

# “*THY* Kingdom Come”

by Dr. Ralph Blair

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Have you noticed how “un-Presidential” presidential campaigns can get? Instead of what we might assume *befits* a wannabe president, we get mere *precedent* and more prestidigitation. Huh? Dirty card tricks of class, sex, gender, faith, ethnicity and race!

Political “establishments” are accused of offering “been there, done that” that doesn’t *do* it. So, there’s an opting for outliers as if *they’re* from a *whole different realm*. Dah!

But, whether “establishment” or “outlier”, voters fall for the idiocy of idolatry – worshipping at shrines of two ancient temptresses, Nostalgia and Fantasy. Nostalgia’s stuck in her *delusions* of the *past*, swamped as ever, in her historical illiteracy and self-serving selective recall. And habitually blindsided Fantasy, too, is stuck in *her delusions* – her *expectations* of all she blindly predicts and then projects, though it’s nothing but figments of her delusional daydreams or nightmares. So, whether wistful, wishful or worried, voters flock in lockstep, following in the faltering footsteps of Nostalgia or Fantasy, while getting hung up on politicians’ plans and promises.

Well, what else do most folks *know to do*? What *is* there to do, if *politicians’* plans and promises are the *only options*? Indeed, these *are* the only options, *if* there’s insufficient or no awareness of the Hope that’s ours in the *Reign of God*, already here, with so much more on the way.

In Christ’s return to reign, Bob Dylan is mindful of what so many resist. As he puts it: “Of every earthly plan that be known to man, He is unconcerned. He’s got plans of His own to set up His throne when He returns.”

Keep this in mind. Before we conclude, we’ll return to this *blessed* Hope of Christ’s return to reign, while others are adrift, unanchored and awash in nostalgia and fantasy of mere *political* hope. In the prayer Jesus authorized for us, we petition: “*Thy* Kingdom come!” Bring *Your* Reign! And we have his assurance that we’re asking by *his authority*, and so, it will come to pass. (John 14:13)

But of course, there's no sure and satisfying hope in mere *politics*. Even at its best, as Reinhold Niebuhr wisely pointed out, politics offers only "proximate solutions to insoluble problems" due to our fallen human nature. Thus, rather than rationality, politicians give us rationalizations; instead of substance, mere style. Instead of candor and clarity, its camouflage, cover-ups and threats of chaos at conventions. We have mob violence, criminal investigations, scams, scandals and assassination musings. Instead of debates with discernment we get the loud discord of disrespect, unfeasible plans in promises of what's to come and sly spin on what's already been and failed. There's flimflam, bluster, backpedalling, sidestepping, doubletalk, double standards, non sequitur, false equivalence, obfuscation and outright lies, plus negotiated questions, focus-grouped responses and the bias of the press, with yada yada by the yard.

We've seen smirks over the way one candidate "shovels" food into his mouth, potshots at other candidates' *physical* appearance and even that of their wives, weird innuendo of menstrual bleeding and totally irrelevant asides that prompt retorts of prickly braggadocio about penis size. *Puh-leeze!*

One candidate was depicted as a big cock. Oh, wait, that was in 1804, a jab at Jefferson and his mistress, shown as a little black hen. A year later, rivalry between Hamilton and Vice-President Burr led Burr to kill him in a duel. Rumors were spread of James Madison's offering Dolly's sexual favors to Jefferson in exchange for an endorsement and Jefferson labeled John Adams, "a hideous hermaphroditic". And *these* were "the good old days"?

This year, a Rightwing super PAC pushed for return to our allegedly *theocratic* foundations, prophesying that its candidate would win his party's nomination, for, we were told, he's *God's choice*. Then he dropped out of the race. Nostalgia and Fantasy keep playing us for fools.

Politics has been nasty business from the start, as has so much else, going *all* the way back to Eden – enmity between the sexes, sibling rivalry, intra- and inter-family feuds, intertribal terrorism, et al. So, expecting any candidate to *be* or *become* "presidential" is a booby trap for disappointment.

Yet, our Founders did fight for a revolution worth their struggle. They *meant* to create the greatest land for liberty in human history. And they well knew that their *intended* outcome was *not inevitable*. Still, they came closer to their goal than was likely. And though they saw slavery as inconsistent with their revolution's values, they "consciously subordinated the moral to the political agenda ... as the price to pay for nationhood." (Joseph J. Ellis)

But building *on their foundations*, later generations finally did free the slaves and did grant full citizenship to women and blacks.

At the close of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, a woman came up to Ben Franklin and asked: “Well, doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” He replied: “A republic, madam, *if you can keep it.*” He relayed what they’d done. But he framed his report with a keen awareness of human nature’s faults and frailties and history’s many failures. He knew it *would* be a big challenge to “keep it”, what with the predictable human predispositions to selfishness, self-centeredness and self-righteousness. He was savvy to the multiple obstacles to preserving, *on our own*, this *experiment in self-governance*.

Since *none of us* resists *our own* self-centeredness and self-righteousness any better than we do, why in *this* world would we expect *any presidential candidate* or a *sitting president* to resist such temptations any *better* than we do?

Franklin’s news of founding a *republic*, not a *monarchy*, had a bit of *irony* this year. Out of a possible candidate pool of our nation’s 320 million citizens, one Republican tried to “inherit”, as it were, the throne of his father and older brother and a Democrat is trying to “inherit”, as it were, her husband’s throne. No wonder outliers barged in!

Of course, the mere *labels*, “republic” or “democratic”, mean nothing when used to deceive. *Totalitarian* regimes deliberately mislabel themselves as, e.g., the Union of Soviet Socialist *Republics*, the German *Democratic Republic*, Peoples’ *Republic* of China, *Democratic People’s Republic* of Korea, *Republic* of Cuba, *Republic* of Venezuela, Islamic *Republic* of Pakistan, Islamic *Republic* of Iran, et al.

So-called “Republic” and “Democratic” dictatorships are disasters: No dissent, millions enslaved and imprisoned, mandated abortions and enforced organ harvesting, torture, starvation and summary execution! This deceptive misuse of terms reveals in itself, a *calculated abuse* of the *human hunger* for freedom.

Alexis de Tocqueville sensed our *free* republic’s need to vigilantly resist the constant threat of *demagoguery* – what continued to so disfigure revolutions in the late modern era, from the storming of the Bastille through Lenin’s Social-Democrats and Communist Party, Hitler’s National Socialism, Stalinism, the Chinese People’s Revolution, et al. He knew what Plato knew in Socrates’ warning: “Tyranny erupts out of no regime so readily as from democracy, and the most savage of slavery out of plentiful freedom.” Tocqueville agreed with Elias Boudinot, a devout Christian, President of the Continental Congress and advocate for prisoners of war,

blacks and Native Americans. Later, he'd head the American Bible Society, now in its 200<sup>th</sup> year. He warned: "If the moral character of a people once degenerate, their political character must soon follow." G. K. Chesterton would later warn of the same disaster: "Once we abolish God, the Government becomes the God."

So, Tocqueville saw the need for more than a *written* Constitution. We needed one that's *lived* in the *common character* of the people. He looked to the country's *shared* values, to a *cooperative* spirit, integrity, personal responsibility, self-control, hard work, a strong family, prudence and disciplined suspicion of materialism. In brief: *Teamwork* for the welfare of all.

Yet today, social research finds that Americans have adopted individual "self-fulfillment as the highest good". And this is the value of far too many "practicing Christians". (Barna Research)

The *power* of citizens' *cooperation* for the *common* good is confirmed by social psychological studies, but popularly divisive identity politics ignores this. Research by Muzafer and Carolyn Sherif, under whom I studied at Penn State, shows that, when competing groups work *together* on a *common* goal benefitting both groups, enmity breaks down, but when it's "us vs. them", enmity is reinforced. It's really a no-brainer.

The dogma of self-serving, selectively defined so-called "diversity"-training fuels predictable backfires, exacerbating conflict instead of resolving it. And mandated micro-aggression awareness that retaliates with *macro*-aggression against all the alleged *micro*-aggressors is equally counterproductive. These so-called remedies fuel *hypersensitivity*, disempowering the self-offended from effectively dealing with their own thoughts that prompt their unwanted feelings. And they rob the accused of the freedom to deal with their own possible insensitivities without having to watch every word or action, lest what's *innocently meant* be taken as *hateful* and there'll be hell to pay.

In the controlling spirit of *ideological* censorship not unlike Stalin's or Islamic State's, today's American universities stoop to censorship for the ostensible welfare of those who are favored by the powers of politically correctness. For example, Yale *English majors* demand microaggression-protection from having to read two semesters of "dead white men" (e.g., Shakespeare, Chaucer, Milton, et al.). But they seem not to have read Maya Angelou's memoir. As a child, this black poet thought that, "Shakespeare must be a black girl" since his words so reflected her experience in the Jim Crow South. She was especially drawn to Sonnet 29 and to the line about "fortune and men's eyes". The very same line was used for the title of a

famously pro-gay and prison reform play, produced over a quarter century before the birth of these narrow focused, thin-skinned Yale students. David Rothenberg was the producer. He founded The Fortune Society for the rights of prisoners and for their re-entry success after their incarceration. He named it, so appropriately, with that Shakespearean line.

*Self-centered* demands for “*safe space*” are rampant on college campuses today. Addressing 2016 graduates at the University of Michigan, Mike Bloomberg nailed it: “One of the most dangerous places on a college campus is a safe space. [It] creates the false impression that we can insulate ourselves from those who hold different views.” Sure as shootin’, the petulant and hypersensitive graduates loudly booed and cursed him, feigning fear for their safety. Bloomberg went on: “As durable as the American system of government has been, democracy is fragile – and demagogues are always lurking.” And so they were, right there in front of him.

Addressing the 2016 Rutgers graduates, President Obama hit that same necessary note. Recalling Rutgers’ forced cancellation of a speech by Condoleezza Rice, he advised the graduates: “Don’t feel like you got to shut your ears off because you’re too fragile and somebody might offend your sensibilities.”

In his 1961 Inaugural Address, President John F. Kennedy called all of us to a renewed commitment to our *common* cause: “My fellow Americans, Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”

Anyone who was even 15 years old when Kennedy spoke those stirring words is now over 70 or dead. Sadly, today, the self-centered denounce Kennedy’s call as *offensive*.

Instead of working *together* for *one another’s* welfare, those who offend themselves over Kennedy’s words are trapped in *identity politics*, obsessing over perks of poison picked up while dishonestly gathering increasingly trivial grievances against others.

When President Kennedy was assassinated, Lyndon Johnson became President. The relationship between Johnson, Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. was complex to put it mildly. Nonetheless, those three men *managed* their self-centeredness, treachery and altruism so as to work *together* for racial justice in that explosive era in which self-centeredness was no less defensive, divisive, destructive and deadly than today.

Ironically, one’s *self-interest* is the very practical gauge by which Jesus called all his followers to *look within, to look out for* the welfare of others: “Treat others as you want to be treated.” (Matt 7:12) *Identifying* with all that we share in common with *others* can help us overcome the selfish

divisiveness and identity politics that prevent us from recognizing ourselves in them.

But, how out of sync with *this* is even Christians' too *typical use* of self-interest – whether that Christian is, e.g., the baker or the buyer of a gay wedding cake! We fixate on “what’s-in-it-for-me” – personally and politically, while miscalculating: “What’s-in-it-for-me to go to *all the trouble* to treat others as *I* want to be treated?” Rather, the honest and wise Christian’s question must be: “What’s the *trouble* with *me*, if I *don’t* treat others, as I want to be treated?” What’s the *deep trouble* with *me*?

Instead of selfish attempts to try to put God in our debt by a wooden “obedience” to The Golden Rule, wouldn’t be wiser to recall how Jesus responded to our need, even by laying down his life to do for us what we needed and could not do for ourselves? After all, it’s out of His love, that we, so deeply loved, can *afford* to love others as we love ourselves!

So, how do things *get* so very nasty, whether in our own Christian circles where we *claim* to be grateful “sinners saved by grace” or in secular politics where such a statement would be severely judged as “politically incorrect”?

Is politics simply *cynical*? Well, cynicism is as sincere as the fear that prompts it. A politician can afford to write, but only *anonymously*: “Like most of my colleagues, I promise my constituents a lot of stuff I can never deliver. But, what the hell? My main job is to keep my job.”

It’s all about *sensed insecurity* and its consequent *anxiety* in the danger-framing brains and churning stomachs of politicians, voters, secularists, traditionalists, progressives, atheists, Christians, Islamists, homophobes, et al. Everyone *thinks*: Things *must* go *my* way or else I’ll be in *danger*. Everyone *fears*: Things *won’t* go *my* way. Of course, *nobody* can predict how he or she will *actually experience* the future except that it will be a *mixed* experience and not the *one-sided* experience of one’s dreaded or idolized scenarios of the future. Yet, with uncritical trust in one’s own predictions of danger or delight, one’s set oneself up in a trap.

In politics, anxious voters are *complicit* in the nasty stuff that’s done by anxious candidates to appease voter prejudices and predispositions. Voters readily lap up the lies and spin of their choice, fearing outcomes of danger and coveting outcomes of delight.

So here’s the sequence to *nasty*. We *try* to *make* things go *our* way since we *fantasize* they *must* go *our* way. But we *can’t* *make* them go *our* way on our own since *others* have a hand in the way things go. *Fearing* they *won’t* go *our* way, *frustrating* ourselves by our inability to *make* them go *our* way, we try to get on top of our fears and frustration by *venting hostility* – that indulgent, but impotent, pump of adrenaline! So, candidates and voters, too,

hold themselves hostage to fantasies and then frighten and frustrate themselves. Then, they too, try to get on top of these unwanted feelings by getting hostile. This sequence can't solve any problem, but that doesn't stop the cycle from getting repeated through still more fear, frustration and anger.

Candidates *try* to hide their *fears* and *frustration* behind bravado, but they can't *buy* their bravado for they *know* it *is* bravado since they're the ones who posture it. *Seeing* their bravado for what it is, they fear, irrationally, that the voters too see through it, so their fears are fueled. This is the *thin-skinned underside* of arrogance and narcissism – so frequently on display in politicians.

Voters' anger is aimed at *their self-serving versions* of the *status quo* or at *their self-serving fantasies* of what *might*, but *mustn't*, become the *status quo* or what *must* but *might not* become the status quo. And, of course, it's all tied to their own predictions of what "needs" to be or "needs" not to be.

These days, only 27 percent of likely voters say the country is headed in the *right* direction. An historian notes, "Never before in American political history have two presumptive presidential candidates ... entered the general election with such soaring high negative numbers." (Donald T. Critchlow) We're not a *happy camper* country.

So, some are saying they'll hold their nose and vote. But, if one holds one's nose with one hand, while the other hand holds tightly to the grip of Nostalgia or Fantasy, how is one free to mark one's ballot? Perhaps these folks will opt to punt in a pout with those who say they'll *not* vote at all – their pointless parting shot.

Meanwhile, few seem grateful, that, here and now, even in the midst of this angry election cycle, we are among the tiniest fraction of all-time 1-percenters, at the very tip of the most *privileged* of over 100 billion people who've struggled for survival throughout human history. Still, we whine – as, of course, it's to be expected of spoiled brats.

During the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon contest, I was studying at Dallas Seminary. When Kennedy won, I telegraphed my congratulations. This got me into trouble at the seminary. See, JFK was a Catholic.

*This* ruckus reminded me of my getting into even *more* trouble for speaking up for Billy Graham in my first semester at Bob Jones University. On my way to lunch, I was overheard objecting to BJU's opposition to Graham's pending crusade in Madison Square Garden. Right after lunch, I was told to go immediately to the Administration Building where I was escorted upstairs to the office of the Dean of Men. There, several deans stood in silence and in a chair in the middle of the office, sat BJU's elderly founder, Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., himself, facing an empty chair meant for me.

Overweight and with his neck veins bulging and his face getting redder every second, he berated me loudly and at length for my audacity as a mere teenager to think I knew more than he did about evangelistic crusades. See, Billy Graham was a “compromiser”.

Well, walls have ears – at Fundamentalist colleges and at today’s secular universities, in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Cuba, China, North Korea, et al. Left, Right, atheist, theist, conservative, progressive, multiculturalist, womynist, LGBTQQ-xyz, et al. No *totalitarian* regime can *afford* to tolerate free speech or diversity of opinion. And none does.

My earliest church experience was in the nominal, blandly civil religion of 1950s Mainline Protestantism –the hazy hangover of earlier Modernist theology. Nonetheless, I heard the clear Gospel from my Sunday-School teacher and over the radio.

Then, it was in my *public* high school library that I found a bright yellow catalog from a school I’d never heard of: Bob Jones University. What an odd name for a college, I thought. But I liked what I read. So, against my dad’s preference and without any *preparatory experience* within separatist Fundamentalism, I enrolled at BJU in 1956. After two good years of classwork, Shakespearean productions and Grand Opera, Bible conferences, a mock presidential convention (Ike vs. Adlai) and friendship that extends to the present day, I transferred, as per prior agreement with my dad, to Bowling Green State University in our home state of Ohio, graduating in 1960. There, I’d led our IVCF group with a BJU film, *Macbeth*, and for the campus’ Religious Emphasis Weeks, I invited “Peanuts” creator Charles Schulz (he declined), CRC pastor, Ed Palmer, under whom I’d later study at Westminster Seminary (he’d lead the NIV Bible project and hire, as NIV English style consultant, Virginia Mollenkott, who’d be our first keynoter in EC). Our other REW speaker was Jay E. Adams, home missions head for what would evolve into the PCA.

While finishing at BGSU, I helped members of our increasingly liberal Mainline Presbyterian Church to find an evangelical Presbyterian denomination with which to affiliate. After talks with Orthodox Presbyterians and Covenant Seminary reps (including Jay Adams), our group joined the budding PCA. It was then that I met Covenant President Bob Rayburn who, in 1975, became EC’s first friend and supporter.

In 1976, for the first issue of EC’s *Review*, I critiqued Jay Adams’ misguided advice on counseling homosexuals. He’d written, e.g., “The choice of a [homosexual’s] partner that approximates (as closely as possible) a member of the opposite sex shows that the problem does not exist in a lack of interest in heterosexual characteristics.”



In 1962, after two years at Dallas and Westminster seminaries, I transferred to the University of Southern California to earn my Master's degree in 1964. In USC's Inter-Varsity group in 1962 – six years out of high school and seven years before Stonewall – I advocated for acceptance of gay relationship and neither IVCF students nor the faculty advisor gave pushback.

I studied under *Fundamentalists* at BJU, *secularists* at BGSU, *Dispensationalists* at Dallas, *Reformed* at Westminster and *liberals* at USC's Graduate School of Religion. I worked with mixed religious affairs staffs while on Penn's IVCF staff and Penn State's religious affairs staff (after IVCF decided not to reappoint me over my support for same-sex relationships – though I completed that school year's work on IVCF staff). After a year in chaplaincy at PSU, during which I continued to advocate for gay rights, I stayed on in the Graduate School to do my dissertation on homosexuality. My professors were not all that comfortable with my affirmative position on homosexuality since it would not be until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association would drop its mental disorder classification on homosexuality.

In 1969, as an assistant professor in the City University of New York and as the Director of Counseling at CUNY's (now) CityTech, I edited a national monograph series on gay and lesbian issues and, in 1971 I started the Homosexual Community Counseling Center and, two years later, *The Homosexual Counseling Journal*.

From the diversity of my secular and religious education since the mid-1950s and my work experience as well as from my time in various churches, I can attest that, in *all* of these situations, there was quite an *inadequate grasp*, even *caricaturing*, of all the *others*. And the antagonism was often so very petty, yet so preoccupying.

But always, the dogmatism was *too defensive*, the self-righteousness, *too brittle*. It all smacked of *insecurity* motivated by *fear*, moved to *frustration* and handled with *hostility*. Genuine tolerance of any real viewpoint variation was missing. Professors' livelihoods and students' degrees were at stake. With so much dogmatic defensiveness, there was so little depth of understanding and so little ability to identify with others.

Today, although there are some surface changes and approved and disapproved views do come and go, *real tolerance* of any unpopular view is every bit as absent. In the expression of a Princeton scholar, such an atmosphere is characterized by an “unstable amalgam of compassion and contempt.” (Thomas C. Leonard) A popular novelist keenly notes that, in today's secular academia, “Political correctness [is] the mother lode of moral

narcissism”. (Roger L. Simon) Of course, lusting after the approval of one’s smug and “politically correct” comrades is just as *self-righteous* as lusting after the approval of one’s smug and politically *incorrect* comrades. And whether on the Left or the Right, *self-righteousness* is impotent for reaching *true* righteousness.

In 1962, the year before he died, C. S. Lewis commented on the “de-Christianizing of the church” that placates political power. He warned: “I believe that there are many accommodating preachers, and too many practitioners in the church who are not believers. Jesus Christ did not say, ‘Go into all the world and tell the world that it is quite right’. The Gospel is something completely different. In fact”, Lewis affirmed, “it is directly opposed to the world.” i.e., *this world’s worldviews, values and priorities*. That was, as the Brits say, “spot on”. And it still is, of course.

Later, F. F. Bruce, Helmut Thielicke and other evangelical scholars would make the same point. Bruce wrote that God’s peace is *not* “the same sort of thing, albeit in a religious idiom, that the United Nations [has in mind] in a nonreligious idiom”. And Thielicke warned that, “When theology says only what the world can say to itself, it says nothing. The feet of those who will remove it are already at the door.”

These profoundly insightful observations are crucial to our understanding of what really matters. No matter what we think of candidates for political office or how *relatively* they may differ from each other, no matter how *relatively* better or worse we may assess this one or that one, none, *none*, has what it takes to solve this world’s *catastrophe*. To think or hope otherwise is delusional and sets us up for unreasonable expectations leading to predictable disappointments, fear, frustration and hostility and hate.

Overcoming this world’s *catastrophe* requires infinitely more than what *we* can come up with *by ourselves*, or can do *on our own*. What’s wrong with this fallen world goes infinitely deeper than any politician dares to think about.

Now naturally, we must make good use of any opportunities to do what’s right, and this includes political participation. But with only *this world’s* resources and *this world’s* prowess, *we can think and do and say to ourselves* only what secular politicians and voters can *think and do and say* to themselves. Even preachers – “conservative” or “progressive” – parrot *this world’s* party lines, *this world’s* piety, *ad nauseam*, however frequently they footnote with Bible verses so self-servingly selected for confirmation bias and with an eye on the bottom line.

At a Spiritual Progressives meeting a decade ago, Tony Campolo cautioned attendees: “You have no right to be a spiritual leader if you

haven't read Scripture. ... If we don't recognize this, we don't know squat." Well, one guy who didn't know squat, piped up to complain: "I thought this was a spiritual *progressives'* conference. I don't want to get validation from something other than *ourselves*." For *self-validation*, that know-it-all could have stayed at home.

In 1986, John Alexander, a founding editor of the progressive evangelical journal, *The Other Side*, wrote me to say: "I want you to know that my time at both the EC conferences I've been to has been important to me. I'm not sure why it has been so important to me, and the truth is that it surprises me a little. Partly it is simply that now ... I have little contact with gays and not as much with radical Christians who are open on this issue, and I fear I forget about its importance till I get back in touch with the people who are on the wrong end of this argument.

"But I think it's more than that; something more important has happened to me at both conferences. It is partly you; I was very pleased by both your presentations – your call to a broader faith than gay-is-OK is vital. Certainly you have every reason in the world to be obsessed by gayness to the exclusion of everything else, but you have refused to let that happen. Thank you."

This world's narrative hums along on a familiar loop of broadcast media, the Web, daily conversations and arguments and in our short and long-term memories. Rooted in unexamined assumptions, ignorance, foolishness and selfishness, we want it all to suit our fantasies, but it doesn't because it can't.

Echo chambers of vested interest go back to the back walls of ancient caves and they're as postmodern as isolated and isolating ivory towers, boardrooms high over Wall Street and backrooms of politicians and drug pushers.

You've heard that malingering popular notion that, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but bends toward justice" – by which, is meant, of course, it "bends *our way*". Why else would this self-serving slogan be used repeatedly for *polar opposite* purposes, as on issues of *racial justice*, by, e.g., both Theodore Parker *and* R. L. Dabney? It *can be* merely another of those proverbial "logs" that obliterate vision when one tries to deal with controversy involving one's own vested interest. (Matt 7:3)

We boast *we're* on the "right side of history" while we're oblivious to bygone "right sides", later proved to be "wrong". Self-styled traditionalists bemoan loss of "traditional" marriage, while forgetting eons of polygamy and chattel wives. Southern Baptists and United Methodists hailed *Roe v Wade*. Later, facing mounting scientific evidence, Southern Baptists changed their minds and repented. Finally this year, facing even more

scientific evidence, the Methodists changed their minds on abortion. After *we're* gone, our “right side” may be the future’s “wrong” side.

Such is narcissism’s nearsightedness. What’s *right* in front of *our* eyes is missed and remains to be, perhaps, better understood by our descendants. And if *you've* ever changed your mind about anything, you yourself have already *experienced* this – all within the short span of but *one* lifetime.

The *Infinite Arc* of the moral universe doesn’t stop short where we stop short. It’s shortsighted to think it does. To freeze-frame our own time and place is utter folly. The *True Arc’s end* is in the *Purpose of God*. And this glory of God’s justice is far beyond our sight and infinitely beyond our imagination. The mystery of this *fullest justice and mercy* is “in Christ Jesus”, not in our measly myopia – much as we try to pretend otherwise.

By the way, have you seen the prediction that, by 2050, myopia will be a crisis in *half* the world? News flash: The *entire* world has suffered shortsightedness for *ages*.

With some wordplay on “*myopia*” we *see* that, envisioning from *our own subjective* point for viewing anything at all, let alone all things, we start and end inside our isolated and isolating self-centeredness, “*me, myself and I*”. And this trio is not the *three* witnesses Paul had in mind for the confirmation of fact. (II Cor 13:1) It’s not much of a perspective from which to view anything. Yet it’s our default point from which we try, and fail, to see it all.

Since Eden, humanity has suffered the claustrophobia of nearsightedness, caught up in navel-gazing, the fixation of Adam and Eve – even without navels of their own. But, they no doubt *fantasized* what they were missing, as we all do about what we don’t have. It’s a fatal mistake, as it was for them, to think that the very narrow scope of our own self-centered focus can ever even begin to really comprehend wider realities, let alone the widest of all reality, from God’s omniscient point of view.

Nietzsche was a latecomer to observe the “*will to power*” as our driving force. Asserting *his own* “will to power”, he called, “crazy” what he said was the “Christian concept of the ‘equality of souls before God’ ”, disdaining this as, “the prototype of all theories of equal rights”. Freud, too, was a latecomer in discovering *pleasure* as our primordial desire. He dubbed it *id*. But *id* projected merely presumed “pleasure” into that perilous tree in Eden. And Homer was also a latecomer, viewing idols as images in *our mirrors*.

Long before those three, Adam and Eve found out the hard way how fatal was a *will to postured power*, the envying of the allure of only *apparent pleasure* and the *idolizing of a bogus, alter ego*.

Are “Selfies” *our* mirrors of idolatry? *Id, idol, identity group, iPhones, iPads, et al.*? They all begin with a self-centered “I”, but that “I” is not a matter of mere *spelling*. It’s a matter of *the spell* under which we cast ourselves when we look only *to* our selves, *at* our selves, *by* our selves, on *our own*.

Fifty years ago, *Time* magazine published a provocative cover essay, “Is God Dead?” It was *Time*’s first text-only cover – three bold words in big red letters with a question mark against a background of blackness. *Avant-garde* in the ‘60s, *this twisted* theology was soon passé, tossed off with tie-dies and *The Twist*. But each generation regurgitates *its own version* of denial of God’s witness to the world.

We try to come up with our own interpretations of everything from within the closed system of our own presuppositions, prejudice and, thus, poor perspective. So did Eve; so did Adam. And, *this* is what we’re warned against: What all fools *can* say and *do* say to themselves on their own. (Ps 14:1)

However, even within our darkness, thank God, we do *sense* that something’s wrong with *us* and we do *sense* that all that’s *not* wrong has all to do with Him. If we didn’t, we’d not be so defensive, so very much in denial. We don’t *deny* what we don’t *sense*; we *can’t* deny what we *can’t* sense. Created in God’s image, we *intuit* Who’s there but *ignore* Him. Even as we try to be *absent* ourselves, aren’t we *aware* of His Presence?

Humanity knows wrong from right. Eighteen centuries BC, even the pagan Law Code of Hammurabi is a witness to this when its epilogue states: “In order that the mighty not wrong the weak, to provide just ways for the waif and widow, I have inscribed my precious pronouncements” on this stone. There’s never been a people group in all of human history for which archeologists and anthropologists have not found evidence of a sense of guilt and a need for atonement.

But these days, *inside* the darkness of our resistance, we *rationalize* and come up with our own era’s banal diagnoses and bland prescriptions to get us off the hook on which we’ve hanged ourselves. Loath to come to grips with what’s wrong, we defensively assert, its, “oh, a case of *low self-esteem*”, hmm? So, we stay stuck in *self-esteeming* our little idol of “self-esteem”.

And, obsessed with “self-esteem”, we exhaust ourselves, huffing and puffing to inflate our “self-esteem”. But, in all that huffing and puffing, we’re wasting our breath. We have way too big a problem to try to blow it off.

Consulting *self*, we keep seeking *solutions in self* – where no *real* solution can be found. Unsatisfied, unsurprisingly, we stubbornly *keep on* seeking *self-satisfaction* through one *self-serving* “solution” after another, e.g., more self-esteem, more sex, more money, more drugs, more Facebook fame, more whatever – even from the hot air of politicians’ promises. But it’s all utterly useless against what’s really wrong with us. It never can add up to what’s really right for us. Isn’t our constantly looking for merely *more* of that *same stuff* a sufficient enough clue that, merely *more of that same stuff* won’t and indeed can’t give us anything other than the disappointments already received? Isn’t it time to look elsewhere?

A wise, old Christian psychiatrist with whom I once had lunch, said: “Selfishness is the root cause of all sin.” (O. Quentin Hyder)

A London newspaper once asked readers: “What’s wrong with the world?” G. K. Chesterton, wise to himself and so, wise to his part in “what’s wrong with the world”, frankly replied to the newspaper with these two simple words: “I am.”

Joel Osteen’s new book, *The Power of I Am*, urges us to repeat mantras of “I am” but of a very different perspective from Chesterton’s. Osteen says we should repeat every day: “I am talented”, “I am healthy”, “I am strong”, “I am beautiful”. Then, “talent follows you”, “health heads your way”, “strength tracks you down”, “beauty comes looking for you”. Such happy-claptrap turned his Houston church into the biggest congregation in this country, with 45,000 worshippers each week. Ten million other Americans and many millions more, in a hundred countries around the world, tune into his televised advice for successful living.

Now, they’re *all* obviously aware of a *troubled* self. Though, sadly, they seem to know nothing of Chesterton’s confession of sin or of faith in Christ instead of a *self-centered faith in self*.

But do Christians who’re less easily lampooned know any better?

According to the Barna Research to which I’ve referred, *most* American Christians strongly agree that: “The highest good [is] finding yourself by looking within [then] living by what’s right for you”. And their “highest goal” is to “enjoy life”. How does this selfish drivel resemble in *any* way, the way of the “poor in spirit”, to whom Jesus promised inheritance in the Reign of God? (Matt 5:3)

In 1963, in the midst of the West’s pretentious “Death of God” days, a distraught 17-year-old atheist in India *had no answer* to his guilt and emptiness. Thinking life was useless, he tried to kill himself by swallowing poison. Recovering in hospital, a Christian pointed him to Jesus’ words: “Because I live, you will live also.” (John 14:19)

There and then, this Indian teenager trusted the Author of life and that's made all the difference to him and to so many others. And now, for decades, Ravi Zacharias has led an apologetics ministry, teaching the Good News of Christ throughout the world.

In Ravi's darkest days before his conversion to Christ, pop singer Ed Ames had released a haunting question in a song called, "Who Will Answer?" Ames chanted the lines in ecclesiastical cadence and was accompanied by drums, harpsichord and a choir's singing, "*Aleluya, Aleluya.*"

Ravi has often cited the lines from, "Who Will Answer?" for they express *his* turmoil in those same days before he knew *the Christ who answers*.

Listen to these lines from "Who will Answer?" "From the canyons of the mind, we wander on and stumble blindly through the often-tangled maze of starless nights and sunless days, while asking for some kind of clue or road to lead us to the truth. But who will answer? Side by side two people stand together, vowing hand-in-hand that love's imbedded in their hearts, but soon an empty feeling starts to overwhelm their hollow lives. And when they seek the hows and whys, who will answer? On a strange and distant hill, a young man's lying very still. His arms will never hold his child because a bullet running wild has struck him down. And now we cry, 'Dear God, Oh, why, oh, why?' But who will answer? High upon a lonely ledge, a figure teeters near the edge, and jeering crowds collect below to egg him on with, 'Go, man, go!' But who will ask what led him to his private day of doom, and who will answer? If the soul is darkened by a fear it cannot name, if the mind is baffled when the rules don't fit the game, who will answer? In rooms of dark and shades, the scent of sandalwood pervades the colored thoughts in muddled heads reclining in the rumpled beds of unmade dreams that can't come true. And when we ask what we should do, who will answer? 'Neath the spreading mushroom tree [Atom Bomb], the world revolves in apathy as overhead, a row of specks roars on, drowned out by discotheques. And if a secret button's pressed because one man has been outguessed, who will answer? Is our hope in walnut shells worn 'round the neck with temple bells, or deep within some cloistered walls where hooded figures pray in halls? Or crumbled books on dusty shelves, or in our stars, or in ourselves? Who will answer? Who will answer?"

These are *poignant* lines. They urge us to ask the *right* question, "*Who* will answer?" not "*What's* the answer?" *Who* has *already* answered? *Who* answered his Father's call to come to live and die, giving his life's blood for all?

Edward Shillito's poem, "Jesus of the Scars", tells us *Who!* "To our wounds only God's wounds can speak, and not a god has wounds, but Thou alone."

The date on that *Time* magazine cover on the alleged "Death of God" was April 8, 1966. Good Friday! On that very day, as self-sophisticated secularists toyed with drivel on the supposed "Death of God", Christians were recalling the *death of God incarnate* for the sins of the world. And they were looking ahead to recall the resurrection of Christ and to Easter ever after, under God's eternal Reign.

God's grace is what no one ever *came up with* on his own, what no one ever *believes* on her own. What we *can't* and *don't* and *won't* say on our own, God *reveals* by His grace in what He's *done* to meet our deepest needs.

*God's love* casts out fear that leads to frustration that we vent in hostility. "No fear exists where God's love is. His perfect love gets rid of fear, for fear is about punishment." (I John 4:18) Where's any room to fear that things won't go *our* way when we're loved in God's Way, the risen Christ? Where's a need for our *self*-seeking when we're sought and found by Love Himself? (Cf. I Cor 13:5)

As Paul wrote after his utterly unanticipated and life changing encounter with the risen Christ: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting the people's sins against them." (II Cor 5:19)

This Good News *can't* and *won't* come from any presidential candidates, nor will it be the election results on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November, whether or not you'll call that good news.

If God's Good News doesn't *excite* us and *motivate* us with *gratitude* far beyond any commitment to a political campaign, if it isn't *everlastingly more significant* to us than whatever propaganda politicians dispense, we're not listening. Do we *get* that? Do *you* get it? *If* we get it, how are we *living* it in gratitude and love?

Jesus said of *himself*, "*I am* the way, *I am* the truth, *I am* the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Immediately, Philip interrupted, "Show us the Father, and that will suffice." Jesus said: "Philip, don't you know me? I've been with you all this time. Whoever sees *me* sees *the Father*. So, how can you ask, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:6ff)

On Palm Sunday, Jesus approached Jerusalem, weeping and pondering, "Would that you had known on this day what makes for *peace!* But it's hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:41) So, he pressed on ahead, for *us*, "the joy that was set before him, to endure the cross, ignoring the shame" and now he's seated at God's right hand. (Heb 12:2) From there, he'll bring to fruition God's Reign "on Earth as it is in Heaven". This Reign was Jesus'



*main* theme during his ministry. He'd said that, it was to proclaim this Good News of God's Reign that he was sent to us. (Luke 4:43)

But God's Reign is not at all what this world expected then or expects now. It's even *violently* resisted by this world's religious establishments and this world's political systems and narratives.

John the Baptizer, himself, stumbled over his own doubts about the arrival of God's Reign in Jesus' arrival. Jesus told him to look beyond his doubts and discern what in the world Jesus was doing. He was told to see the evidence in all the miracles and in Jesus' authority to forgive sins! (Matt 11)

Jesus' *disciples*, also, were often clueless, expecting he'd bring *political* and *military* solutions to their problems. Not until they'd met the *risen* Lord did they have more clarity. And then, with the gift of God's indwelling Spirit after Jesus' ascension, they were given *indwelling* clarity.

One day, Nostalgia's reign of misleading memories and Fantasy's reign of misleading imagination will be over for good. The Reign of God will be fully revealed when Jesus returns "so that, by the authority of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that *Jesus is Lord* to the glory of God the Father." (Phil 2:10f) "This world's failed reigns will all be replaced by the glorious Reign of God in Christ, and He, indeed, will reign forever." (Rev 11:15)

In Bob Dylan's ballad, "When He Returns", he puts it this way: "Like a thief in the night, He'll replace wrong with right when He returns. ... How long can I listen to the lies of prejudice? How long can I stay drunk on fear out in the wilderness? ... Will I ever learn that there'll be no peace that the war won't cease, 'til He returns? Surrender your crown on this blood stained ground. Take off your mask. He sees your deeds. He knows your needs, even before you ask. How long can you falsify and deny what is real? How long can you hate yourself for the weakness you conceal? Of every earthly plan that be known to man, He is unconcerned. He's got plans of His own to set up His throne when He returns."

Until then, remember that Jesus gave us fair warning: We'd be *hated* because of him. Of course! For, as he said, "The world hated me first." (Matt 24:9; John 15:18)

Ever since then, Christians have been persecuted, even down to death. In America today, self-righteous secularists may smear us as repugnant rubes or try to rob us of our Constitutional rights of religious freedom and free speech, but elsewhere, our sisters and brothers in Christ are imprisoned for years on end, tortured and cruelly put to death by atheist and Islamist regimes.

When the first disciples were flogged to within an inch of their lives they came away “rejoicing that they’d been counted worthy to suffer for Christ”. (Acts 5:40) Today’s most persecuted have this same response, grateful confidence as they face horrible deaths. And we whine and take offense at our relatively light afflictions for Christ?

Meanwhile, we await His return, His Reign, fully aware and content that, as he told Pilate, “My reign is not from this world”. (John 18:36) It doesn’t depend on politicians or any presidential election.

So, as we share the Good News of Christ, we get to *be* what he said we *are*, “the *light* of the world”, shining in its deepest darkness, and “the *salt* of the earth”, seasoning and preserving what this world needs of deepest nourishment and gracious generosity. (Matt 5:13f)

Are we ready and willing to *be* what we *are in Christ*, glimmers of light for a stumbling world and refreshing zest for an unpalatable world that’s perishing but for God’s deep love in the Christ of the cross, the throne of the Lamb of God?

