



Donald Shoemaker

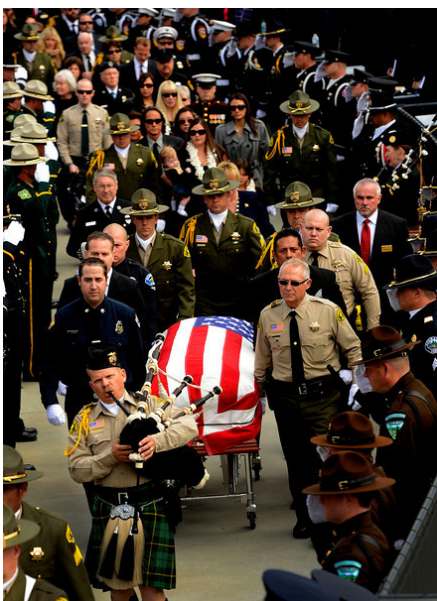
“A Piece of My Mind”

March 2013 Newsletter from Donald Shoemaker

*Advancing Christian Faith and Values,
Defending Religious Liberty for All,
Supporting Civility and the Common Good
through Preaching, Teaching, Writing, Activism and
Reasoned Conversations*

www.donaldshoemakerministries.com

Deputy MacKay Honored



I was privileged to attend the funeral for San Bernardino Sheriff's Deputy Jeremiah MacKay on February 21. Deputy MacKay was killed in a gun battle with Christopher Dorner on February 12. The service, attended by thousands, was very moving and quite centered on our Lord. We pray for the family and the department.

As I drove in the processional, seeing all the people, signs and flags on bridges and along the road to the Glen Helen Amphitheater was an emotional sight.

Five Good Resolutions for Lent (ABCDE)

- **A**void all gluttony and drunkenness
- **B**ecome a person of sincere prayer
- **C**ontrol your time on social media
- **D**evote more time to reading the Bible
- **E**xamine your finances so they are responsible and sacrificial (as well as bringing you enjoyments)



“Prophets are Good for Business”

How Moral Values Influence Economic Systems

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.” – Leviticus 23:33 ESV

“When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.”

– Deuteronomy 24:19-21 ESV

We need to keep two principles in mind:

- 1) The Bible doesn't set forth any specific economic system as “God's way”. Rather, it addresses the world's economic systems and situations as it finds them.
- 2) No economic system has intrinsic moral values—these values have to be imported into the system from something outside it (that “something” is ultimately “religion”, but that's a separate topic).

Take Capitalism for example. Probably no economic system has done a better job at producing more goods for more people than Capitalism. But Capitalism doesn't teach as a value intrinsic to its system, for example, that those who produce should provide for the poor and do so by not maximizing profits to the detriment of others.

Even a system as broadly beneficial as Capitalism needs moral guidance to leaven it as a system and, at the very least, soften its "rough edges". Drawing practical moral lessons from the Law of Moses (such as from Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 24) and applying them to capitalistic practices would be a strong example of good ethical thinking.

Bible Insight – Ash Wednesday and Lent: “To keep or not to keep?”

“Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.” – Daniel 9:3

“The word [Jonah’s message of judgment] reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.” – Jonah 3:6

Evangelical Christians often shy away from symbolism, but in recent years I’ve trended back to my childhood’s Christian roots where symbols had value in marking features of our spiritual journey and underscoring key spiritual concepts.

This year, for the first time in my 45-year career as a minister, I planned and observed an Ash Wednesday service, ashes and all. What’s the symbolism of ashes?

- Our mortality (Genesis 18:27; Job 30:19)
- Our sorrow over the horrible events in life that may come our way (Esther 4:1,3; Jeremiah 6:26)
- Our sense of sin and repentance of it before God (Job 42:6, Matthew 11:21 and the scriptures above—Daniel 9:3 and Jonah 3:6)

Ash Wednesday and the Lenten Season is a time to examine our own lives and make amends and fresh commitments before God. It's also a time for prayer for the broader failures of humanity and our own nation. And we should also pray for the failures within the company of people of our own faith—never hard to find. This was Daniel's beautiful prayer (chapter 9).

Wearing ashes on our foreheads can be a form of spiritual show-off, but can also be a genuine sign of our hearts humbly open before God. Lent can be a time of "going through the motions" of a religious tradition, or a dedicated time of renewal.

Lent anticipates Easter, resurrection reality. So there is a hope that something will rise from our ashes. The ministry of Jesus is:

to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
(Isaiah 61:3)

Religious Liberty Vigilance

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

- 1st Amendment (Our "First Freedom" in the Bill of Rights)

Thank God that our nation's founders (along with court decisions) never felt the government was competent to require that we must believe this or that. The right to choose or change one's religion, or have none at all, is deeply imbedded in our liberal tradition.

Contrast Spain: The governments of Spain and Morocco have agreed that Moroccan children adopted by Spanish families must be raised as Muslims. The agreement obliges the Spanish government to establish a "control mechanism" that would enable Moroccan religious authorities to monitor the children until they reach the age of 18 to ensure they have not converted to Christianity. (Source: *Catholic World News*, Feb. 22)

Upcoming Ministries

5 Sundays in June—Speak at 1st United Methodist Church of Seal Beach on “The Lord’s Prayer” (9:30 a.m.)

Note: The February 7 presentation on professional responses to the Salon Meritage incident (Oct. 12, 2011) for the Chaplain Corp of the Los Angeles Police Department was cancelled due to the search for fugitive Christopher Dorner. I hope this can be rescheduled soon.

Good News from Grace

www.gracesealbeach.org

At Grace Community Church of Seal Beach, Good Friday Services are at Noon and 7:00 p.m. The Noon service is in cooperation with 1st United Methodist Church.

Easter Sunday Services – 8:00, 9:30 and 11:00 in the Fellowship Hall; 9:30 and 11:00 in the Surfside Room. Truly the high point of the year.

Message of the Month – A Successor to Pope Benedict XVI

The sudden word from Pope Benedict XVI that he will relinquish his papal role on February 28 hit the world on February 11.

In pondering this, I've decided to re-release the Guest Editorial that I wrote in 2005 following the death of John Paul II (Long Beach CA Press-Telegram, April 9, 2005). Ironically, in this editorial I mention Joseph Ratzinger (in a point of disagreement), who would become Benedict XVI. I still affirm my thoughts on a successor (although my phone didn't ring seeking my opinion last time and I doubt it will this time either).

“One Evangelical’s Gratitude for John Paul II”

In the conservative Protestant environment of my upbringing just about anything that came from Rome was suspicious.

The Roman Catholic Church was, so we were taught, the “scarlet harlot” of the Book of Revelation, chapter 17—clearly identified by her vestments of purple and scarlet, her gold, silver and jewels, and the golden chalice in her hand. She was destined to align herself with the Antichrist, the Devil’s ruler of the End Times,.

To us Catholicism was as Winston Churchill characterized the Kremlin, “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” Church rituals with their beads and vestments and Latin were a world away from our simple message and revivalist enthusiasm.

A more historically informed approach to biblical interpretation has led to a better look at the Book of Revelation. But what really affected our thought was a courageous and humble man who came out of nowhere to become John Paul II.

John Paul was a human face with which we could easily connect, not a lofty anachronism from the Middle Ages. Coming through the crucible of suffering under two totalitarian systems and being willing to return to Poland to suffer with his people if events so summoned him, he personified the call of Jesus to take up the cross and follow Him.

We saw him as a powerful spiritual leader who in God’s providence, though not single-handedly, brought on the collapse of the Communist evil in Eastern Europe. Though Joseph Stalin mocked the pope in 1935 with “How many divisions has he?” we saw in John Paul the spiritual power of the cross and the Gospel at work emancipating human souls from misery.

We appreciated the unabashed orthodoxy that John Paul represented. His resolute support of pro-life issues resonated with us (opposition to abortion on demand is the one moral position that unites Evangelical Protestants whether their politics are right, left or center).

Significant issues remain on both sides. Some conservative denominations still pronounce that the papacy is the Antichrist. Obsolete attitudes and teachings are readily found amongst Evangelicals, as if the Second Vatican Council never happened.

Pragmatists that we are, Evangelicals cannot see any compelling reason to withhold the option of marriage from priests and we can give many reasons for this option. We are solidly in the Reformation commitment to the authority of Scripture alone, not Scripture and Tradition. We don't like to hear Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger say that our communities of the faithful are not truly "the Church."

We see true "apostolic succession" as fidelity to apostolic doctrine more than as a continuity of bishops. We are not comfortable with the veneration rendered to the Virgin Mary, though we are chastened that we have not honored the spirit of her words in the Magnificat, "All generations shall call me blessed," for she should indeed be our model of devotion and discipleship.

What would many Evangelical Protestants hope to see emerge from the upcoming Conclave? I speak for myself, but I think I have the pulse of much of our movement.

We want to see a pope emerge who would forge a strong confessional relationship with theologically conservative Protestants. We are one in heart with Catholics who can confess the Ecumenical Creeds without crossing their fingers behind their backs.

We would delight in a pope who comes from the Southern Hemisphere, where Christianity is vibrant and growing and orthodox. We want this to be the wave of the future.

Finally, we want to see a pope who continues John Paul's ministries of being a shepherd to his people and a prophetic voice to the world. News analysis presently abounds with bobbing heads complaining that John Paul did not bring strong administrative skills to the Vatican and they hope the new pope will.

God forbid! In the earliest days of Christian history the infant church carefully and wisely separated the apostolic role of teaching and prayer from the administrative role that others should do (chapter six of the Book of Acts).

I dread to ponder the outcome had John Paul devoted himself to management instead of pastoral and prophetic ministry. We might have the Vatican well oiled and Eastern Europe still in chains.

Finally, One of Those “Now We Know You’re Human” Moments



I have a nice new watch. Its contemporary style has no numbers, only a raised mark to indicate each hour.

Recently I noticed the “hour hand” was lagging. For example, at 3:00 it would be halfway between the marks indicating 2:00 and 3:00 when it should have been right over the 3:00 mark.

So I took it to the jewelry store. The jeweler looked at it and found it was working just fine. I had been wearing it upside down!

A Joyous Easter, everyone!

Jesus has died; Jesus has risen; Jesus is coming again!

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