

Bush, speaking on the economic chaos

Colleagues,

I couldn't resist.

Peace and joy!

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This morning on my computer screen:

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Bush, speaking on the economic chaos for the 21st time out of the past 26 days, said Friday that the government's rescue program was aggressive enough and big enough to work. "We can solve this crisis and we will," he pledged.

Don't believe him.

"Krisis" is the Greek word for "judgment." The first time that word appears in the NT, right from the git-go in Matt. 5:21, it's talking about "God's krisis." Not a krisis that God has, but a krisis that God inflicts. God is the "kritees," THE judge, the critic, doing the krisis, making the critique. Throughout the NT there are umpteen references in the same format, many of them about the "day of krisis." Judgment day is the day God settles accounts. But you don't have to wait till the last day of world history. God's judgment day is every day.

In popular Christian piety we regularly deceive ourselves by "postponing" Judgment Day till THAT day way at the end. And that is a big mistake. Jesus said so to his contemporaries. More than once. When Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, it's because their

Judgment Day is happening on that very day—and they are blind to it. Postponing Judgment Day to history's last day is to guarantee that the verdict on the Final Day will be thumbs down.

In one sense, nothing really new happens on the “final” Judgment Day. THAT final one will “only” give full exposure to the fact and the truth of all God's prior krisis-days throughout history—with individuals and with nations. On THAT day even the folks blind to all prior judgment days will finally see. So back to today, under the rubric, oft repeated in the Letter to the Hebrews, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

Today God is the critic behind the crisis in the world economy. The economist Adam Smith's “invisible hand” is indeed in the mix, and “Boy, is he mad!” That hand is being placed right smack on our posteriors—with a smack and a whack. If we don't hear his voice, can we at least hear and feel his whack?

Nobody in the public arena—and not very many in churchly voices I've heard—seems to notice that voice or that whack. Surely not our national president. But it's not just he. He speaks for the nation. His “bully pulpit” is preaching to the choir. We all believe the sermon he preaches. God is not in the mix on this one. Both presidential candidates preach the same sermon: “We can solve the crisis, and we will.” We will cope with God our critic by our smarts, our know-how, our capital infusions. If a \$7 billion bandaid won't quite do it to get God to back off, we'll find some other bandaid. The Bible's word for that is blindness. And for those who claimed that they were not blind about God-stuff, Jesus had biting words: “Because you say you see, your blindness gets even blinder.”

“We can solve the crisis, and we will” can only be said by a president—born-again Christian that he may be—who doesn't

believe, doesn't see, God the critic in the mix. Yes, he speaks for our nation. That is our national faith, ritually expressed as the religion of God Bless America, but operationally expressed as "We can solve the crisis, and we will."

Whoever proclaims that, doesn't have a clue about what's really going on in the USA. Doesn't have a clue that the same words that God scribbled on the wall for Nebuchadnezzar to read as his empire crumbled under his feet, are now scribbled on our wall, as Wall Street's empire (=our own) crumbles: "You have been weighed and found wanting."

No, WE won't solve it until we confront THE critic. Which, to be sure, is at first an even more unpleasant prospect than waiting for the next Dow-Jones numbers to come in.

So long as we keep grabbing for bandaids—and do so because our official and elected diagnosticians and therapists (our "doctors") see the crisis as "merely" a money matter—we are indeed lost. Rescue package? Hah! Rescue from the real crisis? No way! "Solving" comes from the same Latin root as "saving." The vocabulary of theology —rescue, save, solve, restore, "faith" in the market—covers the front pages, but it's lost-cause theology. Like prescribing bandaids to cope with cancer. No rescue package is available at the Federal Reserve Bank —or all the banks in the world—when God is the critic administering the crisis. When God is our nemesis. And he is. It's that simple.

So back to Luther's counsel in the War against the Turks. Back to Lincoln's action midpoint in the Civil War. Call to repentance. Not a monetary turn-around, but a God-turn-around. But what good would that do for our "real" problem? some will always say. Ay, there's the rub. What is the REAL problem? And if a "Call to Repentance" that both of these ancient worthies

advocated seems too radical at first, it at least gets God's name into the conversation. If the US president can say without danger "God bless America," why not simply ask: Is God indeed blessing America? That would shift the conversation, as Christians see it, to a deeper level, to a level where, if we did find a "solution," it would surely be salutary back up where all the current hub-bub prevails.

Why doesn't Obama (or McCain or Nader or the other third party candidates) say this? "God is clearly not blessing America these days. And if he's not blessing us, what are the other options? Biblically, there's only one. The opposite of blessing is cursing. Its synonym is damning. I missed it a couple of months ago with that flap about my pastor. It's now perfectly clear. Pastor Wright was right. God's handwriting is on the wall. Same message that Nebuchadnezzar got. I didn't see it then, sorry to say. Nor did many others of our leaders. But "today" the handwriting is on the wall at Wall Street and throughout the world of global capitalism, plain for everyone to see: God is not blessing America. God's doing the very opposite.

In Crossings lingo, the current national analysis is stuck at Level One diagnosis, the EXTERNAL ouch that hurts—yes, hurts bad!

Beneath that diagnosis is D-2, the not-so-visible cause of the ouch, the INTERNAL alternate-faith of money-trusters hyped by a capitalist society. The Biblical label for that alternate faith is "love of money." Note the scramble to restore our "confidence" in the market. In the market! The market is the object of our fear—and the hoped-for solver (=savior) from that Market-fear. Now there's an offer! Take a closer look at "conFIDENCE." It has the word FAITH right smack in the middle. Faith in the market is flat out trusting a false god. Yes, that is a no-no. Already at Sinai God announced that worshiping phony

gods will not make True God happy. Even pragmatically, we're seeing that it won't work.

Worse even than that is the ETERNAL level of diagnosis, the God-problem at the root, the ultimate crisis-causer, God the super-critic whose "invisible hand" in the mix makes this "little" monetary crisis into a super-crisis.

To say yes to that full-scale fruit-shoot-root diagnosis of our ills is step one of repentance: God, you're right, we're wrong. Step two is the turn-around from that admission, that lethal analysis, leaving us confronting the cosmic critic with no cover to shield us. Turn around to what? Jesus' opening mantra (Mark 1:15) was simple: "Turn around and trust the Good News." And what, pray tell, is that Good News, Jesus? "It's me."

With all due respect, Jesus sir, how on earth will that change anything in the meltdown we're experiencing? "You'll only find out if you try it," he says. "If you accept my offer to turn around and trust me, but do so because you really trust the goodies that you hope will come down the pipeline, then you're neither repenting nor trusting me. Sorry, that's the way it is."

One of you out there has an e-address "Blindfaith." It might be a quote from Luther. Doesn't sound very promising, but at root it is. "Blindfaith" is indeed blind to what the future consequences might be for what we call real life, but it is NOT blind, it is open-eyed in "seeing Jesus," hearing his invitation to "Turn around. Trust me," and then doing exactly that.

When someone asked Luther what "real" benefit repentance would have militarily as the Holy Roman Empire faced Suleiman the Magnificent in 1529, he said this: "For those who repent, God is no longer their enemy, but their ally. So here at the gates of Vienna, it would no longer be God AND Suleiman outside the wall inflicting crisis, but "just" Suleiman and his 600,000 soldiers.

When he loses his divine ally, he's no longer invulnerable. The Suleiman-problem is then solvable."

In 1529 it was a military crisis. In 2008 a monetary one. When God pulls his invisible hand off of the crisis-lever, it's solvable. In the crucified and risen Messiah, Christians claim, God has done exactly that. Where all might that lead our frazzled world? No advance blueprint is available. The promise comes from the blueprint-maker. He's the one we hang our hearts on, not the blueprint. Yet the promise coming from the Promissor is that as the blueprint unfolds, Christ-trusters can "count it all joy," even if some of it proves to be very sticky. And others standing within earshot of these rejoicers can get in on the goodies too.

For Crossings matrix junkies—

Stage 4 (Good news to trump the level 3 bad news): Christ's cross and resurrection is God trumping God's own criticism.

Stage 5 (to trump level 2): Parallel to the sweet-swap of #4 is the internal swap away from trusting the gods of the market, who can't even save themselves, to trusting the Savior who now has death-proof credentials in the savings business.

Stage 6 (to trump #1, back out into the "real" world): Christ-trusters practice their "count it all joy" inventively and ad hoc as they carry their cross alongside their neighbors, the Sisyphus-rock -pushers. As they grunt and groan in life together, they tell their rock-pushing neighbors why their daily life is no longer pushing rocks, but carrying a cross — as Sherman Lee showed us so winsomely a couple weeks ago in his ThTh post.