

*"The church will outlive the universe;
the individual person will outlive the
universe. Everything that is joined
to the immortal Head will share His
immortality."*

C. S. Lewis



A TIME AND PLACE FOR US

Ralph Blair

A Time and Place for Us is an expanded version of the Keynote address given by Dr. Blair at the Eastern and Western connECtions2001.

Copyright 2001 by Dr. Ralph Blair. All rights reserved.
Dr. Ralph Blair, 311 East 72nd St., New York, NY 10021
www.ecinc.org

Frasier has dragged Niles and their father to a basketball game for “a good night of male-bonding” as only Frasier could fantasize. He’s trying his best to whip up their interest but dad is preoccupied with an old unsolved murder case and Niles is preoccupied with the music in his headset. A burly fan arrives late, plops down next to Niles and grunts: “What’s the score?” Niles lifts his headset and pronounces: “West Side Story.”

What’s the score? That depends. What’s the question?

One of the numbers from *West Side Story* promises “a time and place for us.” “Hold my hand and I’ll take you there; hold my hand and we’re half-way there.” That may work for infatuation – at least on Broadway, but let’s frame the question more broadly than Broadway. Not the narrow and harried world of lovers or the isolation of Frasier, Niles and their dad – all at the same game but each in his own world and each in his own time zone. Instead, let’s think of a time and place for us all in the deepest and widest of worlds.

We’re all enmeshed in time. It “weighs us down, every moment,” as Baudelaire complained about tick-tock time. When we’re younger or bored, time drags; when we’re older or having fun, time flies. There’s the life-giving time of pulse and brain waves and the life-stealing time of aging. In “Queer as Folk,” the narcissistic Brian rejects time with his sperm-donated son, complaining that a baby is just a “wrinkled little time clock ticking away reminding you you’re getting older by the minute, by the second.” Time is a mystery, always on the move in all directions at once. It’s what one scientist calls “the deepest of all enigmas in physics” [Malcolm W. Browne], what a classicist calls “the most nostalgic of elements.” [Robert Eisner]

To ask: “What’s the time?” is like asking “What’s the score?” It all depends on what we mean. For some purposes we think of eons and light-years. For other purposes it’s enough to know what year it is or what day or what hour. At other times we must know the time down to billionths of a second. It’s the same if we ask “Where are we?” “Are we there yet?” That depends on what

we mean. What are our expectations? What's the question? Where was Niles? Was he at the basketball game or on a fire escape of a tenement in Hell's Kitchen? Or was he sailing on a sphere called Earth, somewhere in the Milky Way?

God's Time and Space

Many of you think you're *too old*. But you're even older than that. You did not *begin* on the day you were born. Biologically speaking, each of us began life at conception. All the raw material that we would ever be was there then. But we're not simply nine months older than we thought we were. We're much older than that. All the stuff that the universe would ever be was there in that split-second called the Big Bang. Each of us was there then – in all that everything – some 14 billion years ago. But we're much older than that. We go back, not just to the beginning of time and space but, as Scripture reveals, we spring from the eternal purposes of God from “*before* the creation of the world.” No wonder we're feeling our age!

“In the beginning of time, the Word already was.” “And all things came into being by that Word.” The Word came to expression in all worlds. The Concept created the cosmos. “In the beginning of time, the Word already was, ... and the Word became flesh” in Jesus Christ, and “apart from Him, nothing has come into being that has come into being.” [John 1:1-3 and 14.; cf. Gen 1:1 and I John 1:1]

As Christians, we believe that God, in Christ, made time and space. And we believe that God made a visit as a man in time and space – 2,000 years ago. Says a Bible translator: Christianity's “starting point is the most important event in the whole of human history. The Christian religion asserts that ... two thousand years ago, God, whose vast and complex wisdom science is daily uncovering, visited this small planet of ours in Person. ... This is the heart and center of the Christian faith.” He goes on to say that “Nothing must be allowed to distract us from considering with adult minds and hearts whether this is true history or a beautiful myth. The decision is so important that it must not, indeed cannot, be avoided. Yet,” he observes, “this is

the point at which so many people take evasive action.” [J. B. Phillips]

It cannot be denied that this year, 2001, references the coming of Christ – for Christians as well as for non-Christians. After all, 2001 is *AD* 2001 – *anno Domini* 2001 – “*the year of our Lord*” 2001. This year marks the beginning of the Third Millennium of Jesus Christ, the sovereign Lord and Savior of the world. It is *this* fact that is evaded these days. And the evasion takes many forms – from the intense denial of a practiced and even principled refusal to consider the claims of Christ to violent hostility, sophistry, sarcasm, crass commercialism and casual indifference. It's not politically correct even to *say* “BC” and “AD.”

Looking back to that great “moment when Before Turned into After” [U. A. Fanthorpe], when BC became AD, when God's “Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us,” we're looking into the deepest of mysteries. The Living Word of God took on flesh and bones and blood as a Jew in occupied Palestine. This is the *stuff* of the Spirit. This coming of the Messiah was no abstract idea of philosophical speculation, no immaterial metaphysics, no merely ephemeral feelings of “spirituality.” Nor was His coming a political projection of self-empowered propaganda. The only God came to this planet in a particular place and in a particular human being – one of us, yet not merely one of us.

He came at a *particular* time in human history. As numbered by the Romans who occupied Palestine at the time of his birth in Bethlehem, it was around the 750th year A. U. C. – *ab urbe condita* (“from the foundation of the city” of Rome). As numbered by the Jews to whom he came, it was thought to be around 5,750 years since the foundation of the world. Though that number was off by some 14 billion years, he did come at a particular time in the history of the *cosmos*. He came at a particular time in the *Pax Romana*, when the known world was one. He came, as Scripture says, at God's *appointed* time, just at the *right* time, the time of God's *choice* – the *Kairos*. That momentous moment of mystery was when “the time was fulfilled.”

The Word in flesh came out of the counsels of the eternal Good Will and Purpose for what Scripture calls His *destination* “from before the creation of the world.” He was no afterthought. He was “the Lamb slain before the creation of the world.” He himself declared that in the end, God gives “a kingdom prepared from before the creation of the world” for the inheritance of a people, as Paul put it, “chosen in Christ from before the creation of the world.” [Matt 25:34; Eph 1:4] This was, from beginning to end, no last-minute matter.

We can't imagine going back “before the creation of the world.” We really can't imagine going back those 14 billion years to the very beginning of time-space in the Big Bang. That wasn't “Once Upon a Time.” That was “In the *Beginning*” of time. That wasn't just “*somewhere*.” That was at the very edge of *anywhere*. Science cannot get behind that trillionth of a second when *nothing* became *everything*. That's, of course, because – as St. Augustine knew in the 4th century – there *was* no “before” before the beginning of time. As a Stanford cosmologist says: “To ask what is before this moment is a self-contradiction.” [Andrei Linde] The developer of inflation theory – the theory that the universe is an expansion from the size of a proton to the size of a grapefruit in a tiny fraction of a second and then continues on to unimaginable time and distance – calls this creation out of nothing “the ultimate free lunch” [Alan Guth] Christians call that *grace*. And *we're* all made of that ancient stardust – our bodies, our minds. And so, too, was the very flesh God's Word would become in Jesus of Nazareth!

The Why of When and Where

But “*Why* is there *anything* rather than nothing?” An Oxford cosmologist says there's no question that's more sublime than this. [Derek Parfit] Sublime it may be, and yet as another scientist acknowledges: “Science in the deep sense *explains* nothing, and can make no pretence to answer ultimate questions such as ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ ” [John R. G. Turner]

Yet poets may give it a crack. We read these words in Andre Gide's *Journal*: “There might very well be nothing; nor anyone. No one to notice that there is nothing, and to consider that natural. But that there is something, and whatever it may be, the strange thing! I shall never cease being amazed at this.” In speaking of “how to enjoy enjoyment,” G. K. Chesterton used to say that “the most logical form of this is in thanks to a Creator, but,” he says, “at every stage I felt that such praises could never rise too high; because they could not even reach the height of our own thanks for unthinkable existence, or horror of more unthinkable non-existence.”

Why is there something rather than nothing? To whom can one address such a question? Only the One who created *ex nihilo* can answer it. And His revelation in Scripture has been repeated by the poets. In John Updike's words: “Nothing has had to be, but is by Grace.” Robert Louis Stevenson wrote these words: “Nothing but God's Grace! We walk upon it; we breathe it; we live and die by it; it makes the nails and axles of the universe.” Charles Williams perceived that “Everything that has ever happened is an act of love or an act against love.” Certainly the creation of everything out of nothing and the redemption and recreation of an unloving world out of its nothingness are acts of God's sovereign love. This is “the Love that moves the sun and all the stars” (in Dante's words) and the Love John said moved Love Himself to “so love this world” – lost among all the stars – that He gave His only begotten Son! *Love* is why there is something rather than nothing!

The Big Bang and Belief

At a meeting of world-class cosmologists and astrophysicists a year ago, there was agreement that the origin of the universe has been traced back to the first microseconds after the Big Bang, when the universe made the transition from featureless conditions to the ever expanding ripples out of which *we* would eventually emerge. One of these scientists told the others that their scenario of cosmic history was in line with that of St. Augustine's long ago. In the 4th century, Augustine knew better than both sides in

the 20th century Scopes Trial. He wrote: "The universe was brought into being in a less than fully formed state but was gifted with the capacity to transform itself from unformed matter into a truly marvelous array of structures and life forms." As Cambridge physicist (and Anglican priest) Sir John Polkinghorne puts it: "God created a world that could make itself." Oxford biochemist (and Anglican priest) Arthur Peacocke says that God is a continuing, intimately involved Presence in the world's progressing creation.

Even a *New York Times* science writer and self-proclaimed atheist, in her call for "a revival of pagan peevishness," puts her professing atheism in these words: "I'm convinced that the world as we see it was shaped by the again genuinely miraculous, let's even say transcendent, hand of evolution through natural selection." [Natalie Angier] It's not *science* that stops her from saying that it was the hand of "God [that] created a world that could make itself" – even by "evolution through natural selection."

Fundamentalist theists deny that God did it *this way*. Fundamentalist atheists deny that *God* did it.

And still, science can't say what really got everything going. In the words of a University of Chicago cosmologist: "If inflation is the dynamite behind the Big Bang, we're still looking for the match" [Michael Turner] – not to mention the match-Maker! The *Science Times* admits: "The only thing that all the experts agree on is that no idea works – yet." [Dennis Oberbye]

There's a Wideness to God's Love

So far, we know that throughout the universe, there are more than 200 billion galaxies of stars. There's also an untold amount of dark matter – that which is neither solid nor gas. And permeating all the space between all the stars there's a mysterious counter-gravity energy that far outweighs the weight of all the matter in the universe, dark and visible. The 200 billion galaxies average some 50,000 light-years across. You know that a light-year is how far light travels in a vacuum in one year: almost 6 trillion miles. So how wide, on average, is each of these 200

billion galaxies? Multiply 50,000 times 6 trillion miles. The galaxies are bound into clouds of a few dozen to a few thousand galaxies stretching for some 3 million light-years. How wide is each cloud of galaxies? Multiply 3 million times 6 trillion miles. And then, at spans of hundreds of millions of light-years, there are the superclusters in which galaxy clusters are linked and adjoin equally vast voids. How wide is a supercluster? Multiply hundreds of millions times 6 trillion miles.

The Vital Vastness

Some skeptics mistake these statistics as proof of our insignificance. But the more we understand, the more we realize that this vastness of time and space is exactly what is needed for a time and place for *us*. It is the *vital* vastness. These are *our* vital statistics. Scientifically speaking, we simply could not have come into existence with anything less. We could not have continued to exist on anything less. These are some of the designed dimensions of Divine Love. And all of this time and space was consciously created in one inevitably providential, imperatively precise, infinitesimally tiny, indivisibly dense, and intensively hot point "In the Beginning," 14 billion years ago. God really did make time and room for us!

Just some 3,000 years ago, the psalmist David looked up into the night skies above Bethlehem and meditated in awe: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; What are we that thou art mindful of us?" [Psalm 8]

But as he wondered that in all that vastness God was yet mindful of humanity, David could have had no idea of the tremendous vastness of the vastness. He could have had no idea of the scientific fact that without billions of years and billions of stars and without that moon's being exactly where it is, there would be no humanity at all. The moon and stars are precisely here and there *in order* for *human beings* to have a time and place. Earth's size, distance from the sun, and rotational speed are all tailor-made to suit *us*! The really amazing thing is not that God thought of us in the midst of all those stars. The really

amazing thing is that all those stars were created *because* God thought of us. We are no afterthought; the stars and moon were God's forethought of us – God's precise plan for us. In the poignant words of the leading physicist at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton: "In some sense the universe knew we were coming." [Freeman Dyson]

Can we see that the stars have been *looking back* at us as "a great cloud of witnesses?" Robert Louis Stevenson recalled looking up at the stars over the Scotland of his childhood. He wrote in "Escape at Bedtime" that "high overhead and all moving about, / There were thousands of millions of stars. / ... crowds of stars *that looked down upon me*, / And that glittered and winked in the dark." He says that even after he'd been chased down and "packed into bed; ... the glory kept shining and bright in my eyes / And the stars going round in my head."

This fact that we find ourselves in an ecosphere of human-scaled hospitality is called "the anthropic principle." By this term, scientists mean that there is a humanity-friendly coherence to what *is*. In other words, what *is* precisely allows for *our* coming into being. According to one scientist: "Only the anthropic principle plus inflation will explain the universe as we see it. ... [It's] what allows us to be here." [Andrei Linde]

But what if it *more* than merely *allows* us to be here? What if we have here more than mere description? Scripture and what one physicist calls a "generous" reading of the physical world's "rumors of divine purpose" lead us to marvel that we're somehow *intended* to be here. What if it's not that the universe just happens to be such that we *could* evolve; what if the universe's "finely-tuned fruitfulness" [Polkinghorne] is such that we *would* evolve?!

According to the Astronomer Royal, if the Big Bang were to have "started *too* fast, then the expansion energy would, early on, have become so dominant ... that galaxies and stars would never have been able to pull themselves together via gravity and condensed out; the universe would expand for ever, but there would be no chance of life. On the other hand, the expansion must not have been too slow: otherwise the universe would have recollapsed too quickly to a Big Crunch." [Sir Martin Rees] If

the strength of the force that binds together the particles that make up an atomic nucleus were weaker by a factor of 0.0001, a proton could not be bonded to a neutron and the Big Bang would have been a Big Bust. A developer of Black Hole theories estimates that the odds of a Big Bang's producing by accident an orderly universe is one in 100 billion to the 123rd power. [Roger Penrose] A Nobel-winning biologist predicts that "Eventually we will understand that the origin of life was not a highly improbable cosmic jest but rather an almost obligatory outcome of chemical structures, given the right conditions." [Christian de Duve] A mathematician puts it this way: "If, during the Big Bang, some values would only differ by 0.000000000001%, the resulting universe could never yield any biological life. It is further explained that "the probability [of] an *intelligent* life form[']s" emerging is calculated at 400 zeros after the '1' of the denominator." How fine-tuned is this design? Aim at a square inch target on the other side of the known universe. Now hit it. That's the precision. And without that precision, there would have been no there there, and thus, no us. As it happens(?), there's just the *right there* there, and just the *right then* then – for *us!*

"What does it take to make a rose, Mother-mine? / The God that died to make it knows ... / It takes the moon and all the stars, / It takes the might of heaven and hell / And the everlasting Love as well, / Little child." [Alfred Noyes]

The Galaxies of Inner Space

The galaxies of outer space are more than matched for grandeur of design by sub-atomic galaxies of the inner space in each of us. Great Britain's Astronomer Royal says that the understanding of outer space is relatively simple – it's molecular biology that's really complex. [Rees] As one science writer puts it: "The exaggerated topography of the genome reveals nothing so much as evolution's taste for hyperbole. ... The heights are higher, the brights are brassier." [Angier]

Although we all share 99.9 percent of the human DNA tape that's some 3 billion chemical units long, that still leaves 3

million bits for differences for each of us. Surprisingly, each DNA tape is inscribed with but 30,000 genes, so clearly, we're not hard-wired. But those 30,000 genes, by their interactions, can result in an almost infinite array of human complexity. And that doesn't even take into account the added influence of the external environment.

There, inside each of our 100 trillion interacting cells, we can now begin to read what the head of the Human Genome Project calls "the book of life in God's own language." [Francis Collins] In the data storage DNA and the information processing RNA, the living relic of life's beginnings some 5 billion years ago, we're the brightest biological blossom of the Big Bang. Down deep inside each of us, "there is a map and a clock of human history" [Nancy Shute] – a time and place for us.

And just as we would not *be* without the billions of worlds within worlds God put "out there," we would not *be* without the billions of worlds within worlds God put "in here." From billions of stars and all the superclusters to billions of brain cells and all the bacterial scavengers – some 400 species of friendly flora in each of us – it's all designed with us in mind.

For example, take proteins, the most complex of all known molecules. They're what our bodies are made of and what work to keep our bodies in good repair. It's been discovered that "Each of the body's genes carries the code to create as many as 10 different proteins, and each of those proteins links together with hundreds of other proteins, sometimes creating still more proteins in the process. All in all, the body may have 2 million or more distinct proteins. And a single protein is so complex that IBM plans to spend the next five years deciphering how just one particular protein forms its unique shape. To do that, the company will need to create a computer 500 times as powerful as any in existence today and 40 times as fast as today's 40 fastest machines working in concert." [Joannie Schrof Fischer]

A Cambridge historian and philosopher of science explains that "the probability of constructing a rather short, functional protein at random becomes so small as to be effectively zero (no more than 1 chance in 10 to the power of 125), even given our multi-billion-year-old universe." [Stephen Meyers] He adds:

"Consider further that equally severe probabilistic difficulties attend the random assembly of functional DNA. Moreover, a minimally complex cell requires not one, but at least one hundred complex proteins (and many other biomolecular components such as DNA and RNA) all functioning in close coordination." His understated conclusion: "Chance is not an adequate explanation for the origin of biological complexity and specificity."

We're Here. How Did We Get Here?

So whether we go down deep into the DNA in each of us star-borne creations of God or go out into deep space where the cosmic DNA still radiates from God's creative Big Bang, we cannot go deeper than the deep, deep Love.

Evidence of design, no matter how divine, is not, of course, automatically interpreted as evidence of a Divine Designer. Theoretical physicist Paul Davies is convinced that "the contrived nature of physical existence is just too fantastic for me to take on board as simply a 'given.' It points forcefully to a deeper underlying meaning to existence." He notes that "some call it purpose, some design." But Davies, himself, is reluctant to use these "loaded words," as he terms them. He's uncomfortable with the word "God" and says that "Science takes as its starting point the assumption that life wasn't made by a god or supernatural being: it happened unaided and spontaneously, as a natural process." He grants that this is the *assumption* of science, that it's its *starting point*. No matter that science itself has been seen by other scientists to be possible only and precisely because the universe rests in the rational system of the designing God. But Davies at least acknowledges what amounts to his pre-scientific and pre-theoretical starting point. His naturalistic prejudice and personal preference is evident in his saying he'd "rather that nature take care of itself ... in the ingenious and unswerving lawfulness of the cosmos." But what does personal preference have to do with science? Everything, evidently. It's the personal preference or, as Reformed apologists would say, the fundamental "heart commitment" of the individual scientist with

which the operation of the science begins. [cf. Herman Dooyeweerd and Cornelius Van Til]

Yet Davies recognizes that laws have limits. In his words, they're "information-poor" while life is "information-rich." He asks: "Can [specified complexity] be the guaranteed product of a deterministic, mechanical law-like process, like a primordial soup left to the mercy of familiar laws of physics and chemistry?" He answers "No, it couldn't. No known law of nature could achieve this." Biochemist Michael Behe calls Davies' conflicted approach "blinker thought in action. [He's] boxed in by his [anti-theistic] presuppositions." Of course Behe is right.

So we're here. How did we get here? We were *invited!* We were invited by The Host of hosts. "Yeah right," some might scoff. That's a nice way of putting it, considering your Christian commitment. But how did we *really* get here? The questioner means, of course: Apart from Christian biases and preconceptions – *scientifically* speaking – how did we get here? After all, Darwinist Stephen Jay Gould relishes that we were *not* created, but are mere accidents of nature. Darwinist Richard Dawkins exults: "Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist." Says popular Darwinist philosopher-turned-literary critic Richard Rorty: "It will probably take at least a thousand years for human beings to give up the last remnants of the idea that they [are creations of God]; to see Beethoven and Jefferson as animals with extra neurons. ... Darwin," he says, "will be honored for having given his species greater self-reliance and greater self-respect ... placing [us] within a disenchanted world." A *disenchanted* world? That'll get them up in the morning!

But wait. These scientist/philosophers are not speaking scientifically; they're spouting *pre-scientific presuppositions*. As an Arizona State University anthropologist cautions: "We [all] select alternative sets of research conclusions in accordance with our biases and preconceptions." [Geoffrey Clark] He suggests that, indeed, "paleoanthropology has the form but not the substance of a science." The Curator of the American Museum of Natural History admits that "in paleoanthropology, the patterns we perceive are as likely to result from our unconscious mindsets as from the evidence itself." [Ian Tattersall] In the words of

another paleoanthropologist, theories of human origins "far exceed what can be inferred from the study of fossils alone and in fact place a heavy burden of interpretation on the fossil record." [Misia Landau] In other words, we're ventriloquists to otherwise dumb and dry bone dummies.

But it's not only an unconscious mindset here and a faulty reasoning there that lies behind much of the missionary zeal of macro-evolutionism. A molecular and cell biologist has catalogued the history of hoaxes and mischievous misapplications in the preaching of evolution. [Jonathan Wells] He reprises the Miller-Urey life-in-a-bottle nonsense, Haeckel's faked embryos chart, Darwin's overly-simplistic Tree of Life and "homology," the glued-on peppered moths, the famous finch-beak blunders, and the fabricated Piltdown man. C. S. Lewis called the Piltdown man a fake years before the science establishment recognized it as such in 1953. In his poem, "A Footnote to Pre-History," published in *Punch* on September 14, 1949, Lewis wrote: "Memory, not built on a fake from Piltdown, / Reaches us. We know more than bones can teach."

Herrman notes that though "it's possible that no form of scientific observation is able to determine whether our universe was formed exactly as stated in the literal Genesis 1 account or by any of the other means presently suggested, ... one can conclude that everything that exists and all natural-system behavior is *indirect* evidence for the existence of ... an intelligence" behind it all. He argues mathematically that "it is *rational* to assume that the Genesis and other similar creation accounts are true and that such a deity does exist."

Thus, at least one mathematical model suggests that it is reasonable to say that we're here because we've been *invited!* We're here – through 3 million years of pre-human development. "The bulk of the genetic data suggests that [we're descended from] a small population of modern humans, as few as 10,000, [that] left Africa 100,000 or so years ago, wandering into the Middle East and on to Asia and Europe." [Nancy Shute] Each of our bodies contains traces of ancient African genes.

Then, from the fossil evidence of around 50,000 years ago – in the latest fraction of a percentage point (.0015) in the history

of life – it's *inferred* that there was something like another Big Bang. All of a sudden, after the slow flow of eons, there was, in *Homo sapiens*, an explosion of progress, what one scientist calls "a discontinuity of colossal proportions ... an instantaneous acquisition." [Richard E. Ecker] What was this? Was this when *Adam*, "the man of dust," was kissed by his Creator and inhaled the breath of Life itself? Who knows? Whatever it was, it seems to have marked the coming of primitive culture and a consciousness of transcendence.

By the end of prehistory, around 5,500 years ago, we begin to have our ancestors' own reports. Of particular interest to us is a man named Abram from the Sumerian city of Ur in the Persian Gulf. We're told that God called him out of Haran at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC – some 1,700 years before the coming of the Christ who would be Abraham's promised Seed through whom God would bless all the families of the earth.

A Scale Model

Some 700 years ago, Daniel Ben Judah hymned in awe: "The one eternal God, ere aught that now appears; / The First, the Last: beyond all thought, His timeless years!" This *is* beyond all thought. Numbers in the millions and billions and trillions – not to mention timelessness and nothingness – these all get lost to our comprehension.

Faced with such incomprehensible complexity, one tack might be simply to do what Albert Einstein observed in his teenage son Eduard. Writing to Hans Albert, Eduard's older brother, Einstein said: "To take on heavy subjects is not his passion, but there need to be guys like him who are able to simply enjoy God's creation – maybe that is the latter's purpose. After all, our own goals are just soap bubbles." What a thoughtfully welcome approach from the father of relativity theory! But we could also get at something of the vast spans of space-time by thinking in more familiar terms.

Picture this: a time-line from Miami all the way up north to this lectern. Had the Big Bang been ignited at the southern tip of this time-line, the very first minute signs of life on Earth,

primeval protoplasm, would not emerge along this time-line until Virginia. The first four-footed land animals would begin to appear down around Bangor. Dinosaurs would first roam around the Farmhouse and monkeys would be swinging in the trees somewhere between here and Turning Point. Apes first show up out here in the parking lot. The first Neanderthals are huddled over there in the doorway. Then, with that second Big Bang, there, standing around the piano: *our* ancestors – *Homo sapiens*. The earliest evidence for civilization emerges about a yard and a half to my right (that's 14,000 years ago). The Exodus takes place right here beside me. And here at the edge of the lectern, Jesus is born. We're all here on top of the lectern, along with the entire sweep of Western civilization and church history.

The psalmist sang in understatement: "a thousand years in [God's] sight are but as yesterday when it is past." [Psalm 90:4]. Still, from our human perspective, the Creator took a very long time to prepare just the right place for us in His cosmos. But it took even more than all time and space. Remember the Scripture: We were all in the mind and heart of God from before or outside all time and space – whatever that may mean. "We come from farther away than space and longer ago than time." [Frederick Buechner] So we say "Amen" to the insightful words of a 17th century Christian mystic: "You never enjoy the world aright till you remember how lately you were made and how wonderful it was when you came into it." [Thomas Traherne]

The Intrusion of Iniquity

Wonderful it surely was. And yet, through the hubris of humanity's ungrateful pride, we fell away from all that God had desired for us. As a Muslim scholar puts it: "There is within the world a tendency toward what Islam calls forgetfulness of Divine reality; Christianity calls it Original Sin. Although God created us in goodness, we have fallen away. And so we tend to keep falling down. It's what the Hindus call the *tamasic* tendency." [Seyyed Hossein Nasr]

Unfortunately, usually when sin is mentioned these days – as it is mentioned both too frequently in some quarters and not

frequently enough in others – what seems to be meant is rather restricted to matters of sexuality. That’s nothing new. In AD 308, Christian leaders met at Granada, in Spain, to draft canons that have come down to us as the earliest extant standards of Christian ethics. They came up with 81 sentences, half of which deal with sex. Of course, the anti-Christians are also obsessed with a linkage of sex, “transgressive acts” and religion. Just look at the “queer-friendly” art with which so-called cutting edge artists taunt Christians. Two recent examples of such “transgressive art” that “queers” the Christians are a painting of “St. Francis” as an S&M “sexual warrior” and a depiction of a prayer card that shows a “gleaming, buff, loin-clad Christ perhaps enjoying his crucifixion,” as the GLBT *New York Blade News* describes it. A “gay studies scholar” scoffs at “uptight” Christians who might be offended by these pretentious projects and protests that diversity to these people means being like *them*. [James Saslow] But interestingly, he and his GLBT cohorts are just as quick to take offense at whatever *they* claim smacks of “homophobia” and *they* are the ones who preach a “diversity” that’s defined by *themselves*.

Still, as C. S. Lewis knew, “The worst sins ... are spiritual.” He spoke of “two things inside me, competing with the human self which I must try to become. They are the Animal self, and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But,” Lewis added, “of course, it is better to be neither.”

All around the world and throughout human history, people have had a sense that we’re not what we should be. One sees it in psychotherapy all the time. But it’s even deeper. It’s a sense of our having offended something or someone beyond ourselves, for which atonement must be made. Sometimes the attempts at atonement have assumed a bizarre range of rituals. But they’ve always been there.

These days, though, there’s a popular tendency to deny this. Richard Rorty, for one, contends that Christianity simply projected what he unintelligibly labels a “psychosis” for which it then prescribed redemption in Christ. The *promise of salvation*

from sin is said to be the *problem*. The denial itself, though, is a postmodern expression of the ages-old attempt to atone.

In this case, atonement tends to be sought through an “us” versus “them” passing of blame. For example, those who are committed to politically correct postmodern relativism succumb to the silly notion of “The Noble Savage.” That’s the myth that pre-literate, non-Western societies (with which postmodernists are wont to identify) are inherently pleasant and peaceful folk. They succumb to the equally silly notion that *selected* minorities (with which they also are wont to identify) are inherently *good* and *right* while those who have been “privileged” are inherently *bad* and *wrong*. The former class includes such sub-groups as selected women, blacks, American Indians, witches and the so-called GLBT community. The latter class is made up of dead white European males and their male heirs. Thus, these postmodernists try to “privilege” *themselves* at the expense of *their own* marginalized victims. But when they do this, they claim that *they* are still the good and right, and the *newly marginalized* are still the bad and wrong. Assigning favored-victim status to oneself and one’s own while assigning unfavored-victimizer status to the despised others is an “inexpensive virtue” [C. S. Lewis] and but another strategy for trying to atone for what one is somehow aware is awry with oneself. It’s a kind of reaction formation writ large.

Historian Martin E. Marty of the University of Chicago calls such self-serving notions to historical account. He writes: “During the past third of a century, where have we been asked to turn to find examples of purity? Typical answers: The white men killed all the buffalo and trashed the environment; go to the Native Americans to see ecological perfection exemplified. Or, men messed things up; go to the women, the matriarchies of the past, to find gentility and egalitarianism in action. Or, the prophetic and scriptural traditions caused harm; go to the ancient pagan ways when witches and wizards taught respect for the earth and for others. ... But,” he says, “recent findings by archaeologists, anthropologists, social scientists, historians and philosophers have begun to present a more balanced picture – a picture that forces us to question the possibility of finding earthly

edens.” He continues: “Respect life like the Native Americans did? Now we have found evidence of human sacrifices on thousands-of-persons scales among pre-Columbian Aztecs. The evidence of fecal remains points to cannibalism not restricted to ritual observance but part of the regular diet. We have found convincing indications that Indians were complicit with whites in killing off the buffalo, as well as their friends and relatives. As for matriarchies, ... when and if we find them, [they] will not live up to our romantic images of them. As for the paganism exemplified by Wiccans today, we find that most of what Wiccans proclaim was invented during the 20th century, and most of their claims for the ancient witch religions are not grounded in fact.” Marty concludes: “In the real world we do best not to imagine edens or perfect beings but to deal with what Immanuel Kant and Isaiah Berlin called ‘the crooked timber of humanity.’ ”

A hundred years ago it was quite popular in America to expect that the 20th century would be a century of uninterrupted progress and peace. Some Protestant clergy – albeit liberal – were so taken by expectations of the progress and peace to be witnessed in the new century that they founded a periodical called *The Christian Century*. (It’s Martin Marty’s own home journal.) Secular humanists, capitalists, socialists, fascists, communists and others dreamed their own delusions of the progress to be unfolded in the new 20th century. In the end these were the very ideologies that wrecked the worst and widest havoc the world had ever witnessed. “The scale of the destruction of human life in the twentieth century was unprecedented.” [Clive Ponting] By the end of the century, there had been great technological progress as well as some progress in human rights and the United States was the only superpower, but it was far from “the Christian century.” Liberals, though, do not easily give up on utopian fantasies that fail to take into account the depth of human depravity. Without recalling *The Christian Century*’s blunder at the beginning of the 20th century, the journal’s present editor/publisher repeated the blunder in the very first issue of the 21st century. He proposed that we make “the 21st century the century of reconciliation and reunion” for peace among all the nations and religions of the world. [James M. Buchanan] The

editorial, entitled “Overcoming Division,” missed the point that calling for such an end to division is inadvertently divisive. Besides, didn’t Jesus warn that his Gospel was, in itself, divisive? Didn’t he say that instead of bringing “peace on earth” his message and mission would split families and bring discord and division to the world? [Matt 10:34; Luke 12:51]

And the Religious Right makes the same mistake. Forgetting the depths to which we tend to fall, the Right tries to save America through self-righteous moralism and an idolatrous patriotism.

We really should have known better than to think that the mere passage of time, improved technology, social reconstruction or moralism and patriotism *would* or *could* solve human sinfulness. Human history has been called “a huge libel on human nature” [Washington Irving], “the autobiography of a madman” [Alexander Herzen], “little else than a narrative of designs which have failed, and hopes that have been disappointed” [Samuel Johnson], and “little more than the register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind.” [Edward Gibbon] Said Dostoevsky: “Everything which could possibly enter into the most disordered of imaginations might be said of the history of the world.” At mid-20th century, Rebecca West wrote: “It is sometimes very hard to tell the difference between history and the smell of skunk.”

Shouldn’t we all know this experientially? If we’re on to ourselves, shouldn’t we know this? Chesterton used to say that the Christian doctrine of human sinfulness is the most obviously self-evident doctrine of the church.

A recent editorial in *The New York Times* states: “Over the past 500 years, science has emerged as a dominant intellectual force, displacing religion and philosophy as the chief explanation of the natural world. It radically altered humanity’s view of its place in the universe, and brought a cascade of technological marvels, not to mention potential doom.” The editorial concluded that in the “age of biology” in the 21st century, “One can only hope that the emphasis will be different [from that of the ‘age of physics’ in the past]. The most transforming technology emerging from the atomic era was the thermonuclear bomb, with

peaceful applications of nuclear energy a distant second.” *The Times* goes on to say that “the challenge for biology will be to reverse the priorities – to concentrate on human welfare and quell the urge to produce demonic germ weapons.” Good luck! The editorial misses the lesson that’s been displaced. This is a *fallen* world and we shouldn’t be surprised when it looks and acts like what it is.

The problem of human sin runs deeper than technology and social reconstruction can go. Technologies have both saved and destroyed millions of lives and the human rights enterprise has become, in many ways, a projection of hegemonic power through bias, selectivity, and double standards.

These days, the Religious Right sees homosexuality as the epitome of what’s wrong with the world. The Lesbigayt Left sees homophobia as what’s wrong with the world. It’s an “us” versus “them” attempt to atone – whatever may well be wrong with some expressions of homosexuality and all homophobia rightly so called. But when G. K. Chesterton was asked “What’s wrong with the world?” he was quick to say: “I’m what’s wrong with the world!” Homosexuality is not the *real* problem. Overcoming homosexuality is not the *solution*. Homophobia is not the *real* problem. Overcoming homophobia is not the *solution*. The problems and solutions as defined by both the Religious Right and the Lesbigayt Left are simply too superficial – even silly. And that’s sad!

Repeatedly, we’re reminded that the radical nature of the problem requires a radical remedy. As Christians, we believe that Christ is God’s radical remedy to our problem of the radical sin of which we are all guilty. We believe that it was for the restoration of all we lost to the sin of pride that Christ came into the world “in the fullness of time,” reconciling the world to God through his life and through his death.

And yet, the era of the late 20th and the beginning of the 21st century is dominated by the cultural elite’s disdained dismissal of the Gospel’s appraisal of our problem and proclaimed solution. The response of the elite powers to the preaching of the Gospel has been resentment, resistance, and refusal from the beginning. With few exceptions, the religious, cultural and governmental

establishments have always found the Gospel challenge to the *status quo* threatening. So the early success of Messiah’s missioners was met with opposition: they were ostracized, flogged within an inch of their lives, imprisoned and killed. Whether to ancient or modern pagans, anything Christian “is the stench of death.” [II Cor. 2:16] We witness today to those who are every bit as ignorant of Christ as were those to whom Paul took the Gospel. But unlike the 1st century pagans, our contemporary pagans think they’ve already heard all they need to hear about Christ.

As a professor of religion at secular (and lesbian-friendly) Smith College puts it, “to be a Christian in this society sometimes feels like a diaspora, a people in exile living in a strange land.” [Carol Zaleski] She writes of trudging up and down Main Street in her college town of Northampton, (where Jonathan Edwards once held forth) looking in vain to buy Advent candles at Christmas. She says “perfumed candles fill the New Age bookstore with the scent of generic spirituality.” There were “votive candles for chafing dishes and long leggy tapers for the table.” In all the shops there were plenty of “candles to match the seasons (Spring Lily, Pumpkin Patch and Candy Cane), create pleasing moods (Friendship, Cinnamon Buns and Baby Fresh) and restore body and mind (Stimulating, Balancing and Relaxing).” She also found plenty of “aromatherapy supplies.” But nary an Advent candle! The clerks didn’t even know what Advent candles were. She says “It troubles me that the paraphernalia of ordinary Christian devotion are so hard to come by in a town that sets great store on spiritual self-realization.” But she concludes by observing: “Why should it surprise us that makeshift practices like the winter solstice celebrations and illumination nights that are proliferating in our town should be more visible than the original and authentic mysteries of which they are derivative reflections? These are the conditions of the cultural diaspora in which we have to live.”

The elite women of Smith College are not alone among those who have chosen to move on into their own more conveniently self-indulgent introspection through New Age spirituality and a “therapeutic” lifestyle. Indeed, though it may not always be

rigorously based in psychological research, "Psychological insight is the creed of our time." That's how a Harvard social studies professor begins her new book, *The Romance of American Psychology*. [Ellen Herman] Even back in 1959, C. S. Lewis was lamenting what he called "the increasing modern habit of seeing all personal difficulties in terms of disease and cure, and so reducing things that are really moral or intellectual or both to the pathological element." But so much that passes for the psychological today is mere pop-psych.

Ben Stein, the funny and bright economist, lawyer, and star of Comedy Central's *Win Ben Stein's Money*, tells of being in his synagogue for the recent High Holy Days. "The rabbi gave a list of sins one might atone for, such as pride, haughtiness, greed, lending money at excess interest, lust, slander, covetousness, and then she said she had asked some members of the congregation for some of the sins they thought they should be atoning for. Then she read them to us: The sin of not giving myself enough credit for my creativity. The sin of not setting boundaries and of letting people walk all over me." And on they went. Stein notes his dismay and bemusement: "The usual understanding of what sin is [is] about excessive self-absorption and self-obsession ... the new all-American sins are about not being selfish and self-obsessed enough."

And a sense of *guilt* nowadays is about grabbing too little rather than grabbing too much. *Atonement* is grabbing it all.

The dean of the chapel at Duke University deplors how even much of American evangelicalism has sold out to quasi-therapeutic intervention and pop-psychology instead of preaching the disturbingly Good News of the Gospel. [William Willimon] A conservative Presbyterian minister observes that "nominal Christianity is the greatest weakness in the evangelical churches in the Western world today." [J. Ligon Duncan] He clarifies that he means that this is the case "even in the Gospel believing churches ... whose doctrinal norms have not strayed far from historic orthodox Christianity." He says that even in these churches, "professing Christians half-heartedly assent to the truths of the faith, while bearing all the marks of worldliness in their thinking, lives, and priorities."

If this is the case in Evangelicaland, it is certainly the case in liberal ecclesiastical circles. A Yale professor observes that though "the mainline churches have inherited theological wealth sufficient to serve substantial theological fare, ... all too often they offer little more than potato skins to those who hunger for a real meal." [Leander Keck] He adds: "Indeed the churches are suffering from theological anorexia themselves." And what is sadly true of these mainline churches is also true of the lesbigayt caucuses within them. They tend to offer nothing more theologically substantial than warmed-over rhetoric from the secular and interfaith lesbigayt Left.

The whole point these days seems to be to keep everyone *feeling* happy à la Oprah. One of the weirdest recent instances of this reducing everything to "happiness" was the appearance by Sheryl Crow and Mary J. Blige at a benefit concert for a 12-step drug-treatment clinic. As it was reported in a "Pop Review" column in *The New York Times*: "While Ms. Crow sang contentedly 'If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad,' [at a drug-treatment benefit?] Ms. Blige yearned 'All I really want is for me to be happy.'" The "happiness" that she and many in Evangelicaland as well as in Lesbigaytland have in mind is no doubt the self-defeating fantasy of self-indulgence. It's hardly what Ellen Charry of Princeton Seminary terms the "true happiness [of] enjoyment of Life as God wants us to practice it" and it's certainly far from the happiness of those who are "reviled and persecuted for righteousness sake" that Jesus promised his followers. In Charry's words: "At it's best, the Christian way of life can inconvenience our secular assumptions. It ought to be a nuisance, challenging us."

In Kevin Smith's film, *Dogma*, a muse named Serendipity counsels in the spirit of multicultural, pluralistic, diversity: "It doesn't matter what you have faith in. What matters is that you have faith." Dr. Joyce Brothers counsels in the same spirit: "It isn't so important what a person's faith is. If the faith is strong, it's going to help that individual cope with many problems in life. ... If a person translates this faith into action in his daily life, it helps to center the individual, helps him to know what's meaningful and what isn't. It helps the person cope with anger,

frustration and despair. It serves as a guide for a good life.” I guess she and Serendipity have never heard of the faith put into action by Jim Jones, the commune of Heaven’s Gate, the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God, the Ku Klux Klan or Islamic and Hindu fundamentalists.

Even when the symbols of faith are unquestionably Christian, these can be simply subsumed for the sake of entertainment and fashion. A recent review of the latest U2 CD assured prospective listeners that they’d get “an emotional and spiritual rush, whether you appreciate [U2’s] Christian leanings or not.” The “Style Watch” reporter for *People* magazine did a feature entitled “Cross Purposes” in which she notes celebrities’ various reasons for carrying their crosses. “These days, [celebrities] all have large crosses to bear. Gone are the dainty pendants of recent years, replaced by supersize versions.” We’re told that “Sean ‘Puffy’ Combs ‘likes to wear a big cross on a long chain because it makes him stand out,’ [while] L. A. designer Loree Rodkin is drawn to the oversize pendants because she ‘loves the architecture’ of the shape.” Her mother is quoted as saying, “Honey, what’s up with the crosses? We’re Jewish!”

Today, pantheism is a favorite faith. But today, pantheism is false. In human terms, there was a time and place beyond time-space when Pantheism was true – when the Living God was all there was. [C. S. Lewis] And the Living God, in Love, desired to share Life beyond Himself. The Triune God desired that He not be all there was. The One who had no need for love beyond His Triune Self, chose to create us for His love and ours. So He created out of nothing all that it took to prepare a time and place for us, His guests, to bear His image. But we betrayed that image. We rejected the gift of life as well as the Giver of Life, Himself. And so we died. And we’ve been in the throes of this death ever since. The Living God, grieved at our rejection and loss, and desiring that we be reborn, repaired a place for us. He gave His own Life in exchange for our lost life – His Death for our death.

That’s the dirty little secret that lay hidden in the manger and the horrible public secret that lay open on the cross. It’s the precious living secret made flesh in Mary’s womb and the

enlivening open secret of the empty tomb. After his crucifixion and resurrection, Christ went away, as He said He would, to prepare another place just in time for us, so that, as He promised, “where I am, you may be also.” Now He’s still here, where two or three are gathered in His name. His Spirit dwells in us as Christians. And yet one day, in another Time and Place, we’ll see Him face to face, and know Him and ourselves as God’s Love has intended from before all time and space.

We’re Here; We’re Queer! Is there a time and place for us?

Notwithstanding the fact that there’s a time and place in this world for all humankind – Christians as well as non-Christians – is there a time and place for those of us whose sexual orientations are different from most? At first it seems that the answer to this question is that there’s never been a *better* time and place for *us* than here in America in the 21st century. Undoubtedly, there’s never been a time or place in which more people were more understanding of the sexual minority.

But since some people still won’t give *us* “the time of day” or “a place at the table,” too many of us have tried to make a time and place for ourselves around our identity in sexual anomaly. That won’t work for anybody. It *cannot* work for Christians.

An *Advocate* columnist laments that some lesbian folk “don’t distinguish their [sexual] orientation from their way of life; their sexual preference from their general, nonsexual likes and dislikes.” She rightly judges that “there is something inherently wrong with [such] a monosexual worldview: colossal denial, to say the very least.” [Norah Vincent] Another gay columnist says he’s “always laughed at homophobic conservatives’ bogeyman notion of a ‘gay agenda’ since [his] experience has proven that two or more gay people can’t agree on where to go for dinner, much less on the public platform of a political event.” [Steve Bolerjack] Says sex-advice columnist Dan Savage: “I’m an Irish Catholic fag from Chicago. What do I have in common with a Polynesian lesbian immigrant? There’s

this infantile notion that there is such a thing as a gay community and that they all feel and think the same way about everything.”

Savage is right about this. There *is* such an infantile notion out there. And yet we don't all feel and think the same way. And that's especially true of evangelical Christians who happen to be gay or lesbian. We don't feel and think like non-Christians who may share some aspects of our sexuality or gender difference. At least, we shouldn't. GLBT-centric values and sub-culture are not and should not be our own. We are called to be people of the *Christ-centered counter-culture*. Our place is with Christ, at all times.

Still, His place, for now, is in *this* world – in *us*. Though we are not *of* this world, we are called to be active for Christ *in* this world.

For Christians, gay or straight – as it was for Jesus himself – the present world is a dangerous place and the present age is a dangerous time. It was Jesus himself who said so. And He said: “*I* send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” [Matt 10:16] Luke renders it an even greater danger: “*lamb*s among wolves.” [Luke 10:3] It is emphatically Jesus himself who commissions Christian disciples to go out into this hostile *milieu*. Jesus’ “discourse [with his disciples] continually anticipates opposition and active persecution.” [Floyd V. Filson] His witnesses will be flogged in synagogues and be betrayed by their parents, their siblings and their own children who will turn them over to death under the secular authorities. The opposition will be on all fronts: religious or spiritual, familial, secular. No wonder W. H. Auden called this “for the time being” time between Christ’s first and second coming, “the hardest time of all.”

Jesus’ instructions are that, through all this hostility and persecution, his disciples are to be as tactful and prudent as snakes and as harmless as doves. And he instructs them to retreat in the face of reinforced resistance to the Gospel – to “shake off the dust” of those who refuse the Gospel. [Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5] He declares that, at the Judgment, it will be far better for even Sodom and Gomorrah than for those who obstinately oppose the Gospel. [Matt 10:15]

It's precisely the so-called “proselytizing” by Christian witnesses that so incenses those who resist the Gospel – among which are most GLBT activists. This politically correct resistance has been distracting to gay and lesbian Christians who should know better. We who are Christians who happen to be gay or lesbian are under orders to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, no less than are other Christians. And that Gospel is clearly not the proclamation of the GLBT worldview. As Duke University's chapel dean reminds us: “You haven't preached Jesus when you've basically first submitted to the language of Marxism, or feminism, or existentialism, or self-esteem, or capitalism, or whatever else. As we sometimes say, ‘something is lost in translation.’ And what is lost may in fact be the very essence of the stuff.” [William Willimon] He warns that “in leaning over to speak to the world,” we're in danger of “fall[ing] in; giv[ing] away too much.”

Of course, while attacking *Christian* “proselytizing,” lesbigayt “activists [are urged to] be making a special effort [to do their own proselytizing] to propagandize for a selectively p.c. “diversity” and the opportunistic taking of offense at Christian evangelism. They are urged to “inoculate people against Christianity in advance,” as a *Gay Today* Web site editorial puts it. The warning is that, “once sucked into the parallel universe of Christianity, the adherent is too intimidated ... to attempt escape [from] Christianity's Mind-Snaring System [of] logical absurdities ... deception and delusion.” [Stephen Van Eck] So-called “Q-Spirit” is, of course, fine. So is “A Course in Miracles,” “The Body Electric,” and refashioned Buddhism – but any mention of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not.

And what about the Lesbigerian churches? In a recent report on the MCC in the liberal *Christian Century*, MCC theology was described as “a patchwork of spirituality ... rang[ing] from a charismatic-Pentecostal church in Long Beach to a San Jose church whose approach is oriented toward metaphysics and New Thought to a San Francisco congregation that ‘is darn near Unitarian.’” [John Dart] It's comfort food that's anything but stick-to-the-ribs soul food. It's everything you think you want and nothing you really need. Though it

seems to offer a complete cafeteria of choices, more often than not, if anyone asks for a selection from a nourishing orthodox and evangelical Christianity, the kitchen is closed.

Too many of the secular gay alternatives to faith in the Transcendent God demand faith in the trendy gay gods of party circuit sex, money, fashion, popularity. A *New York Times* mid-winter travel feature on the drugs and decadence of South Beach ended by noting that “what’s hot depends on what night it is.” [Pamela Robin Brandt] After spotlighting a hot spot “where beverages, entertainment and dinner are served atop mammoth gauze-draped beds,” she cautioned: “All this will, of course, be outdated by tomorrow.” Tomorrow? Today – even as we speak – South Beach is over. Talk about an ephemeral time and place for us!

These days, it’s not at all difficult to find plenty of anti-Christian assault – from Marilyn Manson’s “Cruci-Fiction” to *South Park*’s caricaturing all Christians as hateful kooks. When George W. Bush witnessed to his faith in Jesus Christ, the mainstream news media went bananas, “as though,” in the words of a Yale law professor, “professions of faith are pollutants in the pure waters of politics.” [Stephen L. Carter] John Ashcroft’s quoting the American colonists rebuke to King George: “We have no king but Jesus!” sent the secular media into another tizzy of Christophobic religious profiling. *The New York Times* reprinted four gospel songs Ashcroft had written over 20 years before, as though an alarm had to be sounded. Ignoring the fact that most Americans consider themselves Christians who have problems with abortion-on-demand and that a full quarter of all the world’s Christians identify with Ashcroft’s Pentecostalism, Leftist, pro-GLBT non-Christians such as Charles E. Schumer try to get away with caricaturing Ashcroft’s faith as “an ideological bent that is significantly outside the mainstream.” Who’s out of touch?

The hostility to Jesus is bipartisan. The hostility to theism is bi-religious. Here’s two-cents worth from the Charles Darwin Professor of Anthropology at Rutgers University. Writing in the aftermath of the recent Presidential campaign, he asserts: “At least half the voters in America are unhappy with the recent

election. But every one of them should be appalled with all the main-event candidates of both parties who bloviated [*sic*] so earnestly about their attraction to God. They all of them committed a breach of national security. ... Both George Bush and Al Gore waxed lyrical about the leadership of Jesus and Joe Lieberman confessed to moral excellence because of his religion [which is not what he did]. These glistening pieties ... made normal digestion difficult.” [Lionel Tiger] He continued bloviating with comparisons to “doing Jihad,” the Taliban and Osama bin Laden.

A New York theater critic, relating a recent Edward Albee character’s “divigat[ing] on the life of Jesus, says that those who say “they could follow, through the resultant laughter, more than five consecutive words of [his] speech must be lying: the last time I heard a whole theater roar this way, Bert Lahr was shinnying up the proscenium arch.” [Michael Feingold]

The Village Voice did a recent special issue on the Internet in which one article covered what the paper called “Hate.com” – about the Ku Klux Klan, the Council of Conservative Citizens, and so called Christian Identity groups. The other article was a guide to “the Radical Web” – spotlighting a dozen “alternative voices” such as an anti-NASA Watch, an anti-Monsanto site, a Secular Web site, and a site for drug policy reform, along with other favorites. Among these recommended sites was one called “JesusDressUp.com.” Here’s the *Voice*’s description: “Jesus’s attire on the cross could’ve used a little pizzazz, and thanks to the wonders of the Web, you can provide it. Based on the dress-up paper dolls of our youth, this site lets you see how the crucified Jesus looks in pink bunny slippers, a top hat, Daisy Duke shorts, a football helmet, shades, bell-bottoms, and other wild threads. Just drag an article of clothing over to the Messiah, and it snaps into place. For the finishing touch, add a sign to the cross (personal favorite: ‘Hang in there baby!’).”

In the cable television series, “South Park,” a red-suited Satan consults an ugly rat called “God.” After using the name of Jesus as an expletive, “God” advises that Satan take “the middle way.” “God” says that, as a Buddhist, he himself takes “the middle way.”

The politically correct, of course, take no offense in any of this. But all of this pales when we realize that, in the 20th century, more men, women and children have been tortured and slaughtered for their Christian faith than in all the rest of Christian history. Christians are still being kidnapped, thrown into slavery, maimed and hacked to death with machetes, doused with kerosene and set on fire with blowtorches. But a press that is generally indifferent or hostile to Christianity often fails to report these atrocities and a culture indifferent or hostile to Christ ignores the news, distracted by more politically correct issues.

In GLBT religious organizations, you often hear of the need for these groups to be “safe” places. That’s understandable given all the dangers of being gay or lesbian in a homophobic church and society (not to mention being a Christian in the secular GLBT world). But I can’t help thinking something’s amiss in these obsessive concerns for “safety.” If, as Oscar Wilde observed: “An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all,” can we not see that the rescue we seek without risk is no rescue at all. I think of C. S. Lewis’ having one of the children in Narnia, in anticipation of Aslan’s arrival, ask Mrs. Beaver: “Is he safe?” “Of course he’s not safe,” replies Mrs. Beaver. “But he’s good.” I think of the lines of Rupert Brooke, that promising young poet of World War I, cut down at 27: “Safe shall be my going,/ Secretly armed against all death’s endeavor;/ Safe though all safety’s lost; safe where men fall;/ And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.” In the next world war, Bonhoeffer would live out to the gallows his saying: “When God calls [us] He bids [us] come and die!” But to die *in Christ* is to *live forever!*

“We’re here; we’re *queer?*” *That’s* not it. We’re here; *He’s* here! And we’re *His!* *That’s* it. Our life is neither our gayness nor “ex-gayness.” Our life is not our Christianity. Our life is not *ours*. Our life is God’s, in Christ. Our life *is* Christ, living His Life in and through us.

Closing Remarks

This hostile 21st century is the time and our secular culture is the place in which *we*, now in our turn, get to live the Love with which we’ve been Loved from before the creation of the world. We’re here; we’re His – from before we were zygotes to beyond our rest in Zion. Just think of the lengths of love to which Love Himself goes to create us out of nothing to be these bodies, these minds, His very special image bearers. Just think of the lengths of love to which Love goes – even to horrible death on a cross – to recreate us from the nothingness into which we would choose to perish to conform us to the image of His Son – here and now and beyond this time and place.

Surely such *Incarnate Love* cannot be canceled by the *anatomy* of the one we love. Here and now, one of the gifts of His Presence can still be found in a presence wrapped in the body of our heart’s companion.

Once we were not. Then we were. Then we were lost. But now we’re found. And found, we’re lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Before we were dust of the Earth, we were stardust. But “dust to dust” is not our destiny. There is a Time and Place for us beyond *this* time and place for us. God’s Time for us is His eternal Present and God’s Place for us is His eternal Presence. He Himself is our Time and Place. Hold His hand and you’re not just half-way there – you’re Home.

“He knoweth nothing as he ought to know it, who thinketh he knoweth anything without seeing its place and the manner how it relateth to God, angels, and men, and to all the creatures in earth, heaven and hell, time and eternity.”

Thomas Traherne