



Thoughts from the Bible and Books

A Newsletter for University Reformed Church
4930 S. Hagadorn Rd., E. Lansing, MI 48823 - 517.351.6810

September 2005

In the spirit of Bunyan's Pilgrim Progress, I have written an allegory for (post-) modern American life. In this story, Evangelist tries to lead twelve individuals to The Pearl of Greatest Price. By no means, is my story as creative or powerful as Bunyan's. But perhaps it will be helpful all the same. The story will unfold throughout the summer issues of TBB. So you'll have to go back and read the others!

Many are Called, But Few are Chosen (Part 4)

The sky was aglow with the sun's descent and the travelers stood at the mouth of the Caves.

Then Sincerity spoke up. "The view into the western horizon is simply breathtaking." And she was right. Even Evangelist agreed that they were witnessing a stunning sunset. "Soon the stars will be out and the night sky will be alive with constellations."

"But more than the stars will come out my friend," offered Evangelist. "Come Sincerity, the others are waiting."

"I don't see what could possibly be of trouble out here. My companions will be the moon and stars and maybe a comet if I'm lucky. I'll make my bed right here." Sincerity cleared a patch of ground with her foot.

Evangelist was insistent. "Believe me. You won't be safe unless you hide in the cleft of rock with the rest of us."

"Look, I don't care where you sleep Evangelist, but I am sleeping here. I have no doubt that I will rest well and be safe," insisted Sincerity.

"What if you are mistaken?"

"There's no mistake in sleeping under the stars, I'm quite sure of that. Enjoy the Caves. I'll be fine. Don't worry about me. Now, please, go take your rest with the others."

Evangelist couldn't afford to argue any longer. Sunlight had given away to moonlight and he needed shelter. Although Evangelist knew that those already

cleared for entry into the Great City would certainly make it there, he couldn't help but mourn the loss of so good a traveler. (Evangelist never knew for sure who had been granted citizenship in the City, but all her citizens arrived and no one who arrived had ever been turned away.) Evangelist was understandably upset, but the others, fast asleep, were too tired to notice.

"Good morning," Evangelist chirped, displaying a cheerier countenance after a short but splendid sleep in the Caves of Rest. "We are almost there! The Pearl of Greatest Price is just through the other side of this cave."

"I'll believe it when I see it," Skeptic muttered to himself.

"And what about the Rocks?" queried Civil Religion from his makeshift pillow.

"The Rocks of Offense can be dangerous, Civil Religion. But follow me and you will be safe," Evangelist assured. "Now let's get going. Time to get up. Rise and shine."

"Rise and *shine*?" Intellect was confused. "I can't see a thing. What happened to the sun?"

Nothing had happened to the sun, of course. It was hanging in the sky like the morning before, bright and brilliant. But they were in a cave after all, and it was dark as night. In fact, no one (except Evangelist) had noticed that even before the sun went down the previous night, inside the Caves had been pitch black.

"Trust me," said Evangelist. "The darkness will only be a temporary part of the journey. If you just follow me to the other side of the Caves soon you will be walking in the light."

"How will I know where to go if I can't see?"

"You must believe my word, Intellect. You have been valuable to our trip. Don't hesitate now. Have faith beyond what you can see."

"I can't go, Evangelist. I can't. I won't. I would rather stay here in the darkness. I know what is right here, my pack and my bag. I know this spot, but without my sight I don't know what is front of me."

And so Intellect took a seat on the ground, more content to sit in the darkness than trust Evangelist into the light.

“Some people just can’t believe in what they can’t see,” offered Civil Religion. “It’s a pity.”

“We must press on,” Evangelist urged. “The Great City is expecting us today.”

When they reached the mouth of the Caves on the opposite side, the light streamed in, causing the pilgrims to squint down hard. True, their eyes had seen nothing but darkness for several hours, but even so, the sun seemed especially radiant.

Then, as if in a dream, the Great City suddenly burst upon them. They froze. Even Evangelist who had seen the Great City hundreds of times stood speechless. The City was adorned with rubies and emeralds and many precious stones. A rainbow surrounded the city and its streets glittered with gold. The gates to the city, ornate as they were opulent, swung wide open, beckoning any pilgrim who would come.

Then Skeptic broke the silence with an announcement. “I’m turning back.”

“What!” Chosen was shocked. “But the Great City is right before your eyes. How can you turn back now? I would gladly count all things rubbish just to walk through those gates.”

“I guess it’s nice.”

“Nice! What more could you want?”

Skeptic gathered his thoughts. “It seems so final, so absolute, this Great City.”

“It is absolute,” Evangelist added. “This is what we’ve been looking for. This is the end and the beginning. This is what is. I thought you wanted proof, Skeptic. I thought you wanted answers. Well here’s your answer. Here’s the end to all your questions.”

“I guess I like questions more than answers,” the always candid Skeptic asserted. “I enjoyed the journey, don’t get me wrong. I’m just not so sure I like the destination. I’m really more of a wanderer. I enjoy seeking more than finding I suppose.”

Civil Religion stood appalled as Skeptic walked off. “I have never seen such blatant disregard for the things of religion. Chosen and I—we will see your work is not in vain good Evangelist.”

“I pray that you will.” Evangelist sighed. “All we have left is to cross this mighty river before us. But to do so requires the Rocks of Offense.” At this Evangelist pointed to a humble series of stones poking through the surface of the water. “Who will go first? Bear in mind, the Rocks of Offense will either be your salvation or your undoing.”

“I see no other way across,” Chosen said with

desperation. “I am not strong enough to swim against the current nor can I jump to the other side. The Rocks of Offense are my only hope.”

Chosen took his first tentative step onto the first small rock. He was pleasantly surprised. His foot fit firmly in place. In fact, the rock seemed grooved especially for his feet. Chosen carefully, but boldly, bounded across over the river from rock to rock. In fact, it seemed at that moment that a strong wind picked him up and blew him across. Chosen felt like he wasn’t doing a thing.

“Come on. There’s no problem,” Chosen cried halfway across the river. “It’s not your effort that will get you across. Trust me. Everything is taken care of. Come on.”

“Your turn Civil Religion,” Evangelist exhorted.

“I think I will just wade across. The water doesn’t look that deep.”

“You won’t make it!” Chosen and Evangelist were crying almost in unison. “Only the Rocks of Offense can save you.”

“But I’m strong. I’m a good man. I love my family. I work hard. I value faith. I don’t need the Rocks of Offense!” Civil Religion was uncharacteristically feisty. “It would be a scandal for someone like me to get this far and then take the easy road. I’ll make it across on my own just fine!”

But of course he didn’t. The waves and breakers swept over him and Civil Religion was washed away. Evangelist wasn’t happy with Civil Religion’s decision, but his job was too important to wallow in discouragement. Besides, there were still one with him. So he pressed on and led Chosen to the other side.

When Chosen made his final step there was no longer any loss or weariness, only much rejoicing. He looked around at the city, dazzling and full of life. He noticed for the first time—as if his eyes were opened to some new reality—throngs of people in the city and many more streaming to it from every direction. From every angle there were scores of pilgrims walking across the Rocks of Offense. Many more, sadly, were being swept away down the river just like Civil Religion. He saw others darting back into the forest like Skeptic. No doubt, there were countless travelers who hadn’t made it this far.

But Chosen was delighted to be home. And all were cheered by his arrival. With food and drink and loud singing, the entire City celebrated into the evening, through the night, and forever.