

2021 Evangelicals Concerned Fall Festival

Three Presentations

We're Never Alone at Thanksgiving! All Thanksgiving, *already* and *thankfully is*, a Togethering.

Ralph Blair

Each year, in late October or early November, it's usually singles, who're asked a friendly question many find awkward to answer.

Yet, in 2020, given lockdowns and social distancing restrictions, it wasn't so awkward to answer. But, in 2021, triple-vaccinated and masked, it could, again, be an awkward question to answer.

So, what's the question? It's usually asked in a very upbeat way, with anticipatory excitement: "So, whatch'ya gonna' do for Thanksgiving?" To cover-up for *not having been invited* to any Thanksgiving Day affair, and *not wanting* to be thought of as, "*not wanted*" – people *compose*, in postured "carefree" *defensiveness*: "Oh, *I haven't made up my plans, yet.*" That *made-up* dodge will work a lot better in early-October than it will in mid-November.

Others actually *decline* invitations that they *do get*. Why? They don't want to get stuck with family, in-laws or friends fighting over politics and religion or to be held hostage in front of endless hours of widescreen football games in which they have no interest at all.

Yet, even *these who deliberately avoid* all of the *squabbling* and the *lonely isolation*, cooped up and surrounded by the hooting and hollering over football, still receive *sympathy*, "Oh, I'm so sad that you'll be *all alone* on Thanksgiving Day!" "Thanks, but *I'm not sad*, so don't be sad *for me*. Stuck *alone* in the middle of all that bitter bickering over politics or stuck with all those football games, and all their endless innings [*sic*] is what *I'm so gladly escaping.*"

Actually, and here's *the real point*. Missing mere "*company*" on Thanksgiving Day, *misses the real mark of all true thanksgiving!*

Truly, definitionally: *We're never alone at thanksgiving! We are never alone at being thankful, at giving thanks, whether the one or the many for whom we're thankful are still with us or have now passed away. We gratefully give thanks for what all they have meant to us, and still mean to us, for all the good we've received.*

Thanksgiving is, itself, a *togetherness*, a blessed *ingathering*, if you will. It's a *plural* – *one* is *thankful*, and *another* or *others*, are *thanked*, whether there in person, at even some distance away, or simply in one's privately peaceful recollection and fond memories.

Besides the *people* in our lives, now or back there, whenever, there are and have always been, *intangibles*, *entire contexts*, *gifted abilities*, *interests*, *perspectives*, *empathic inclinations*, *aesthetics*, *talents*, *sensibilities*, *lessons learned*, *lessons still to learn*, even from our *mistakes*, and surely, the *great gift of sheer thankfulness*, *itself*, for which we can always be so *thankful*. Any thanksgiving is a *lifesaver!*

If thankful for even *one thing* or *one person*, there's at least *something* or *someone* that's been a *blessing*. And there's also Someone for Whom we *ought to be thankful that we're not alone*, when we consider what *all we've been given* so freely, that's not been given *to us by us*, or *by other folks*. God gives us *Himself!*

These *true discoveries* bring more gratitude and our *very most precious awareness of them adds to yet even greater gratitude*.

So, here's *the reasonable* response to someone's asking, "So, whatch'ya gonna' do for Thanksgiving?" And it's *not smart-alecky* to be *smart enough* to so *thankfully* reply: "I'm gonna' *be thankful! That's what I'm gonna' do for Thanksgiving!*"

That response can *reinforce your own awareness of truth*, and can be a helpfully *thought-provoking perspective* for the one who asked. *Thank* the inquirer for asking, and thus, prevent him or her from mistaking your *wise* reply as merely a rude "wise crack".

So, *let yourself be even more thankful by truly thinking about it, by truly implementing it!* And, by that deeper awareness, you'll *grow, gratefully, even more deeply thankful*. You can count on it.

It's the *truth*, as we count our many blessings, recognizing that, throughout our lives, there've been *those who've really and truly been there for us*, no matter how many, we may have thought, or might even still think, *weren't* there for us.

And, of *those* we think "weren't" there for us, let's note that, this is just *our take* on *them*. We *can't* be so cocksure that we're so *right* about *all of them*, especially after all of these years of our *reinforcing our resentments*, with wily *echoes* of enticement from *sycophants* who seek to please us for *their own* selfish purposes.

But if, in *any* sense, we're right about some having let us down, we need to *help ourselves*, and *them*, too, by *forgiving* them. We then can *thank ourselves* for unloading that *heavy burden* we've stubbornly, self-centeredly, carried on *our backs* for far too long. And, we now may be able to improve *our* being there, for *them*.

Quite commonly, we *miss out* on being *thankful* by our holding ourselves hostage to our *selfishly limited understandings*. Yet, as Christians, we can be *liberated* by the *wider understanding* that's anchored in God's eternal love and forgiveness available for all.

Rather than be so *distracted* by how *we want* things to go, how *we "needed" things to be*, based in *our limited awareness* and our *selfishness and self-centered perspectives*, and *fantasies* of roads never traveled, we *need* to *stop misleading ourselves* into thinking that, to be *thankful*, we must always have it "*our way*" in order to *feel happy or pleased* with our *selfish* definitions of that for which we can or can't be thankful. We need to be rid of that nonsense!

But God's perspective is so very much *wiser, wider* and so, *far deeper*, so very much more *loving* than ours ever was, is or can be in our *fantasies*! Wouldn't you say that, *His* interpretations and evaluations of all things that ever were, are, or ever will be, are so much more *comprehensive* than ours? Yet, blindly, so foolishly, we limit ourselves inside *our own* horizons, failing to be grateful for God's lovingly wise Providence. We woefully miss, not only a *bigger picture*, but we miss *the most truly everlastingly sovereign Reality of all the reality that ever was, is and ever will be*. Right?

The prophet Habakkuk, some six centuries before Christ came, preached in a very difficult world. So, he appealed for the Lord's intervention and was assured that the Lord was aware of all of it and would deal with it all in *His own way* and in *His time*. So, for Habakkuk, that *settled* the matter, in faith, in God. Awareness of God's knowledge and compassionate power, not mere positivity, should *settle* such matters for all of the *unsettled* today, just as back then. Habakkuk wrote the following with confidence in God:

Though the fig tree doesn't bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet, I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, empowering me to tread upon the very heights. (Habakkuk 3:17ff)

Paul, too, gives insightful instruction, urging: "In *everything*, give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus, for you" (I Thess 5:18). "*Everything*", of course, includes, *everything!* He doesn't say, we should *enjoy* everything, but to *give thanks, in everything*, for we, along with Paul, are *in on the sacred secret*, whatever else we may *not* know: "We do know that *all things do, indeed, work together, for good*, to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Rom 8:28)

Have we never been pleasantly surprised by something's going the opposite way from how we thought we needed it to go? Have we never been disappointed by something's not going as we'd wanted it to go, only later realizing what all we missed of misery?

It should be *gratitude, whatever the grind*, for there's *more in the grind* than what's readily obvious. (Cf also: Col 1:12; 3:15ff; Rom 14:6; I Cor 10:30) Golgotha's awful grind led to awe-filled Glory!

By reliance on the Truth of God's goodness, we sense, not only a *bigger* picture than the *presently passing* parameters of *today's* troubles may *seem* to display, not only the *forgotten* troubles that upset us yesterday, last month, or years ago, the details of which we've long since lost track of, but we can sense that God's *eternal embrace*, from before the creation of the universe, assures us of

the *grace-filled meaning* of all that we, alone, on our own, simply can't grasp, nor do we *need* to grasp, at any distracted moment.

Paul said: "In *everything* give thanks." Our kneejerk *reaction* is a clueless one-word of *complaint*, "Everything?" Well, what's *not* within God's *omniscience*? What's *not* under God's *eternal love*?

Giving thanks, in a sense, is an *act of will*. But, still, it's *based* in the knowledge of *God's goodness*. *Feeling thankful* is an *emotion* produced by *the knowledge that God is good*. We can *freely* give thanks, inasmuch as we are convinced of the truth of what Paul said, "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to *His purpose*." (Rom 8:28)

So, let's join in prayer with two great men who conversed with God. Shakespeare, who was not unacquainted with grief, said, "O Lord, that lends me life, lend me also a heart replete with thankfulness." This was so well worth an "Amen!" from George Herbert, that he, in his own words to the Lord, said: "Thou who hast given so much to me, give me one thing more – a grateful heart." Great minds can be wisely grateful! Be, likewise, as *wise!*

To be *grateful* is, by definition, to *be in a good relationship*. And not just *any good* relationship, but one that's *so very valuable*, *so gratifying*, that *gratefulness*, itself, *is entwined within it*. This is the case whether the relationship is with *one* other person, *several* others, or is, and by far, and best of all – with *God, Himself*, our Creator, our Redeemer and our loving Heavenly Father, forever!

The *truly grateful* are *truly never alone*, as they can give thanks – *whenever, wherever*, and with *whomever* they're truly grateful.

It's *no wonder* – yet, it's even *well beyond wonderful* – that, in the Bible, *gratitude, thanksgiving*, is the *joyful* experience of *our relationship* with the *God of Providence* Who truly *provides* for all of our *deepest* needs by *His deep wisdom* and *His eternal love*.

G. K. Chesterton wrote: "I would maintain that, thanks are the highest form of thought; and that, gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder." That's a thought worth contemplating *into wonder!*

David knew this *wonder* from his days as a shepherd boy. He would later express it, thousands of years ago now, in words of

praise to the One he called *his* Shepherd. In *peace* that wouldn't always be so familiar to him, David gazed up into those spacious skies at night, while *his* sheep, in peace, under *his* shepherding, grazed, but with their eyes to the ground, oblivious to the One Who so captivated David's attention, as he gazed up at all those stars in the sky *above him, above his sheep, and even far above those skies themselves, in a consciously deeper peace* than all those skies and sheep could ever know.

What he *saw* with his eyes, unaided by telescope or scientific data on astronomy of which we're aware, he *felt* in his *heart*. He was not at all aware that some of that light shining into his eyes, came from, not merely millions of miles away, but from millions of light years away. Yet, even with our "sophisticated" frames of reference, distracted by city lights and our own self-generated blindness, do we ever get even close to all the grateful awe of *David's awareness of God's Presence*, looking up into the starry skies that we see with more detailed scientific information, yet we so casually take it all for granted? David didn't; we shouldn't.

At the opening ceremonies of the 2021 Olympics in Tokyo, a large children's choir was forced to sing John Lennon's nonsense, "Imagine there's no heaven / It's easy if you try / No hell below us, above us only sky." These were the tempting lies of a snake in the grass of Eden, and Adam and Eve fooled themselves as that 20th-century copycat did. Presumably, Lennon knew a bit more science than David, but he didn't *want* to know *Who* David knew.

David had not the faintest notion of how *vast* was what his eyes beheld, or what stretched far beyond what his eyes could see. Yet, he knew that it was all *God's handiwork*, and on that, he was absolutely on target, unlike so many folks today who may know something more about the science, but not the Truth behind it all.

200,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars fill the universe! That's *two billion trillion*. And probably, planets orbit so many of them.

To David, it was really all about God's *brief, but so powerfully creative words that spoke everything into existence* when God said: "*Let there be light!*" – and, look, *there was light!* (Gen 1:3)

So, David joined with the heavens, to declare *his* joy in what *he* saw, and *Who* he knew, was *far beyond those silently spacious skies, so far above his head, and yet, so deep within his heart.* In contrast to Lennon's *self-centeredness*, David *focused on God*:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they make Him known without words; no sound is ever heard. Yet, their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." (Ps 19:1-4)

God's Word in flesh would, Himself, one day, be born at Royal David's city, to *be* and to *declare*, as God's *Personified Word*, His *Good News* of *redemption* for fallen humanity, by his sacrifice and resurrection, to be proclaimed, ever since, by faithful followers, to "the ends of the world". Thanks to God, we, get to share that.

Paul would one day add his own praise in awe of God, writing to converts at Rome, "From *Him* and through *Him* and to *Him* are *all* things. To *Him* be the glory forever. Amen." (Rom 11:36)

We're never alone if we're thankful, even "by ourselves", as it were, on any Thanksgiving Day holiday, for *He is there with us.*

Whenever we're thankful, 365 days every year, each morning, all day long and on into the deepest of darkest nights, whenever we're *thankful for our past, our present* and for our *ever-present Savior and Lord, now and in all of our future, forever and ever!*

Hymns have been written for Thanksgiving Day. Yet, so many *more* hymns are *full of thanksgiving*, without one reference to fall harvest festivals. They're hymns of Blessed Hope. They refer to a *Heavenly Harvest* that *the redeemed await with Christian faith.*

In the 19th Century, the grateful Philip P. Bliss wrote words and music for his exclamatory hymn, *full of thanksgiving*, "*Hallelujah! What a Savior!*" That's *straight* speech, isn't it! His contemplative words of *gratitude*, go right to the very heart of God's *Good News.*

"*Man of Sorrows!*", what a name, For the Son of God, who came;
Ruined sinners to reclaim. *Hallelujah! What a Savior!*
Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in *my* place condemned *He* stood;
Sealed *my* pardon with *His* blood. *Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

Guilty, vile, and helpless we; Spotless Lamb of God was *He*;
Full atonement! – can it be? *Hallelujah! What a Savior!*
Lifted up was He, to die, “It is finished!”, was His cry;
Now in heaven, exalted high; *Hallelujah! What a Savior!*
When He comes, our glorious King, To His Kingdom, us to bring,
Then, *anew*, this song *we’ll* sing; *Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

Bliss faithfully reminded us of Jesus’ crucifixion, 19 centuries after that brutal scene at Golgotha, and some 26 centuries after Isaiah’s prophesy of it (Isa 53), and billions of years, as it were, after The Lamb was committed to be slain “from the *foundation* of the world”, as John, would later reveal it, in awe, to all. (Rev 13:8).

But, Bliss’ hymn of truth that, so *thankfully* reminds us of God’s amazing grace in Christ, isn’t sung very much these days. Why? What’s *wrong* with it? *Nothing’s* wrong with *it*. But *performance* is what *matters much more* nowadays, in “Contemporary Praise & Worship” music. *Plain-spoken biblical theology* has been pushed aside for a *trendy “atmosphere”* that’s “with it”, with “star-power” *performances*, starring *me, myself* and *I*, in a dark auditorium with bands under colorful *spotlights* and overbearingly *amplified noise*.

Yet, nothing is *outdated* in Bliss’s plain-spoken thanks, or in his straightforward exclamations of awe over the revelations of that supremely supernatural intervention of God, Himself, in Christ, for *full redemption* of sinners and *eternal reconciliation* with God. It’s *God’s redeeming truth* that *prompts* such *eternal thanksgiving*.

These lyrics of Bliss are so clear and so much more *explicitly unambiguous* than contemporary repetitions of a single syllable or a vacuous sound that lacks any *intelligibly meaningful narrative* of salvation’s *truths* by which one could be *informed*, thus, *thankful*, recalling gracious *historical facts*, redemptive *applications* of the *Good News* and the heavenly *forecasts* of being forgiven forever in God’s Gracious Presence. *Hallelujah! What a Savior, indeed!*

Henrietta C. Mears, adored “Mother” of 20th-century Evangelical Renewal, *knew* that *gracious Savior* was her Savior, too. And, as that quite interestingly *eccentric* educator in her Sunday Schools

at Hollywood's First Presbyterian Church, she'd often remark: "All that I see teaches me to thank the Creator for all I cannot see." She had in mind, maybe, what brings joy and what brings sorrow.

She *lived* her faith in Christ, regardless of all of the conventional notions that *she* was a tad too "odd", maybe even a lesbian. But then, *others*, also deemed "odd", received God's love by way of *her* abundant love and her own very warm welcome to *them*.

And *our thanksgiving*, too, is a gifted way to *vitaly connect* with *one another*, especially with the *unwelcomed* – the *oddest* of all varieties, even *our own*. In our *redeemed relationship*, designed by our Creator and Redeemer *against self-centered* isolation and estrangement, we, too can truly afford to love *others* who've *also*, so badly lost *their way*, *inside themselves* and *inside* their *self-presumed*, *self-serving* presuppositions *about* and *against* God.

It's in these gifts of our awareness of God's creation of us all, and in thanksgiving for God's grace, that we, too, can so readily afford, not only to *thank God*, but to *share in our thanksgiving* with *fellow image-bearers of God*, throughout *our one human race*, all created in God's Image. By God's grace, *we're created to be for the welfare of one another* and so, *to become thankful with one another*. And we can fully afford to do so, so fully loved by God.

All are grateful *when* they're thanked – and, the less perfunctory the "thank you", the more genuine it is, the happier, more blessed, more grateful, are those who're thanked, and *those*, too, who can thank them. As all this *makes sense*, isn't it, thus, *thankworthy*?

Yet, sadly, humanity has been, from the beginning, is now, and ever shall be – *except for God's intervening grace in Christ* – at *odds* with each other, in *self-righteously sick self-centeredness*, relentlessly refusing to be grateful, trying to insist, against all the evidence, that "*we're*" *not as bad as* "*them*". Yet, all our *nervous* accusations against "*them*", *mean* "*we're*" *trying to hide our guilt*. But this trick never tricks the trickster, who knows no better trick.

One who didn't need to *hide* her guilt, for she knew it was nailed to Christ's cross, was gratefully able to *spend herself serving the needs and welfare of many others*, even at the risk of her own life.

After the end of World War II, when I was just 7-years-old in our German Reformed Sunday School's basement, I saw this strange woman who seemed, to me, to be so very old, coming down the stairs. She walked right over to me, shook my hand, and asked me my name. I told her my name. Then she told me that her name was, "Corrie ten BOOM!", as it *sounded* to me, in her oddly-accented voice with that *very loud*, "BOOM!" I'd never forget it.

Only later would I realize *who* she was, and what a Christian testimony she had, in *concentration camps* and *across the world*.

She'd tell of her months in solitary confinement under the Nazis, for hiding Jews in a hidden room above her family's clock shop in the Dutch town of Haarlem. The family's gratitude for God's love prompted their risking their lives to hide Jews behind that fake wall upstairs. Many years later, I'd visit that hidden room upstairs.

Corrie, her sister Betsie and their father were arrested and sent to the death camps after their secret "hiding place" was exposed by a Nazi, posturing as a Jew seeking safe shelter. Corrie's sister and father would die in the camp. Corrie survived her months of solitary confinement and years of physical abuse, and she'd go on to live her testimony of how, even in her *solitary confinement*, she *wasn't alone*, for, "*Jesus was with me*", as were even those that she called, "my little friends", the *lice*, that so spooked the guards that they kept away from her. This was *her perspective on Reality from within her Christian gratitude*, even in those Nazi hell holes.

From those late 1940s, I recall a gospel song of gratitude by a Glasgow tram motorman, Seth Sykes and his wife, Bessie. They taught many folks to truly and gratefully *want to sing their songs* of praise to God for His grace. Here's their most popular lyric: "Thank You, Lord, for saving my soul, Thank You, Lord, for making me whole; Thank You, Lord, for giving to me, Thy great salvation, so rich and free."

In 1953 Ray Boltz was born in Muncie, Indiana. He'd grow up to be a Gospel singer and songwriter. His own "*Thank You*" lyric became his signature song. I've long related to his words, for they remind me of my tutelage under *my* Sunday School teacher, Johnny Myers, at that German Reformed Church in Youngstown,

Ohio. Sadly, that building was demolished long ago in the blight into which my hometown collapsed under the Mafia, the crooked politicians, and LBJ's "Great Society" restrictions forbidding two-parent households in order for women rearing children to qualify for welfare. Boys without fathers don't grow up into *responsible* young men and *law-abiding* adults. They're reared by *gangs*.

Here are the words Ray Boltz wrote for *his* "Thank You" song:

I dreamed I went to heaven, and you were there with me.
We walked upon the streets of gold, beside the crystal sea.
We heard the angels singing. Then someone called your name,
You turned and saw this young man, and he was smiling as he came.
And he said, friend, you may not know me now. And then he said, but wait,
You used to teach my Sunday School when I was only eight.
And every week you'd say a prayer before the class would start,
And one day when you said that prayer, I asked Jesus into my heart.

CHORUS

Thank you for giving to the Lord. I am a life that was changed.
Thank you for giving to the Lord. I am so glad you gave.

For me, it was Harry D. Clarke's 1924 hymn, "Into My Heart", that we sang in that Sunday School of my childhood.

"Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus; come in today,
come in to stay, come into my heart, Lord Jesus.

"Out of my heart, out of my heart, shine out of my heart, Lord Jesus; shine out today,
shine out always; shine out of my heart, Lord Jesus.

On September 12, 2008, in the gay *Washington Blade*, Ray Boltz "came out" as *gay*. He and his whole family, are still *family*.

He still writes and sings Gospel music, but he's lost many fans who can't grasp how *he* could "go gay". Maybe God's Grace had Something to do with it – for *sharing, with gays*, Christ's Gospel.

J. Gresham Machen, was another "odd duck" for Christ, reared in an elite family, he was socially awkward. A lifelong bachelor, a biblical scholar, he dedicated his whole life to defending Christian orthodoxy and he founded Westminster Seminary while Princeton Seminary, where he'd taught, was drifting into those sad early 20th Century doldrums of theological "Modernism", or, as one popular commentator of the day, the atheistic H. L. Mencken, who much

respected Machen's brilliance, badgered: Modernism was turning church into a mere "social club devoted vaguely to good works."

At just 55, looking "deadly tired", it was said, Machen took a train to North Dakota to fulfill speaking engagements in 20-below-zero weather. On January 1, 1937, he died there, of pneumonia. His last words were by telegram to his very best friend, theologian John Murray, also a bachelor, saying: "I'm so thankful for active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." With his last breath, he expressed his *gratitude* for God's imputing to him, Christ's own righteousness, over his own oft-acknowledged unrighteousness.

William Cowper, an earlier "odd duck", was a very *grateful* 18th-century hymnwriter and abolitionist. So often misunderstood, yet dearly befriended by John Newton, Cowper was often depressed, sometimes suicidal, always *socially-awkward* (perhaps autistic), and later it was speculated that he was "a homosexual" *merely* because he was a *bachelor*. Well, in *thankful confidence*, Cowper penned *soaring* words from his *foundational faith* and *hope*: "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform". In summing up our ultimate future with God, Cowper so wisely and gratefully added, in *solid Christian assurance*: "God is His Own Interpreter, and He will make it plain." And, thanks be to God, He surely will!

Pilgrims Enlighten the Dawn Lands

400th Anniversary of the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving with the Wampanoags

Ralph Blair

After surviving the dreadful storms of their Atlantic crossing, *The Mayflower's* Pilgrims were swept to a safe harbor far to the north of their expected landfall in Virginia. It was just in time to shelter for a brutal winter on ground that Natives called, "the dawn lands", where, every morning, the sunshine came rising from the horizon.

"Dawn Lands" quite aptly describes *this stage* of their ongoing journey, or *Pilgrimage*, though folks tend to think of the Pilgrims'

Cape Cod arrival as *their destination*, albeit not that *Mayflower* captain's intended landfall. But *neither here, nor down there* on Virginia's coast, was *their truly ordained destination*, for they'd always understood that they were on the *Truest Pilgrimage*, as "strangers and pilgrims" *here*, on this *earthly* sojourn, headed to their *Heavenly Home*. As their governor, William Bradford, put it: "They knew that they were pilgrims and looked not much on these things here; but lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country." *Temporary shelter* in New England was but an escape from oppressive *Old England*. Higher Rescue lay *ahead, above*.

That they were now in what were called the "dawn lands", must have reminded them that they were *still "on their way"*, with *further pilgrimage ahead* – not necessarily *westward*, but *ever Upward*, prior to the inevitable *twilight, dusk* and the final setting of that sun that rose in these dawn lands every morning, and to the Coming of the Son of Glory over the *darkness of this world* for that great and everlastingly liberating *Dawning* of God's Truly New Day!

In the meantime, they'd enlighten these Natives with blessings of God's Word and the Light of Christ's Love, and in that process, too, they'd contribute to the inspiring of a vision for *an amazingly new nation* here on the North American continent, to be founded and established to so honestly champion *liberty and justice for all*.

Can we Christians, here and now, relate to life as an *ongoing Pilgrimage* in a lost and hostile world that openly resents *serious commitment to Christ*? Jesus alerted his true followers to *expect such hostility and not hospitality*. And so, we, too, must *expect* it.

But, do we? Or, expecting it, do we *camouflage* our testimony? Plenty of Christians around the world are the victims of far more hostility on an everyday basis. They're literally being slaughtered.

Here in America, the prejudice and the persecution are usually not expressed in physical or deadly violence. But all of the *woke* prejudice and the "cancel culture", especially in academia, by Big Tech, and in society's socially-consecrated secularism, is *routine*.

So, as Jesus explained, and candidly warned his *true* followers:

"If the world hates you, you should realize that it hated *me* before it hated *you*. If you held to the basic common ground of *this world's priorities*, *this world* would love you as *its own*. But *you don't* have basic common ground with *this world's priorities*. I chose to bring you *out* of *this world*, and *that's* why *this world hates* you. Remember, as I've told you: 'A servant isn't greater than his master.' So, if they persecuted *me*, they will also persecute *you*. If they did what I taught, they would also do what you say. Indeed, they *resent* you *because* you are committed to *me*. *They don't know* the One who sent me.

"Had I not come and spoken to them they would have *an excuse*. But now, they have *no excuse*. Anyone who hates me, hates my Father, too. If I hadn't done among them what nobody else has done, they would not be responsible for their sin. But now, they *have seen* what I have done, and they hate me, and hate my Father, too. (John 15:18ff)

But, besides such negative responses, hatred and persecution that's to be expected from this fallen world, we must not fail to discern that, if *we don't* get such *negative* responses and such *hostility*, it's probably because *our* Christian witness isn't *clearly apparent*. Perhaps it's even *absent*. And whose fault is that?

We don't have to go out of our way to be *obnoxious* in order to get negative feedback, but we need to be careful that what is so judged as obnoxious is *Christ's Good News* and not our own *self-righteousness* which is certainly *no* "testimony" at all, for Christ.

Well, even before these Pilgrims had disembarked from *The Mayflower*, they drafted a remarkable document to govern their close-knit community here in these new "dawn lands". In their *Mayflower Compact*, they agreed to form a "civil body politic" of "just and equal laws" based on the consent of the governed and dedicated to the "Glory of God" and to the "general good of the colony." After signing this *Compact*, these grateful signatories conducted a democratic election and chose their first governor.

And, appropriately, in these "dawn lands" in the 17th Century, their *Compact*, in its fewer than 200 words, foreshadowed *basic principles* of *The Declaration of Independence* – that was also a declaring of *independence* from English overlords – and *The Constitution* of over a century later, with, *faith in God*, *humanity's natural equality*, *government by consent*, and by the *rule of law*.

So, it's no wonder that John Adams would later refer back to *The Mayflower Compact*, and to these *Pilgrims' arrival* in these "dawn lands", as, the *real* "birth-day of your nation." And Daniel

Webster agreed, declaring that it truly was *there*, that “the *first scene of our history* was laid”, in *that* “dawn’s early light!”, *there!*

Upon going ashore, according to Bradford’s own journal, they all “fell on their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean.”

So, going back, 400 years now, to 1621, *we’re there*, and *we are*, as it were, in a promising embryo of our land of freedom, in that refugee encampment, *there* in *those* “dawn lands”, at the *dawning* of *America’s* early experiment *in liberty and justice for all*.

As the Natives witnessed back then, that same sun is still rising every morning, now over Massachusetts, the Algonquian-based name of this, the sixth state of these United States of America.

Five years *before* the Pilgrims’ arrived, local Natives were struck by severe plague that left a less threatening populace than might otherwise have been encountered by the Pilgrims on their arrival.

Still, and for all, this was to be a “sad and lamentable” season of disease, starvation, and death. Half of the Pilgrims died in this very first winter, from the consequences of their Atlantic voyage, and from the harsh weather right there. The Pilgrims called this winter, “the starving time”. There were seldom more than six or so who had enough strength to care for all of the sick, or provide food and shelter, and otherwise protect their little settlement.

Then, on March 16, four months after landing and building some huts, they had their *first up-close* encounter with a Native, and it came as a real shock to them for it was, Samoset, a *sagamore*, *i.e.*, a subordinate chief, who so casually strolled into their colony and greeted them *in English!* Whoa! Then, their second shock was when he asked them for *a beer!* A *beer?* Well, they soon learned that Samoset learned English and his taste for beer from English fishermen who’d been coming into this Cape for decades.

Samoset stayed with them overnight. He later returned with five other Natives with pelts to trade. On March 22, Samoset came back with his good friend, Squanto, who’d been kidnapped in 1614 by an English sea captain. Squanto learned English from

monks overseas. When he'd been brought back to his native land, he learned that his entire Patuxet tribe had died of plague.

Since Squanto's English was much better than Samoset's, he and the Pilgrims were even better able to communicate. Squanto also became a translator for the Pilgrims with other Native tribes.

The Wampanoag chief, Massasoit, had good reasons to form a strong alliance with the Pilgrims, and Squanto helped to facilitate their mutual-aid treaty that would then last for over half a century.

Squanto remained with the Pilgrims as their interpreter and, in Bradford's words, he was "a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectations." Squanto instructed them on cultivation of native crops such as corn, squash, and beans. He also showed them where and how best to fish and hunt game.

We've all heard of what came next, right? It was, "The First Thanksgiving"? Both Pilgrims and Natives had survived on good harvests, so a grateful three-day feast was enjoyed by both the Pilgrims and the Wampanoags in happily *celebrating together*.

Such *harvest feasts*, in one form or another, were and are quite common to Native Americans, to the English and with people groups across history and around the world. All are so glad and grateful to celebrate good harvests, thankful to whatever deities they praise for their good fortune! Isn't it quite understandable?

Well, leave it to an *atheist* like Ayn Rand, to *rationalize* just *who* should be thanked at Thanksgiving. As she argued: "In spite of its religious form, its essential, secular meaning is a celebration of a successful *production*. It is a *producer's* holiday." Me! Me?

Nowadays, of that Pilgrims thanksgiving with the Wampanoags, the self-appointed virtue signaling elite complain that those pretty pictures of that 1621 Thanksgiving don't depict the festivity as a camera would have recorded the event. Really!? And, so what!? And, just who's *seen* all of those original photos to the contrary?

The anti-Christian woke mobs, so quick to stumble over un-PC interracial intersectionality, are even quicker to mock that 1621's *communal* thanksgiving as "*whiteness-dominated racism*". But *truly awake, well-informed historians* spam that woke spin as a

scam. *They're* fully aware of the *relief* that was experienced by *both* Natives *and* Pilgrims in these *fine harvests*, i.e., *survival!* As to who was *host* and who was *guest*, there was *no distinction*. Natives *and* Pilgrims *shared their plenty* in *common gratitude*.

In 2017, *The New York Times*, in its blatantly bloated headline warned: “*Everything You Learned About Thanksgiving Is Wrong*”, although, the author, herself, was quite modest. *She* simply said that, *some* of the familiar story is, “not exactly accurate”, as she noted, e.g., “There were no sweet potatoes in North America at the time.” *Really?!!* Well now, that *does* “prove” the point of that hostile headline in that so-ever-pompous “newspaper of record”!

Nikole Hannah-Jones of the *Times'* terribly flawed *1619 Project*, tried to defend herself with wise-cracks against *the many eminent historians'* many major objections to her *Project's* propagandizing. One of her own bloopers of self-defense was: “Imagine calling the *1619 Project* debunked in order to defend a childish Thanksgiving myth.” [For my review of her seriously flawed *1619 Project*, with many quotations from these many reputable historians who made mincemeat of its accusations against the Pilgrims, see EC's 2020 keynote, “The Meanings of Words and the Word of All Meaning”, (particularly pp 53ff, on our EC website.)

Unlike other Europeans who settled here, the Pilgrims were, as John Adams later noted, *neither* adventurers *nor* traders *nor* were they after “avarice and ambition”, but they *were* “under the single inspiration of conscience”, *seeking freedom for the Christian faith without persecution from governmental/ecclesiastical hierarchies*.

Contrary to woke narratives now, the authentic historical records document that the Pilgrims were *against racism*, *not supportive* of it. As they, themselves, were escaping terrible tyranny, they very much valued *individual rights* with no prejudice, and freedom and self-government, and these values were then passed down to our nation's Founding Fathers in *their* escaping from British tyranny.

Slavery has been in this fallen world of ours all through history, described in all of the world's ancient texts and it's still spreading mass misery through enslavement and human trafficking.

Slavery was indigenous on both of the American continents for *generations beyond counting*. And, from ancient Persia, China, Mongolia, Japan and Arabia, it was a *basic fact of life*, as it was in the *Native American tribes* who enslaved other *Native American tribes*, or, were, themselves, enslaved by *more powerful tribes of Native Americans*. Choctaw enslaved Cherokee and Choccoma. Pima enslaved Apache and Yuma. Pueblo kept their enslaved for *food*, as well as forced labor. Huron peddled slaves to Outauac. The Sauk and Ottawa enslaved the Missouri, Osage, Mandan, and Pawnee. “Pawnee” was even a synonym for “slave”! This list only begins to reference all of the *indigenous* American tribes that *enslaved* other *indigenous* American tribes, or, *were enslaved* by other *indigenous* American tribes – often as plunder in intertribal warfare. Native Americans continued to enslave each other, even after the founding of these United States of America in 1776.

So, slavery clearly had been here on this continent long before 1526, when the Spanish explorers brought a hundred or so slaves to a settlement somewhere in what much later became South Carolina or Georgia. But, in just a short while, these subjugated revolted and then they disappeared without a recorded trace.

The 1619 Project erroneously claims that America was “founded in slavery” in Virginia in 1619. But, even Captain John Smith, the noted, knighted English explorer who, from 1607, was a *leader* at Jamestown, in Virginia, had, himself, been *a slave* of the Turks.

These Arab slavers were notorious for their capturing isolated peasants who lived on the European coasts of the Mediterranean, as well as natives all around the Indian Ocean and Western and Central Asia and on Africa’s shores. They’d engaged in this for centuries, even on into the early 20th century. Muslims had, from their beginning, bought African slaves from *rival* African tribes.

Smith, himself, was captured by Powhatan, the Great Chief of the Algonquians, who’d planned to bring Jamestown under *his* dominion. He’d even sent his own scout to England to spy out his chances for bringing England under his Algonquian rule. He later

settled for his idea to hopefully combine *his* power with Smith's to control his own neighboring *tribal* enemies. But it didn't work out.

Today, millions of Uyghurs, a Muslim minority, are under cruel control in totalitarian Communist China's "re-education" camps for brainwashing and slave labor. Extensive data show that they're forced to make high-end products to be sold to the woke elite in America and elsewhere, by the virtue-signaling woke Apple, Nike, Adidas, etc. But, under President Trump, the importation of these products of these slave-camps in China was banned in the USA.

So, it's not surprising that the Chinese Communist state-run media promote the *1619 Project* to shift blame from themselves. Nor is it surprising that China's training school texts falsely teach that *Jesus actually stoned to death, that woman accused of adultery* in the Bible. (John 7:53 – 8;11) It's an obvious attempt to destroy Jesus' credibility with China's persecuted Christians so that they'll be more pliant to the Communist regime's rampant use of capital punishment against Christians who don't bend over to the whims of China's evil Marxist dictator with that frozen smirk.

So, the *worldwide phenomenon of slavery* didn't need "white Europeans" to *introduce it* to North America or anywhere else on earth. As in all Native American slavery customs, it's been the case on the African continent, where African tribes enslaved *other* tribes of Africans and *others*, Asians enslaved *other* Asians and *others*, etc. And Egypt, you remember, enslaved the Israelites.

Black Africa today, according to the Global Slavery Index, still holds *the world's highest rate of enslavement and forced labor*.

Slavery's *dismantlement*, so far as it's been achieved, both here in America in the past, and all around the world today, has been and is being accomplished by *whites*, mainly, whose *antislavery* views were informed by *the whole Judeo-Christian heritage*. This is the basic truth of *slavery's abolition*. That, that earliest abolition movement to free *black* slaves was *initiated by and very largely accomplished by whites* rightfully and quite clearly contradicts all the *racist* propaganda of the CRT woke today. But, to take any truthful note of these accurate historical facts will automatically

put the truth teller under enslavement by the politically correct and woke, cancel culture in the elitist media, academia and Big Tech.

Both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures were taken very seriously and applied for living at peace with all others, without distinction of *race* or *ethnicity*. It was as a *serious Christian*, that William Wilberforce *broke* the British *slave trade* of African slave traders selling fellow Africans into slavery. Among all those early antislavery supporters were the Methodist founders, John and Charles Wesley, William Cowper with his movingly anti-slavery poetry and his very best friend, former slave ship captain John Newton, who, after his conversion to Christ, wrote his greatly beloved hymn, “Amazing Grace ...that saved a *wretch* like me.”

Constitutional historian Paul Moreno reminds us that, “When [the former slave] Frederick Douglass read the Constitution and came to understand it in its historical context and its background, understanding the political philosophy behind the Constitution”, he clearly saw that, “the Constitution was actually a glorious liberty document and that there was no problem of dealing with slavery under the Constitution, so you could preserve the Constitution and preserve the Union. The best way to get rid of slavery was by constitutional, not by revolutionary means.”

During the Civil War, 364,511 *white* American men were *killed* and 281,881 additional *white* American men were *wounded* when *they*, as *Union* soldiers, went to war *against other white* American men *to end the enslavement of black men and black women* in the South. That’s a loss of 646,392 *white* Union soldiers so that 3.9 million *blacks* could be *freed from slavery under other whites*.

But CRT woke crowds today push *lies* that America is and was always *systemically racist* against *black* folk. Indeed, CRT tutors insist that “whiteness”, itself, is *intrinsically racist*. The woke Left need to *learn accurate history* and need, then, to *be honest*. But don’t hold your breath for their admitting *any of their own racism*.

Against the *1619 Project’s* spin on slavery, University of Texas sociologist, John Sibley Butler, who is, himself, black, points to the “black bourgeoisie”, thriving communities of former slaves in

the North and the South *following* the Civil War. He says that these freed blacks “created business enclaves that stood at the center of their mission of economic opportunity and education.”

This work for *racial equality* was joined by later Christians to end *racial segregation* in America. It was given eloquent voice by Martin Luther King, Jr.’s declaring: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” For saying so, he’s now *mocked* by the racist woke.

I so well remember where I was when I heard Dr. King give his “I Have a Dream” speech at that March on Washington, at the Lincoln Memorial, on August 28, 1963. I’d just flown back to Los Angeles to resume my graduate studies at USC and I heard his speech on the radio in my roommate’s car at a local gas station.

Even before those Civil Rights laws of the mid-20th Century, the *intact black middle-class families* in America often succeeded far beyond the whites who refused, as these blacks did not refuse, to remain *together as families*, to stress the importance of books and school, getting jobs and staying out of trouble. Sadly, those wise ideals have been trashed as “*acting white*” among many blacks.

I recognize these much earlier black families who’d only later be insulted for “acting white”. Such black families lived in my own middle-class neighborhood during all of my childhood in the 1940s and early-to-mid-1950s. *Two parent families* (whether black or white) with well-reared sons and daughters who were serious fellow students, were not into gangs or drugs, and were all aiming for jobs or college after high school.

The founding of these United States in 1776 *was never* for the *championing* of slavery. It *wasn’t* for the *triumph* of “White Supremacy”. But there was *plenty to do*, including the War of Revolutionary for freedom from England and all of its aftermath. The framers of our Constitution aimed at independence, limited self-government and freedom for all, as they saw that freedom for all was the revealed will of God. Even back then, they anticipated

the *inevitable demise* of slavery here, but they saw no way to achieve that goal among the conflicting colonies at the time.

The sooner America comes to terms with *all* of its history — the good, bad, and ugly — without demonizing folks who're living now for whatever were the sins of generations now long dead, (e.g. the Old South's racist gentry who founded what's now the *New York Times*) the sooner we can move on to the hard, but honest job of *team work*, for making our *union* ever so much better.

Christian theologian Miroslav Volf expounds on ages-old self-righteous rivalries and rationalized discrimination between “us” and “them”, tracing it back to Cain and Abel. Such divisiveness rationalizes slavery as it did in Cain's own evil against his brother.

From then on, in Volf's view, “this has been the foundation of conflicts, this rivalry between ‘Us’ and ‘Them’”. The dehumanizing, belittling and killing of *our* ‘brothers’, are all manifestations of this malady. The characters and scenes change, but the script outline remains the same: ‘Your existence threatens my identity. Now, with racism, ‘the beast’ enjoys a hearty banquet.’”

Volf goes on to observe: “It seems to me that [racism] embodies some of the most extreme forms of exclusion; and exclusion that has been both in the individual hearts of people, but that has been baked into history, so to speak.” He discerns that, *sin*, “is also a very personal thing”, and he posits that, laws are not enough. “The legal system allows for order... and for the most part the absence of violence. But peace, *shalom* ... true reconciliation ... that requires the help of a Higher Power ... one that has already defeated the beast.”

That great Christian poet of paradox and ironies, John Donne, observed the self-contradictory mentalities of “us” versus “them” in the age of the Puritans when he penned: “No man is an Island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore, never send to know for

whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” Too often and so sadly, so counterproductively, the only tolled bells that *grab the attention* of *this* or *that* tribe are the bells that toll in a tribe’s *own bell-tower*.

Among the Pilgrims’ significant assumptions, was the *biblical* doctrine of self-evidently pervasive “original sin”, i.e., we are *all inclined to self-centeredness as fallen humans*, and our *only hope* is, *not in ourselves*, but in God, our loving Creator and Redeemer.

As historian Susan Hanssen wisely notes, the “conviction of the total depravity of man and the impossibility of building here any heavenly city” kept Pilgrims’ focus on an eventually eternal Home. In the meantime, since humans do tend to be so self-centered and selfish, as individuals and as identity groups that try to wield power over all others, the *widest distribution of power* must be provided, so that there are always plenty of *checks and balances*.

These basic ideas were then imbedded in the very assumptions that were vital in the eventual founding of these United States of America. Various provisions of protection for individual rights in America’s Constitution and Bill of Rights exhibit such assumptions with all necessary counterbalancing for sufficient preparedness.

The Pilgrims knew that sin is what *restricts* freedom, for Jesus had so clearly stated, “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” (John 8:34). *Sin always enslaves!* In a climate of rampaging and selfish violence, crimes, and threats, *no one is, or can be, free. No one!*

We’re *fallen* human beings, and so, in need of *self-government*. This term was *not, at first, a political* term, but a *moral* term: the ability to *govern oneself; to well control one’s own thoughts and behavior*. This comes, in a limited way, by external disciplines, as well as by a fundamental, character-forming, heart’s commitment.

But, *ultimately*, it comes from the *inner transformation of the Gospel*. After Jesus explained how sin makes us slaves, he told us how we can be freed: “If the Son sets you free, you’ll be, free indeed” (John 8:36). *Moral self-government*, might, then, lead to a community-wide adoption in *sociopolitical self-government*.

Hanssen discusses how John Adams, as a Founder of America and as our second President, repeatedly warned about the *sinful* proclivities of *tyrants* as well as the *sinful* proclivities of *those who would try to overthrow the tyrants*. Adams fervently cautioned: “My opinion is, and always has been, that *absolute power intoxicates alike, despots, monarchs, aristocrats, and democrats, and Jacobins*, and also [‘those without breeches’, so to speak].”

Hanssen quotes Adams saying: “We have no Government armed with Power capable of contending with human Passions *unbridled by morality and Religion*”. That’s a *sobering reality* for these *secularist* days in which we now live. Hanssen notes that Adams warned that, “avarice, ambition, and revenge would break the strongest Cords of our Constitution as a Whale goes through a Net. Our Constitution was made *only for a moral and religious people*. *It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.*” That *warning* is, indeed, *sobering* in our national culture in 2021. Former slave, Frederick Douglass, agreed: “The life of the nation is secure only while the nation is honest, truthful and virtuous.”

Their *soundly sober warnings*, are *unnoted* in today’s state-sponsored “religion” of *self-segregating, self-righteous identity politics* in which all must *conform to dictatorial powers*, especially if it’s all, so gussied up, as “multiculturalism”, “intersectionality”, and something so racist as so-called, “critical race theory”.

We still hold to a sort of *E Pluribus Unum*, “out of many, one”, but the *crucial* questions must be: What does that, “many”, mean; what’s the definition of that, “one”? Our one *very basic value has been*, thankfully: “*Liberty and Justice for All*”. But that’s now being twisted into a *depressingly dangerous disintegrating choice*: “*Be politically correct or be cancelled!*”, “*Be woke or be broke!*” “*Your race gives you no place in this discussion, so, shut up! Conform!*” Such are the dictated “choices” that are presented to us today. It takes rigorously informed awareness, a very good understanding of history and of rational thought to truly grasp the magnitude of these current Fascist fallacies and Marxist misconceptions that have killed and keep killing multiplied millions under their spells.

Yet, the most demonic of fallen humanity's self-righteousness can be easily exposed as *ludicrous*. Theologian Helmut Thielicke well remarked: "How comical the gods of the day seem just a few hours later, how absurd they look from behind!" He surely knew this from his living through the hell of the Third Reich. But those who are ignorant of history, who are fed lies that they can't see *through*, are not at all prepared to handle the lies, and so they never will see the lies *from behind* – until it's *too late to escape*.

As America becomes *increasingly and self-righteously secular*, ignoring Adams' warnings on losing our Divine focus, *increasingly averse to revealed truth on sin and grace, increasingly selective in our merely politicizing what's basically "wrong" or "right"*, we'll have so badly *lost* our way that we'll be nearly, if not, *done for*.

Among our greatest of losses, is the *gift of gratitude*, the great *satisfaction of thankfulness*, the utter *blessings of thanksgiving*.

And, what was it, that so very predictably replaced *gratitude*? It was, of course, *grievance* and *griping*, indeed, even *industries of grievance* and *multiplied gripes over irrational fantasies* that were coveted and remain, so predictably, *intrinsically*, out-of-reach of reality for they were, and are, mere *fantasies conjured up by our own self-centered naivete*. So, they spawn *resentment, jealousy, anger, rage, revenge* – all of which reinforce each other and then explode into *self-righteous vengeance* and *deadly violence* that's displayed night after night, increasingly obvious, even day after day, in cities from coast to coast with record numbers of crimes against the innocent. And popular "promises" only *fuel the crisis*.

So long as there's a refusal to turn to the Source of Salvation and real joy in the Love and Grace of our Creator and Savior, there'll still be a *clueless search for counterfeit substitutions*. The unmet needs for God's Love and Grace, offered so freely, will still be on exhibit in all of the angry self-righteousness and revenge.

Augustine of Hippo searched for fulfillment in all sorts of earthly pleasures, in decades of decadence and debauchery, through trapdoors of mythology and an assortment of varied philosophies. He finally gave up what he finally knew was his fruitless search

and, in his very deepest depths of desperation, he cried out: “How long, O Lord, how long?”

In that uttered plea of his utter self-exhaustion, this brilliantly distressed *seeker* found the One Who’d always been seeking him, *God, Himself*. Then this grateful foundling wrote to God in rejoicing: “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.” So, he *thanked* God that, in God’s wise providence, his *troubled heart* had kept him *unsatisfied until he willingly received the Deepest Rest that he so deeply needed from his Loving Creator, his Gracious Redeemer*.

Thankfully, *we’re made* for that *very most personal relationship* with the *One in Whose Image we’re made and Who saved us by His Incarnation* in our place on the cross. Thank God that it’s no wonder our souls remain so very restless until we’re awakened *by His love and to His love, and we rest* in Him and His grace!

Our 21st Year in the 21st Century: Maturity?

Making it to Maturity Means Much More than Amassing More Years.

Ralph Blair

“Which came *first*, the chicken or the egg?” That’s a very ancient riddle. It’s a philosophical puzzle on the world’s beginnings and a question about *all sorts of other sequences and consequences*.

Responses to *this* old question, as with *all* questions, depend on *how we begin*, with *what we assume* or *don’t assume*, with *what we believe* or *don’t believe*, with *what we know*, or *don’t know* and *how we then proceed from there*. As a riddle, it’s not supposed to have a *simple, self-evident* answer. Such a *stumper* shows that, *ready answers* to some questions aren’t always readily available.

It *can be* simply good fun, yet frustrating, or it *can well serve* to reinforce some *humility*, leading us into *profoundly instructive* and *subsequent lessons in maturity, immaturity, progress, or regress*.

At any rate, such *exploration* is so very much needed *these* days. So, let's look into this.

In the beginning of Genesis (1-4), we read that God *created all that exists*, including *human life*. God declared that, His whole creation was *good*, including the *two humans He'd created in His Image*. *He gave them authority to caringly steward His creation*, and to do it with *free will and moral responsibility*, unlike animals who act strictly from *instinct*. These two most complex of beings were brought on only *after all else* was made, so *that they could then manage and care for it all*. We humans, were *gifted* by God, to be *beneficiaries of*, and *benefactors for*, all that God had made.

The *first* humans, as we're told, were *created as mature and not as embryos* as *we've all* been made ever since. So, in terms of that ancient riddle, *humanity*, that "chicken", *arrived as adult*, not as an "egg". But then, and *all on our own*, we laid *our own rotten "egg"* in *our self-centered rebellion* against our loving Creator.

Our *self-centeredness ruined us*, and it ruined *all else*, as we insisted on running *our own selfish plan*, to have "*our very own world, in our very own way*". And, *in this, our very own damned fantasy*, we *destroyed our maturity*. And, we've been coping with our resultant *immaturity* ever since.

So, *today*, when we ask skeptics, *what*, in this biblical account, so *distracts* you in your 21st Century *woke way*, they say, in their *woke way*, it's our "*sophistication*", since this story's, "just nothing but *fiction!* A 'talking' snake?! Are you kidding? *Puhleeze!*"

But, wait! As *woke, as you claim to be*, you're getting yourself quite *distracted* by making a big deal over that very *same talking snake* that so *distracted* those two back in Eden! *Those two* got *themselves distracted* from even *God's call*, by that *same talking snake*, and it cost *them, all* that they'd already been given by God, and then, so *very much more!* Now, *you're* getting yourself so *very distracted* by that very *same talking snake*. Yet, you think you're "sophisticated", a Postmodernist, committed to being *woke*.

No, my *woke* friends! It's not your *virtue-signaling sophistication* that gets in *your way* today, in this matter of Adam and Eve in the

Garden of Eden. What gets in *your* way is what's always gotten in the way of those who *try not to see what they see*, and find so *disturbingly true*. It's, *defensiveness – the attempt to deny what one finds undeniable*, but what one is *bent on not admitting to*.

Honestly, frankly, who, today, can say, they *can't see us, our everyday selves*, in *that very pair*, back there, in Eden's mirror?

This "old story" describes *us all*, so *uncomfortably*, and so very *convincingly*. But we *can't stand our resemblance to "them"*, "our kin", in Eden. *No! We won't stand for it!* But, right there in front of us, our *defensiveness*, our closest ally, *denial itself*, stands in our way, telling us, *that's us, that's our own "oldest story"*, and *our everyday story still*. The resemblance is *too recognizable to freely admit* that it's *us*. Yet, for *truest freedom*, and for *goodness' sake*, we *need to come to terms with this unvarnished truth about each one of us*, no matter the literary genre of the honest-to-goodness mirror in front of our faces. And it's there in that Genesis account.

It's all so *contrary* to our self-serving notions and all of our own wishful thinking about *human development from immaturity to ever more maturity* down through the years to today's, so very *obviously, immature and divisive and divided* 21st Century *chaos* all around us, and even within us. But what would appear to be *quite contrary* to our *self-serving scenario* of denial, has proven to be *quite ordinary*. Indeed, by now, our fatal fall into *immaturity*, no matter how we style it or try to spin it, as "progress", is all, still, so very sadly, "old hat". And, it's so often, so much worse, than that.

But *our re-write* tries to *wipe out* the true account of humanity's *mad immaturity* throughout all of human history, down to *our day*. We're all still so *swelled up*, in all of our own ugly, self-centered perspectives, in *jealousy* of our Loving Creator and God, that we misbehave like that first thankless pair that sinned long before we followed up with all of *our own egoisms*. We copy *their* lead, then we copy *our own*, falling into more narcissism and more excuses.

They tried to *displace their Creator and wound up displacing themselves out of the Paradise they'd freely been given*. We copy them, in *our ungrateful greed*, and *into all of our own guilt*

and loss. Trying to usurp God's authority *over all*, and *all on our own*, we've wound up, as *they* did, in all of *our chaos*, and in all of *our loss*. Way to go, "grown-ups", growing yet more "grown up"!

Created for our *morally mature fellowship* with God, we sought to be *our own* creators, in *our fantasy's* image of us, and *trashed* it all by denigrating God's *gifted maturity* into our very own utter *rejection of moral maturity*. And we've followed in all of the fatal footsteps of our earliest ancestors in every generation since then.

So, according to scripture, *in that very beginning, adulthood* came without a *childhood*. *Maturity was given without some time in immaturity* and a *gifted perfection was prior to the ungrateful imperfection*. This was all the reverse of *our own experiences* growing up, from being so totally *dependent* on the union of our parents' egg and sperm, into an infant who had to *grow up* and *learn*, through thick and thin, *to strive for maturity, though not ever reaching anything like our fantasy's goals*.

In the beginning, in God's intended good gift for all of creation, humanity's experience in fellowship with God was present prior to humanity's refusal to fellowship with God, humanity's maturity preceded humanity's immaturity, humanity's reverent respect preceded humanity's disdainful disrespect, human responsibility was pre-empted by human irresponsibility. Humanity fancied its "much better" plan than God's plan. Humanity was dead wrong!

There and then, *we rebelled*, as *we still rebel*, here and now. We fell for a lie, and we still fall for the *identical lie*, trying to *make of ourselves the sole source and the center* of all that was, is and forever *should be*. How *tragically immature is self-centeredness!*

God's *gifted life* for Adam and Eve was *willfully demolished* by them, into the *opposite* of what they *aimed* to achieve by and for themselves in *grasping* at God's power and glory, for *their own self-centered project*. Their self-centered *stupidity* and *selfish greed* were *deadly*, not only to them, but for all their descendants.

Adults *chose to sin* as *no embryo* does or *can*. No *decision for death* can be made by an embryo, a most innocent child all alone, inside a mother's womb. But deadly decisions to *kill embryos* are

made every day, by *supposed* adults and governed and legalized by *supposed* adults. But, understand: All of these alleged adults are, as *we all are*, descendants of our *first* parents, whom we all still so very much resemble in all *our fatal self-centeredness*. We choose to go *our own way*, away from God's Way, to *try* to get, for *us*, what can't be gotten without counterproductive consequences.

What a *different* world *that was before the Fall!* Maturity before immaturity! But, *was it, really different?* *That temper tantrum of a will-to-power was hatched in the midst of that plentiful Garden of Eden. That's where we sought to get the upper hand over God? We chose to reject maturity for immaturity.* Recognize someone?

Irrational lust is still *never* satisfied, as it was *not* satisfied, even in Eden. Yet, selfishly, so easily, *we still resist maturity!* Selfishly, so easily, *we still relish* at least our *fantasy of immaturity* before it *explodes* into something quite otherwise. Against all graciously indispensable instruction from God, we, too, so quickly and so selfishly, draw ourselves into our *chosen immaturity by our own obstinance* and *our own greed*, just as our foolish ancestors did.

Aren't we reading something of *our own biographies* when we read of the *first two humans*, so lovingly created in God's Image, *gifted with free will, an informed conscience, and fellowship with God*, so selfishly *ruining* themselves and their *relationship with God*, and all else, *by conniving to choose to remodel* themselves into what they foolishly imagined as an *improvement over God's wise design?* Their *immature fantasies* reduced a *gifted maturity* into resulting *immaturity*. Self-serving, coveting *for their own possession*, the benevolent God's *position* as Creator/Sustainer of the universe, and all else that is, ever was or ever could, would, should or will be – *they fell into a hell of a mess of their own.*

As *they fell* from *their gifted good and innocence*, into their *earning their deadly evil by their own haughty and irrationally concocted self-centeredness*, so do we. And so, ever since that sinful fall of our early ancestors, who we "resemble to a T" (for *traitor*), *we've followed in each and every one of their missteps.* *Our own immaturity in ungrateful dereliction* has been our own

habituated way by default from the beginning of human history, all the way down, through history, to *our own* days here in AD 2021.

Pressing the terms of that old riddle, “Those chickens of Eden have come home to roost in us!” Though so obviously, *mortally-wounded*, we’re so adept at telling ourselves that we’re “*maturing so wonderfully well, so swell, and we’re doing it all on our own*”. *In 2021? Are we awake? We’re “woke”, but we’re not awake!*

Those who were the *first* in the human race, were given God’s gift of *innocent maturity, created good, in our Creator’s Image*, to live life with Him and with one another. But they were *not* made to be *robots*, and *neither are we*.

These two humans, *and we, ourselves*, in *our* turn, were and are given *free will* for *fellowship with God and with one another*. But they, and we in our own turn, *revolted* as we *still revolt*, with *selfish grabs for power in self-centeredness*. Created with *gifted* life to *live in maturity in relationship with God*, we *chose and still choose our, immaturity* instead. We fell and we fall, from God’s precious gift of *maturity in Him* into our own booby prizes. God, help us! Well, *He has, and He does, and He will!* But we can’t do it on our own – *again*. We need so very much more help than, “self-help”. We tried that in Eden, and it killed us. So now is no time to fall back into more of our self-centered, “self-help”.

Seeking “*maturity*” in “self-actualization” or “self-realization”, so-called, in the latter years of the 20th-Century and now in this 21st, there’s been interest in, “New Age” *self-fulfillment* schemes that are promoted by popular gurus. They promise that more positive feedback inside one’s sense of self will lead to more positive feedback from others. But being an obnoxious bragger has never worked well. None of such schemes ever fills the bill.

And, that’s basically because, they don’t adequately *diagnose* the problem, so, they have no *real answer* to *the real problem*. They’re being far too *superficial* to even begin to *understand* that, at bottom these deep and disturbing senses of self-inferiority are rooted in our own not measuring up in our relationship with God –

and that sense of inferiority is a *clue to this*, but instead of being wisely discerned, it's so unwisely denied.

Though, extremely distracting, people *refuse* to see *why* it's so. So, they foolishly keep looking for *superficial* solutions in self that, of course, never work, and so they're still seeking more and more affirmation from others, who, of course, are all so very basically distracted inside themselves, and can't afford to so *affirm* others.

Wanting to be in control, by themselves, they're all stuck in self, and refusing to admit that their *real* problem *runs so far deeper* in their relationship to *God*. They, as did Adam and Eve, want to be in charge of fixing what they view as, not enough *self*-satisfaction, even in that Garden of Eden.

One of the popular New Age gurus is Marianne Williamson, whose *self-help advice* took off in the early 1980s in the terror-filled days of "The Gay Plague", HIV/AIDS. In 2019 she ran for nomination to be the Democrats' Presidential candidate but dropped out in early January 2020 when her popularity was toward the bottom of the pool of candidates.

Yet, as a guru, she *irrationally pushes immature mantras* for seeking "maturity". She tries to "*motivate*" people *out of their obsessing over their low self-esteem and towards "maturity"* by *claiming*, in her pep talk that, "Maturity includes the recognition that no one is going to see anything in us that we *don't* see in ourselves."

In other words, if you want to *be seen* by others as *better* than you privately see yourself to be, you must *think* better thoughts about you and, somehow, your own thinking more highly of yourself will get across to others' views of you and then they'll think more highly of you. Her approach *did not work* for her!

And, of course, it didn't, for, to the contrary, what one thinks of self is one's own thought in one's own brain, one's own agenda's priority, and nobody else experiences either that one's sense of self or that one's priority to be more desirable. So, the one who's in his or her own brain cells, grunting to move his faux "flattering" revision of his own sense of self into another's brain cells is trying

to do the impossible. So, it's frustrating. And, its unconvincing to both the sender and to the intended recipients. What's in each person's brain cells is unique to that brain. Nobody else lives in somebody else's brain cells.

It's neither the other's version of the one who's trying to send that positive thought into the other, but the other's agenda does not rank the significance of the other's sense of self as high on the priority as the other rank's his or her own concern about his or her own sense of not measuring up. *No mix accumulated in our brains is duplicated in others' brains. Reality is the reverse of her notion that, to gain another's admiration, one must admire one's self and then project that inner sense into the mind of the other.*

So, she urges all, to see ourselves as "measuring up", to see "our good", so that, by our seeing ourselves that way, we'll then be seen by others, that way? *What nonsense! Nobody has seen, sees, or will see in us what we see in us, no matter if we like or don't like what we see in us! Our thoughts are inside our brain cells, not in others' brain cells. Their thoughts are in their brain cells, not in our brain cells.* Thinking otherwise is not only unwise, it's *totally self-delusional, and totally so self-defeating.*

Even if one *tries to spell out* for another, one's image of one's self, the other agrees or disagrees to different degrees, based on his or her own agenda. And if the other person is indifferent about us, if his version of us isn't even on his or her agenda, it's not. Each one's view is idiosyncratic even if superficially similar.

There are *such unavoidably different agendas* at play in the interaction between one who's *complaining*, to get *relief*, and one who's *expected* to supply *relief*. When the interchange is all said and done, each still *experiences* his or her own version and agenda, even if revised in *some way*.

Moreover, listeners may mistake complaints as requests for *complements* that they can't afford to grant, or grant but flippantly, out of their own sense of not measuring up to their own version of the complainant, which, in such a case, would likely be positive even envied, which, then, the one envying the other couldn't

afford, truthfully, to give. These are a few of the irrational ways to, unsuccessfully, try to improve one's sense of self by getting another to affirm one's self.

Additionally, as indicated, Williamson's entire approach totally contradicts all of the biological science of the brain. So, in this and so many other ways, her self-help advice makes no sense.

Biologically, as I've said, *our thoughts of us sit all alone*, in *our own* brain cells, *not in others'* brain cells. They *don't* sneak out of isolation cells inside *our* skulls and sneak into isolation cells in *others'* skulls. We're *numbskulls* if we think otherwise.

The *rational* approach toward maturity in such situations is *not to extrapolate* from what's in *your* sense of self from *your* lifetime of living *inside your* brain, to which *no one else* has *any access*, to what *others* think in *their brains*, to which *you* have *no access*. If *rationally* understood, as *grown-ups should*, this *obvious reality* relieves us from worrying that, *others* think of *us*, from within *our* obsessing over *our sense of self in our brains*. Of course, *they don't*, for, *they can't*. But, *our squatting in ours*, gets in *our* way.

And, of course, *they're* far too distracted over *there*, *squatting in their own brains of self-obsession* to ever be internally distracted over *our worries over our version of our not measuring up*. They may even be motivated to insult any of whom they're jealous. *It's all part of what our membership in our fallen race entails for us all*.

So, do yourself the favor of *waking up* to this *brisk aroma and fine flavor* of a coffee called, *reality testing!* As it's been said so often: "Wake up and smell the coffee." In other words, *get real!*

Williamson didn't even make it through the course of the efforts of candidates for nomination to President, even with her version of positive thinking. She dropped out of running in early January.

Another candidate was running for re-election as President. In his youth he'd been influence by Norman Vincent Peale's "Power of Positive Thinking". His foes interpreted his adoption of Peale's advice as his being but a "trumpeter", pun intended, a synonym for "bragger". Yet, he neither won his first election nor lost re-election due to Peale's influence. There were as many reasons

for voting for Trump or against Trump, or for voting for Biden or against Biden as there were voters who voted for or against either one of them. Again, any action is the story of the actor, not the story of the acted upon.

Back in the mid-50s, when Adlai Stevenson ran against Ike, he was asked what he thought of Peale. Adlai snapped, "I find Paul appealing, but Peale, appalling!" It was such a quick reply, he'd probably used before. And, Stevenson was a *Unitarian*, not a sect that's usually much acquainted with Paul. It may have just been his idea of a clever play on words. At any rate, whatever one says or does is the story of the speaker or actor – though we may not be aware of what that story is.

Here's a pathetic, but indelible, example of what I'm talking about, from a New York City group therapy session on its first night's meeting after 9/11/2001. The group was *struggling to process the utter horrors* of that week in Manhattan, when, finally, one of the members who hadn't been engaging interrupted with frustration to angrily demand rhetorically: "Can't we get *off this* subject? I have *my own* stuff to talk about." If *that tragedy within the week of 9/11*, right there in New York City, can't be a *reality check on our own perspectives on all of our own problems and our obsessions over what distracts us so self-centeredly in our own private lives, what in this world, pray tell, could ever do it?*

There's a myriad of ways that everybody views everybody else, and themselves, but none of these multiphasic ways of seeing resides without an idiosyncratic twist from one person's brain to another. No one experiences oneself as others experience him. It's all a matter of what all is stored within each brain. Everyone's own individual formative years, interpretation of those years, the sense of one's self, agendas, beliefs, interests, preoccupations, priorities and all else that went into and goes into whatever's in each person's brain cells is the very proof that, his or her own *unique mind's complexity isn't ours*. Even *brain surgeons* can't find *our thoughts*, however much they poke around in our brains.

Biologically, we don't operate with, or in, anyone else's brain cells. What's so difficult to *get about this basic biological fact*?

Well, what's so difficult to *get about this basic biological fact* is the truth of the fact, itself, i.e., that, *we're squatting and squirming, alone, within our own brain cells, so, our thoughts are in our own awareness.* That's *why we're aware of them!* And that's *why others are not aware of them!* They don't think *our* thoughts. They think *their* thoughts. *Their* thoughts preoccupy them. *Ours* preoccupy us. *Realizing this truth about the brain is a "no brainer" that'll free us to get on with what's our job that needs our brain's attention.*

Have you ever thought you had trouble being able to be understood by others, try as you may to get *your point* across to them? Have you ever been told by others that they were frustrated, trying to get *their point* across to you? Communication can be hard, even when, supposedly, we're *trying* to understand each other. That's because none of us is on *the very same purpose page at the very same time*, nor coming from the same formative years and experiences and distracted as we all are by our own self-centeredness and self-consciousness. The more each can step out of his or her *own way*, to be able to carefully *listen* and try to *identify* with what we have *in common*, the better each can try to communicate with the other. But, *self-distracted*, we can't.

And, for *goodness* sake, as well as for *your own good sake*, *do* operate with the brain God gave *you*. Don't try to operate with what you merely *guess* He gave to *others*. He didn't give them carbon copies of what you and your experiences accumulated there in *your own* brain. We may and should *try to relate to* one another, however, *inside ourselves, we're not that other person!*

It's not hard to understand this *biological fact*, so we need never trip over *our unreasonably agitated* versions of *us* or our *envious* versions of *anyone else*. *Your* "you", *your* "him", "her" or "them" is *invisible* to him, her and them and to any other onlooker from within that onlooker's private, self-centered, self-distracted view.

Get it? If you do, you'll not forget it! Move through the cells in your own brain all you want. You can't help but do that. But, for sanity's sake, for your sake, and for the sake of others, for the sake of all that God has called you to be and to do, pick up all that trash about what all *you* think, on your own, regarding what you suppose *others* think of *you*, and toss it into your own trash bin.

None sees *within us*, but the One who created us, the One Who loves us far deeper than we, self-centered "lovers" of *self*, do.

Grow up! Mature into the one you were created to become, not your daydream that you foolishly patched together on your own. And then, you can afford *to love others* and *to be there for them*, realizing that God is *there for you*, and He's been *there*, for *you*, from all eternity to all eternity. Function under His parameters.

As in all *immature misinterpretations* of so-called "maturity", we misuse and trip ourselves up over all of our so-called "progress". In today's freeze-framing of our *supposedly* "progressive" society, *bent so self-centeredly on self-serving, self-flattering and currently held ideas* of "progress". Folks *claim* to be *woke* but it's all such a joke, and a very *tragic* joke, for, it's all so very badly *broken*, and all reminiscent of tripping ourselves up, away back there in Eden.

These days, what *should* be simply a comment of a differing opinion, can quickly be *branded*, a "microaggression", at the very *least*. And then, that *politically incorrect* "culprit" is consequently "*cancelled*" in, his or her own group, on social media, or *fired* and *blacklisted as never-ever-again-hirable!* *This is called progress? This is called maturity? This is called woke! It's wokus-pocus* or less delicately: "BS"! And, it could be put even more bluntly.

A *New York Times* poll finds that, just 51 percent of their *Times'* employees are "*not* afraid to say what they really think". Where, professedly, "All the News that's Fit to Print", *is printed*, not *all* the employees' *opinions* seem *fit* to be *spoken*, even, *in-house*. *Self-censorship* by *employees* is done to keep their *jobs*. Given the *NY Times'* narrowly woke-slant on everything, any *forbidden* opinions are so very easy to *spot* and then, to *tattle* on.

Facebook's woke algorithm on prejudice "weights" posts of "hate" to hone in on "hate" against its *privileged* LGBTQQ+, Blacks, and Muslims, but *relegates* to "low priority", all the "hate" against "whites" and "men". AOL *dumps* into users' *Spam* folders, "for your security", it claims, e-mails from, e.g., "Right & Free", "Flag and Cross", "Judicial Watch" or headed with words such as, "Patriot", "Freedom", "Liberty", "Herschel Walker", "Marco Rubio", "Jim Jordan", etc. Presuming to "baby-sit" *un-woke* allies of these sites, AOL also insults users who *don't* support these sites, as if they were clueless and needed AOL's "childcare" to feel "safe".

In Black History Month, Amazon *nixed* from its streaming service, *Created Equal: Clarence Thomas in His Own Words*, an inspiring documentary on this Justice's rise from poverty down in Jim Crow's segregated Georgia to Yale Law School, and on up to his becoming only the 2nd black on the US Supreme Court. Is Big Tech's, as it certainly seems to attest, the *racism de rigueur*?

By *definition*, freedom of speech *should* be highly prized in all institutions of *higher learning*. But the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, FIRE, finds that, among university students, 70 percent of *conservatives* are self-censoring, compared with 61 percent of *moderates* and 55 percent of *liberals*. And religiously active students self-censor at 63 percent, in contrast to atheists, agnostics and the otherwise openly non-religious, at 56 percent.

Thankfully and reliably, FIRE publishes an annual list of 150 schools, i.e., "The Worst" and "The Best" colleges *for free speech*.

Woke targeting of professorial *scholars* for voicing "unpopular" views has *quadrupled* just since 2015, so that, now, a *fourth* of all such attacks on openly-articulating professors' free speech rights have already *cost them their jobs!* How tragically *illiberal*, how stupidly *immature* is all of this allegedly "progressive" and "woke" *censorship!* It's no *true maturity!* It's an absolutizing of *prejudice* by the Left. It's *routine* in every dirty dictatorship through history.

Pampered college students, "snowflakes", are requiring "trigger warnings", a term that can now, itself, be *feared* to be *too scary* to even *utter*, even as a *warning*. So, as *The New Yorker* reports:

“Those who received trigger warnings, reported *greater* anxiety in response to disturbing literary passages than those who did not.”

Leftist *bias* is propagated for no *sound educational* purpose, while responses from the Right are ruthlessly labeled as “hate”. The woke allies in offices of student affairs, in HR, and in college counseling centers *push this indoctrination*. To help all of these so very easily-triggered college students try to cope with all their *emotional fragility*, they’re offered some time with puppies and *Play-Doh*. Were they any better prepared to *read* and to *think critically*, they’d be able to do far better with some wisdom from *Plato!*

Are these *still, far too immature* college students, as in need of “safe space” as when they scared themselves into a panic in their “boogeyman-haunted” bedrooms of early childhood? Or, are they demanding trigger warnings as the *manipulations of spoiled brats*, so as to hear *only* what they *want* to hear, in order to still get *their way*, each and every day? *Just whose finger is on that “trigger”?*

Meanwhile, many of their non-college *peers* are being readied for *truly tough military combat* in perilous, very predictably *deadly*, encounters with actual, angry, life-threatening enemies. That’s *not* what only seems to *appear* in woke fantasies of inexperience.

These latter youth learn to face *truly hard realities*, undistorted by woke progressivist professors, bent on propagandizing all of their own self-righteous disparagement of Western Civilization, or any and all accurate understandings of *really true* history, and the necessary principles of *clear rational thinking and reasoning* for intelligent assessments, to *prepare to fend off* all of the pitifully pop propaganda that’s so continuously dished out all around us.

According to our major media, “Islamophobia” *rages* in America. Yet, actually, *it’s Jews, not Muslims*, who are more often targeted for *hate crimes*. *Anti-Christian* prejudice, while quite common, is given very little, if, actually, any coverage as a *hate crime*, in the mainstream media. Indeed, the media *commits that* hate crime.

Where, for example, were the headlines around the web about a 5-year-old, *forbidden* to sing *his* song in his public-school talent

show because, it “mentions Jesus too much”? Any kid forbidden to call out his own, “*Allah hu Akbar!*” in *his submitted* performance for *his* public-school talent show, would have been prime news on CNN, MSNBC and all the rest. Administrators of a public-school, even in a “Bible Belt” town of only 1,543 residents, *knew* they had to be *woke enough* to *mandate* that a third-grader *not be allowed* to wear her facemask inscribed with three “offensive” words. The words? “Jesus Loves Me”. Indeed, it took the filing of a federal lawsuit about our American Freedoms to remove that *anti-Jesus rule* so that this little girl could wear *her* favorite facemask.

Interviews on American college campuses find that, most of the students know *virtually nothing* about 9/11. Of course, they *were* babies back then. That’s all the more reason to *learn* about it! Yet, only 14 out of our 50 states mandate instruction about 9/11. The students vilify “pro-lifers” as “Taliban”, so, they *do know* that, that’s a *bad* word, but don’t seem to know really *why* it’s so bad. They’re *quick, repeatedly*, to *scorn*, “American exceptionalism” and *quick, repeatedly*, to denounce “American imperialism”. They *favor* Socialism, saying they want “more freedom”. Yeah? Under Socialism? *Teen Vogue* headlines, “Socialism for Gen Z-ers” as it labels “capitalism’s very existence as a system of profit and exploitation”. What’s ahead in such ignorance and propaganda?

No doubt, there’s all of the same sort of *blissful ignorance* and forced bigotry, *but in reverse*, at Fundamentalist Bible colleges! But this doesn’t justify the bigotry that’s pushed in *any* schools.

Is there hope for a *fairer tolerance* all around? Well, Harvard’s Graduate School of Education finds that 83 percent of its survey’s respondents say that they’d respect someone who disagrees with them, “as long as the person respected them back”. Sounds nice. But, is this response *real progress* toward *reasonable discussion* and *debate*, or is it only a *virtue signaling*, for one’s very own *ego gratification*? Well, these are only some examples of the dismal academic *immaturity* that already abounds in America these days. And, in terms of the trending, the college and university scene is only getting more restrictive of alternative viewpoints.

So, how *long* does it take to *grow up*? That depends on what's learned and put into good use in a *lifetime*, however long the life. One can continue to learn and put all of that, too, into good use so long as one is alert enough to be able to continue to learn and to recall what's learned. And if you're able to continue to keep on learning, you're able to put it into practice. Once you've moved beyond your ability to learn more, you may still be quite able to keep using what you're used to using, for yet some time to come.

Of course, *growing toward increasing maturity* takes more than merely the *passage* of time. Hours, days, years, and decades are merely the *sequences* for our *human development*, but they're not our *mentors*. We need to learn to put to *very good use whatever life experiences* we have, ours, and others', and to diligently and rationally interpret, so that we don't *waste* any significant lessons by either neglecting them or by rationalizing them away.

Being alert to learning what we need to learn requires learning that we may, at first, try *not* to learn. But trying *not* to learn what we really *should* try to learn does us no favor. Examining our own reasons, often expressed as *excuses*, can allow us freer access to what may be, indeed, *necessary* to learn. The more we resist learning what we think we *don't want* to know or what, off the top of our head, we don't *agree* with, can be a *clue* that we *should* pay at least some attention to learning at least a bit more *about* what we're "resisting" and *why* we're "resisting" it. It might well mean that we don't really know enough about "it" yet, to resist "it".

Obviously, it takes *a whole lot more to become mature* than to be, simply, officially, *counted* as an "adult" on one's 21st birthday. Birthdays *occur* in an *annual succession* over time that passes by.

To become increasingly *mature*, requires, in no particular order: *a lifetime of honest commitment, patience, flexibility, intelligent attention, rational thinking, wise intentionality, frank examination of one's own motives, truly serious efforts, realistic goals and expectations, a mental ability to work at recovering from life's inevitable disappointments, an ability to rightly refuse to rely on*

boasting of oneself and blaming others, empathic awareness and a serious willingness to identify with and cooperate with others, loving others and actively committing to a deeply serious spiritual growth for the absolutely most profound of all perspectives and confidence for the deepest sense of truthful, dependable and everlasting security, i.e., the deepest faith in, and love of, God.

Given such reasonable requirements for truly fruitful living, how disadvantaged students will be, if woke tutors get *their* way and provide them with nothing but what panders to immature whims of even these *still immature* tutors, themselves, in virtue-signaling in quest of more *ego applause, tenure and a safe, continuing salary!*

Just because one is *older*, doesn't mean one is any *wiser*, more *mature, relevantly informed, competent, honest* or even *decent*.

It's much like this, too, in the longer haul of *civilization's history* and, in particular, in the competition between conflicting cultural assumptions, philosophies, worldviews, and value systems, etc.

Maturity *can't* be defined by *labeling* a point of view as "up-to-date", to signal, it's, "true" and "useful", any more than by *labeling* a point of view as "out-of-date", means it's therefore, "false" and "useless". The *really true* and the *really false* sweep through *all* of the ages of humanity. That's why it's necessary to have a keenly *reliable* awareness of both *world history* and *American history*.

DNA-based evidence indicates that *we, on earth today, are all related to one another*. *We all descend* through these *latest forty* or so *generations* of *genetic* and *cultural* influences from *common ancestors*. Moving back in time, as a Yale statistician notes, "*All individuals* who have *any* descendants among the *present-day* individuals, are actually *ancestors* of *all* present-day individuals." Ponder *that*, if you *will* or *dare*, while reflecting on *all* of your daily interactions with, "the folks", i.e., *your long-lost kin, all around you*.

Unfortunately, in the latter half of the 20th Century and in these early decades of this 21st, Postmodernism pushes *dismissal* of the *best of all the rational wisdom* from the past and pushes *selective prioritizing* and *magnifying* of a *divisive relevance* to *racial, ethnic* and *gender identities*. How very much "of the moment", all this is!

But far deeper than all of this contemporary divisiveness, there's, *really*, a more *basic connection within our common humanity*.

In their ordering all of us to so quickly adopt radically different assumptions, values, priorities and paradigms toward a radical *reset* into *virtue-signaled* “progressivist” *redefinitions* of *maturity*, against all of the alleged “immaturity” of all of the past, these self-styled woke “progressivist revolutionaries” are, as such, *blinded by their own shortsightedness, unidentified, thus, unexamined* assumptions, prejudices, ignorance of actual history, their naïve expectations, values, customs, styles, standards, popular whims, fantasies, etc., and their own *absolutizing* of the *immediate*, that seriously threatens the foundations of the most valuable cultural heritage that *is*, indeed, our *Western* civilization, *the most truly progressive and most truly productive civilization in the entire history of the world*. And all of this *historical ignorance, fear and prejudice* is by the courtesy of *naïvely woke, Postmodernism*.

Today, in schools, K-12, the fundamental, indispensable “3 R’s” are relegated below the importance of increasingly irrational and inevitably harmful distractions, e.g., so-called “critical race theory”, setting up *internalized racist rivalries* between even the little kids, *premature transitioning* into very foolish responses to *prepubertal gender fantasies*, reminiscent of old “*ex-gay*” *hoaxes*, along with other former fads like that very harmful “*recovered memory*” *farce*. And I’ve seen clinical and social harm that’s been done by all of these come-and-go fads. It’s been tragic.

Now, this all struts under newer, yet still “progressive”, banners.

Fads rise, fail, fall and fade away as other fads, too, rise, fail, fall and fade away, but not before they’ve already done yet so much more damage to yet another generation caught up in all of the very newest, then passing, nonsense. Newer fads and fashions cram, squeeze and bully through ever rapidly-revolving doors of yet more unexamined “progressivisms”, that, although likewise doomed, if the past is even *suggestive* of what’s to come, do their damage in those *tender, formative years* of their victims. And, the damage can last for a lifetime, for, as always, with *unexamined*

fads, there'll be destructive contamination left behind to cause more pain for years ahead.

Writing in *Newsweek* for *Rosh Hashanah*, 2021, year 5782 in the Jewish calendar, Rabbi Yaakov Menken, was inspired by this Holy Day's traditional reflections and contemplation over how one "veered off course during the previous year". He saw that this self-reflecting time could also be as "opportune a time as any, to contemplate how we, as the American people, have recently strayed from our own covenant – specifically, our united dedication to the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

So, he notes the American Booksellers Association's calling its own "inclusion of an 'anti-transgender' title in a mailing, not merely worthy of apology, but a 'violent incident'". In another story", as the rabbi notes, "terrorists launching bombs attached to brightly colored balloons were recently described by the Associated Press as 'pro-Hamas activists.' Put together, these statements suggest that exposing adults to uncomfortable ideas is more barbaric and dangerous than trying to blow up Jewish children." Menken also cited Big Tech's "exploit[ing] its dominance to arbitrarily curate the content that most Americans are allowed to see. The leader of the free world was banned from Twitter both before and after the election, while both the Taliban and the ayatollahs of Iran use the platform as often as they desire. That Twitter, thus became America's *de facto* foremost promoter of terrorism and genocide, passed almost without notice", this noted Rabbi observes.

We need to *truly* wake up and recognize that, just because the years seem to go by at increasing speeds, in all of our lives, as individuals and as generations, even of entire cultures, doesn't mean that anyone becomes *any wiser* or *more mature*. Indeed, it's far more likely that we can all get *egomaniacally fixated* inside our *nearsightedness*, clinging to stupid, *self-centered* fantasies for *our selfish* purposes, or at least attempting to do so, while *alleging* that *ours* are simply, "sincerely good intentions for the welfare of all". Really? This all can end in our never really learning any

truer wisdom that was not only better *understood*, but *proved to be so very practical*, long before *we all* were born.

The *epitome* of *immaturity* is, *me, me, me* and *we, we, we*, as *up and over against, me* and *her* and *him* and *them* – and *Him!* *That's the pity!* And it's a selfish pit of hell. Sadly, it's been the *chosen way of the living dead* since Adam and Eve turned all of that gracious generosity, blooming in Eden's Garden, into their own tiny tent of ungrateful discontentment. And, ever since, *we've imitated* their disgruntled, ungrateful *immaturity*. *We are surely their descendants!*

Well, here *we* are, in this 21st year of this 21st century AD – a rare combination, albeit *arbitrarily* linked to *our cultural* imposition of “maturity” onto that number, “21”. Nonetheless, let's look into a few *facts, fallacies* and *meanings of maturity* and *immaturity* in our own *personal lives*, in the *life* of today's *world* and in *life, as such*.

As the *human race*, how are we doing these days, in terms of *maturity*? How are we, as *individuals*, doing in *this* regard? May we all be wise enough to take an honestly frank inventory of *our own* everyday lives and of life in general, in this, *our own lifetime!*

On each individual's level, one's *first two decades* of life *are felt, subjectively*, as absolutely, the very *longest* twenty years of one's *entire* life. Isn't that so, in your own experience before adulthood?

That's because *each year* of life is *personally experienced* in the *context* of *how long* we've lived *so far*. Thus, over the length of all of our years, *so far*, each additional year *seems* shorter, because each additional year really is *experienced* as a *relatively shorter span* of our *entire lifespan's* experience, *so far*. Got it?

And this same phenomenon of *experienced* time is there in our hourly and weekly experience of segments in the passage of time. What slows down or speeds up this sense of time's passage is influenced by whether and to what degree we're bored or in flow.

Recall *how l-o-n-g*, as kids, we had to *wait, frustrated, impatient*, from the day *after* Christmas until *next year's* Christmas *presents!*

Far more seriously, during the Covid-19 lockdowns and isolated from *in-person comradery* at school, there was an alarming uptick of suicidal ideation in *kids* – for whom the lockdowns were *felt* to be so much more *never-ending* than the adults *experienced* them. These suicidal thoughts increased by 24% in kids *under* 18 years of age during what were experienced as l-o-n-g weeks and l-o-n-g months *separated* from their in-person contact with classmates.

Think back to 20 years before today. That most recent 20-year span *doesn't seem* as long as the time it took to crawl from your crib to your college graduation, does it? Yet, the two stretches of time, from your crib to your college graduation, and from 9/11, 2001, to today, were exactly, the *very same number of years!*

So, *timewise*, your parents and you, as a little kid, *weren't in sync*. This explains a lot to you, as an adult, looking back. You and your parents *never did experience time the same way*, while you lived *together*, and later, in visits home, *together*. No wonder your Mom might have said at the end of each of your “too short” visits later on, “Oh, you have to leave, *now?* You just got here!”

Even with all of those childhood “naps”, “time-outs”, bored and impatient, we had *a lot to learn* through our *first* 20 years – as we were experiencing all of those *growing pains*, physically, mentally, academically, interpersonally, psychologically, sexually, morally, spiritually, etc. They're called “*formative years*” for good reasons! So, it's no wonder the years before we were, *legally*, adults, seem to have taken *soooo long* – back then and even now, *in memory*.

If old enough, we *can't forget* where we were on 9/11, that truly most terrible morning of unleashed evil. Its *stench* filled the air in New York City for many weeks. Still, today, of course, that acrid aftermath lingers in the lives of all of those who so suddenly, and without any warning at all, lost their precious loved ones to all of that evil Islamist loathing and lunacy.

Babies *born* in 2001 have now *graduated* from college, and as kids, *their* first two decades *crept by* for *them*, as *ours* once did.

Now, we may be *older* than we *feel*. So, we may wonder, as did Billy Graham, late in life, saying that, his *biggest shock in life* was

how *soon* he was so *old*. He lived to within 9 months of his 100th birthday, so, from *conception to his dying day*, he made it to 100!

We *experienced* pre-school and grade school as if *stuck* in time. “*When?*”, was our constant complaint. Yet, as years passed, we noticed that, *time was on the move*. As little kids, time goes by at, say, 5 miles an hour, hm? In our teens, maybe 10 miles an hour? In our 20s, time is going some 20 miles an hour (no matter what our speedometers say). In our 30s we’re doing 30 miles an hour. In our 40s, 40 miles an hour, and so on until, in our 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s? we’re speeding faster and faster and faster, and, we’re suddenly *shocked to suspect that, we’ll likely, “so soon”, crash!*

As we age, we *may try* to “adjust” our expectations. Yet, all of our well-intentioned “adjustments” really *don’t* ever quite prepare us for what we’ve *not* “learned” since our *having* “grown up” at 21!

As those Pilgrims were experiencing their real-life challenges in their newfound habitat in the Dawn Lands of 1621, back across the Atlantic, a Catholic priest, later to be known as, *Saint Vincent de Paul*, served as a chaplain to the galley slaves imprisoned at Marseilles. He, himself, had been kidnapped and enslaved by Moslem pirates who plied the vulnerable Mediterranean coasts to *capture and enslave* “infidel” peasants, i.e., the Christians, so that these *hateful* abductors could “earn the pleasure of *Allah*”.

One of Vincent’s insights – learned from *his* life and the lives of *others* – he, thoughtfully, left behind for *us* to contemplate: “What is to endure for a long time is slowest to reach *maturity*.” He then added, with his trust in God: “All comes at the *proper* time to those who know *how* to wait.” And, the very best *way to wait* is to *wait with God!* If we wait with our faith in our faithful God, *we can fully afford to be patient*.

We’re reminded of what those Pilgrims’ pastor, John Robinson, shared with them when he bid them Godspeed on their voyage to the New World. He said: “I am verily persuaded that, the Lord hath *yet more truth, to break forth out of His Holy Word.*” So true!

Well, the stupidest of *immature* expectations, although, it’s quite common when we’re young, is: “*Yippy! I’ll be an adult at 21!*”.

“What?”, an old man smirks, “You kidding?” “OK”, the pre-21-year-old quickly admits, to sound more mature, then, impatiently, asks, “But, if not, *then, when?*”, repeating his frustrated tantrums from preschool. “Well,” that old man replies, “Just you *wait*, just you *listen*, and *live*, and *learn that waiting won’t always be so irritating.*” That old man could have “saved his breath to cool his porridge”, as our pastor, Maurice Boyd, so very often reminded us in that fine Irish brogue of his.

Still, let’s put all of the *necessary time and intelligence* into *moving toward more maturity by growing as best we can, all along the way!*

...It was on Friday, February 19, 1960, a *leap* year, that I *leapt eagerly, and officially*, into “adulthood”. On that same day, Prince Andrew was born to Queen Elizabeth II and China launched a rocket that reached an altitude of *five miles*.

Now Prince Andrew is accused in a Jeffrey Epstein rape case though, it’s thought that, by a technicality and perhaps some money, it’ll be settled soon. A still hostile Chinese Communist regime has now test-launched a nuclear-capable hypersonic missile that circled the globe. A China expert says it came as China was waging its “malicious” propaganda against the US, “laying the justification for an *attack.*” His concern is that, “Beijing will someday take a clueless political class in Washington by surprise.”

An evil world still plots its way into *sex scandals* of immaturity and deadly *wars* of immaturity. “Way to go, *world ‘maturity’!*”

Well, back there, on my 21st birthday in 1960, when I, myself, arrived at “maturity” so-called, I was a senior at Bowling Green State University in my home state of Ohio. I was about to fly down to Dallas, Texas, to take a look at Dallas Theological Seminary to continue my education there.

During my visit, I met with a student I’d known before, and with his DTS friends, who’d later become my friends, too, at DTS. We dined at a popular “grown-up” restaurant, Trader Vic’s & Tiki Bar,

under “Big D’s” bright skyline with its famous red horse, *Pegasus*, flying high atop the city’s first skyscraper.

Since, at 21, I’m so “*mature*”, I buy, and bring back, a little tin of chocolate coated *ants* for my Bowling Green dormmates to enjoy.

Back at BGSU, and for fun, prior to our indulging in these little candy-coated crispy critters, I say *nothing* about *what* they are. So, there we are, all chatting away and chewing the candy, when one of the guys spots the label on the little tin and he shouts out: “Yikes! We’re eatin’ *ants!*”. Some of us find it *hilarious* – this little vignette of my arrival into *maturity*, as I’m anticipating my BGSU graduation day in June and my going on to *grad* school in the fall.

Down at Dallas Seminary in my first few weeks there, fellow students planned a little vignette of their own *on me*. And they all, likewise, were 21 *or even, older*, and *all*, too, *were now graduate students!*

They suggested that we take an evening’s stroll for ice cream. When we got back to the dorm, I opened the door to my dorm room and I found that it was now totally *empty*. Not one stick of furniture was under all of the many unrolled toilet paper strands draped from the ceiling. My fellow grad students all laughed their heads off. And then, they all pitched in, to retrieve all my furniture from other rooms down the hall, and they ripped down all of the toilet paper streamers. “Maturity” can be such fun!

But some take *many more years* than others do to reach *truer maturity* – *if, they ever do*. Some, so very sadly, never seem to.

On *Easter Sunday*, 1960, two months after I turned 21, as racial *integration* was being *supported by at least some whites* in the South, Bob Jones University’s founder, Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., chose to preach his *Easter Sunday* sermon *for racial segregation and against racial integration*. His sermon was called, “Is Segregation Scriptural?” He loudly insisted that the Bible calls for *racial segregation*. So, he chose to *displace Easter Sunday’s* focus on *Jesus’ Resurrection* with a death rattled *defense of racial segregation*. In so doing, he “biblically” abused all Southern blacks *and* the Bible.

Ironically, to do it, he also had to *contradict* two of his own most popular sayings from his, *Dr. Bob Says* list: “Do Right!” and “Don’t sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate!” *Doing right* surely means doing what’s *truly biblical*, e.g., the Golden Rule’s *loving others as we love ourselves*, and our praying, “Thy Kingdom come *on earth* as it is *in Heaven*”, etc. Did he *really* picture Heaven as *racially segregated*? He threw away what’s *permanent*, “on the altar of the immediate”, for his *Jim Crow era* was *already on its way out*, and *the truly integrated Kingdom of Heaven is what’s permanent*.

And, he did this, on *Easter Sunday*! Apparently, he was so *hell-bent* to defend his own *inherited racist culture*, that he had no more *relevant a topic* for an *Easter Sunday*’s sermon than his *racist rant*. It was a *tragic lack of Christian maturity* even in 1960, by an Alabaman born in 1883.

Yet, we all can be just as self-righteously stubborn in our own entrenched immaturity in all sorts of our own very favorite ways.

I didn’t *hear* that “Easter” sermon *in person*, for I’d already left BJU, to continue my college education and then to graduate from BGSU, that very spring. And I’m thankful I didn’t have to hear it.

After Dr. Bob Sr. died in 1968 and Dr. Bob Jr. died in 1997, Dr. Bob III, BJU’s *third* president, for yet 5 more years, announced in 2000, though he did so under duress, that “BJU was wrong in not admitting African-American students before 1971”. Yet he passed the buck, saying simply: “It sadly, was a common practice of both public and private universities in the years prior to that time”. He also then discarded BJU’s “policy against interracial dating”.

In 2015, Dr. Bob III *finally* apologized for what he said was his “reckless” calling for *the stoning of homosexuals 35 years before*.

Even the most stubborn, *change if need be*. They may even *mature*. But these changes made by Dr. Bob III would have been too “compromising” of “Bible standards” for his old grandpa.

In that fall of 1960, with a few of my new fellow students at Dallas Seminary, we, sent our President-elect, John F. Kennedy,

a congratulatory telegram from the very readily at hand Dallas Seminary business office, as 1960 was far too early for emails!

Well, cluelessly *immature*, as we DTS novices were, we were very quickly reprimanded for conveying an impression that *Dallas Seminary endorsed a Roman Catholic* for President. But to *us*, JFK was a war hero, articulate Senator, and, now, *our President*.

Having had good Catholic friends as I grew up in my hometown, in my neighborhood and at school in the 1940s and 1950s, and as I was an avid viewer of Bishop Sheen's TV program, I was *not* at all prepared for this raw *anti-Catholicism* at Dallas Seminary.

Three years later, in grad school at USC, as I was walking from the university's campus to downtown Los Angeles, I passed the *Herald Examiner's* parking lot and I noticed the rush to load piles of extra editions into cars and vans. Then, I saw the headlines announcing that President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas.

In 1999, Dallas Seminary celebrated its 75th anniversary, and guess what? A *Roman Catholic*, Bill Bennett, the US Secretary of Education, was the invited *special guest speaker* at this big DTS 75th celebration! Clearly, since 1960, DTS had had a change of administrators, even of policy, yet it still held to the evangelical theology of its 1924 founders, though, *this Dispensationalist* brand of evangelicalism originally emerged just a century before, after some two millennia of Christianity's overall history.

Well, institutions can and do change – as BJU and DTS did – by either becoming more, or even less, mature. Changes are made when it's thought there's more to be *gained* by changing than *not*.

As DTS honored Bennett, predictably, *other* Christians labeled it a "trespass". It was self-righteously *denounced* by anti-Catholic Fundamentalists for *their own perceived* in-house "advantages".

Today, Greg Epstein, author of *Good Without God*, is a chaplain at Puritan-founded Harvard. As a proud "*progressive atheist*", he claims: "We don't look to a god for answers. We are each other's answers". Oh? One might ask: "As were Adam and Eve to each other, '*each other's answers*' in jointly rebellious self-delusions?"

So, Epstein's boast is, as such, not "progressive" at all. It's just every bit as *primeval*, as "old fashioned", if you will, as what was so tragically concocted under *that self-deluded self-centeredness* in Eden. And, its fruit is no less bitter than what *they* swallowed. And it's certainly not what John Robinson meant when he assured those embarking Pilgrims that, "the Lord hath *yet more truth, to break forth out of His Holy Word.*"

Harvard claims that, in Epstein, it's simply serving the *religiously unaffiliated* by offering them, an *atheist* chaplain. So, this *claim* supports the fact that neither Epstein, nor his so-called "religiously unaffiliated" students, nor anyone else, *is ever actually religiously unaffiliated!* *All are worshippers!* But, *worshippers* of *what* or of *whom?* There's never any getting around *worshipping*, whether we worship *ourselves, stuff, others, atheism, rationalizing of our defensiveness, gods and goddesses or God, Almighty, Himself.*

Since my own 21st year, my life has continued to be a series of adventures and experiences, both less and more challenging, but each has been an *opportunity* for further maturity, both by way of wiser and unwise choices, a not unusual mix for all of our *growing into yet more maturity.*

And, it's been that way through my transferring from DTS up to Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, then through my graduating from the University of Southern California's Grad School, and my year on the Inter-Varsity staff at the University of Pennsylvania before I was *not reappointed* for the following year due to my *supportive* views on homosexuality. I then moved to Penn State's religious affairs staff for just a year to fill in for a chaplain on leave and I stayed on at Penn State' Grad School to do my doctoral research into the etiology and the mental health approaches to homosexual orientation and life. I graduated from Penn State University in 1971.

While finishing my doctoral dissertation, I'd already moved to New York City to be the Director of Counseling at City University's college in downtown Brooklyn, now known as CUNY's City Tech.

From my office window, looking across the Brooklyn Bridge, I saw the Twin Towers being erected in Lower Manhattan and certainly never imagined they'd be gone just three decades later.

I founded The Homosexual Community Counseling Center (50 years ago this year) and *The Homosexual Counseling Journal* and began my private practice of psychotherapy, individual and groups, to help same-sex couples put together and build a life with each other, a rationally monogamous partnership on firm foundations of mutual attraction, shared basic values, and the skills required for rational teamwork, as well as all of the other psychological challenges of daily life.

In 1975, I founded Evangelicals Concerned to better inform gay and lesbian evangelicals, their families and the wider evangelical world, of a *truly biblically-affirming understanding and acceptance of same-sex attraction and committed same-sex partnership*.

I've taught our weekly EC Bible studies and annual winter Bible studies, written our EC quarterlies, *review* and *Record*, and our essays, booklets and keynotes for EC's conferences, to which we've invited important evangelical leaders as *guest* speakers.

Our EC guest keynoters at summer ConnECTIONS since 1980, annually in the East and, for many years in both the West and the Midwest as well, have been, in alphabetical order:

John F. Alexander, Kori Ashton, Randall Balmer, Beverly Barbo, Clark Barshinger, Mary Kay Beall, Melanie Beechey, Mary V. Borhek, John Bostrom, R. Maurice Boyd, Jane Bradbury, Ptah Brown, James V. Brownson, Patricia Burgin, Michael Bussee, Peggy Campolo, Tony Campolo, Matthew Carden, Holly Chaisson, Michael J. Christiansen, Mary Franzen Clark, Cynthia Clawson, Val Clear, Roy Clements, Gary Cooper, Carol Ann Vaughn Cross, Virginia West Davidson, Donald W. Dayton, Jane R. Dickie, Daniel Dobson, Ron Drummond, Jerushah Duford, Kyle Duford, Anne Eggebrotten, J. Harold Ellens, Elise Elrod, Jan Evans, Reta Halteman Finger, Jeff Ford, Darlene Franklin, Nelson Gonzales, June Steffenson Hagen, Alex J. Haiken, Jeanne Hanson, Nancy Hardesty, Hendrik Hart, Phyllis Hart, Walt Hearn, Walden Howard, Fisher Humphreys, Deanna Jawarski, Shari Johnson, Tom Key, Todd Komarnicki, Roberta Showalter Kreider, Ling Lam, Stacey Latimer, Justin Lee, Kay Lindskoog, John Linscheid, Patricia V. Long, Jim Lucas, Chip Miller, Douglas J. Miller, Nancy Miller, Jeremy Marks, Ken Medema, Virginia R. Mollenkott, Jenny Morgan, David G. Myers, Theresa McClellan, Diana McLean, Kathy Olsen, Joan Olson, Mark Olson, Gerald Palmer, Mildred Pearson, Ann Phillips, Amy Plantinga Pauw, Jared Porter, Gayla R. Postma, Ann M. Quick, Jim Rayburn III, Howard L. Rice, Marchiene Rienstra, Rosalind

Rinker, Linda Robertson, Stanley A. Rock, Jack Rogers, Ruth Rus, Stephanie Sandberg, Abigail Santamaria, Letha Dawson Scanzoni, Evelyn Schave, Ken Sehested, Nancy Hastings Sehested, Charlie Shedd, Gerald T. Sheppard, Mahan Silar, Caroline J. Simon, Steve Slagg, Lewis B. Smedes, Chuck Smith, Jr., Pamela Warwick Smith, Marsha Stevens, Kirk Talley, James Tinney, Miguel de la Torre, Sandra Turnbull, Ken Van Wyck, Mary Lou Wallner, Nick Warner, Mel White, Nicholas Wolterstorff.

EC's ministry supports the building of a *mature integration* of an evangelical faith and same-sex orientation through faithful same-sex partnership or, if one chooses, in celibacy.

For many years before EC, I'd critiqued the "ex-gay" hoaxes as psychologically baseless and harmful, as well as biblically illiterate and contrary to Jesus' Golden Rule about loving all others as we love ourselves. EC continues to be a conduit for the support and publishing of that same message these days.

Significantly and happily, I'm still good friends with a few of my classmates from our days at BJU, DTS and WTS, though I'm no longer in contact with classmates from BGSU, USC or PSU.

What we, as Christians, have in common in Christ, is far more fundamentally intimate and mutually encouraging than what we, nonetheless, do have in common with our non-Christian friends. *Most* of my BJU, DTS, and WTS friends support EC's aims and seem to like what else I share with them, although one or two are not on the same page on the matters of homosexuality. Still, as an old DTS friend, referring to other DTS alumni, informs me, our EC material is, as he puts it, from his own awareness, "read in many closets across the country". And even much younger DTS contacts have been encouraged by our EC material and connect with us from time to time for their own working with gay Christians whom they see in their own pastoral ministries.

Well, here *we all* are, among the few in all of human history to reach this 21st year of this 21st Century AD! We'll soon be moving from this milestone year, to begin the 22nd year of the 21st Century AD. And, for all of us, it's all still going at a still faster clip, isn't it?

Have we all gotten *more mature as adults* in our 21st year of this 21st Century AD? *If so, how so? If not, why not?* Think about it.

As it was at 21, 31, or 51, and so on up the timeline, will we, as individuals, *ever grow-up?* Surely, we'll *never "grow up" truly, this side of our Eternal Home with God.*

But we're *here, for now, in the meantime, and called to live as we're meant to live, here and now, in this still, very mean time, a still, immature time, in so many ways.* What else could we expect in a *fallen* world such as ours is, as it has been, ever since Eden?

So, in *our years in the 20th Century and in these earliest years of this 21st, don't expect humanity on the whole, to become really any more whole, any holier, even in this very most advantaged nation in all of history.* Don't expect folks to be *really any wiser, truly any more mature, actually any more loving, in the here and now, for, we're all, together, fallen, in this, our fallen world!* Our righteousness is in Christ's gift of *His righteousness.* We're called to follow Him and, in doing so, *to become more faithful followers.*

As those with faith in God, Who so loved all of the people of this fallen world that, in Love, He gave His only Son Who *sacrificed himself, to die in our place, to redeem us from our sinful selves, we can surely and thankfully, receive His Love and, thus, be more loving here and now on earth.* The *more seriously we take God's Love for us and for all, the more we truly can afford to be more loving to all! But, without His Love, we can't; we don't; we won't.* With His Love, we *can.* The question for us, is this: *What, do we do about our calling to love God and others as we love ourselves?* If we're dithering, we need to know, dithering is not God's calling.

Broken humanity *can't fix what we broke* in turning our backs on God, our generous, loving Creator, by Whom, alone, we can live.

Reconciliation over our sin must be *accomplished.* And it was and is, by the One Who is our Creator and the One Who is our Redeemer, that faithful Son, who *accomplished* it for us, there on the cross. Nailed to that cross, Jesus pronounced, once and for all, *"It's finished!"* (John 19:30) *Done!* The *Good News* is this: At the cross, on that day we call, *"Good Friday"*, our own *deep debt* was paid by Jesus' own *deep death.* This is the *Good News!*

It's in *this confidence, this faith in the Faithful One*, that we can so fully afford to be faithful to Him in His call to proceed as sinners saved by God's grace and by *nothing else*. Zwingli put our faithful follow-up to all of this, so plainly, so pastorally: "Our confidence in Christ *awakens* us, urging us to live right and to do what's good. No *self-confidence* can compare with this." And, that's for sure!

But a *proud self-confidence* is so popularly, but so pointlessly, peddled by "*self-help*" *gurus* nowadays. Gullibly and repeatedly, people try to *muster it up*, all on their own, and fail to make even a *start*, much less *master* it, for all of these attempts are by a *self-motivation*, the bane of "*self-help*". Our motivation is cluttered by *mixed* motives, but God's motivation is the *singularity* of His Love.

Increasingly, fewer Americans are being reared with the Bible's Good News. And it's the sad case all across the rest of the West, and in the rest of the world, where *rival religions*, Islamism and atheism, etc., dogmatically and ruthlessly, rule entire cultures.

Here, now, in America, church *membership* has fallen below 50%, impacting both *spiritual* and *social* life. The Barna Group finds that, while in 2011, 43 percent of Americans reported that they attended church each week, by February, 2020, the number had decreased 14 percentage points to 29 percent.

It's no wonder so many churches have lost members since so many churches have lost their *will* to preach the Saving Grace of God and what God so lovingly did for us, in Christ, at Calvary.

There's no point to *lament all the empty pews* in *those buildings* where *no Gospel* is preached. But we must *truly lament* over the *few who do still sit there, but never hear the Good News*. They hear, *there*, what's easily heard from everyday *secular* sources, so there's no need to get up early on Sunday mornings to hear it.

Rituals of virtue signals of *pride* in rainbow flags, rainbow stoles, BLM banners, politically correct CRT seminars as substitutes for Bible studies, and abortion promotion that deceptively ignores all of the science and all of those sacred lives of the pre-born, are what "modernist" churches offer. And, the louder the "modernist"

clergy shout their slogan, “*Shout your abortion!*”, the louder they shout their very own *guilty repression* of the truth that they fear to face or reveal, for fear of being cancelled by their woke comrades.

Do they hear a still small voice pleading, “Mommy, I’m *not* what you call, *your* body, I’m *me!*” But, for years after her abortion, an awareness of an absence may be felt in mourning. Moreover, *in her aborting her baby*, she’s also turning over her own future’s eldercare to *strangers*, who surely *won’t* lovingly care for her as a grateful daughter or a grateful son would have cared for her.

But *stubborn is stubborn*, and “progressive” churches fear their loss of *woke cred* if they’re less “progressive” than their rivals up the street, for there are too few parishioners to go around for them all. So, for cheap *wokeness sake*, for *worthless cred*, for paying salaries and other bills, they can’t afford to do or to be, otherwise.

Yet, all these self-centered claims to *wokeness*, *avoid*, and thus, *void*, any *true* awareness of a deep and refreshing walk with God as was known by those “un-woke” folk, so *wonderfully awakened* to the Gospel’s Good News in all of the *evangelical Awakenings* across this country and around the world in centuries past.

Instead of getting to the *Heart* of the Matter of Who truly does matter most, regarding what’s really so woefully *wrong* with us all, to *hear* the Good News we’ve been called to receive, believe and proclaim, postmodernist “piety” is *stranded in self-righteously self-signaled* “social justice” warfare that folks *try* to claim to save themselves, by themselves, but it’s all to no *real* avail.

Postmodernist Protestantism emerged from the old “modernist” liberalism of Unitarianism. In 1960, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote insightfully of the stinking *leftovers* of Unitarian triteness, stating: “Liberalism’s superficial optimism concerning human nature caused it to overlook the fact that reason is darkened by sin. ... Liberalism failed to see that reason, by itself, is little more than an instrument to justify man’s defensive ways of thinking.”

But now, if you’re *white* and *conservative*, and *revere* Dr. King and *quote* him, *watch out* for a *hostile woke attack* from a self-styled “antiracism” guru, who now calls himself, Ibram X. Kendi.

His own racism shows up when, as he did again, in The Atlantic, this October, he attacks those who cite Dr. King's inspiring lines, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

According to Kendi, we who revere those famous words from Dr. King in his "I Have a Dream" speech, are all, his "modern day assassins"! We, of course, recall those words from his historic speech at the Lincoln Memorial on August 28th, 1963 – two full decades *before* Kendi was even born, let alone was old enough to *experience* what Dr. King knew from his experience and what went into his created his wonderful dream for the future.

What more *mature* dream can any loving father, of any race, have for *his* children and for *all* children! But today's "antiracism" rhetoric so proudly puts the emphasis on *color before character* and that has made a *terrible* difference in so many *terrible* ways.

Today's *woke*, including the *woke* religionists, give expressions of that *defensiveness* of Liberalism's superficiality that Dr. King so rightly found so very offensive, six decades ago.

The *woke still reject the Gospel*, refusing to see it as the very *deepest* answer to all of humanity's sinful ways – including, the sin of racism. So, the "religiously" *woke* cling to the only thing that they have to hang onto, yet, as it's so *flimsy* and so *unstable as it's in constant revisioning*, with other intrinsic disadvantages, it's much worse than worthless. Their clinging is so *desperately insecure*, since whatever's *woke* today might not be *woke* at all tomorrow, so it's all such a *shaky* deal, so *unstable*, and that's *distressing* to all who, for their own reputations, fear that they might take a misstep and fall short of *woke*. They "need" always to be, up to date, on the very cutting edge of "politically correct".

In defensiveness, the "religiously" *woke assault* the Bible, trying to pick and choose for *their own* purposes, alleged "proof texts" to "prove" the Bible's *wrong*. But, as the *woke* "religionists" majored in *wokeness* in their *woke* seminaries and got very little training, if any, in any rigorous biblical exegesis, it's all done to no avail, not

only because, what the woke are looking for, precisely, can't be found in the Bible, but because *their* problem is *not* with the Bible, as such, for *their* problem is in *themselves* and *their own agenda*.

How can the woke *claim* to have *answers* to what's all so wrong with *us all*, when they keep on tripping up over all of their woke *self-centeredness*, *self-sired anxieties*, and their *hurt* feelings that *they bring onto themselves* by *personalizing* what others say that they *can't refute*, for they, themselves, suspect it, but can't admit it. Thus, they vent their *vindictive resentment* and then, *revenge* in *desperate* blaming and boasting, for they're sure that so much more than *their slips are showing!* And, predictably, others don't appreciate any of this resentment and revenge, so, *they retaliate*.

All these useless defenses are but frustrated hissy fits, *inflated, but still limp*. They try to "cancel" all who *stump* them, against whom they have no *rational* way of escape from their own *self-deluded entrapments* and their unintentionally set *felt failures to rationally wrestle and win* in all of these deepest issues at stake. *Their self-centered and self-justified excuses* in *immaturity* and *uncertainty*, not to mention their fretting over fears of losing face, all fail to deliver the true redemption that they profoundly do need.

So, stumbling into their cycles of fear, frustration, and anger, they try to take it out on those whom they suspect might be *right*, but they *need*, so frantically, so frustratingly, to see as *all wrong*, as *not woke*, while yet *fearing* that those "unwoke" *might be right!* What a *predicament!* Yet, what an *opportunity* for an *awakening!*

Woke is a *constantly aggravating and internal rivalry* between a sensed *insecurity in self-awareness* and a sensed *insecurity in self-pretentious responses to God's gift of that self-awareness*.

There's this troubling, yet truly *divinely gifted awareness* that, *something's not right in me*. It's God's call to come Home to the gifted maturity that was rejected and lost, *back in the beginning*.

It's *everyone's worry about one's self*. Whether defined in quite *superficial* ways to try to get on top of it all, politically, socially, financially, etc., or it's sensed in the *most intimately and deeply rooted supernatural* ways, in which case, self-centered temptation

abounds to *suppress* it by one's continuing with *self-righteous rationalizing* in anxious denial and dishonest subterfuge.

This latest effort – “wokeness” – is but yet another version of a constantly *self-righteous human temptation* to publicly “grieve” for *oneself* and push one's own way into control over others, to better suit one's self – yet, to no one's satisfaction, much less, to *joy*.

Yet, *truest maturity, wisdom and love*, are *rooted* in *God's Truth*. From *that Truth*, the *truth of all else*, including all of the *truth* about ourselves and this world, is to be derived, discerned and digested.

What we must ask *as Christians*, instead of trying to be *the final judges of ourselves and others*, is this: “How mature are we in *our own* allegedly Christian lives, *today*?” Are *our lives “our own” or Christ's to own*? They *should be Christ's own, now and forever!*

Herman Bavinck, passed into Jesus' nearer presence 100 years ago. He'd observed that, among Christians: “There is so much narrow-mindedness, so much pettiness among us, and the worst thing is that this is regarded as piety.” Although, as Christians, we don't have a *monopoly* on such *self-righteousness*, he was honest enough to acknowledge *our part* in this farce of fallen humanity.

The more we *understand ourselves*, the more we'll be able to *understand others*, for we have much more in common with them than we like to admit, especially with reference to those “we can't stand”. What we “*can't stand*” in *them*, undoubtedly reminds us of what *we really can't stand in us* – whether it's what *embarrasses* us about *our sense of us* or it's what we *envy* in our *fantasies of them*, that we *so selfishly, and so foolishly, covet*. Without a close and abiding walk with God, we're still such a mess of multifaceted myopia, selfishly seeking our shortsighted, even deadly delusions instead of *loving others in the love by which we're loved by God*.

What *embarrasses us* is *our experience of our sense of falling short of our self-centered fantasies* for ourselves. What *should embarrass us* is our falling *far short of God's gifted purpose* in creating us for relationship of lovingkindness with Him and with one another. We need to *wake up* to this, our *real problem!*

Our envy of others is always our story, not another's story, of which we're experientially ignorant. As I've repeatedly said, our own versions of us and our versions of others are all inside our own solitary brain cells. Their versions of us and their versions of them are all inside their own solitary brain cells. Our brain cells never leak into theirs and theirs never leak into ours.

So, let's stop with all of our foolish projections and our foolish introjections and use our heretofore dull numbskulls to far better advantage through more rational and biblically realistic insight – for our own welfare and for the welfare of all others.

With faith in God and with more reasonable thinking, we can get over our stupid misuse of our self-centered sense of “self” and our stupid envy of our stupid versions of “others”. We can then drop our stupid excuses for our versions of us, and drop our stupidly useless blaming of them, so as to be of some real help to them and some real help to ourselves, while treating all of them better.

We can't see their sense of self. They can't see our sense of self. So, why do we so self-consumedly, waste any precious time distracting ourselves with our stupid extrapolations in all of these cases? Let's stop reinforcing all of our pointless projecting and pointless posturing. We need to wise up and grow up into better touch with reality and more maturity instead of wasting even more of our precious, limited time, and others' time, too, with our own immaturity! Such a waste of time does no good at all for anyone.

Remember, time is a nonrenewable resource. We're fools to waste time on our self-obsessing foolishness instead of doing what's truly worth this precious time we're given, responding in love to God with thanksgiving and in loving others as we love ourselves. That's what we're called, by God, to do, for our good and for the good of others, with this precious time that we're so graciously given by God. Let's use it to the true advantages of all.

What we think of us and what we think of others is out-of-focus inside our brains and theirs. But it's all perfectly in full focus from God's Point of View. So, let's pay attention to His revealed views.

The *mature focus* for us is to focus on what God's Word tells us of what *we are* and what *we should be*, and how *we should love one another, whoever the others are and wherever the others are* in *their* experience, without our expecting *any reciprocity* from any we foolishly envy and cluelessly crave something of theirs, for us.

The better we understand *us, in the perfect love by which we're loved by God, in Christ*, the better we'll be able to let go of all of our own *foolishly immature, counterproductive envy, coveting, and hurting of our own feelings, feeling sorry for ourselves for not being entangled up in the mess that's behind that fantasy we so miserably miss. And then we blame what we think we're missing on others* who, then, in their *resentment* of our resenting them, *retaliate* in kind. *Such immaturity!* Let's gratefully pass God's love, *from Him, through us, to all* whom God likewise loves and for whom, too, He gave his life, in Christ, to save. *Be part of that!*

In passing God's love along, there's always *more love* from God *for us* to pass along to them and, thus *we mature* in God's love to *us*. We must realize, lest we set ourselves up for really pointless frustration and needless exhaustion, that, the Love of God that *we share is given to us by God to share* with one another. Let's do it!

Well, in *concluding* our overview of this *long and constantly stumbling trek toward sinful humanity's ever meager moving to "maturity" of any kind, and not overlooking humanity's still ever-stumbling self-righteousness*, let's look back into ancient biblical history at a glimpse of what, from those early days, was foreseen for the future, for example, by Abraham, in his reasoning with God, so far above petty wokeness, that *justice and mercy* would finally come through, by way of *God's always, now and forever sovereign providence and loving provision. Thank God for that!*

Abraham, in pleading with God for God's mercy on the people of Sodom, reasoned with God, knowing that God is, indeed, both *Just and Merciful*, and that, His *truly absolute justice* must be *truly tempered by absolute mercy*. Abraham carefully, so respectfully, said to God: "Far be it from You to do a thing such as punishing

the righteous in Sodom along with the unrighteous. Far be it from You to destroy them all! Will not the Judge of all the earth do what's right?" And God does not push back against Abraham's clear and reasoning faith and trust, that God will always do what is *most right, both just and merciful*. (Gen 18:25)

This deep sense of *justice and mercy* has been available to the awareness of even fallen humanity all along, as it's been put, for instance, in the Latin phrase, "*summum jus, summa injuria*", "*extreme justice is extreme injustice*".

God called on Abraham again, not long after that interchange between Abraham and God on mercy and justice for the folks in Sodom, but, quite significantly, *after* Abraham had seen, in his sojourning among the Philistines, *their lack of any awe of God*.

God called: "Abraham!", and Abraham immediately and faithfully replied, "Here I am." God said: "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go up to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a sacrifice on a mountain that I will show you." (Gen 22:1f) Abraham didn't resist God's instruction. He didn't try to change God's Mind. He didn't replay his previous approach, "Far be it for You to command such a thing." He trusted that God well knew what He was saying and that God was to be fully trusted.

We read that, Abraham, early that very next morning, started on his journey to Mount Moriah, with his dearly beloved son, Isaac, in tow. He did it in faithful compliance and without second-guessing God, but with full faith in God's wisdom and love.

When, after three days, Abraham and Isaac, along with their servants, arrived at Moriah, Abraham told the servants to remain behind, saying, "The boy and I will go over there to worship, and then we will return to you." "*We*" reveals Abraham's faith in God.

Abraham had brought wood for the burnt offering and gave it to Isaac to carry. He himself carried the fire and the sacrificial knife. Then at the site for the sacrifice, Isaac said to his father, "My father!" "Here I am, my son," he replied. "The fire and the wood are here," Isaac noted, "but *where is the lamb* for burnt offering?"

Abraham answered, with faith in God, “God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”

So, Abraham built the altar and arranged the wood on it. He then *began his binding* of his son Isaac to be placed on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham then reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. But, *just then*, the Angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “*Abraham! Abraham!*” He replied, “Here I am.” The Angels said: “Don’t lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you are in awe of God, since you have not withheld *your only son* from Me.”

Abraham looked up and he saw a ram in a thicket behind him, caught by its horns. So, he went and took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering *in place of his son*. And Abraham called that place ‘The Lord Will Provide’.” Indeed, the Lord *did provide*.

Then the angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven, “By Myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, for you have not withheld your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will multiply your descendants like the stars in the sky and the sand on the shore. ... Through your offspring all nations of the earth will be blessed, for you obeyed My voice.” (Gen 22)

According to Talmudic sages, Isaac’s killing was never, as such, intended. There’s no doubt they’re right, for *all are sinners* and, *no sinner’s death can absolve another’s sins*. Abraham seems to have assumed this when he answered Isaac’s question, “Where is the lamb?”, by saying, “God Himself will provide the lamb.”

Again, this year, in September, 2021, the shofar, a ram’s horn, was blown to summon Jews to repentance at Rosh Hashanah, recalling that Divine Intervention of God there at Mount Moriah.

In God’s Providence, when the right time had finally come, after yet another 20 centuries from Abraham and Isaac, and once again, there at Mount Moriah, God, the Father, Himself, provided the Lamb of God, in God, the Son, to take away *the sins of the world*, where *Justice and Mercy* met in *Christ’s own sacrifice of Himself*.

He had said, “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life, that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own accord.” (John 10:17f) And, he *did* lay it down of *his own* accord – contrary to the unbiblical accusations in anti-Semitic slurs against all Jews throughout history, accusing *them* of being, “Christ killers”. No. He laid down his life for our lives, forever.

Then, because Jesus died for us, his resurrection from the dead came three days after his crucifixion. By him and in him, we too, shall be raised from death.

Jesus’ crucifixion and his resurrection were the bottom lines on the entire history of humanity’s *sinful rebellion in willful immaturity*. God was there as always, “In the beginning, *God!*” (Gen 1) *God* is ever present. *God* is the Alpha and Omega, the *Beginning* and the *Fulfillment* of our lives – all of that, *in Him*, our merciful and righteous, *Creator and Redeemer Who saves us from our sinful fall into immaturity to Maturity through His indwelling us and in our resurrection to Eternal Life in God’s Eternal Love*. Amen.