

“Who is ministering to him and any family?”

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“The Forgotten Remedy”

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There’s a church that’s struggling to make it. They want to make it. It’s tough. Fortunately, they recently contracted with an exciting part-time pastor. She, besides wanting to become familiar with the congregation and community, believes it vital to beautify the building. The church elders are ready to tackle their long neglected building. One elder suggested painting the water-stained ceiling tiles in Sunday school rooms and offices. I interrupted, my paint background showing: “Can’t. Can’t paint over water-stains unless you use pigmented shellac, which is a pain to use. Best to replace them, if possible.”

Sometimes I actually know what I’m saying. I simply applied our Presbyterian Church’s basic theological principle to ceiling tiles. Implicit since the 17th century our motto declares: “The church reformed, always to be reformed according to the Word of God.” We remain a lower-case church because the capital ‘C’ Church is the one invisible. What I find endearing about my church’s principle is that it assumes we usually get things wrong and require correction. It’s insufficient to blurt, “I’m sorry,” or, “My bad,” when we’ve done wrong. It’s insufficient just to admit mistakes. Necessity and honor require self-examination. We cannot keep walking in the same unhelpful, unhealthy, baleful, or harmful directions. We must turn away and walk in faithful directions. We call this repentance. Tough-minded, discomforting repentance for our sins seems to be the forgotten remedy for our indulgent modern lives, a relic of a moralistic age. Such sin talk embarrasses us, like middle-schoolers publicly accompanied by their parents.

Thank you, John Calvin, for being both the father of Presbyterianism and for supplying the intellectual and soulful source for the United States Constitution. Historian Jon Meacham wryly observed the other morning: “We have a Calvinistic constitution because we realize we will do the wrong most of the time.” We are prone naturally toward abuse of power. John Calvin drew the core of his theology from the Hebrews and from North African Augustine, thus inspiring John Locke who inspired the Scottish Enlightenment Philosophers who inspired the men of the Continental Congress. ‘Tis funny, Calvin wasn’t Anglo-Saxon. Nope. He was French. The original Scottish Presbyterians were Gaelic, Celtic. The American family Arbor tree teems with varied roots and branches, dropping lots of nuts.

Shall we try to paint over our institutional sins? Or repent, seek reformation? Or worse, cruelly, insolently, expediently, justify them? Which way do you commend, given our manifold failings, stains, conceit? What you may call ‘political correctness,’ I call having manners. What you may disdain as ‘cancel culture,’ I call naming sin. I dearly miss Pogo, the cartoon. Walt Kelly’s 1970 Earth Day Pogo Poster summed it up honestly: “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

Boys Scouts seeking bankruptcy protection from pederasty law-suits. The NRA’s malfeasance exposed. Roman Catholic sex scandals. Olympians abused by their doctors. Penn State a Sandusky ago. Ohio State’s version of wrestling. State Republican hostility toward the First Amendment and voting rights. Fossil fuel subsidies. Flint lead levels. Curriculums dumbed down, promoting political propaganda. Judges incarcerating kids for money. Trump elected because of this distrust of government, so he goes on to prove hundred-fold how immoral, malign, lethal, and incompetent the White House can be. A Congress that includes folks like Greene, Hawley, Cruz, Gosar, Jordan, Gaetz – each of whom makes

Maxine Waters look like Margaret Chase Smith. Why should police departments be any less immune from sins? I'm pleading that the right people enter law enforcement. Once, a Mahoning officer tried intimidating me late night into reporting to the station to give my social security number.

All this saddens me, which is why I cannot celebrate Chauvin's murder convictions, despite his fateful indifference. We learn, we repent. Who is ministering to him and any family?

Can persons be part of evil systems without doing evil? There was a reason Lincoln proclaimed days of thanksgiving and days of national repentance. We are due one soon.

When haven't we changed our wayward ways except when pushed by our problems? Can you imagine any hospital department realizing one of their surgeons is dangerous but refusing to fire him or her? Reforms in rules and practices matter. External controls must be applied whenever our own internal controls fail. Simply, any institutional problem is a problem with us. May our country cry out for spiritual renewal, for renouncing the animus damaging our souls, for us to manifest a loving disposition. Only when you love others do you get to know them.