

Monday, October 29, 2007

CELEBRATING THE RED...

I won't rub it in: the Red Sox are the World Champions, again! One lesson of life for those who supported the Other Team might simply be, "You win some and you lose some. Oh well- keep going, keep trying." Of course, now you could root for the Patriots. For the sports fans here, this is a great time to be a New Englander. For everyone here, the view outdoors is magnificent! Foliage is at its peak and it is absolutely perfect! Awesome display of Beauty that glorifies the Creator. My brother is an Artist. God is, too. Color (red or not), creativity, imagination and design are things Christians should celebrate for God's sake.

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 15:05

ABORTION: DOES IT MATTER IN THE ELECTION?

It is not irrational for voters to care deeply about a candidate's stance regarding abortion because that stance is accurately considered an important signifier of the candidate's sensibilities and sympathies, and of his or her notion of sound constitutional reasoning. But regarding abortion itself, what a candidate thinks about abortion rights is not especially important. This is from today's column by George Will. Could it be true? <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/10/26/AR2007102601864.html?sub=AR>

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 14:41

PLAYING WITH FIRE

"A headline in the Los Angeles Times pretty much said it all: 'Maddening Intense Blazes Met Explosive Suburban Growth.'" This is from a column today by Richard Reeves. Our local paper ran it with the title "Playing with fire, getting burned" "The results were predictable: Fifteen big "brush" fires, more than 600 square miles burned, more than 1,800 buildings reduced to ashes, hundreds of thousands of people running for their lives, cost about a billion dollars. There is no mystery about any of this. The Times headline was perfect because it caught the relationship between man and nature in disaster, whether fire, flood, earthquake or global warming. What nature does is inevitable; all these things were happening with maddening regularity long before there were upright bipeds running around making them better or worse."

"Southern California is, in fact, a great laboratory for the study of the interaction between nature and man, our attempts to manipulate nature for pleasure and profit. Left on its own, the climate, flora and fauna of this stretch of Pacific coast is a paradise suitable for hundreds of thousands, ... Of course, tens of millions are crammed in now, fighting nature and each other for every shovelful of land and drop of water. So stuff happens, as it did last week from Malibu to northern Mexico." Read the rest of Mr. Reeves column here-http://www.richardreeves.com/latest_column.html

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 14:33

ANN COULTER AND ACCUSATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM

CNBC's The Big Idea host, Donny Deutsch, recently interviewed conservative columnist Ann Coulter. He said he was offended by her remarks and many other columnists and bloggers have picked up the story of Ms Coulter's alleged anti-Semitism expressed in that interview. What did she say? Everyone, including Jews, should become Christians. Mr. Deutsch, who is Jewish, said this was like the view of the "head of Iran" who wants to "wipe Israel off the face of the earth." Not so, countered Ms Coulter. She pressed the view that evangelical Christians believe everyone needs to believe in Jesus. When Jewish people do that, she said, they are "perfected". I think the preferred term is "completed".

I agree with Ms Coulter on this. It is what all evangelicals believe and what we all work for: the conversion of every man, woman and child to Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations ("ethne": people groups), baptizing

them...“This has absolutely nothing to do with ‘wiping” out the secular Nation which is Israel. It is not “anti-Semitic (apparently defined as hate Jews), anti-Islam (as in hate Moslems) or even anti Atheism (as in hate atheists). It is love Jews, Moslems and Atheists. The most loving thing we can do for them (and everyone) is lead them to Christ that they may have Life Eternal. But certainly, we are not advocating hating and persecuting them or denying them (or anyone) their God-given human Rights. Come on! <http://www.mefedia.com/entry/3734727/#>But all that is exactly what liberal columnist Leonard Pitts insists Ann Coulter and all who believe as she does want to do. Last week, Mr. Pitts reports, Ann “Coulter said that in her perfect America, everyone would be a Christian. ... that Jews simply needed to be "perfected" -- i.e., made to accept Jesus as savior. Which is, of course, one of the pillars (along with the slander of Christ's murder) supporting 2,000 years of pogroms, abuse and Holocaust.” He accused her (and all evangelicals) of ignorance, anti-Semitism, hate, and intolerance. He said his readers “ought to view [her] with alarm“. “So, what about Ann Coulter? (Mr Pitts asked) What about the push-back against diversity, pluralism and tolerance, that she represents? [We should stand up and] shout against the Coulters of the world”Here is his article- http://www.miamiherald.com/living/columnists/leonard_pitts/story/274100.html

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 13:15

Saturday, October 27, 2007

PRIORITIES IN PICKING A PRESIDENT

It requires Special Revelation via the Scripture to know the Gospel; nevertheless "Natural Law" exists and it is the basis God has for holding pagan Nations accountable for their actions. For example, study the first chapter of Amos which records God's judgment coming on those pagan Nations guilty of violence, oppression, cruelty in their treatment of other Nations and people groups (e.g.- slave trading). Natural Law, particularly, Natural Moral Law, is about Justice. That is God's yardstick for every Nation. Instead of politicking and seeking legislation to make this a Christian Country, our goal should be to make it a Country wherein there is Justice (as measured by God's standards) for all. This gives us a major principle to use in deciding which candidates to support in the coming national election. Likewise, this goal gives us a guideline to use in evaluating legislation and government policies. Who will work for Justice? What will enable Justice?

Any politician who endorses or enables oppression, cruelty or unwarranted violence (I believe the federal Government has the right to wage a just war in the protection of its citizens, as well as to administer capital punishment to confessed and convicted murderers. All this would be warranted violence) or who would deny anyone their basic human rights should, in turn, be denied. The candidate for President should support basic human rights as defined in the Bible (especially in the Torah) These are the rights to life, marriage and family, work, ownership of property, privacy, due process when accused of crime (a fair and honest trial) and freedom to worship God. The main concern of most citizens is the Iraq War (ending it) and second (according to recent polls) is the economy (jobs- fear of a Depression), followed by health care (especially insurance coverage). However, I believe we should give priority to the issues of basic Justice, as defined Biblically. That means Christians should support candidates and legislation that are anti-abortion, anti-eugenics (anti-embryonic stem cell research) and anti-euthanasia; pro-traditional (man and woman only) marriage and parental authority; pro-business and the free market as well as fair, non-discriminatory labor laws; less taxation (which would require limiting entitlement programs as well as a balanced budget); less surveillance of citizens ("Big Brother"); reform of the courts and legal system; and an end to restriction on public worship and expressions of belief in God.

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 18:06

ROMNEY FOR PRESIDENT?

In light of what I have written above, I am inclined to think that Mitt Romney might be the best candidate for our next president. I am also persuaded by this well-reasoned article by Wayne Grudem that Mr Romney is probably the best person among the current candidates for the position. <http://www.crosswalk.com/news/commentary/11557559/page1/>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 17:57

MOTHER NATURE? WHO IS MOTHER NATURE?

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

Maybe as a substitute for (and a refusal to acknowledge) the Deity that is in control- our true "Mother": God the Father, Maker of Heaven and Earth. Most Christians declare that truth at least once a week when we confess the Nicene Creed during our worship. The natural world in which we live is the handiwork of God. We care for that natural world because He has given us that responsibility and we honor Him when we do it. Instead of "Mother Nature", we should be hearing about the Father's Providence. Part of believing God is Creator is believing that God is continually involved in the preservation of what He has created. In that sense, creation never ends. He holds and keeps all thing together. He

guides the earth as it orbits the sun. He waters the earth and feeds the animals. He controls the seasons and the weather- not some Mother Nature (as deity or metaphor). That is one of the main reasons we worship Him.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:51

THE CURSE

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

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

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 09:48

Thursday, October 25, 2007

ENJOYING FAMILY AND THE BALTIMORE-DC AREA

We returned from Maryland last night. We had a good visit with our family there and that included visiting Baltimore's Inner Harbor- always fun, and times wandering on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay- also a pleasure. It is a great area- sometimes we visit Annapolis or go down to DC. We also spent time on the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) campus where our daughter, Melinda, is a student. She is one of 13,000 at this school that bills itself as an honors university, known for research in various Sciences. I was really impressed by the great number of East Indian and Asian students. What a mission field for local churches and groups like IVCF. I know that is not PC to say in this age of Pluralism and, in fact, all the students on the campus need Christ, not only the international ones. And then, all the students who are Christians need to be challenged to think Biblically about the material they are studying. I would make a good guess that most of them are not.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 16:23

Thursday, October 18, 2007

1263 POSTS AVAILABLE HERE

Thank you for checking out my Blog. There will be no new posts until next week. However, there are 1263 posts already on this site for your perusal

Posted by Cal at 08:38

Tuesday, October 16, 2007

JOEL OSTEEN: HERETIC?

A friend wondered if I had seen the segment on the 60 Minutes TV program last Sunday about Joel Osteen, Sr. Pastor of perhaps the largest church in America and what I thought of it. Yes, we watched that segment. Mr Osteen is very, very good at what he does. He is a smooth, personable and passionate speaker and has reached millions (?) through his TV and radio shows, Conferences and books including more than 40,000 people every weekend at his church in Houston, Texas! Amazing. One person interviewed in the segment for his analysis of Mr Osteen was a noted Reformed Theologian, Michael Horton. Dr Horton described Mr. Osteen's message as "cotton candy Gospel"- God is nice and wants to be nice to us. He claimed Mr. Osteen is preaching heresy: God is a resource to help each of us realize our potential, to be all we can be. Mr. Osteen message is all about us, not about God.

Well, the Statement of Faith of Lakewood Church is one that most every evangelical today would be comfortable with. I presume, as the Pastor, Mr Osteen agrees with it and does not contradict it in his preaching or books. That would make him an evangelical to most people. I have never heard Mr Osteen preach nor have I read any of his books so I can not say if he is heretical in his doctrine. I suspect that it is his interpretation of the last of the doctrines in his church's Statement that is at issue here. "WE BELIEVE...as children of God, we are overcomers and more than conquerors and God intends for each of us to experience the abundant life He has in store for us"http://www.lakewood.cc/site/PageServer?pagename=LCH_ourbeliefsAs always- definitions! The Statement is true as it stands. I gather Mr. Osteen majors on this more than the other Doctrines in the Statement and the issue of contention is the definition of "experience the abundant life". For some this could lead to preaching what is called the "Health, Wealth and Prosperity" Gospel. That is a false Gospel.Sadly, many of today's evangelicals in churches everywhere would value and enjoy Mr. Osteen's message and see nothing heretical in it. No, Mr Osteen is apparently not preaching the classic Gospel in his sermons (especially the reality of sin and the need for repentance, forgiveness and regeneration as well as a call to righteous living). Actually, I suspect that many evangelical Pastors are not preaching the classic Gospel either. Mr. Osteen is giving people what they want and he does it bigger and better than most. There are many other men and women Speakers and "Bible Teachers", who are very popular among evangelicals with the same positive message, using it to give people inspiration, hope and confidence. Many Pastors are attempting to do the same as he does. It is what people perceive they need. All that, not just Mr. Osteen, is very disturbing to me. I just keep doing what I do. Each servant of the Lord will one day answer to the Lord for how he has served Him. Hopefully, the classic Gospel will yet prevail.

Posted by Cal in Church at 18:56

RED LETTER CHRISTIANS?

Here is Stan Guthrie's take on the UN Report below. Also read his article on why he is not a Red Letter Christian. I agree with him and think Tony Campolo's retort is unfair to say the very least.<http://www.stanguthrie.com/>

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 13:21

THE SKY IS NOT FALLING

"A new United Nations report called "State of the Future" concludes: "People around the world are becoming healthier, wealthier, better educated, more peaceful, more connected, and they are living longer."<http://www.opinionjournal.com/taste/?id=110010695>

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 13:09

AT LEAST 87.7 % OF PEOPLE IN U.S. ARE NOT POOR!

The nation's poverty rate was 12.3 percent in 2006, down from 12.6 percent a year before, the Census Bureau reported

last Tuesday. The “poverty rate” is the percentage of all people in the US living below the poverty level. The “poverty level” is the official measure used to decide eligibility for federal health, housing, nutrition and child care benefits. <http://biz.yahoo.com/ap/070828/poverty.html> This means 87.7% of Americans live above the poverty level and are neither eligible for, nor do they need, welfare benefits. That is good news! There are all kinds of problems with statistics for poverty rate and levels. One is that they use arbitrary definitions of official poverty and the poor. They do not sufficiently take into account regional differences (especially variations in the cost of living) or count as income “in-kind” benefits (food, housing, child care, etc). They assume that poverty is permanent- it is actually often temporary and can differ by the month, as well as over the years. People move in and out of poverty and that must be accounted for. And within “people” there are different categories- single, couples, children, the elderly, etc. The official poverty level assumes that family needs are static, when actually they change with people moving in and out of a household and going through different ages and stages. A single parent with a teenager has different needs than a single parent with a baby than that same single parent whose child has moved out of the house. There is also a failure to account for the fact that reported expenditures are far more than reported incomes among the poor. Is this a matter of the latter overspending, i.e.-going into debt. Or is this a matter of inaccuracies in the way income is counted or reported? For many more related issues and a good, in depth discussion of determining poverty levels in America, study-<http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/3930481.html>

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 12:45

MARTYRS REMEMBERED

Today the Church commemorates Nicholas Ridley, Bishop of London, and Hugh Latimer, Bishop of Worcester, Martyrs, 1555 On this day, 452 years ago in England, two of the most important and stalwart Protestant Reformers were burned to death at the stake for Christ and the Gospel of Grace [the Gospel as understood and preached by Luther and Calvin], condemned by Mary (“Bloody Mary”), the devout Roman Catholic Queen of that time. I don’t know if there is any connection, but my father’s mother’s English family were Ridleys. I am thankful, however, to be spiritually related to Nicholas Ridley, who helped Thomas Cranmer [also martyred by Mary] author or edit the first Book of Common Prayer and to thus contribute to the reformation of the then Roman Catholic Church in England into the Protestant Church of England. It is very painful to observe how far many of today’s Protestant Churches have come from the Faith and Church for which these men gave their lives. But the flames that consumed them lit a Light which still does burn in the hearts of millions around the world. <http://chi.gospelcom.net/DAILYF/2003/10/daily-10-16-2003.shtml>

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:49

Wednesday, October 10, 2007

SEEKING THE COMMON GOOD

We are having a debate here in Springfield about adopting Ward Representation. Certain sections of the City believe they are under represented and should be able to elect City Councilors that will aggressively pursue, not the common good, but their interests. Here is a very apropos statement. It is written about national politics, but certainly applies to our Town—"Politics in the United States has become increasingly issue-oriented, short-term, and pragmatic. Citizens approach government primarily as a means to achieve the ends that various interest groups, regions, or sectors of society hold dear. Politics often amounts to little more than interest-group competition among diverse groups, each seeking its own goals. Too little attention is given to the soundness of public institutions, to the art of long-term constitutional statecraft, and to the common good of the republic as a whole." "The prevalence of interest-group politics fuels an electoral process in which candidates raise money from special interests and typically appeal to voters on a narrow range of issues. Think tanks do research, some of it quite detailed and in-depth, but most of it focuses narrowly on particular issues, with little concern for other, equally vital matters. The political parties, interest groups, think tanks, and most citizens tend to take for granted this system along with the dominant ideologies and American civil religion that fuel the action." <http://www.cpjustice.org/distinguish.html>

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 16:06

'PRINCIPLED PLURALISM'

If a Christian Nation is defined as one in which it's Leaders and citizens are confessing Christians and its Laws are Scriptural and its Public Policies and predominant Culture are righteous by Christian standards, then the United States of America is not a Christian Nation today. If a Christian Nation is defined as one which was originally founded by Christians with the intent for it to be Christian, with most of its earliest settlers professing the Faith and its founding documents purposely designed to reflect Biblical Principles and these, in turn, were embodied in its Constitution as the Law of the Land, then a case could be made that the USA was a Christian nation. That, however, does not prove that it is one today. At the very most, we can argue that Biblical, Judeo-Christian principles, from its founding days, are embodied in many of our Laws and common "American" culture. However, in practice, the founding documents are interpreted by our Courts to increasingly reflect, at every level, a plurality of religious, moral and cultural values. Its secondary laws and policies increasingly embody a mix of Christian and very non-Christian principles. We are not, nor can we be, a Christian nation as defined in the opening paragraph. Inasmuch as Scripture does not mandate or justify a Theocracy in America, wherein our Civil Government officially endorses, supports and protects Christianity and whereas the Kingdom of God can not be legislated nor extended by political or governmental coercion, and inasmuch as the clock of history can not be turned back to Colonial Days (or to the days when there was a core Protestant Christian consensus, which arguably was the case in America until the early 20th Century), we must pursue another approach in seeking the common good for this Nation. That approach, which is Scriptural, is to work toward a nation which recognizes and conforms to the Natural Law of God. This has been called "Principled Pluralism". The "Principles" involved would be those moral laws and standards (Norms) revealed in Scripture which are of God and designed to be universal (rather than specific to the Church), e.g. - the 10 Commandments. Being universal they apply to everyone and every nation all the time. People and Nations do not need to be regenerate or Christian in order to obey them e.g. - Thou shalt not steal or murder and God judges Nations by how well they do this. [See my study on this topic posted below] Thus the Nation would respect the pluralism of Religions within it, while upholding in its Laws and Courts one set of core moral principles grounded in the Judeo-Christian Scripture. This is "Principled Pluralism" as I understand it. (Others have trimmed down the "Principles", substituting generic concepts such as "fairness" and "equality" and "freedom" and "human rights" or "human dignity" for specifically Biblical morals and Norms. I do not agree with that.) For Christians, Biblical Principled Pluralism falls short of our vision of the Kingdom of God on earth in our time, but it is a feasible approach to the common good which we can support and that goes a long way toward that ultimate goal.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 11:34

JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

1. God is the Highest Authority- The Kingdom, Power and Glory is His alone! He is Sovereign over all. 2. Kings [all

governors] are to rule for God, as His representative and minister. This is true, even of pagan Rulers.³ All people who hold authority are subject to God, particularly, to the Law of God, whether they acknowledge Him or not.⁴ If the Rulers [civil governments] do not "keep the Law", eventually God's negative Judgment will come upon the Nation.⁵ Does all of this about ancient Israel apply to other nations, including ours today? YES

The pagan rulers mentioned in the Old Testament did not know the Mosaic Law. However, they were still held accountable to God for their actions according to the most basic moral principles of that Law. See the stories of Sennacherib Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and the king of Tyre. The Apostle Paul tells us that God was just in His judgment of these pagan rulers, because what may be known about God is plain to them' Rom.1:19 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that [Rulers] are without excuse. 32...they know God's righteous decree... Rom 2:14 Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law...¹⁵ ... show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. All peoples have "written on their hearts" a basic sense of moral "oughtness". Yes, they have a "fallen nature" and they are "dead in sin"; but, they are still human beings and this inner witness of conscience is still present, as are all the other qualities of human beings, such as rationality and creativity. As Rom 2:15 says, people may have great inner conflict over what is right and wrong and a sense of moral guilt, even though they are "hard-hearted"; but they still have an inner witness that some acts are morally horrific, while others are noble. It requires Special Revelation via the Scripture to know the Gospel; nevertheless this "Natural Law" exists and it is the basis God has for holding pagan Nations accountable for their actions. For example, study the first chapter of Amos which records God's judgment coming on those pagan Nations guilty of violence, oppression, cruelty in their treatment of other Nations and people groups (e.g.- slave trading). Natural Law, particularly, Natural Moral Law, is about Justice. That is God's yardstick for every Nation. Instead of politicking and legislating to make this a Christian Country, our goal should be to make it a Country wherein there is Justice (as measured by God's standards) for all.

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 11:25

THE HEART OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

The Post after this one [below] declares that the heart of the Gospel is Jesus' sacrifice of himself (by dying on the cross), as a penal substitute for sinners, atoning for their sin that the justice of God could be satisfied and those sinners forgiven. It follows that the heart of corporate Worship offered by People redeemed by the Savior's Blood, is the commemoration of that Sacrifice, re-presenting it with emblems and acts and (formulaic) words used in what is called Holy Communion. For the great majority of Christians (Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican) around the world and through the centuries, all corporate Worship has included and focused on this commemoration, accompanied, of course, with Preaching. Protestant Christians (since the 16th Century) have instead typically put the focus on the Pulpit rather than the Table, observing the Lord's Supper perhaps once a month and then simplifying it into a mere symbolic ritual- a remembrance, but not a re-presentation, an ordinance to be obeyed, but not a Sacrament by which to receive grace and be edified.

Reformed Christians adhere to what is called The Regulative Principle. Corporate Worship must include those "parts" commanded by God and must not include anything which God has not commanded. Thus a Reformed Service every week will include prayers, Scripture Readings, singing and preaching, as well as the Lord's Supper maybe once a month. Many Reformed Churches also include a Confession of Faith in every Service and an Offering is normally taken. There is no agreement as to the exact order or content of each of these parts. When the Church in England underwent transformation influenced by the Protestant Reformation, the order of Worship (the Liturgy) came to include all these parts but they were arranged in a unique way so as not only to focus on Holy Communion, the Sacrament of the Gospel, but to take the worshippers through the Gospel itself. This makes classic Anglican Worship totally, from prelude to postlude, very Protestant (Reformed) and potentially very evangelistic. Thomas Cranmer designed a Liturgy in 1552, later revised in 1662, which contained 3 cycles of a 3-fold sequence. The sequence involved repentance and the confession of sin; announcing grace and forgiveness and a call to the response of faith. These 3 Gospel Themes were repeated 3 times each in different ways, in each Service. This has been the framework for every version of the Anglican Liturgy used around the world since Cranmer's time. It has increasingly been modernized (liberalized) over the years. Interestingly, the Liturgy that comes closest to preserving the 1662 version in the USA today is the one used by the Reformed Episcopal Church.

Posted by Cal in Church at 11:20

Monday, October 8, 2007

THE HEART OF THE TRUE GOSPEL

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

God's redemptive love must not be conceived - misconceived, rather - as somehow triumphing and displacing God's retributive justice, as if the Creator-Judge simply decided to let bygones be bygones. The measure of God's holy love for us is that 'while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' and that 'he...did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all' (Romans 5:8, 8:32). Evidently there was no alternative to paying that price if we were to be saved, so the Son, at the Father's behest 'through the eternal Spirit' (Hebrews 9:14), paid it. Thus God 'set aside...the record of debt that stood against us...nailing it to the cross' (Colossians 2:14). Had we been among the watchers at Calvary, we should have seen, nailed to the cross, Pilate's notice of Jesus' alleged crime. But if, by faith, we look back to Calvary from where we now are, what we see is the list of our own unpaid debts of obedience to God, for which Christ paid the penalty in our place. Paul, having himself learned to do this, testified: 'the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Galatians 2:20). -J.I. Packer http://www.reformation21.org/Reformation_21_Blog/Reformation_21_Blog/58/vobId__6193/

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 14:33

BEING A NEIGHBOR

The commentary I sent out this morning [Today's QT Thots] about the story of the Good Samaritan has ramifications for public policy. If we use its model to guide America, as it wrestles with the issue of Poverty, we would at least be very leary of State Welfare programs, as well as private "Charity" which does not include some degree of personal involvement with the people we seek to help. It also supports the principle that welfare of any kind should be means tested (rather than a blank check, come one come all, no questions asked policy). A basic background book on this subject is "The Tragedy of American Compassion" by Marvin Olasky

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 10:33

Saturday, October 6, 2007

THE GOSPEL COALITION

A new Gospel Coalition was formally announced this week. It is a very encouraging and positive development in which many outstanding Reformed Leaders from a variety of Reformed Churches and Organizations have come together to restate the Gospel we share and to reconfigure the way we can work together and new ways in which we can minister in today's Culture. Check out their new website, including the links found there to some good resources.
<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/>

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:58

WE LIKE IT HERE

We like living in Western Massachusetts. Though the foliage has not yet peaked and it is far too warm, we went for a long drive yesterday (to Otis) and stopped at Lake Congemond on the way back and went on a short drive today to buy some cider and cider donuts (at a farm in Monson). Just about everywhere you look, all can see is beautiful. This is mostly rural, very hilly farm and resort country with many quaint New England villages and college towns. These leisurely drives were very pleasant. We try to take them often- usually an hour or so in every direction from the house and back. Together. Very nice. Meanwhile, new Federal and State monies keep coming in to improve or beautify Springfield, a city of maybe 153,000 with all the ammenities. Yes, we like it here.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 15:46

CAN HOMOSEXUALS CHANGE?

Recent research seems to confirm that there are people who truly are homosexual. They have a dominant sexual attraction to people of the same gender, in contrast to heterosexual people, who do not have such an attraction. It is important to recognize the distinction between being homosexual and engaging in same gender sex acts. Many Christians still are convinced that both the nature and the behavior are intentional and can be changed or stopped at will. The latest research by Christian psychologists, reviewing the results of 30 years of reparative or conversion therapy indicates that it does not seem possible to change homosexual nature. There is no consensus as to the origins of this nature; but it is possible for some persons with that nature to change (modify) their behavior with a lot of help and support. With this help and support, some stop the behavior altogether, even while they remain homosexual by nature (Cf this to alcoholics who stop drinking but are still alcoholics) Read more here-<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/october/6.48.html>

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 15:21

Wednesday, October 3, 2007

OUR "OTHER" TROOPS IN IRAQ

We have a national debate about the number of troops in Iraq and when to bring them home. We hear various accounts about how many are necessary to get the job done and what they are costing the taxpayers. Until now, very little has been mentioned in Congress or the media about the "other troops" we have stationed in Iraq. Frankly, I was shocked to learn of the numbers involved and have serious questions about these paramilitary operations, which I understand are now essential to the war effort. "There are now more private contractors working in Iraq than U.S. soldiers serving there. Many are not U.S. citizens. Triple Canopy, another private firm, usually hires Peruvians to man the checkpoints inside the International Zone and Ugandans to guard distant airbases. The Peruvians, known as "incas" among Americans there, usually do not speak English"

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/04/AR2006120401311.html>http://www.pajamasmedia.com/2007/09/cia_shut_down_in_iraq.php

"In a House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee hearing on March 29, 2007, both Secretary Robert Gates and DoD Comptroller Tina Jonas confirmed that there are currently around 126,000 private contractors doing business in Iraq. Secretary Gates estimated that only 20 percent, or around 25,000, are U.S. citizens, although the remaining 101,000 Iraqi citizens and third party nationals work for companies operating under U.S. government contracts." <http://theiraqinsider.blogspot.com/2007/05/how-many-private-contractors-in-iraq.html> In addition, there are CIA operatives and Special Operations Forces in Iraq-<http://www.fas.org/man/crs/RS22017.pdf><http://www.fas.org/irp/eprint/stone.pdf>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 18:55

MUDDLEHEADED, AGAIN

It happened again. I went to a meeting last night in which open discussion ("sharing") from the floor was encouraged. It was a mess, mostly due to an old, too common problem- failure to define words being used: justice, racism, politics, unity, reconciliation, segregation; even Biblical words were not defined: Gospel, Church, Christian, Evangelical, Forgiveness. This led to the usual muddleheaded thinking common to such open discussions ("bull-sessions"). We ended up with misunderstanding, banalities and much over simplified discourse that produced more heat than light. I did not want to get drawn in and was not going to participate. Regretfully I did. Again, I resolve not to do so again! I do not intend to return next week for Session 2- this format does not make for a good forum. A well thought out position paper (complete with definitions) should be presented and then comments and discussion confined to that paper, guided by a good moderator to keep discussion on target, would be better. Another major and serious problem with many Christian discussions is the absence of comprehensive Biblical world-view. There must be one and it should be stated clearly and accepted up-front. A world view would provide parameters for the discussion: this is where we are coming from. These are the given presuppositions. This is the common ground which will guide our discussion. These are the agreed upon Principles by which we will approach and measure whatever the assigned topic is. Otherwise, we waste a lot of time and get no where.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 10:40

Tuesday, October 2, 2007

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

Last Wednesday, our local paper headlined the bestowal by the State of a "1.4 million dollar grant to combat youth violence". We need it, officials are quoted as saying, because we have had an increase in youth crime. Actually, half a million will go to pay overtime for police and almost another quarter million to improve a local job training center. The rest will be divided up among a dozen social service and recreation agencies. Last year we had similar grant. Anything wrong with that picture? Today, the paper heralded an 11 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Some 1.6 million will go to Head Start to promote a "Healthy Marriage Initiative" for teens and unwed mothers. Some 9.5 million will go to improve programming in a few of our schools. Most of the state school students here do not graduate from high school, we have one of the highest rates of teen pregnancies in the State and we rank as having the 6th highest percentage of children living in poverty (44.6% under 18) in the entire Nation. As Christians we must be involved with improving this situation. Because we are stoutly pro-life and pro-family and pro-education we have no choice but to be involved. But how? One thing is certain: pouring millions of dollars of tax payer money at the problems is not how. Sure, that money will temporarily alleviate some of the symptoms. That's good. But solve the problem? We need a major effort to evangelize and disciple the children of this city through the local churches. These kids need Christ! I was a Child Welfare Social Worker in Hartford, CT more than 45 years ago. I came to that conclusion way back then and became an inner city Pastor (in Lowell, MA) Millions and millions have been spent by the Government on these problems since then. The problems are still there. What not here in Springfield, is the massive effort necessary to evangelize and disciple children. Sure, there are efforts made and a few Christians are seriously committed- but not enough. Most of the children we are talking about are Hispanic and African-American and live in tough areas of this City and the churches needed for the work are neither. Oh, well, bring on the Government largess!

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 18:17

BIBLICAL FAITH REQUIRES ACTION ON HEALTH INSURANCE

I realize that in applying the Biblical Principles (as understood by neo-Calvinists) to public policy, there is a wide gap between theory and practice. Much needs to be explored on this topic of SCHIP and health Insurance [which is what I have hoped to do in seminars in my proposed Institute]. It is one thing to say that health care is a family matter and not a matter for Civil Government and another to work out ways that will enable families to provide. One of the reasons that many children of families whose income is 400% or more above the official Poverty level want or need insurance provided by the government is that, although their parents are employed, increasing numbers of employers (especially in small companies) are decreasing what they provide for health insurance, or requiring larger premiums for what they provide. The latter leads employees to opt out and most of them go without. Many companies are shifting to Health Insurance Accounts (HIA), trying to work out ways that employees contribute more to their insurance coverage. These and other plans have caps on both company inputs and government tax breaks. That is necessary but also a drawback for many. http://www.ebri.org/pdf/PR_776_17Sept07.pdf

There is also an increasing drive to institute Consumer Driven Health Care (CDHC) which is intended to motivate employees to be more responsible for their personal health care and they receive financial incentives for that. That may well be the future and a way to enable families to provide for themselves. <http://money.cnn.com/news/newsfeeds/articles/prnewswire/AQW12312092007-1.htm> <http://www.workforce.com/section/02/feature/25/11/36/251140.html> One weakness of CDHC is that it seems to overlook that many health problems are not caused by consumer neglect or abuse of their bodies. There will always be the diseases and injuries that no one could have avoided from birth defects to terrorism and natural disasters. Whatever the payment plan, health care costs themselves must still be contained and come down before many people can afford them. If Christians want to provide for their own health care (as well as enable others to do like wise) and move away from subsidized or socialized Medicine, they must confront and take action on factors that contribute to the high costs of health care: constant new technologies, demand for their increasing use by consumers, labor, pharmaceuticals (prescription drugs), entitlement programs and dominant vested and competing interests (particularly from) academic medical centers and errors and mismanagement within health care delivery systems. Our Faith requires attention to all such issues. Certainly being pro-life and pro-family does.

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

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 16:20

Monday, October 1, 2007

FLOATING SCHIP -Faith and Policy

Last Friday I wrote about Faith and Politics. The current debate about SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program) is a good opportunity to illustrate how Biblical Principles should influence public policy. Advocates of expanding SCHIP say it is being held captive to President Bush's ideology. Of course, the Advocates have their own ideology and that is what compels them to work for its expansion. The debate is not simply "about the children". To enter into this exercise, we must understand what SCHIP currently is and what expansion of it would involve. Figuring this out is not simple as it involves interpreting data and predicting trends and outcomes. This can be tricky. The exercise also requires getting a handle on relevant Biblical teaching. Many Christians think this is easy. There are poor kids without medical insurance and care. God loves poor kids. We all should love poor kids. Therefore, it is a no-brainer: the Government should expand Federal funding of SCHIP to provide for these children. To be against doing this is unconscionable and unchristian. Period. Well, it is not so simple. In that Friday Post about Faith and Politics (which included Public Health Policy), I laid out the neo-Calvinist principles (my Faith) that influence (my) politics. I am persuaded Scripture warns about growing government control over our lives (Totalitarianism), teaches us not to support a cradle to grave "Welfare State", especially ever increasing Entitlement Programs (Socialism), teaches us primary responsibility for the health and well-being of children belongs to their parents and not the State, teaches that the State has no right to use tax payers' money to do what the family is supposed to do and teaches we are to support private rather than state-controlled business (free-market capitalism) Bible believing Christians should support President Bush's veto, if we are convinced that the proposed expanded SCHIP will use taxpayers money to fund State health insurance that can instead be provided by Parents through private health insurance plans that are available to them. This would be an example of Faith influencing Policy. To claim that his veto would indicate that our President is "against children" is simply untrue and unfair. He approves extending the current SCHIP and encourages the States to be more intentional and aggressive to enroll eligible children currently uncovered. For more details read-<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/home/schip.aspx><http://www.kff.org/uninsured/upload/7694.pdf><http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/turnerfocused.pdf><http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/014/177vjfix.asp?pg=1>http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118662306308792513.html?mod=googlenews_wsj<http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=ZGI3NjVIYWRI0GEyOTU2MjNIMWFmNTVjMzZINDQ0ZTg=>

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 10:16

HACK ATTACK

Sometimes this Blog is unavailable. That is because occasionally, my service provider is bombarded by hack attacks and that causes a shut down of the Blog (among other things). We appreciate your understanding, patience and faithfulness in visiting again.-Cal

Posted by Cal at 10:09