

Friday, November 30, 2007

FEAR NOT THE COMPASS?

Many Christians are disturbed about a movie coming out soon: The Golden Compass. They have very legitimate concerns. Here is a well reasoned and sensible article about how we can approach this movie. He says, "fear not". Read the entire article to understand why. He advocates an approach which requires not only wisdom and grace, but also education and sophistication on the part of the viewer and very careful, thoughtful guidance by parents with their children who may view the film- a very tall order. If these essentials are missing, better advice would be to skip [but not condemn] the movie. It is very well done. The problem comes from getting hooked and making folks want to see the two films which will follow and which could be unsettling for people who do not have the critical tools of the CT Reviewer<http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/commentaries/fearnotthecompass.html>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 19:31

SIGN OF THE TIMES

The building that once was home to Springfield's only Christian Bookstore is expected to soon become the site of a Starbucks! This will provide grounds for Pastoral Pundits to percolate for their next homiletical brew, whipped up with the milk of the Word.

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 19:03

Thursday, November 29, 2007

BOOK BANNED IN BOSTON, Part 2

A Reader, commenting on my post below, asked a good question. Here is my reply. I am posting it here so that more than he will read it. Are you saying God's wrath was expiated with only the physical punishment Jesus endured on the cross? God's wrath is the emotion of great displeasure: anger [controlled and directed, not irrational rage] directed toward sin; it also can mean punishment, as a consequent of the anger. Christ's offering of himself on Calvary was a propitiation of God's anger- it placated (appeased) Him. Christ's death also expiated the cause of the anger, our sin- it put an end to our sin and guilt, it removed it from His sight (thus we say, "our sins are covered by the blood of Jesus") Propitiate and expiate are used today interchangeably. However, there is an important distinction in both the Greek and in Theology. God hates sin. He abhors it. This concept is rejected by many today- it does not fit the popular concept of God as Love. That God is angry and must be appeased is also a concept derided by many. Thus the word (and doctrine of) propitiation is rarely used and expiation is deemed far preferable by many. Evangelicals are satisfied with the teaching that Jesus' death paid for our sins. Period. Propitiation requires an atoning sacrifice- a innocent substitute for the guilty. The death of Jesus was penal, ie- a punishment required to appease an angry God. That, too, is a repugnant Doctrine to many. Contemporary Christians are glad to believe that their sin has been forgiven by a loving God; but they do not want to probe deeper as to how and why such forgiveness is made possible. I am not saying that God's wrath was expiated with only the physical punishment Jesus endured on the cross. I am saying God's anger was propitiated and our sin was expiated by the offering of the perfect life of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice. Jesus' life was perfect in obedience and righteousness. And the offering of that life involved his suffering, which he experienced from birth until his last breath on the cross. All of that was the Sacrifice by which we are saved. If the punishment for sin is separation from God, True, the wages of sin is death and that "death" is spiritual separation from God. But that death (separation) does not await sinners when they die. That death is their reality from birth, the consequence of Adam's sin in the Garden. People are born spiritually dead, i.e.- separated from God and they live that way their whole life, unless they become saved. Rom 5:12-21, 1 Cor. 15:22 People who come to saving faith, receive life then and there and are no longer dead (separated) from God- Eph 2:4-5 et al. Jesus took our punishment upon Himself, doesn't this mean He suffered separation from God (ie Hell)? This is a common definition of Hell these days, but Hell is not separation from God per se. Hell involves eternal Torment. What sinners face in eternity is not an extension of their life-long separation (spiritual death), but Torment. Rom 2:8-9 Here are two texts of Scripture that teach that Hell involves everlasting punishment. Matthew 25:46 sums up the judgment on the "sheep and goats" with the words. "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." The same word aionion (eternal) is used to describe the punishment of the wicked and the blessing of the righteous. Whatever we say about the duration of "eternal" life for believers must be said about "eternal" punishment for unbelievers. Since "life" for believers is everlasting (John 10:28), so must be the punishment for unbelievers. In a second text, Revelation 20:10, John describes those in the "lake of fire" being "tormented day and night forever and ever." The expression day and night is used in Revelation to express the concept of "forever." The lake of fire is described in Revelation 19:20 as a place that "burns with brimstone." John declares that anyone whose name is not written in the book of life is "thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). The Bible certainly teaches us that there is very real and very terrible place of punishment for those who keep Christ out of their lives. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself probably had more to say about it than anyone else. This is what he taught: "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Mark 9:43-48 KJV Mr Pynchon [in my post below] rejected the idea that after Christ suffered on the Cross, he then went to spend time in the place called Hell and suffered torment there for our sins. As I did say, I agree with him about this.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 11:04

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

WHO IS A GOOD SCHOOL TEACHER?

Our local paper has a monthly page featuring the opinions of teens from local middle and high schools. This week 17 of them answered the question, "Who is a good Teacher?" At first glance, it seemed almost all of them answered, "The ones who make the lessons or class fun." But what makes for fun in the class room? I reread their comments more closely. Laughter, for sure; but their involvement and participation in class makes for "fun". They like teachers who like their subject and like teaching it. They like teachers who show interest in their students and care how they are doing. They absolutely do not like lectures (boring!) They like teachers who act out roles or parts that illustrate the lessons, as well as demonstrate practical application, and who use a lot of visual aids or "games". Several said they do not like teachers who are pushovers or not strict and let kids get away with nonsense. Does any of this also apply to Sunday School teachers and to Preachers?

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 16:26

LOCAL CHURCH CLOSES DOORS AFTER 370 YEARS

In the very center of Springfield is a park. At one end of it is a large, magnificent church building. It is 188 years old. The congregation is 370 years old- this is its 4th Meeting House. On January 1st the doors will be boarded up and the church dissolved. The number of members has dwindled to less than 100 and they no longer can maintain this historic building. When it was dedicated in 1819, there were 3000 people present.

First Church of Christ, Congregational was the 14th church to be founded in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It was the first church established in this area, having been started by William Pynchon and the first settlers who came here from Roxbury [near Boston] in 1636. [Pynchon had also founded that City] Formal worship began in 1637. Rev. George Moxon was the first Pastor. He and the settlers (every citizen in town) were Calvinists-Puritans. Through its almost 4 centuries, the Church became increasingly liberal. It played an important part in the history of Springfield and many famous people have spoken there, but it is known and will be remembered for its advocacy of the social Gospel and its activism for various social causes. As a member of the United Church of Christ Denomination, it was proud to be "open and affirming". It had long ago given up its Calvinist Heritage. What has happened to Old First Church is an object lesson for all churches. The Church in which I was ordained, a fundamental Baptist church, dissolved after maybe 70 years. Local churches [and even Denominations] are like people- they require a lot of nurture and care for healthy growth, but all die eventually. Some churches long out live their usefulness, while others barely get started. The last Church I helped plant lasted about 7 years. But in all cases, the true Church of Christ lives on forever and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. It just keeps showing up in new places.

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:29

THE FIRST BOOK BANNED IN BOSTON

The Founder of Springfield (named after his home town in England) was William Pynchon. There is an Episcopal Church building here that is a duplicate of his home parish church [Anglican- he was a Puritan] and a statue of him is next to the main City Library. In 1650, he wrote "The Meritorious Price of our Redemption" in which he .. condemned especially the doctrine that Christ suffered the wrath of God and the torments of hell to pay man's debt to his Creator. The Massachusetts General Council members [the Legislature] read the book, considered it to be heretical, and ordered it burned immediately on the Market Place at Boston. It was the first book "banned in Boston".

Mr Pynchon's heresy was in writing that Christ had not suffered the wrath of God, paying a painful price to atone for our sins. He particularly denied that Christ spent 3 days in Hell, suffering the fires there on our behalf (which the Apostles Creed implies). Mr Pynchon denied what John Calvin wrote about this and what has been accepted by many Calvinists as true-...it was expedient for [Christ] to undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment. For this reason, he must also grapple hand to hand with the armies of hell and the dread of everlasting death. A little while ago we referred to the prophet's statement that "the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him," "he was wounded for our transgressions" by the Father, "he was bruised for our infirmities" [Isaiah 53:5 p.]. By these words he means that Christ was put in place of evildoers as surety and pledge — submitting himself even as the accused — to bear and suffer all the punishments that they ought to have sustained. No wonder, then, if he is said to have descended into hell, for he suffered the death that, God in his wrath had inflicted upon the wicked! -from Calvin's

Institutes To deny all this was considered heresy. Rather than recant, Mr Pynchon returned to England. He had tried to make the case that what Christ offered for our redemption was his perfect life, particularly his perfect obedience. Many Calvinists today agree with this "heresy", connecting it with the requirement of the Covenant. Christ fulfilled, by his life, what was impossible for us sinners to provide- perfect obedience and righteous- not just sinlessness [Calvinists who are not Reformed or Covenantalist will debate this.] Covenantal Calvinists connect Christ's righteousness and obedience with the Doctrine of Justification in which sinners are reckoned to have Christ's Righteousness. It is said to be "imputed" to them. Strange as it will sound to many evangelicals, this Doctrine is saying we are not saved by faith alone, rather we are saved by the righteousness of Christ, imputed to sinners when they come to Christ by faith alone. It is actually saying we are not saved by works, but we are saved by merit- the merit of Christ's perfect life and obedience reckoned to us when we come to faith. Salvation is not simply by faith. It is by being "in Christ", which faith makes possible. The forensic and positional nature of Salvation is not commonly understood today, being replaced by a subjective and pietistic understanding. Was Mr Pynchon of Springfield really a Heretic? Yes and No. That Christ suffered the Wrath of God is true and Scriptural. His death was a "propitiation" [here is an example, by the way, of why literal translations of Scripture are essential. Paraphrases do not use this word.] "Propitiation" is a technical word and means a sacrifice upon which God vents His Wrath. In dying, Christ became sin- for us. Thus, he experienced the anger God has against all the sin of the world. Christ's death was also an "expiation", meaning that it effectively removed the sin that made God angry. In denying this Doctrine, Mr Pynchon would be a heretic. However, he is not a heretic in denying that Christ suffered the pain of Hell on our behalf. Christ's sacrificial death was a complete and full Atonement. It did not require that Christ had to suffer additional torment in Hell. The phrase in the Apostles Creed saying Christ "descended into Hell" is very misleading and should be removed. Finally, Mr Pynchon is not a heretic in teaching that Christ offered His perfect obedience and righteousness to atone for our sins, as well as his blood (death) That is Scriptural. I'm sure that none of these Doctrines have been preached at Old First Church for a long, long time. The pity is that they are not preached in many churches today.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:26

Tuesday, November 27, 2007

SATAN SMILES

According to Rev 20:2, Satan is bound, but- he is not destroyed, only restricted. According to Rev 13 and 17, Satan exercises control over the world through three agents: the Anti-Christ (which is totalitarian government, hence our serious concern about ever increasing "Big Brother" government and the "Welfare State", in which government becomes "god" in the lives of people); the False Prophet (the propaganda arm of the State, which works to promote and justify the influence of the State to its citizens. This agent is often a Church or Church Leaders which sell the need of Big Brother to the masses, when it preaches the Social Gospel); and finally, Babylon (which is hedonistic, materialistic society). We see the work of Satan in the gross, obscene consumerism of this Holiday Season. The problem of the Season is not the commercialization of Christmas, it is commercialization. period- the branding of America, especially of its children. How pervasive and perverse commercialization and consumerism is can be seen in the first argument used to encourage it: the Economy. The economy requires people to buy in order to create and protect jobs. And why? So people can make money so they can buy more. We are on a endless conveyor belt of consumerism from which there does not seem to be any escape. You may scoff. Satan smiles.

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 14:27

LIVE WITH IT or DEAL WITH IT! WHICH?

Occasionally, I express my frustration with some church matter and have been told to "live with it!". That can be wise advice about some things, especially about those things we have no control over and can do nothing about. Yes, we all need to learn to accept such things and live with them. But then there are those things that must not be tolerated and can be changed. There are matters which we must not cave in on and the advice to just "live with it" is terrible. Of course, wisdom is needed to tell the difference; but God help those of us who know what is right and do not do it (or at least put up a good fight).

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 10:26

"EVANGELICALS AND EVIL EMPIRES"- 2 APPROACHES

Twice, I have outlined on this Blog what I believe are the key Biblical qualifications for the best candidate for President (of course, there is also the need for personal character and integrity, trustworthiness and honesty, intelligence, leadership ability, speaking ability and, oh yes, elect-ability). Those Biblical qualifications include being pro-life and pro-traditional marriage (i.e.- the marriage of a man and a woman) Foreign Policy, particularly waging some kind of war against radical Islam is not one of the Biblical qualifications.

However, that does not seem to be bother many evangelicals. According to this analysis of Pat Robertson's endorsement of Rudy Giuliani, many evangelicals believe Islam [or radical Islam] is the threat to America and Christianity that Communism once was (and which they strongly opposed). They are willing to sacrifice the other issues for it and therefore, like Mr. Robertson, they will support Mr. Giuliani in spite of the man's unbiblical views on abortion and "gay marriage" (and a few other matters as well, such as his history of marital problems).

http://www.opinionjournal.com/taste/?id=110010868&mod=RSS_Opinion_Journal&ojrss=frontpage&ojpartner=wsj_hpp
On the other hand, many evangelicals, including some nationally known Leaders, apparently do not see Islam as a major threat to be resisted and have endorsed a new effort to reconcile Muslims and Christians on the basis that they all believe in love of God and neighbor (significantly, no distinction is made between Islam and radical Islam or Muslims and terrorist Muslims or, for that matter, between different types of Christians)
<http://www.christianpost.com/article/20071123/30194.htm><http://www.yale.edu/faith/abou-commonword.htm>

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 10:06

WARNING FROM GOD TO PASTORS

Jer 23:1 KJV Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. 2 Therefore thus saith the LORD God against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD.3 And I will gather the remnant of my flock ... and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.4 And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD.

Posted by Cal in Church at 10:04

Monday, November 26, 2007

CYBER MONDAY

Yesterday in the Church Calendar was Christ the King Day. For many, if observed at all, it is a throw away day, a mere marker of the end of the Church Year, which begins again next week with Advent. That would be a mistake. The Day should be an occasion for remembering another (often forgotten) day: Ascension Day. The latter celebrates and commemorates the great event in history when the crucified and resurrected Christ received from his Father, all power in heaven and earth, and began reigning over the world as its Sovereign. Christ the King Day does not commemorate that event, but simply the fact that Jesus is Sovereign. He is Prophet, Priest and King (that is what the title "Christ" indicates. When we accept Jesus we are accepting God's Prophet (Revelation, Word, Teacher); we are accepting God's Priest (who both made the all sufficient sacrifice for our sins, and was himself that Sacrifice and who now has a ministry of intercession before the Father on our behalf); and we are accepting God's King (who now rules on His behalf over all the world). I realize many never have all this explained to them when they are urged to accept Jesus as their Savior.

Multitudes call Jesus "Lord", often in songs and prayers. He has a problem with that because they often do not do what He tells them to do. That is because "Lord" has become for many simply a name for Jesus, indicating that He is God, but not indicating that He is their King. We are Americans. We value freedom. We have a President and if we don't like him we say so and work to undermine him and even to get rid of him. As Christians, we are subjects of a Kingdom and bound to give our loyalty and obedience to our Sovereign. Today is called "Cyber Monday" by those who are shopping on-line for special bargains being offered there by retailers. It is an extension of last week's, made-up to make money, commercial holiday called "Black Friday" by retailers and the media who hype it. Who needs Holy Days when we have Huckster Days? I know we want to be sharp shoppers, but somehow it all comes across to me mostly as a greedy money grubbing ploy by retailers and manufacturers preying on gullible consumers looking for bargains (or the thrill of the hunt. Actually, today is also the beginning of Deer Hunting Season in many places. Can people find them on eBay today, too?). Video images of manic Mallers rushing through doors to get at sale stuff make me think of lemmings rushing into the sea, only to be drowned (but in water, instead of debt)

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 13:53

DO NOT PUT UP YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE YET

Next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent. Don't put up your Christmas tree yet. Christmas begins on December 25 and then goes for 12 Days till Epiphany. Talk about being a "Radical Christian," try going against our dominant culture's grain and observe the ancient (4th century) custom of Advent. Originally, the period was as solemn as Lent, with fasting and penance for sins. The name itself, "Advent" means "coming" and the theme is a combination of remembering the first Coming of the Christ (Messiah) to save us from our sins, promised in the Old Testament and anticipating and preparing for the second Coming of Christ to judge the world (hence, the penance). Scripture read every day for the period combines these two comings.

There is nothing about Christmas trees and decorations, parties, gift buying and giving and nothing about Santa Claus. How's that for counter-cultural! On the other hand, the Twelve days of Christmas are celebratory and conclude with the appearance of the 3 Magi and the gifts they bring to Jesus. That day, in the Church Calendar, has a world-wide missionary theme: Christ appearing to the Gentiles and the Nations coming to Him. [It is, however, also my webmaster and son-in-law's birthday and we do celebrate that, too!]

Posted by Cal at 13:44

MARIE OSMOND'S TESTIMONY

Marie Osmond may very well win this week's "Dancing with the Stars" competition because of her popularity, if not for her dancing skills. She comes across as a very likable, attractive person and as a good testimony for the Lord. She has gone through personal trials and tragedy. In interviews, she witnesses to God and His help. She prays often, as well as reads her Bible daily. She is sincere and her Faith is both real to her and a very practical help in her daily life. She could easily be seen as a strong evangelical Christian. Many may think she is. She is not. What we have here is the

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

old issue of Doctrine and Definition. To what God does she pray? What Bible does she read? What difference does that make, if she "knows the Lord", talks to Him and receives help from Him? Aren't these the things that matter? Here is a very complete overview of Doctrines taught by the Church of Latter day Saints and believed in by Mormons. Marie Osmond is a Mormon. This overview is written by a former LDS member. Read his personal story, also found on this site.<http://www.leaderu.com/offices/michaeldavis/docs/mormonism/mormonism.html>

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:38

Wednesday, November 21, 2007

GOD HAS ABUNDANTLY BLESSED US

May our Thanksgiving Day be a day for which we give thanks!

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 08:38

Tuesday, November 20, 2007

THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE AND CHURCH RENEWAL

Protestants in the Calvinist or Reformed Tradition try to follow the Regulative Principle. It is based on the conviction that God knows how He wants us to worship Him and that He has told us how in Scripture. That makes sense. How we worship is not a matter of personal preference or custom. In practice, the Regulative Principle means that our corporate worship as a church should be governed by what God has commanded by word or example. Anything not so commanded is not to be permitted. God rejects it as "false" or "foreign" worship. Reformed Christians do not agree on specifics, e.g.- the use of instruments and hymnals (versus a cappella singing and use of the Psalter only) And there is the debate about exercising the charismata in church services- forbidden or not? This has also been the basis of debate over observance of Holy Days such as "Christmas"

The opposite view is called the Normative Principle: anything agreeable to a congregation or church is permitted in corporate worship unless it has been specifically forbidden by God in Scripture or is contrary to Scriptural teaching. I have usually gone along with this concept. What has been agreeable to the churches I have served has been your basic, traditional Baptist type Service which is the same as a Service in Reformed churches. However, as churches have started experimenting with new ways of Worship and as I have had to study this subject more closely, I have come around to the Regulative Principle (trying not to take it to an extreme as some seem prone to do in Reformed circles) If we allow personal preference to prevail in determining what goes into our Worship Services, it is conceivable that churches might omit what God expects (as well as have elements that He rejects). Churches, more than ever in this day of change and confusion, need a guideline- direction from God Himself- to help them to evaluate and plan their Services. The Regulative Principle is it (see below). Scripture applying the Regulative Principle to corporate worship is primarily concerned with idolatry and the adoption of pagan customs by the People of God (which today would include the use of Christmas Trees in church). Historically, the primary concern of those who wrote on this subject was with the use by Protestants of Roman Catholic practices (usually connected with the Mass [which itself was rejected as unscriptural] e.g.- genuflecting and kneeling before an Altar or use of statues and prayers to them or for the departed in Purgatory and the use of candles and a cross on the Table and special "priestly" garb on the Clergy.) Today, this topic of the Regulative Principle (R.P.) seems to come up most often in debates about types of music and instruments used in worship (by those who have no problem with using instruments in the first place) and then, with the related topic of music as "amusement". Using the R.P. primarily for debate about Contemporary Music is unfortunate, because it (mis)directs use of the Principle away from the major Biblical and Historical concerns that still need to be addressed (i.e.- elements of Idolatry and Romanism in our Worship) There are also those who would apply the R.P. to all of life, not only to corporate worship. That application is worthy of serious exploration and debate. This topic comes up in this Blog again, because, as we visit churches, talk to folks about the churches they attend and read relevant articles, the need for serious change in "how" traditional churches "do church" is very evident in many places because they are failing and not accomplishing their Mission. Also very evident is the confusion, resistance, and pain involved with such change- particularly with conservative folks like myself. But, if they do not do something different they will dwindle and close. We are talking of evangelical churches here. But, it is important to realize that the basic dynamics of church growth, however, seem to be the same regardless of Theology or Denomination (as much as we like to believe if we just preach the Word, God will bless and "they will come." Doesn't happen.) Assuming it is the goal desired, it is also important to realize the most effective way of achieving real evangelism (actually reaching the lost) is through church planting. An old church using new methods (e.g.- changing the type of music offered), can bring in some new people, but that is not the same. A new building for an old church will attract new people (at least for a while). That, too, is not evangelism. Church planting is increasing around the country. Even the method for that has changed, however. In my day of planting churches the concern was finding an area (a town or section of a city or a region) in which there was no Gospel-preaching church. Geography was paramount. You tried to reach every one possible in that area, casting your net wide, broadcasting seed generously. If there were already "sound" churches present, we would look for fields white unto harvest some place else. Today, the effort is geared more to reaching "affinity groups"- groups of people who connect and bond with each other because they share some interest or characteristic in common, e.g.- an ethnic or language group, skateboarders or surfers, sports, types of music or art, film or theater, computer technologies, international grad students or college students, immigrants or expats, the environment, etc. Out reach is geared to such groups, using their interests, language and styles of communication. The new church may be rather small and stay that way on purpose because they are into reproducing themselves when they reach a certain size) or in some areas, the new work may grow large. Size in itself is not important, because these new churches are not building or program oriented. They are people oriented, emphasizing personal relationships and community. These new churches will be informal and casual and offer a lot of personal space for mutual participation and co-operation. They will be egalitarian,

rather than hierarchical, with a minimum of rules and top down authority. (However, and ironically, many place official leadership in the hands of a few and are not congregational or democratic in their corporate decision making.) The old traditional churches (and old, traditional Believers like me) must make intentional effort to adopt these characteristics, having decided who it is they are trying to reach. Remember, most younger people, and many young adults as well, have not grown up in traditional churches or families. The traditional ways about anything simply do not appeal to them. Here is where the Regulative Principle comes in. New ways to "do Church", yes; but when it comes to Worship, that must be only those ways that God has commanded in the Word. His Word must regulate all changes. Many will say I have just contradicted myself- our old ways are what God has commanded. Well, are they? They are traditional and we are comfortable with them; but they may not be what God has actually commanded, only what we have always assumed He has commanded. I am convinced this is the case. We need to examine anew, in the light of the Word, all we now do as Church, particularly how we worship and see what we see. We will especially be on the watch for signs of idolatry or Roman error in our Services or places of worship. The Principle: Worship Services are to contain what God has commanded by word and example [to separate these is to open the door to many errors] Period. Preaching the Gospel (defined, at least, as the "Gospel" as understood by Evangelicals everywhere. [To me, it should be the Gospel as understood by Calvinists, with its 5 Solas in the context of Reformed Theology (T.U.L.I.P., et al)] Preaching the Gospel is not the same as preaching through the Bible (exposition of passages) or teaching on Topics like Marriage and Family. The Gospel and the Ritual that goes with it, are specifically about Salvation [God's acts of Redemption]. Getting back to that emphasis would be a big change, even for many evangelical churches. The Lord's Supper (the Eucharist, Holy Communion) is definitely commanded: "Do this" and the example in Acts (as well as in the Church from the beginning) is to do it every Lord's Day. This Ceremony goes with the Gospel. It is not to be separated from the Gospel [I see it as a Gospel Sacrament, an effective sign of the Sacrifice of Christ which communicates the effects of that sacrifice to Christians who receive it by faith.] Understanding the connection of the Meal with the Gospel and Salvation, as well as having Communion every week, would be a major change for most Protestant churches. Prayers, Singing, Teaching, Exhortation to Christian living and faithfulness are also commanded. (Interestingly, taking an offering during a Service is not.) All these are meant to be congregational, offered or shared by any believer present (not limited to Clergy or a special Team), as long as done in an orderly manner. This is the area that would require the biggest change in a traditional Church Service. And it is in this area where all the People of God are encouraged and free to be the Church. This is the "Priesthood of Believers" [a very important Protestant Doctrine] in practice. That is it. That is plenty. [I can provide many Bible verses] However else the Church does Church during the rest of the week, building community and relationships and ministering to affinity groups and demonstrating the love of God in the world, its Worship is to contain these components- no more and no less. Work through the implications of all I have just written. This would be truly revolutionary for many congregations! The Regulative Principle [as a principle, not a law] does not dictate specific details of how this Worship is to be conducted, although that is where discussions of this topic bog down. That is a shame. Matters of style in anything are optional. I definitely have my preferences, tending toward the formal and liturgical, but what matters is that these God-commanded elements of a Worship Service be front and center. That is what is major, let's not get side tracked by what is minor in comparison. "We will especially be on the watch for signs of idolatry or Roman error in our Services or places of worship." Did we find any such signs above? The most likely signs of Romanism would be in Worship Services that are Liturgical. But they would not be the obvious ones: an altar and a person robed as a priest. We all have Communion Tables and many of us either have a Pastor with a robe or, at least, choir members dressed in robes. Those are incidentals and matters of custom of preference. It is what the robed people do and what the Table is used for that should be examined for signs of false doctrine. The latter should not be assumed because of appearances. The same with the use of a Prayer Book and printed prayers and responses. We all follow some order, be it elaborate or very simple, printed or memorized. We all read and pray the Psalms or Scripture texts (which is what the "Lord's Prayer" is, after all). We must be careful with guilt by association. Mormons sing and pray. Does that make all singing and praying Mormon? Again, we need to know the actual meaning and purpose of what is said or done before we judge. I have been worshipping as an Anglican (Episcopalian) for some 26 years (with time out for a few years). I am well grounded in Bible and Reformation Doctrine and find absolutely nothing in Anglican Worship itself to be "wrong"; on the contrary, I find it to be better and more Scriptural in many ways, than a typical Protestant Service. It still needs serious improvement, as explained above. As to idolatry, Catholic-type worship is said to look idolatrous, what with statues (including a large crucifix) and all that kneeling. Well, Protestant Services are full of visual images these days (and many Protestants still value their stained glass windows with many images in them) and is kneeling really worse than standing and clapping or arm waving? The kneeling during Communion might be questioned. Historically, Protestants have criticized that practice as idolatrous because they associated the kneeling with a doctrine that says the Body of Christ is literally present in the elements and the kneeling (as well as genuflecting and bowing) is done in deference to that Presence. When the Queen of England has an audience, people bow before her, as they do before many other dignitaries around the world. When you greet someone from Japan, bowing rather than a handshake is customary. In these latter cases, no worship is implied- no idolatry, just respect. The Anglican worshipper does not have to believe that God is on the Altar as the reason for bowing or kneeling before it. He may simply be trying to express respect and adopting a posture that conveys humbleness and submission to the Lord. The main Greek word translated as "worship" is the word that means "prostration"- the proper attitude before Almighty God, Creator and Redeemer and King. That brings us to idolatry in a Protestant Service. Front and center these days in most places is a

Praise Team and an energetic "Worship Leader". Often the congregation will stand and clap before this Leader and the Team. Could that be interpreted as idolatrous? More often, front and center is the Preacher. He is the focus of attention through much of the Service- at least half of it in most places, even more so if he or she is well known, a Christian celebrity. The attention some Preachers receive might lead some to wonder if idolatry is going on here. If the attention is not on the Preacher himself, he often will focus the attention on the people present, as though the Service was all about them and their needs and concerns. That is also the focus of many of the people sitting in the pews- on themselves. Could that be considered idolatrous when the focus by all should be on God and His attributes and work? Some humble prostration might be a good thing for Protestants. The Regulative Principle gives us direction as to what actions should be in our Worship Service. The matters of idolatry and false beliefs are more difficult. They require going into the minds and motives (and lives) of the worshippers and that can be very different than the motions they are going through during the Service and much more important.

Posted by Cal in Church at 12:36

Friday, November 16, 2007

WHAT MAKES FOR A GOOD FUNERAL?

There were two Funerals this week. A Baptist type for a cousin of mine and a Catholic type for a friend. These set me to thinking again about Funerals in general and in particular what I would like at my own someday. Don't roll your eyes- everyone should plan ahead and be prepared spiritually and practically. Every single one of us without exception will have a Funeral of some kind. In theory, a Funeral should be an occasion for Worship. We are there as Believers offering God praise and thanksgiving for His mercy and for the life of our deceased loved one. We are there as a Community of Faith gathered with the Family of the one who has passed on, along with his or her body in the midst of them. We are there for each other, sharing the grief but also sharing the special grace that God gives in such a time- especially through the Word preached and through its Sacrament (Holy Communion). That grace will enable everyone to get through and get on. The Word and Sacrament assure us that Christ has died, Christ has risen and, by faith, so shall we. Ideally, such a Funeral meets a very real need and can be very meaningful and helpful.

The Funerals that have actually been very meaningful and helpful to me through the years have been ones where hymns of personal faith and hope - as well as hymns of Praise- were vigorously or meaningfully sung. They were Funerals where testimonies were given about the departed loved one (or at least a good Eulogy) and personal prayers were offered from the heart, especially for the family. And they were Services where a good Gospel message was brought, declaring in certain terms the Gospel and the grounds of our hope. Churches that have such Funerals do not include Communion- they have been Baptist type Services. Where Funerals of this kind often go wrong is that the Service becomes centered on the departed and is not God-directed at all- not worshipful. Conversely, in my experience, Churches that have Funerals that are liturgical and include the Eucharist do not have these Baptist (evangelical) elements. They are intended to be Christ-centered and worshipful with their Liturgy, but they actually come across as formal, perfunctory, very impersonal and not helpful. As a former Baptist and now an Episcopalian, I earnestly hope there can be a way to combine the best of both.

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 09:01

WHY COMMUNION (EUCHARIST) AT A FUNERAL?

The Eucharist is Food for the Journey This is based on what Jesus said at the last Supper before his crucifixion: "my Body, my Blood, i.e.- Me" and thus the idea that Jesus is literally in the Bread and Wine along with an interpretation of John 6 that combines the bread and wine and the partaking of them mentioned there with the elements and actions of the Eucharist. When Believers partake of Communion they are actually being drawn deeper into union with Christ. The Eucharist is an effective Sign of Salvation This is based on sacramental language throughout the Bible. According to that a "thing" (including a word) effects what it represents. The Bread and Wine represent the Body and Blood of Jesus. They represent his bodily sacrifice for our salvation. That salvation is applied to those who have faith in the actual body and blood. Partaking of the symbols by faith makes it easier to do the same. The Spirit makes that possible or Jesus makes it possible- He acts in and through the symbols. It is His Supper. he is the Host. When Believers receive Communion they are being helped to believe more firmly in Christ's Sacrifice for salvation. Remember, preaching, hearing a Word about Jesus and His sacrifice (the Gospel), must precede taking Communion and only those who believe in that Word, who believe in Jesus, should come to the Altar.

Why Communion at a Funeral? To draw deeper into union with Christ and to strength our faith in His work for our salvation. Both are needed always, but especially when we are facing death. However, when the preaching of the Gospel [not the same as a Eulogy or simple Homily] is missing and the prerequisite saving faith is missing, the Eucharist is perfunctory and does no one any good. When the preaching and faith are there, the Communion is still only helpful when done properly, rather than run through as an "add on", an end in itself (ironically, as many Protestant Churches do). Furthermore, the actual Liturgy at a Funeral can and should be greatly simplified (shortened) considering the emotional state of most people and the amount of time being used and the fact that the Service is public and many of those present are not Believers. The BCP includes an alternative service (Order for Celebrating the Holy Eucharist p.400 and Communion under Special Circumstances p.396. At least the Service at Funerals could begin with the Offertory p.361, keeping it as short as possible.

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

Posted by Cal in Church at 08:52

Wednesday, November 14, 2007

GOT PROTECTION?

Here is a recommendation from my webmaster, Norm-"Is your PC open to attack? You would be surprised. It only takes one wrong click and now your system is a Zombie, ready to be activated in a larger attack against bigger systems. How can you protect yourself? Good Security Practices, that's how. Belarc is a good step, ensuring your system is up to date. The next step is to see what others can see from the outside. Shields UP! is a good online tool, which will scan your system similar to what a hacker might do. Shields UP! is safe to use but read before "proceed". Copy and paste this link into your browser <https://www.grc.com/x/ne.dll?bh0bkyd2>

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 20:48

GO PHISH

Here is a fun way to learn about phishing recommended by my webmaster http://cups.cs.cmu.edu/antiphishing_phil/quiz/index.html

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 20:45

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

BRING IN THE CLONES

Human Cloning is coming. World had better prepare, says Report. How will we treat cloned humans. What will be their rights and their role?<http://www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSSAT27272720071112>

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 09:56

THE BEST CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT

A good 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. Any politician who endorses or enables oppression, cruelty or unwarranted violence* or who would deny anyone their basic human rights should not themselves be endorsed. * 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. 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) anti-human cloning and anti-euthanasia; pro-traditional (man and woman only) marriage; pro-parental authority; pro-business and the free market as well as fair, non-discriminatory labor laws; equitable and fair taxation (which would require limiting entitlement programs, minimizing the "Welfare State", as well as balancing the budget); less surveillance of citizens (less "Big Brother"); reform of the courts and legal system; and an end to restriction on public worship and expressions of belief in God. I believe these are Biblical guidelines for selecting the best candidate for our next president. Taken together, they sound like a candidate who is both a social and an economic conservative. This means many Republicans do not qualify. In addition, if there is a choice among several possible good candidates (as defined above), I believe we should add the additional qualification of elect-ability or, put another way, the one who has the best chance to defeat the Democratic Party Candidate. [For me, the best choice is still Mitt Romney. I agree Mike Huckabee has a lot to offer, but I am guessing he could not beat the Democratic front runners.]

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 09:53

GIVING THE STATE OUR BABIES

Universal pre-school for 3-4 year olds is the goal of legislation, backed by our Governor, for Massachusetts. It would also include health and dental care, as well as meals. There is even a bill working its way that would provide universal day care for infants. The justification for all of this, at tax payers expense, is the working Mom (and thus a Mom not available to care for her children at home) as well as the advantages for the children themselves (say Professional "experts" in the field of Education and Child Welfare (all of whom have vested interests in this). Whatever happened to the concept of family and the responsibility of parents (both of them) to provide for their own children? What about the advantages to those children which that would provide them? Is the alternative of handing all children, from infancy, over to the care, control and indoctrination of the State, really the way we want to go as a Society?

Posted by Cal in Social Issues at 09:52

BIGGEST PROBLEM FACING THE CHURCH?

"In Britain there is now this huge sense that the Christian perspective on things is very much a minority taste that should be neither seen nor heard. Regarding the tussle to shape postmodern culture, a relativistic utilitarian approach to living and decision-making prevails, and attitudes which are rooted in an omnipotent God who has revealed himself are often condemned as irrelevant, intolerant, or both." "Thus the challenge before the churches is huge. Just how do you coax people into a relationship with the believing community when a large part of it either seems totally inept, or might affirm ideas and values that the popular culture either does not understand or sees as petty and narrow-minded. My own commitment to biblical Christian values has already been roundly condemned as such by some of my nearest and

dearest, even though I have overtly said very little.”

“If you were to ask me what is the biggest problem facing the English church at this time, it is that in so many ways it has taken on the relativistic utilitarianism that prevails in so much British thinking. Thus, instead of expressing conviction and living it out, it shrugs its shoulders and says we must be tolerant, committed to diversity, non-judgmental, living and letting live.” These are comments of a former evangelical Episcopal Priest (and friend of our son, Loren) who has moved back to England to be on staff at Ridley Hall at Cambridge. Is this the future for Churches vis-a-vis culture in USA? Is he describing the way it will soon be in our Society? http://richardkew.blogspot.com/2007_10_01_archive.html

Posted by Cal in Church at 09:46

DISPENSATIONALIST DEFUSED BY DEFINITIONS

Back in April, well-known, national evangelical Leader and Pastor, John MacArthur, preached a message at a Conference of Pastors, entitled “Why Every Self-Respecting Calvinist is a Pre-Millennialist.” I have just caught up with the flap it created. Again, it is all about definitions and the flap would have been avoided if words (terms) used had been clarified. First, Pastor MacArthur does not mean “Pre-Millennialist”. He means “Dispensationalist” (or, if you prefer, Pre-millennial Dispensationalist. Historic Pre-Millennialism (as in the works of George Ladd) is not the same as Dispensationalism. The latter misappropriates the former label, so much so, that many assume they are the same thing. They are not. The Baptist church, where I was baptized and later ordained to the Ministry, taught Dispensationalism and I defended it as my belief, in my Ordination Examination, before a Council of other Fundamental Baptist Clergy. Within a few years, I became convinced from Scripture that Dispensationalism can not be defended, but Historic Pre Millennialism can be and I have taught the latter System for most of my years in the Ministry- as a “self-respecting Calvinist”. (I also see strengths in both a- and post-millennialism)

Dr. MacArthur is free to be a Dispensationalist, if he wants to. No problem. He also considers himself to be a Calvinist. This is a problem. To me a Calvinist believes in Covenant Theology. Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism are very different, contradictory, systems of Theology. A man can not be both. However, there are those who hold to Calvinist soteriology (T.U.L.I.P.) but not Covenantalism, the Regulative Principle or any other distinctives of Reformed Theology and practice (including Infant Baptism and a high view of Communion) By their definition, they are Calvinists - a different definition than mine (and many others) This is the one that Dr. MacArthur holds. The linchpin of Dispensationalism is its Doctrine of Two Peoples of God. This is the key to understanding (all versions) of Dispensationalism. God has a spiritual People- the Church and an earthly People- the Nation Israel. There are different covenants and promises to each. In this short post, I will skip to the bottom line: I am convinced that God has one People- the Church. The covenant and promises apply to Her and are fulfilled in Her. The Church is most definitely not a “parenthesis”, nor a replacement of Israel. She is the direct, organic continuation of Israel. I am interested in the modern, secular Nation of Israel in the same way as I am interested in Poland or South Africa. Dispensationalists are passionate supporters (the best friends) of Israel because they believe it is God’s Chosen People. To me, that is not so. The Church is the Chosen of God. Actually, Christ is the Chosen One, the Elect, and all who come to saving faith in Jesus (including Jews) are the Chosen, the Elect of God in Him. I am convinced Scripture teaches this. The Church is composed of Believers who were Jews or Gentiles. In Christ (the Messiah), they are neither. They are One Body, a New Creation, the Israel of God, the seed of Abraham- God’s People. You can see that different principles of interpretation of Scripture are operational here. That is how equally sincere Believers come to opposite conclusions about what the Bible teaches- about Israel or any other subject. When Christians say they believe in the authority of Scripture, that is good, but incomplete (almost dishonest, certainly misleading). They actually believe in the authority of Scripture as interpreted by their particular principles of interpretation- their grid through which they understand the meaning of Scripture (and they should state what that is in their affirmations of faith!) Dispensationalists argue they interpret the Scripture literally. So do the Calvinists who believe in Covenant Theology. We believe in metaphors literally as metaphors, likewise with symbolic and poetic language- all literally as what ever kind of literary genre they may be. Obviously, they define “literally” differently and that is because they read Scripture through different glasses, i.e.- they come to the Book with different presuppositions. (I believe that the Doctrine about the Two Peoples of God is a presupposition not derived from Scripture but read into it.) Those who believe in the Two Peoples of God scheme versus those who believe in the One People of God scheme will interpret particular texts accordingly and thus differently. Pastor MacArthur makes a major case out of this, insisting that only those who hold the Two Peoples Doctrine (like he does) can interpret Scripture properly. Miss that, he says, and you miss what the Bible is saying about a lot of other things, too! Mr. MacArthur’s statement that every Calvinist must be a Dispensationalist is literally nonsense (-ical). He is saying every Calvinist (meaning, every believer in T.U.L.I.P.] who is a Premillennialist (meaning, interprets Scripture in the way a Dispensationalist interprets Scripture) must be a Dispensationalist. This is a tautology: every Premillennialist (Dispensationalist) is a Premillennialist (Dispensationalist). The major argument Pastor MacArthur used in his speech, insisting that Calvinists must be Dispensationalists, is that Calvinists believe in Election. His argument is: the Nation Israel was the Elect. God’s Election is eternal (irrevocable). Since Calvinists believe in Election, they must

believe that Israel is still and always will be the Elect. However, who is "Israel"? The modern secular nation of Israel? Ethnic Jews everywhere, in Israel or not? Believers (Jews and Gentiles) in the Promised Messiah (Christ), i.e.- the Church? If the latter is true (as I believe and most historic Calvinists believe) then the Church in the Old Testament (the True Israel) was the Elect. God's Election is eternal (irrevocable). Since Calvinists believe in Election, they must believe that the Church was, is and always will be the Elect. Simple. I can agree with the words of Mr. MacArthur's argument, while realizing we both mean something very different by them.

Definitions!!<http://www.challies.com/archives/shepherds-confe/why-every-selfr.php> <http://faithbyhearing.wordpress.com/2007/03/15/macarthur-why-every-self-respecting-calvinist-should-be-a-premillennialist/>

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 09:37

GOOD BIBLICAL COUNSEL FOR TEC (AND OTHERS)

Taken from the NT Lesson for the morning, the church bulletin cover at the Episcopal Parish (TEC) we attend, featured in bold type 2 Thess 2:15- "Stand Firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught." Ironically, this verse gives great encouragement to the Conservatives in a Church whose Official Leaders are doing just the opposite.

Posted by Cal at 09:34

Monday, November 12, 2007

THE LAND OF THE FREE

Last week, we remembered the souls of our dearly departed. Included among them are those saints of the Church upon whose shoulders we stand. Yesterday, many churches remembered those Christians who have become martyrs around the world in our own time. Today, most Americans, Believers and non-Believers alike, remembered and honored in our hearts, and recalled in our thoughts of year gone by, all those who have served our Country in our Military, particularly our loved ones [thank you, Norm] and especially those who actually died in or because of our Wars. We recognize our immense debt to them all. We literally, would not be here today without their sacrifice. We know we are the Home of the Brave, but we repay them by laboring and living in such ways that will preserve America as the Land of the Free.

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 23:10

Saturday, November 10, 2007

TO LIGHTEN THINGS UP

After my last post (below) perhaps these two sites might lighten things up a bit-<http://home.flash.net/~go4crown/lightbulb.htm><http://benwitherington.blogspot.com/2007/02/we-are-light-of-world-but-who-changed.html>

Posted by Cal in Church at 15:05

Friday, November 9, 2007

AARGH!

I haven't written much this week as most of the subjects in the news I have been reading about or discussing with others have been most discouraging or disturbing. I have also been spending more time on my serious studies, this week finding roots of some aspects of today's post modern culture in Plato (2500 years ago!), continuing my exploration of Ontology and Epistemology. Speaking of Plato, I realize his ideal "Republic" was ruled from the top down by an elite group of Philosopher-Kings and that twisted versions of this model has led in modern times to Totalitarian States. However, there is something to be said (and our Colonial Founders did say it emphatically) that for our Republic (the U.S.A.) to work well, citizens must be both educated and moral (and that, derived from the Christian Faith). What I hear and read everywhere in these pre-national elections days seem to indicate these virtues are in short supply in both our citizenry at large and among our elected Leaders. There is fear-mongering, pandering to self-interest and blatant ignorance lathered generously over the landscape. This particularly applied to local Elections held in this State (of Confusion) this week past and in votes of our Legislature and to proposals by our Governor. Just the use of basic Aristotelian Logic would help. But false premises and invalid conclusions cluttered the media and public discourse everywhere. All of which brought forth a primal aargh from me. Bring on the Philosopher-Kings or at least educated and moral citizens.

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 16:07

Tuesday, November 6, 2007

"INSANITY AND SPIRITUAL SONGS IN THE SOUL OF A SAINT"

The Quiet Times Thots that I emailed to many on Monday featured a Hymn by William Cowper. A friend responded, asking me if I had heard or read a message by John Piper about this Christian Brother, close friend of John Newton, who had suffered a life time of misery and mental anguish, while trusting in the grace of God. You may find Dr Piper's account of Mr Cowper's life and struggles here. It is well worth reading, with some important lessons for all of us. http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1463_Insanity_and_Spiritual_Songs_in_the_Soul_of_a_Saint/

Posted by Cal in Christian Living at 18:35

Saturday, November 3, 2007

A PROPHECY FOR THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Romans 11:1-6, 11-12, 25-29 adapted with The Episcopal Church [TEC] in mind: a prophecy ask, then, has God rejected [TEC]? By no means! I myself [and my family, are confirmed members]. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 'Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.' But what is the divine reply to him? 'I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. [i.e.-within TEC there are those who are faithful to the Truth and the Tradition] So I ask, [has TEC] stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling [the Spiritual, Liturgical and Ecclesiastical Anglican Heritage of the Church] has come to [to those outside TEC who otherwise would never have heard of it], so as to make [TEC] jealous. Now if their stumbling means riches for those [who leave TEC], and if their defeat means riches for [non-Episcopalians] how much more will their full [restoration] mean! So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon [TEC], until the full number of [the Elect] has come in. And so all [the Elect] will be saved; [The Body of Christ is catholic, extending far wider than TEC and that Body will continue to grow, now enriched by the classic Anglicanism that flows out into the world from the ruins of TEC] ... as it is written, [Christ] will banish ungodliness from [TEC] 'This is my covenant with them- I take away their sins' [someday]. As regards the gospel [the Leaders of TEC] are enemies of God for the sake [of non Episcopalians]; but as regards [the historic positions they hold] they are beloved for the sake of their ancestors. [It was God who raised TEC up in the first place more than 200 years ago and gave them their Heritage and purpose and we know] the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. God has moved on, creating a new Church-building on the Anglican Heritage TEC is squandering. Someday, it shall repent and rejoin the New People of God.

Posted by Cal in Church at 13:10

PATRIOTS (no, not the football Team)

Last night, my wife and I enjoyed a wonderful free concert. The Marine Band, in sharp red and blue dress uniforms, was here and they are as good as it gets- perfect performance from musical professionals! They played pieces by Mennin, Williams, Dvorak, Ives and Berntein. Of course the audience favorites were the marches by John Philip Sousa. The program concluded with a rousing salute to the Armed Forces of the United States of America. This was an emotional, heart in the throat, rendition of the official "songs" of the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force and Marines. People who have served, or have family members who have, stood at the appropriate time. Almost everyone did. Very moving, patriotic experience! There was one very sad and troubling note. There might have been 1000 people jammed into the auditorium. Almost all of us were "old white folks". The population here is mostly "People of Color". Why weren't they there? And why were there almost no youth at all (I counted maybe a dozen) and very few middle agers? We were sitting with a passing generation. Will the youth of today ever experience the pride of being Americans and serving their Country like these old-timers?

Posted by Cal in Current Events at 11:32

PURGING ALL SOULS' DAY

Some of you will realize I did not mention All Souls Day- the day that comes after All Saints Day [Halloween, of course, takes its name from All Hallow Even- the night before All Saints Day. The word "saint" comes from holy or hallowed. Halloween is the night before the day in which we honor the hallowed dead. This meaning has obviously been lost for most people] I conflate honoring all the dead (the "dearly departed") with honoring those heroes of the Church, commonly known as "Saints") into one Day. It is like the secular Memorial Day. All Souls Day, historically, is the Day in Roman Catholic Church when souls, supposedly in Purgatory, are prayed for that their time there may be shortened and they may move on into Heaven. Of course, as a Protestant, while I believe in the Communion of Saints, living and dead (we confess that Doctrine in the Apostles Creed), I do not believe in Purgatory or, obviously, for praying for souls there. Hence, no mention here of All Souls Day. I purged it from my Calendar

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Posted by Cal in Church at 11:04

Thursday, November 1, 2007

ALL SAINTS DAY

Lo! round the throne, a glorious band, the saints in countless myriads stand, of every tongue redeemed to God, arrayed in garments washed in blood. Through tribulation great they came; they bore the cross, despised the shame; from all their labors now they rest, in God's eternal glory blest. They see their Savior face to face, and sing the triumphs of his grace; him day and night they ceaseless praise, to him the loud thanksgiving raise: "Worthy the Lamb, for sinners slain, through endless years to live and reign; thou hast redeemed us by thy blood, and made us kings and priests to God." O may we tread the sacred road that saints and holy martyrs trod; wage to the end the glorious strife, and win, like them, a crown of life. -old Hymn copied from Oremus

Posted by Cal in Church at 22:20

WHERE ARE THE DEPARTED SAINTS?

Isaiah 65:17-25 Nov. 1 is All Saints Day, in which we honor those Believers who have "passed away". Where are they? We shall not be disembodied spirits (ghosts)! We believe in the resurrection of the body. Christ has a glorified body and ours will be like his. Where does He live now? Where shall we live when we are with Him in our glorified bodies, after we leave this world in which we now live? [Back in the 8th Century, God promised-] I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; "Create" is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 1, bara, for the creation of the present heavens and earth. God promises an altogether new environment in which we will Live- a glorified "world" for people with glorified bodies the former things [the heavens and earth as we know them] shall not be remembered or come to mind.

That could be a sad, maybe terrible thought, for those with good experiences and enjoyable, special places here But be glad [God says] and rejoice for ever in what I am creating [the new heavens and earth] Why is God doing this? for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; God is creating a new, perfect environment for His new People. They are the Saints we are remembering today, the Church, the Redeemed. The "new heavens and earth" being created are for them. These People will be a source of joy to God. He will delight in them. (This is the main reason why I interpret this prophecy as a metaphor, using images familiar to Isaiah's audience. It is not about Israel, the Nation. It is about the New Covenant People. The second reason is that there are no Gentiles or unbelievers in this new world. We have here a picture of "Heaven" waiting for the Elect) no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. This is the same prophecy, the same Picture, recorded for Believers in the letters of Paul and the Revelation of John. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord and their descendants as well. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord. (cf Isaiah 2 and 11) The Vision describes 7 Benefits for the Citizens of the New World coming: 1. No sorrow or pain 2. Long life span 3. Private property enjoyed in perpetuity 4. Productive labor 5. Happy family life 6. God's true and immediate presence experienced 7. Shalom (peace, well-being, security) for all This is not utopian babble nor is it a secular Plan to be realized by social engineering or Government decree or legislation. It is a thoroughly religious Vision. The heart of it is God's Holy Mountain (The Temple) and Christ as King, seated on the Throne in its midst. It is a description of the "Messianic Kingdom". This Kingdom is not altogether future, waiting on the Second Coming. This Kingdom began on earth with the 3 year earthly ministry of Jesus in Israel. It really took off with his ascension to the Throne in heaven from whence He now reigns. It has been 'coming' ever since and can be found on earth wherever we see these "Benefits" becoming a reality among the People of God. We are justified in pursuing them as Christians. The Lord Himself taught us to pray: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth". Looking beyond the literal meaning of these words, we can get excited about the characteristics of Heaven which can be expected, at least in part, now on earth: Healthy lives [resurrection bodies are perfect and live forever] Sufficient provision of all our needs [in heaven we shall lack nothing] Happy family life [all our relationships will be perfect] God's true and immediate presence experienced Shalom (peace, well-being, security) The principles laid out in the Torah, that we are to live by here and now, show us the way to all of these blessings However, there shall always be conflict and

struggle with evil powers and sin in this present world. The fulfillment of the Vision, the full realization of these promises blessings awaits the Parousia of the King when we, like the departed Saints, shall enter the new heavens and the new earth prepared for us. Come Lord Jesus!

Posted by Cal in Bible Topics at 18:17

A NEW DAY IS COMING

2 Peter 3:8-13 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

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