

August 2

Last week the Democratic National Committee appointed Rev. Brenda Peterson to reach out to faith groups. Republicans are seeking church mailing lists. Some politicians speak from pulpits, a questionable practice under IRS laws...unless Congress passes a law introduced to allow church politicking.

When politicians troll in churches for votes, you hear religious words bent to political purposes. Justice, love, hope, biblical quotations...Even sincere speakers unconsciously mold divine truths like silly putty to suit their immediate purposes.

Back to the basics. Just before His ascension, Jesus summed up the Bible, His ministry, and the church's task: "The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations" (Luke 24:46-47). How many politicians prowling churches for votes are going to give their whole speech to that central biblical message? When you, weary from the week, struggling with your own issues, plop down into a pew, do you want to hear a political message from your pastor that masquerades as a word from God? Yes, a faith that is intellectually active follows the political scene...but such a faith also treasures Jesus' words to a Roman politician, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

August 3

"Deliver us from evil." That's a sound byte prayer, perfectly suited for these days.

Specific terrorist threats...detailed and disturbing...were reported Sunday. Terrorists counted how many pedestrians walk past one building every minute. Terrorists worried their explosives might not melt steel enough to bring down a building. Terrorists scoped out security checkpoints in buildings, even noting that most people turned left when they cleared security. Terrorists noted the degree of slant on garage floor, the size of doors, and terribly much more.

"Deliver us from evil." This sound byte is prayed to a specific God. It's not like people shouting out, "Oh my God!" when something terrible happens. "Deliver us from evil" is not shouted in shock to some generic God but prayed by believing children to "Our Father who art in heaven." ...to the Father who made us and assures us of His love in the Bible. ...to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ..to the Father in heaven, meaning He's able to do eternally more than any earthly person. How He answers this prayer remains to be seen but it will be seen. Remember, it's the "Lord's" prayer, the resurrected Lord. Evil slowed Him down but didn't defeat Him. One day we will be delivered.

August 4

"Lizzie Borden took an ax

And gave her mother 40 whacks;

When she saw what she had done

She gave her father 41!"

Today's the anniversary of Lizzie Borden doing in Andrew and Abby Borden in 1892 in Fall River, Massachusetts. Or was it Lizzie? She was brought to trial and acquitted. Whatever happened back then, kids today still have their moments with dad and mom...and sometimes for good reasons.

"Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12). Martin Luther commented on that commandment: "Young people...must be taught to revere their parents as God's representatives, and to remember that, however lowly, poor, feeble, and eccentric they may be, they are their own father and mother, given them by God" (Large Catechism, 108). The test of the genuineness of faith is not intellectual assent to heavenly ideals but practicing them with less-than-ideal people.

As kids in grade school, we used to sing this ditty...and we sang it out of any adult's hearing...

"I love Bosco; it's rich in poison D.

Mommy put it in my milk and tried to poison me.

But I fooled Mommy and put it in her tea

And now there is no Mommy to try and poison me."

Sorry, Mom. Quite the wrong attitude on our part!

August 5

About 20 years ago... I don't remember the exact year...one of my college professors who was, I think, in his early 60's, died suddenly. Dr. Roy Suelflow taught a history class I had taken in 1966. When I think about those dates, wow! Time marches on. Anyway, the preacher at the funeral lamented that Dr. Suelflow was taken at an age when the vast knowledge and experience he had acquired would have been of invaluable benefit to students.

Now, decades later, I'm baffled by all the TV commercials that offer help for the sexual performance of middle-age or older men. Age doesn't mean celibacy...within marriage, I hasten to add. I'm so prudish! But what is this barrage of commercials teaching us about the essence of a man with a few gray hairs? Any impressionable youth or aging couch potato will conclude that the purpose of our brain is to serve our desires. The thought of western civilization has always been the exact opposite of these subversive commercials. The first century Jewish writer Philo wrote, "Sensation is the servant of the mind" ("Special Laws," I.17).

Something is dysfunctional in society. It's our public disregard for acquiring and sharing a liberal arts education. Call it ED, "Education Dysfunction."

August 6

Weekends aren't what they used to be. A recent Wall Street Journal article was headlined, "Farewell to the Float: Checks Will Clear in an Instant." Floating, writes Andrew Blackman is "the bad habit of writing big checks a couple of days before payday, counting on a few days of check-processing delays to give them time to make a deposit to cover the amounts." Any experienced floater...and I'm one...knows that weekends are an especially good time to float. Being theologically oriented, I've always like to think of weekend floating as a "time of grace."

Ah, but grace is getting in short supply. A TV commercial shows a young man purchasing a bagel with a debit card and voila! Internet banking shows his purchase instantly deducted from his bank balance. Not good news to floaters! The time of grace...going, going, gone.

That's the drift of things in this world. Do things right because you'll be called to account. Theologically we call it the Law. Finances, indeed most of daily life, is quite the opposite of the church's otherworldly and essential message. So if you're thinking about skipping church this weekend, recall that about the only place where patience, where forgiveness, yes, where grace is not going, going, gone is in the Good News of Jesus Christ.

August 9

Here's an encouraging story from Martin and Elisabeth Feucht of Good Samaritan Orphanage in Cambodia .

"A boy named Luka was abandoned by his father when his mother died and given to the care of his grandmother. But she did not want him either and tried to sell him twice. He was passed from person to person until, at eight, Luka found himself at the Orphanage, deeply traumatized by rejection.

"I always had a problem with lying and stealing,' said Luka, now 12. 'During devotions one day, I was pursued by bad thoughts. Mr. Feucht told me that those thoughts were not coming from Jesus but from Satan, but not to worry because Jesus was far stronger than Satan. That same evening I surrendered my life to Jesus.'

"The Feucht's explain, "Our human power is not enough to give the children everything that they need, but we know that Jesus can meet any needs and desires that they have. He is the 'father of the fatherless' (Psalm 68:5), and he has a wonderful plan for them all. Our task here is to tell the children about this message that God has for them in the Bible."

That's a good model for anyone anywhere who deals with young people! Thanks to the American Bible Society for that story.

August 10

On this date in 1945 Japan offered to surrender. How welcome that surrender was! Our present war on terrorism will, we pray, be won but it won't have any such formal surrender of the enemy, any modern VJ or "VT" day. The truth is that even when

there have been formal surrenders, wars tended to peter out rather than end universally once and for all.

Every Christian has spiritual enemies who have not yet surrendered and will not surrender, enemies who want to rob you of the confidence and goodness that Jesus Christ gives. "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12).

My friend Mark, a former military chaplain, keeps this little question on his mirror. "Are you dressed for battle?" By Bible reading and prayer, put on the faith and hope that are in Jesus Christ and go to the tasks of this day, go to your battle station, watchful...but also confident that the ultimate victory will be yours because of Christ's resurrection. One day there will be a definitive surrender of all our spiritual enemies. God promises (1 Corinthians 15:25).

August 11

Back to school! Paul Turner in "The Spokesman-Review" of Spokane , Washington told what you should not say to a 13-year-old when shopping for back-to-school clothes. (August 17, 2001 ; D1)

"Hahahahaha. Yeah, right. Like we're going to buy that."

"That's fine, honey. Go ahead and embarrass our whole family."

"I'm sorry my mere presence here in the store humiliates you. But I wish you would remember that I'm the one with the credit card."

One thing I learned as the parent of teens: Our children are not our appendages. They are independent human beings, fully equal to us in the sight of God. God is no respecter of persons (1 Peter 1:17). Yes, parents have an authority over their children (Exodus 20:12), but that is oh so temporary. Children should honor and obey their parents, but we parents should give the highest respect to these children of God.

Heavenly Father, help us be good parents to your children...and teach them to appreciate that we're the ones with the credit card! Amen.

August 12

A favorite story of mine comes from Carla, who always delights to tell me about the latest exploits of her granddaughter Lisa. When Lisa was two-years-old, she and Carla were watching a Shirley Temple movie. Suddenly Lisa popped up and, motioning to a crucifix on the wall, said she wanted to hold Jesus. So Carla got up, took down the crucifix and gave it to Lisa to hold. Looking at that figure of Jesus on the cross, Lisa pointed to His feet and said, "boo-boo. Then she pointed to the hands of Jesus and repeated, "boo-boo." Then two-year-old Lisa kissed both Jesus' hands and his feet.

That's the kind of story that melts the heart. In the first century St. Peter wrote to people who were caught up in all the things of life that we're caught up in. Remember, he wrote, "that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life...but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18 -19). Jesus' "boo-boos" earned your forgiveness.

In the midst of all our adult doings, it's not a childish thing to let our hearts be melted by the great love God has for each of us.

August 13

Here's hoping that you'll suit up and participate in the Olympic spirit!

We're going to watch amazing athletes. Not a one got to the Olympics by being unfocused and undisciplined. Dreams of gold can't be realized without incredibly long hard days and years of focused training.

David Francis had that kind of spirit. He wasn't a world class athlete, just a college baseball player in the late 1860's. But when David Francis put on his business suit, his focus and discipline rivaled any Olympian. Senator Harry Hawes said, Francis "was a big man who had big conceptions...and did big things."

More than anyone else, David Francis was responsible for the first Olympics held in the western hemisphere. They were held in St. Louis in 1904 on the new campus of Washington University . The stadium and gymnasium for those games are still in use, named after David Francis. Said Senator Hawes, "He invited the nation and the nation came; he invited the world and the world came."

I'm weary of people who talk about their vision. I'm indebted...and so are you...to people who work long and hard to realize their vision for the good of us all. That's an Olympic spirit we can all put on. "Faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26).

August 16

Think about workplace safety...

Know the name Ray Chapman? He was a professional baseball player, a good shortstop for the Cleveland Indians from 1912 until 1920. To be exact, his career ended on this date in 1920. Chapman was batting when a pitch from Yankee pitcher Carl May struck him in the head. Taken to the hospital, Chapman died the next day, the only major league player to die from injuries received in a ball game.

Safety at work is something most of us take for granted.

But military personnel don't. Enemy booby traps, friendly fire, equipment failures.

Pulling over a suspicious car, entering a burning building? Police and fire fighters don't take workplace safety for granted either.

And the rest of us? Innocent Americans are terrorist targets as the "9/11 Report" documents, and we all know that freak accidents happen at work, as the Ray Chapman story reminds us.

So for today: Be careful; it's dangerous out there. Be prayerful; ask for those protecting angels. Plan your day with more dependence upon God today than you did yesterday. "You ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:15).

August 17

Here's part of an old "Meyer Minute," from August, 2001:

"'Why, why, why?' asks the commercial from Enron, a Houston-based energy company. 'Why?' was the question raised last Tuesday when Jeffrey Skilling, Enron's CEO, abruptly resigned. He told the Wall Street Journal that the drop of the company's stock, down 50% this year, was the reason.

"'Why? There's something more from that interview, something to remember as you plunge into this new workweek. 'Mr. Skilling said that the 'final straw' in his decision to leave had come on a visit last week to England in connection with the deaths of three Enron workers in a power-plant accident there. That trip helped reinforce 'how tenuous life is.'"

Three years later we know there was more to the story. Mr. Skilling, like so many other Enron executives, is under indictment. In 2001 I quoted Ecclesiastes 2:11. "I looked on all the works my hands had wrought. Behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit." Now, in view of what's come to light, I do better to go to the last chapter of Ecclesiastes: "Here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment" (12:13).

August 18

School starts soon, so I'm preparing for my seminary students. One of the first handouts they'll get is a warning about plagiarism in sermons. If you quote someone else's material, give credit.

Dave Newbart recently wrote about cheating in the Chicago Sun-Times (July 25, 16A). It's on the increase, not necessarily because students are crooks but because, as Don McCabe of the "Center for Academic Integrity" says, "Students are more liberal in their interpretation of what's permissible and what's not." Some students, stumped by an exam question, text message a friend in class to ask for help. Non-electronic cheats write notes on a paper coffee cup and then slip a heat sleeve over the cup to hide their notes. For assigned papers students can lift lots of material from the Internet. That, however, goes two ways. Says Charles Strain of DePaul University: "The Internet makes it 100 times easier for students to plagiarize but makes it 1,000 times easier to catch them."

I'm pretty confident about the students in my preaching class. I make them write and preach their sermons from verbatim memory. Hard to do that if you crib

someone else's material. Good to know that some of our future preachers will abide by the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal."

August 19

Now it's not wind and rain battering Florida but grief. Grief comes with any significant loss in life, losing a loved one, losing a job, children going off to college, and in Florida, losing home, possessions and the comfort of daily routine because of Charley.

When Jesus told a rich young man to sell his possessions and follow Him, Jesus gave a positive interpretation to grief (Luke 18:22). It's unwelcome, of course, but when the dependable is stripped away, you're either overwhelmed with sadness and, like the rich young man, there's nothing more than that sadness, or you're also drawn closer to God. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" (Psalm 73:25)

"God is love" (1 John 4:8). True, but our inference that He's cuddly is false. His love can be so tough that He'll use grief to draw us closer to Him. Said the Puritan minister Richard Baxter: "Affliction so frequently concurs in the work of conversion." ("Saints Everlasting Rest," p. 88)

"The security we crave would teach us to rest our hearts in this world and oppose an obstacle to our return to God.... Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home." (C. S. Lewis, "The Problem of Pain," p. 115)

August 20

It's been said the surest way to avoid an extra-marital affair is to realize you're susceptible to one. "I'd never do a thing like that" drops your guard and before you know it you're down the slippery slope into the sheets.

Of course, that assumes that marital fidelity is an admirable goal. When New Jersey governor Jim McGreevey resigned because of a homosexual extra-marital affair, pollsters invited the unsanctified masses to pontificate. One poll found the governor's approval rating actually went up 2%! So my assumption that you don't want to go down the slippery slope into forbidden sheets is apparently not shared by all.

What popular moral opinion doesn't do is prioritize the welfare of others. Just ask Mr. McGreevey's family. Brave faces aside, they were wiped out by the slippery slope of moral indulgence. In total contrast, the Ten Commandments are intended to protect other people from your selfish will and from mine.

Some constant self-doubt is good. Self-doubt makes you think that maybe there was a relevant reason for the old morality (see Jeremiah 6:16). Self-doubt isn't paralyzing if it prompts prayer and searching (see 2 Timothy 3:16 -17).

Said Teresa of Avila: "Always struggle within your own heart against...dangerous flatteries; then you will go forth with deeper humility." ("Living Water," in "For All the Saints," II, 382)

August 23

She slips off every morning to do it. Diane and I usually sit together to read the papers over coffee, but sooner or later she slips away to indulge her habit. In the evening she sneaks off to do it again. At first a few hits made her feel good, but the habit is insatiable. A few hits are no longer enough; she wants more and more every day. My wife is a blogger.

A blog is an online diary of sorts where the blogger comments on whatever. When Diane wrote about the Iraqi soccer team (August 15 blog), all sorts of people, Iraqis included, visited her blog. When she commented about sportscaster Bob Costas' political remarks, she got more hits. Blogs are becoming big time media.

Sinful human nature likes to complain and a constantly heard complaint is the bias of traditional media. The Spirit of Christ offers future heavenly blessings but also motivates us to contribute here and now to society, not complain. Are most of us sitting in our easy chairs complaining about media...or moving our mouse to get informed?

So Diane goes off to her blog, "[Respublica](#)," and comes back to tell me about the hits. I'm learning things not on TV. What a great time to be involved citizens!

August 24

A lover might press a rose into a book; I put postcards and pictures and notes into my books. Looking something up the other day I came across a note from August 24. I don't know what year, probably the late 60's. The note was a list of the milk this college student had to deliver to the Ford Stamping Plant in Chicago Heights. On August 24th I unloaded 106 cases of milk, each one taken off the truck by hand...no hydraulic lifts back then.

Life is made up of piecework, of countless little cases we do day-in and day-out. Those are trusts to you from God. "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much" (Luke 16:10). Our media-minded society pays attention to the big things, the celebrity lives, the big stories. But God looks at our little piecework. "Does He who formed the eye not see?" (Psalm 94:9)

A little irony... I found that list for the Ford plant in a Greek dictionary under the word "anthropina." "Anthropina" means "human." How appropriate...human life under God is all about the little cases you and I have to lift every day.

August 25

Why are Michael Jackson, Kobe Bryant, Scott Peterson and Amber Frey getting so much attention when thousands of other people on trial go unnoticed? Favoritism by the media. These real life legal soaps don't hurt ratings.

The rest of us play the favoritism game as well. One Sunday when I was pulled over for speeding, I made sure the trooper saw my clerical collar and my robe hanging in

the back. When Diane was stopped one Mother's Day, she asked the trooper if he didn't have a mother. One trooper showed favoritism; the other didn't.

"Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike" (Deuteronomy 1:15). That command to ancient Israel was rooted in the impartiality of God, something the New Testament affirms. God the Father "judges each man's work impartially" (1 Peter 1:17).

Funny, we see the games played in celebrity trials, but often don't see the rationalizations we use to excuse ourselves. "Repentance does not bring a sense of sin, but a sense of unutterable unworthiness" (Oswald Chambers). Unless we spiritually discipline ourselves to the kind of stringent self-judgment Chambers describes, how shall we ever truly appreciate the mercy with which God tempers His justice toward us...not to mention the kindness of that trooper who let me off?

August 26

Something I haven't been aware of... Better that I say, "Yet another thing I haven't been aware of," is the "graphic novel." Unlike "literary novels," graphic novels are big comic books (the newest one by Chester Brown is 200 pages) and they carry serious messages. "Comic books are what novels used to be – an accessible, vernacular form with mass appeal – and if the highbrows are right, they're a form perfectly suited to our dumbed-down culture and collective attention deficit." (Charles McGrath, "Not Funnies," *The New York Times Magazine*, July 11, 2004)

Graphic novelist Joe Sacco says his purpose is "to be a window on something." That something includes "longing, loss, sexual frustration, loneliness and alienation – a landscape very similar...to that of so much prose fiction" (p. 30).

Since sinful human nature is ego-centric, we tend to look at life from our perspective, whatever that might be, and get bothered when others don't see it our way. Our outlooks are prone to harden, making interpersonal relationships more difficult, not to mention putting up obstacles that hinder God guiding us in His way. Graphic novels literally make us look at real life through different windows, and what we see may reveal that our perspectives are peculiar and self-centered. These aren't your parents' Sunday funnies!

August 27

The most popular sanctuary this past week was the Imam Ali Mosque, where supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr spewed hatred in the name of Allah.

The word "sanctuary" also appeared in the story of the U.S. women's softball team. Only five weeks before the games in Athens, Coach Mike Candrea's wife of 28 years died suddenly from an aneurysm. Sue Candrea had been an integral part of team life, demonstrated, for one example, by giving a little gift basket to each of the players the day before she died. After the team won the gold, Mike Candrea credited his wife's love for the team, cited scripture (1 Corinthians 9:24), and praised the players for the support they gave him. He called them "his sanctuary."

Some churches seem to preach sin and judgment as their way of channeling hate against others. When Jesus said, "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him" (John 3:17), wasn't He teaching that the message of God's judgment on sin is preparatory to words and demonstrations of His love for the whole world? "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:7). That's not the message of the al-Sadr school of evangelism!

August 30

"I..state your name...do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost, one God, blessed for evermore; and I do acknowledge the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be given by divine inspiration." Had you been elected to office in Delaware in the late 1700's, the state constitution required you to take that oath before assuming office. So-called "religious test oaths" were also required in Georgia , Vermont , Pennsylvania , Kentucky and Tennessee .

So it's significant, though scarcely remembered, that on this date, August 30th, in 1787, Charles Pinckney of South Carolina introduced an amendment to Article VI of the proposed federal constitution: "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States ." It passed.

James Madison wrote, "We cannot deny an equal freedom to those whose minds have not yet yielded to the evidence which has convinced us." (in John Witte Jr., "Religion and the American Constitutional Experiment," pp. 46-47).

Several morals can be drawn from this forgotten fact, one being that we easily forget the extent of the blessings handed down by our founding fathers. As with the evidence presented by any temporal good, people of faith also thank our heavenly Father whose Spirit has led us, not compelled us, to yield our minds.

August 31

Last week the Census Bureau reported 35.9 million people, 12.5% of our population, lived in poverty in 2003. The poverty level for a family of four is \$18,810. The New Deal, the Great Society, trickle down capitalism...none has eliminated poverty.

When a woman anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume, His disciples complained the money would have been better spent on the poor. Jesus said, "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have Me" (Matthew 26:11). When the Spirit of Christ is in your heart, the face of the poor is always before you personally. That's Christ: "The Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor" (Isaiah 62:1; Luke 4:18). No copping out with social theories or with callousness. Christ in you takes the poor personally: "Whatever you did, for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me" (Matthew 25:40).

The day after the Census Bureau report came out, the Chicago Tribune ran a feature about "magalogs – a cross between magazines and catalogs." Magalogs, writes Dan Thanh Dang, are "for those unfortunate souls who have more money than ideas on

how to spend it" (August 27; 2, 1). They truly are unfortunate souls, like Scrooge who said, "It's not my business." Be warned, Jesus takes it personally.