101

When the DaVinci Code book and movie made their short-lived splash on the scene, evangelical churches everywhere heard sermons and sponsored public study groups on the alleged threat to The Faith. One of the outcomes of 9/11 should be an urgency to study and understand Islam and so-called radical Muslims as well as renewed commitment to communicate the Gospel to all Muslims. Has there been? This is far more important and crucial than the DaVinci Code fiasco was. I believe we have much to learn from them as well as to share with them.[http://www.ctlibrary.com/6305Cultural Causes for Islamic Terrorist Anger with America](http://www.ctlibrary.com/6305CulturalCausesforIslamicTerroristAngerwithAmerica) (includes links to several resources)<http://www.ctlibrary.com/34308>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 09:59

Saturday, September 8, 2007

AM I BEING AN OLD FOGEY?

Rev. Provocateur. That is what the current Christianity Today calls Mark Driscoll, the latest hot celebrity in the ecclesiastical world. A few months ago it was Ted Haggard and before that was Rick Warren. And then there was Dallas Willard. Even we Christians love our celebrities (Mr. Driscoll shares this issue of CT with Tony Dungy, whose name is in larger type on the cover.) Mr. Driscoll, who is 36, started a church, Mars Hill, in Seattle some 11 years ago, it now has 6000 in attendance and his goal is 20,000. According to men I respect, Mr. Driscoll is a Calvinist in his Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology) and apparently is saved, a brother in Christ. But his methods are over the top Emergent church- very, very contemporary. The large photo of him in the CT story shows him preaching in what is his standard garb: well worn (sloppy) blue jeans, untucked sports shirt, open at the top, with old comfortable shoes. According to the article, his language and illustrations are unapologetically crude and his demeanor is "in your face" and sarcastic. Knowing this about him, I would not attend any Service where he was preaching. If what this article says is true, I would find him very offensive. Interestingly, the largest segment of the mostly young, hip crowd that does gather to hear him are young single women. Trying to sort out my reaction to him, I don't want to be just a reactionary old fogey, stuck in my traditional ways. What objective reasons could I have for my disapproval of Mr. Driscoll's methods and others who also use them?

Mr. Driscoll seems to want to appear as though he were the same kinda people as the folks in his audience. He wants to connect with them, relate and communicate with them. He might very well prefer and enjoy the persona he has, in itself. What seems missing, in a nutshell, is respect for the Holy, the Altogether Different, the Transcendent. If he does respect the Holy how does he show that? I am showing respect for Mark Driscoll by calling him Mister.God has a holy Name, a Holy Day, a holy Place, a holy Meal, a holy People and a holy Book. This means the Name, Day, Place, Meal, People and Book are not the same as every other name, day, place, meal, people and book. They are altogether unique and different. How do we show we believe this? A major part of the problem we are addressing is that many of today's Preachers and "Christians" do not believe this. But the question for those of us who do believe is how do we show reverence to these holy things? People in the Catholic Tradition use Sanctuaries, Altars, Sacraments, Rituals, Symbols and Signs, special Language, Special Days and Celebrations and vested Clergy. Supposedly, many young adults are turned off by all this "holy" stuff. Tell that to the growing numbers of youth attracted to the Catholic Tradition with all these elements. Tell that to all the young adults who are attracted to the mystical (chants, candles, contemplative prayer, etc) and seek holy places and practice holy rituals, albeit not the Catholic ones. (Maybe the would-be preachers in contemporary churches are the ones who are turned off by the Traditional and they use the young generation as their rational.) That Mr. Driscoll is attracting large crowds does not prove what he does is good or right, but only that it attracts large crowds of certain types of people. What is good or right must be determined by the Scripture, not by crowds of the unsaved or by whether it is "successful" by today's standards. Scripture calls for respect of what is Holy. That is the standard we need. The clothing Mr. Driscoll wears while functioning publicly as the Senior Pastor of Mars Hill Church, as well as the language and techniques he uses, show great respect for his audience. What they like and want is what he gives to them. He does believe in showing (them) respect. It is important to realize that his audience is of a certain type of young adults who reflect the culture and values of a particular time and place, mostly today's urban Seattle (and other places like it). He is not respecting or trying to please or connect with other audiences of other types, places and values. He is not respecting the segment of the population to which I belong (even though Scripture is full of admonitions to honor, i.e.- respect, Parents and the Elderly). This topic does not concern just Mark Driscoll. There are many Mark Driscoll wannabes in churches around the country. They look and sound like him, in varying degrees. What we are discussing here applies to them all. My question is: what clothing and language and techniques used by a Pastor during a Church Service show respect for God and what is Holy, according to Scripture? Actually, this is the standard by which to judge everything about the Service and everyone in it. It might well turn out that some "Pastors" and some "Worship Services" are really not about respecting God and what is Holy at all. At best, these men and their meetings might best be described as public meetings for the purpose of "evangelism", ministering primarily to so-called seekers and non Christians. The Meeting is not about Worship at all, it is not primarily for Christians and the preacher is not functioning as a Pastor. That would explain a lot. In that case, maybe the rules and expectations for everyone and everything might be very different. What Mark Driscoll does and says and looks like might make some sense to me in that case. But, Mr. Driscoll's meetings are said to be to be Church Worship Services. New Testament worship was centered in the (weekly) Lord's Supper. It included prayers, Scripture and Preaching. It is interesting that by the 4th Century the Service had two parts. The first part was public and featured the prayers, Scripture and Preaching. When it came time to celebrate the Eucharist, that first part of the meeting ended and the "public" left. The members remained for the second half. Only those who had come to faith and had been baptized and

confirmed, having been catechized, were welcome to stay for The Supper. Perhaps this practice could be a useful model for today, ministering to both the inquirers and the faithful. The test would be whether what is done in the first meeting leads to people going into the second. If the hip young adults of Seattle and elsewhere that come for the public meetings, never come to saving faith, do not get baptized or catechized and publicly confirm their faith and thus become members of the Church, those public meetings fail the grade. The Church Service is not about evangelism. It is for Christians. It is about Worship, Eucharistic Worship. Back to the matter of showing respect to God and the Holy. The word "Respect" means the following-Dictionary definitions for "respect", noun and verb-To have or show esteem for or to have or show a sense of the worth or excellence of ...To give deference to a right, privilege, privileged position, or someone or something considered to have certain rights or privileges; proper acceptance or courtesy;To give reverence, veneration, honor, esteemThe Name (person) of God, Sunday and Worship, the Lord's Supper, the Church and the Bible are Holy and all are to be treated with respect, as defined. The question is: How are we to demonstrate reverence, veneration, honor and esteem to each of them? This is not really a difficult question. The answer simply calls for Believers to gather on the Lord's day in a place set aside as unto the Lord, consecrated, holy- the House of God. Everything about it should convey this purpose. Nothing about it should detract from this purpose. Walking in, anyone should "get this message".There should be two focal points: a Pulpit (or lectern) for preaching and a Holy Table for celebrating Holy Communion at each Service. The preaching should be based on the Bible, revered and treated as the very Word of God written. Standing to listen to it read would convey respect. Respect for the Lord's Supper would be shown by how it is conducted and by whom. The Table and the Elements used would all be treated as holy. Kneeling would convey respect. Who is allowed to participate and how they do it should also demonstrate reverence and respect.The behavior of the congregation, how they talk and sing and pray, must demonstrate that they respect themselves as the Holy People of God and what their business is for which they have assembled. (The meaning of the word "liturgy" is "the work of the people".) The clothing of all the congregants and particularly of the Clergy and Worship Leaders (including the ushers) should show that they are dressed to do holy work and are ministering to a Holy God. In Synagogues today, Rabbis wear a skull cap to show their respect for being in the presence of God and a prayer shawl around their shoulders, over their business suits to indicate what they are about. Jesus and Paul would have done the same, when they ministered in the synagogues of their day. Am I just being an old fogey? No! There are important theological and Biblical concepts at stake in this discussion of Mark Driscoll and others like him. We are talking about what the Church is about and what the Services of the Church are for. We are talking about what is Holy and how to respect it. We are talking about how to please and honor God when we gather in His Name in His House around His Table to hear His Word and to be His People.

Posted by Cal in Church at 14:00

Friday, September 7, 2007

SHOULD CHRISTIANS USE A LABYRINTH?

A certain church we know is planning to make a Labyrinth on the lawn behind its building. A Maze has many paths. A Maze requires decisions: how to get out of it. There are many possibilities, it is a Left Brain exercise. Observation, analysis and reason are required. Walking a Maze can be frustrating and one can become lost in it. A Labyrinth is not a maze. It is a unicursal path. The only decision needed with a Labyrinth is to enter. Once that first step is taken, the path takes you to the center and back out again. That is part of its power. It is a Right Brain activity, appealing to the imagination, a non-rational, spiritual experience. Hence it is used to produce a state of inner peace. Devotees say it aids in achieving inner "resonance or entrainment" (harmony, unity) by the very process of walking back and forth on the turning path. You can't get lost or turn into a wrong path. There is only one and it always leads everyone to the same place. In the Middle Ages walking the path was seen as a pilgrimage.

Labyrinths are found in many religions and are considered to be sacred and a very effective spiritual exercise to achieve a mystical experience and inner healing. "We are all on the path... exactly where we need to be. The labyrinth is a model of that path. A labyrinth is an ancient symbol that relates to wholeness. It combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path. The Labyrinth represents a journey to our own center and back again out into the world. Labyrinths have long been used as meditation and prayer tools. "A labyrinth is an archetype with which we can have a direct experience. We can walk it. It is a metaphor for life's journey. It is a symbol that creates a sacred space and place and takes us out of our ego to 'That Which Is Within.'" "A passive, receptive mindset is needed. At its most basic level the labyrinth is a metaphor for the journey to the center of your deepest self and back out into the world with a broadened understanding of who you are."

<http://www.lessons4living.com/labyrinth.htm><http://www.labyrinthguild.org/whatisalabyrinth.htm>The Church I mentioned above considers its new Labyrinth as "just a way to quiet the mind and heart". "It will be available to all who want to pray and meditate as they walk the path." Yes, the Labyrinth can be simply that, but that understanding is naive and misleading. There are many websites giving the history of the Labyrinth and how it is to be used and how to experience its mystical powers. There are many testimonies to how it has changed the lives of those who walk its path. One of the major Resources for better understanding is the website of Grace Cathedral, an Episcopal Church in San Francisco. Here is an excerpt from that site-"Walking the Labyrinths at Grace CathedralThe Labyrinth is an archetype, a divine imprint, found in all religious traditions in various forms around the world. By walking a replica of the Chartres labyrinth, laid in the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France around 1220, we are rediscovering a long-forgotten mystical tradition that is insisting to be reborn. The labyrinth has only one path so there are no tricks to it and no dead ends. The path winds throughout and becomes a mirror for where we are in our lives. It touches our sorrows and releases our joys. Walk it with an open mind and an open heart. There are three stages of the walk: Purgation (Releasing) ~ A releasing, a letting go of the details of your life. This is the act of shedding thoughts and distractions. A time to open the heart and quiet the mind. Illumination (Receiving) ~ When you reach the center, stay there as long as you like. It is a place of meditation and prayer. Receive what is there for you to receive. Union (Returning) ~ As you leave, following the same path out of the center as you came in, you enter the third stage, which is joining God, your Higher Power, or the healing forces at work in the world. Each time you walk the labyrinth you become more empowered to find and do the work you feel your soul reaching for. "<http://www.gracecathedral.org/labyrinth/Read> that last paragraph again. This is "New Age" Spirituality. In fact, it predates Christianity and is found in many pagan cultures around the world. It is for everyone. Faith in Christ is not required. There is absolutely nothing Christian or Biblical about a Labyrinth. In fact, what you have just read contradicts the Bible. It promotes false teaching. An interesting critique of the use by churches of the Labyrinth, by an Anglican, can be found here http://www3.telus.net/st_simons/arm08.htm A good examination, by a Reformed Christian, can be found here. Read the entire piece. <http://www.challies.com/archives/articles/experience-the.php> A disturbing revelation in this last link is that two evangelical ministries are trying to Christianize the Labyrinth: Group Publishing and Word of Life. I was shocked. http://store.grouppublishing.com/OA_HTML/ibeCCtPltmDspRte.jsp?item=14191 <http://www.yfc.co.uk/labyrinth/online.html> This is wrong headed and irresponsible. They are letting the camel of pagan mysticism get its nose under the tent. The rest of the animal will seek to get in. The Church has always been good at this. Where is the spiritual discernment of these two "evangelical" organizations? I am sad to say I question the same of the Church I mentioned in this area that is about to do the same.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 08:05

Thursday, September 6, 2007

ABSTINENCE PROGRAM TO BE CUT

Many evangelical Christians are very upset with Patrick Deval. The Governor of our State is opposed to using federal money to continue a program sponsored and run by a Christian anti-abortion organization in certain public schools. Proponents insist they are not promoting a pro-life agenda but are teaching traditional values to teens about sexuality, especially self-control and, wait until marriage, abstinence. More than 11,000 students have been involved in the classes. The State would rather turn down the \$700,000 dollars outright than abide by the restriction placed upon its use. The powers that be, as well as the Planned Parenthood League which is very influential here, do not trust or agree with the "Healthy Futures" faith-based organization or its program. They insist teaching abstinence is not just useless, but that such a program prevents teens from getting the message about birth control methods that they really need. "We don't get to decide for young people when they have sex, but we can ensure that they have all of the necessary information and support to be intentional about sexual choices. Governor Patrick got it right on sex ed, because he understands its goals: to increase abstinence, reduce the incidence of unprotected sex, and reduce the number of sexual partners. Abstinence-only-until-marriage programs fail to achieve the first goal, and do not even attempt to achieve the other two. Sex education programs that do achieve these goals give a clear message regarding the value of delaying sexual activity, and a clear message that those who are sexually active must always use condoms and other contraceptives." PATRICIA QUINN Director of Public Policy Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy "The FY08 budget process is in full swing. The House has finished deliberation on teen pregnancy items, ... Please call your Senator and ask him or her to support \$4 million for teen pregnancy prevention (DPH 4530-9000). Investment in teen pregnancy prevention led to a 41% decline in the teen birth rate, saving taxpayers \$144 million in one year alone!" - from the Alliance website A report with encouraging statistics about the decline in teen pregnancies can be found with this link. It indicates that the message about abstinence and birth control is making a difference; but millions of teens are still sexually active. There are significant racial and economic factors involved as well, that must also be addressed in reducing teen pregnancies. See the second link. The largest percentage of teen pregnancies in our area are among Hispanic girls. I agree that an abstinence only program is inadequate. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,289172,00.html?sPage=fnc.health/pregnancy> http://www.mfdp.med.harvard.edu/fellows_faculty/cfhuf/fellows/practicum/mcadoo.htm

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 19:42

WHEN CONVERSION IS NOT CONVERSION

An IVCF staffer wrote in her current prayer letter about all the New England staffers' "covenant to pray and to work together toward seeing more conversions on campus; conversions along the whole spectrum from skeptics to seekers to followers to leaders to world-changers." This is an interesting use of the word "Conversion". I understand what she means and the progression (the "whole spectrum") is a desirable one; but, with due respect for her good work, I have a problem with her use of the word. It is not what the Bible means by "Conversion" and it is more desirable that we use Bible words as the Bible uses them. Here are comments on the subject from a respected Dictionary-"Although the term "conversion" is common in theological and religious discussion today, it was a relatively rare term in the Bible. In its current popular usage it refers to someone who has come to Christ or become a Christian. The biblical roots of the concept involve the use of two terms that mean 'to turn' (Heb. sub; Gk. apostrophe)"...

"In sum, conversion is a turning to embrace God. So on a few key occasions the concepts of repentance and turning appear together in Acts (3:19; 26:20). Repentance reflects the attitude one brings into conversion, while turning pictures the change of orientation and direction that comes as a part of it (9:35 ? turned to the Lord; 11:21 ? alongside a reference to belief; 14:15 ? turn from worthless things; 15:19 ? turn to God; 26:18 ? turn from darkness to light). This is often Luke's way of describing what Paul refers to as faith, although Paul can speak of "turning to God from idols" as well (1 Thess 1:9-10). First Peter 2:25 uses the picture of coming to the great shepherd to express this idea. As one can see, the term can describe what one has turned from or can indicate to whom one turns." from Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology by Darrell L. Bock I have heard other Christians misuse this word also in much the same way as the IV staffer does. Left leaning "Evangelicals" use conversion to mean the turning of Believers into Social Activists. It's core Biblical meaning is sinners turning from idolatry and sin to God. It is a salvation word. To say that there are several conversions and that they are progressive from skepticism to seeking to following to leading to world-changing is saying something very different than what the Bible means by the word. In fact, the specific Bible

meaning gets lost in this new usage. Turning from sin to God is the flip side of Repentance. They are inseparable. The sinner hears the Gospel about the person and work of God in Christ. The Holy Spirit convinces the sinner (who is more than a skeptic and not a seeker) that what s/he has heard is true. This leads to a change of mind (repentance) about the person and work of God in Christ. The sinner is gifted with faith (intellectual assent) toward the person and work of God in Christ. The Holy Spirit works the miracle of regeneration in the sinners heart. This sets the sinner's will free from its bondage to Sin and thus s/he is enabled to turn (convert) from idolatry and sinful living to God in Christ as Lord and Savior. Intellectual assent has deepened into trust and commitment. This repentance and conversion is a once in a life time experience. Biblical Conversion is not the continuum of seeking to following to leading to world-changing. Is "seeking" a substitute for hearing the Gospel, repentance, faith and Biblical conversion? If seeking includes these steps, why not say so? What does "following" mean? Discipleship? To say that following (discipleship) comes after seeking seems to overlook or eliminate hearing the Gospel, repentance, faith and Biblical conversion. It is a serious and common mistake to encourag or expect sinners to follow Christ without ever experiencing regeneration. To say that "leading" is next in the sequences implies that "following" ceases. If "following" means being a disciple who follows, i.e.- obeys and imitates Jesus, why should that cease? Perhaps what the Staffer is after here is a progression from new member of IV into leadership in the chapter. Certainly, a Leader should remain a disciple (if that is what follower meant). Finally, the IV Leader, still a follower-disciple, is hopefully going to graduate and go on to be a world-changer [What that means is even another issue to debate] You see how things get a little confusing here because of the original error of using a Bible word in a non-Biblical way. Biblically, conversion or coming to Christ involves entering a position of union with Christ by faith alone and adoption as a "son" of God. This makes possible the pardon of sins and a standing in grace. This is justification. Justification is the granting of forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness by God to the sinner. It is a once and forever event and not a continuum. (For me it was September 5, 1955) Out of justification, because of justification, comes sanctification or progressive growth in holiness and righteousness. Finally, there will be glorification. Altogether, this is salvation. We can say, Biblically, we who are in Christ have been saved, are being saved and shall be saved. I have been believing and preaching this Doctrine for almost 50 years. The word "Conversion" as it is used today, such as by the IV staffer, does not convey any of this Doctrine. That is tragic.

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 15:56

THREE YEARS NOW

We have now lived in Springfield a full three years. We lived here for 19 years before moving to Vermont to pastor a church there. That we lived in Vermont for six years before returning here seems more and more unreal. We miss some of the places there that we used to enjoy. We definitely miss fellowship with the friends we had to leave behind. One major reason we came back here- we could have gone anywhere- was to be near our ailing mothers. In fact, they both passed away about a year after we returned. We also wanted to be closer to our children and their families. They do not live around here, but the highways and airport are closer for easier travel than from northern Vermont. We also expected that we could have a ministry here with friends who work in the inner city or with churches and Christians we once had worked with. That ministry has not happened for several reasons. Simply put, folks and situations here changed while we were gone and those here now "know not Joseph". That has been disappointing, but God has His reasons. I am thankful for the time I now have to study and write and hope that good will come from that eventually. We realize keenly that we are very much out of the swirl of things. Maybe we should be glad. We are well. We enjoy time with the friends we still have here, as well as Greater Springfield (including its medical facilities) and Western Mass (including the college towns). We like our little Cape (house) and so we remain for now. God may yet call us elsewhere or open doors for ministry here of which we now know not.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 15:52

Tuesday, September 4, 2007

WHERE DO YOU GO TO CHURCH? WHY?

I mentioned in Monday's QT Thots that I am often frustrated at corporate Worship, not only in the Church we attend, but elsewhere. My conclusion was that the key is in my own heart. Regardless of whatever is happening around me during corporate Worship, wherever that is, I must look for the Lord within and commune with Him there, worshipping Him in spirit as Jesus taught. I guess my frustration comes from not doing that. I really am influenced by whatever is happening around me and during corporate Worship. What should aide my worship actually often impedes or distracts from it. Friends who have moved into this area are looking for a new church home. They are used to dynamic, contemporary worship (including music) and strong Bible preaching. They asked where we attend. I am struck by the fact that I am very uncomfortable answering that question and by the fact that I would not invite them (or anyone else) to attend with us.

We worship in a small Episcopal parish. It is liturgical worship (which we like, but we know our friends, who are strong Protestant evangelicals, would not care for) and nothing about the Service is dynamic. The parish has grown a little over the last 4 years. Sunday there may have been 40 at the Service we attended. "Well, after all, it is Labor day." About 10 miles down the road, an evangelical church had more than 400 in attendance. It was Labor Day for them, too. So why do we still attend this small Episcopal Church? I'm writing this to help sort out an answer. I write as one who was ordained as a conservative Baptist Pastor more than 45 years ago. In recent years, I have come to prefer and value formal Liturgical Worship, which includes Communion every week. Going forward and kneeling (or standing) before the Altar every week, confessing sin, receiving the elements that are effective symbols of the Sacrifice for that sin, accepting forgiveness of that sin and then renewing our covenant promises to obey and serve the Lord is all very meaningful and important to us. The Episcopal Church (for all of its admitted many problems and shortcomings) is the only Church that offers this and our quiet small Parish is the most convenient place around here where we can worship as we like. Of course, before celebrating the Eucharist (the Episcopal Church name for the Lord's Supper), the vested Priest-Pastor has preached a short sermon [from a Pulpit] based on the three passages of Scripture for the day. A lot of Scripture is read in an Episcopal Worship Service- more than in many evangelical churches. Most of the Bible is covered every 3 years. That is always a blessing. The passages are printed on a leaflet included in the Bulletin. That is very helpful, too. Our particular Priest-Pastor is a conservative evangelical and a good number of those who attend and are active in this Parish seem to really know the Lord and are friends of ours from when we lived in Springfield before we went to Vermont. In contrast, we do not value or prefer the kind of worship services we have experienced in other churches in the area. These are far more dynamic and in churches that are growing and very active with a lot of programming for all ages and stages of seekers and finders. They are especially geared to appeal to today's young adults. To that end, they make much use of the latest audio visual technology and contemporary music. Messages are presented in a very casual, conversational, story-telling manner by a Pastor dressed like everyone else in the congregation, often walking around among them as he talks. He does not stay behind a pulpit. Some of my response to this kind of Service are influenced, no doubt, by my Senior Citizen status. But I have other issues as well. These latter churches are, in a word, horizontal; with an emphasis on the social relationships between worshippers. There is always an extended meet and greet time before and during the Service and extended Fellowship Hour after or between Services. Liturgical Services, in contrast, are vertical. Worship is corporate: We confess our Faith, "We believe..." and prayers and the many congregational responses throughout the Service are offered in unison. But, the emphasis throughout is on the spiritual relationship of the worshippers and God rather than with each other. This difference is typically reflected in the architecture of the buildings. Often today's contemporary churches have low roofs. In fact, they are often converted business buildings. People look at each other. God is found in the fellowship. Classic liturgical church buildings have vaulted ceilings. God is found by looking up, above: Our Father is found in Heaven. Granted I have oversimplified. Episcopal parishes attempting to attract new people are experimenting with some of the forms of contemporary evangelical churches with mixed success. Visitors to one of them will find a confusing mix of both types of Worship. I am a purist and pray that God will revive traditional parishes and the Holy Spirit will fill the classic forms of liturgical worship with new power and life. I won't have any problem inviting folks to such a Service. In fact, I will want to.

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:27

PICKING UP THE TRASH

Some people really take care and pride in their property. Their yards are well maintained, shrubs trimmed and colorful flowers abound. What I admire are those homeowners who do this when their immediate neighbors have let their yards run down. They do not let the unsightly mess, often a junk filled or trashed yard, next door discourage them from

keeping up their place. It is, after all, their place. More often than not, the owners of the dumpy places do not live there and the tenants do not take responsibility. "Hey, it's not my place. I just live here.", they will say. Exactly, they just live there. That should be reason enough to take care of the place. They live there. I should note the City is seriously cracking down on homeowners who neglect their property and violate City ordinances. Why should they have to do that? It is not primarily or usually about money. Self-respect should be enough. Wanting a healthy and safe environment, especially for children, should be enough. A neglected and dilapidated house and yard reveals a lot about the people who occupy the place. So does a well-maintained one. All of this can be a metaphor for our Christian lives.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 15:24

LIVE YOUR LIFE

"Live your life, forget your age"- Norman Vincent Peale That all of us must die sometime is because we are mortals. We are mortals because of Adam and his disobedience in the Garden of Eden (The Fall). Exactly when and how we die is normally out of our hands; but the when and how is not the result of being mortal, nor of our fallen nature (although it may be because of our sins or the sins of others, which are the result of the Fall) That all of us will live beyond our mortality, beyond the grave, is because of the will of God. He intends for all of us to be resurrected and stand before Him to be judged- some to enter Heaven, while others go into Hell. This means we all exist for the same amount of time, forever, even though our life on earth as mortals is of different length for each of us. What is important is to redeem our limited time here and prepare for our time beyond. Since the latter is forever, which is most important? Is what we are doing today a reflection of that?

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 08:28

HEROES?

Words are constantly being inflated and robbed of their traditional meaning. Currently, the word "hero" is one of them. It is commonly used for anyone in uniform who has lost life or limb and increasingly used for anyone who simply completes a tour of duty in the military. Of course, it is also used of sports figures and "good guys" in comic books, action games and as the title of a current TV hit show. (It is even the name of a grinder sandwich.) It is important to use the noun properly in order to honor those who truly are heroes. If everyone is a hero, no one is a hero.

HERO [definitions from 3 dictionaries] person noted for feats of courage, especially one who has risked or sacrificed his or her life a person noted for courageous actions a person distinguished by exceptional courage COURAGE [definitions from 2 dictionaries] the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., without fear; bravery a quality of spirit that enables you to face danger or pain without showing fear A Hero is a person who has demonstrated by his or her actions the ability to face danger or pain without showing fear; a person who has demonstrated courage and bravery in action. The highest form of such action is risking or sacrificing one's life for others. The key here is doing this knowingly or voluntarily. A victim of an accident is a victim, not a hero. Knowingly going into a situation where accidents are possible (e.g.- the fire fighters who recently lost their lives in Boston in a restaurant fire) is not necessarily heroic. That could simply be stupidity or recklessness or "obeying orders" or an attempt to make good money. If they become victims of an accident, they are victims. That is not to take away from the tragedy, but it does not make the victims heroes, by the dictionary definition of "hero". There is a difference between going to work everyday, facing the risks as a coal miner (granted, dangerous or unhealthy work) in order to support one's family (and "because we proudly come from a family of miners", although that often means, "We don't know any other kind of work") and voluntarily going into the shaft after an accident to rescue other miners from death, knowing that doing so could take your own life. Everyone who puts on a uniform (military, police officer, fire fighter, paramedic or ER nurse, mail carrier, etc) is not a hero. There is some risk involved (of varying degrees) for all who do. But, there must be a difference between someone who does this to make money and who hopes and tries to avoid all the risks and those who voluntarily place their life on the line, "above and beyond", in a known dangerous situation of high risk for the purpose of saving someone else's life. The latter is a true hero. We do not want to diminish that. If everyone is a hero, no one is a hero. This leaves the question as to why the family and friends of victims all seem to want to think of their departed loved one as some kind of hero. Perhaps, it is an effort to bring meaning to the tragedy. Perhaps using the name, "Hero", is an attempt to justify the death and gives the victim some dignity and honor in their mind and that brings comfort. Maybe, but it is the wrong name and the reality is that some tragic deaths are not justified, do not have meaning or dignity. They are just that- "tragedy: a lamentable, dreadful, or fatal event or affair; calamity; disaster" -Dictionary For me, Jesus is the ultimate Hero. He purposely gave his life so that others may live and it is through Him and his triumph over death that we can deal with tragedy.

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Posted by Cal in Current Events at 07:40