

Thoughts on Christianity and the Church

December 27 2009: Christmas Eve Service

It has been several years since Central Baptist put on a Christmas Eve service. So for several years now, we have gone elsewhere for a Christmas Eve service - once at First Baptist (before it died) in their ornate auditorium, with a very small group, and a few times at First Southern Baptist, with a large crowd and many old acquaintances.



These services are usually a bit dark (winter evening) and warm, often with candles and (typical Southwest) "luminarias", with people in colorful sweaters and nice "church clothes" happy to be there and full of anticipation for tomorrow. There are infrequent members and usually visitors (such as we have been), since the phenomenon of "C&E (Christmas and Easter) Christians" is more than just a theory. People who consider themselves Christian seem to put special stock in the special holy-days of Christmas and Easter... even if it is nothing more than attending a ceremony.

This year, I had it in mind to visit [Christian Faith Fellowship](#), a relatively new church operation not far from us, since they were advertising a Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion service. In the end, because we were so behind in our own Christmas preparations, we decided not to go.

Did we miss anything?

On the one hand, YES. We are all certainly aware that, while Christmas has a Christian connotation and, practically speaking, Christian origins*, the holiday has become increasingly secular. Anything that reinforces the holiday as a *Christian* holiday, therefore, particularly as an testimony for the secular world that would prefer to suppress and deny it's Christian nature, is a Good Thing. Furthermore, if Christmas

and Easter are the only times when the "C&E Christians" can affirm their identity as Christians, it's better than not at all. Plus, it is an opportunity to worship God, to acknowledge Him as the author of Christmas and all that flowed from it, including Easter. No opportunity to worship the Creator and Redeemer should be taken lightly.

[On the other hand, NO](#). It is true that Christmas is a time for Christians to affirm their identity as a testimony to a watching world. However, for most of us, most of the time, our lives are *NOT* a testimony to Christ's reality and Lordship. It's actually been kind of interesting; where I work, there are a number of fellows who are hard-drinking, foul-mouthed MEN who are not above telling an off-color joke or "admiring" a female co-worker. So when I hear one of them tell us that he is going to choir practice for the Christmas Special at his church, I am just bowled over. I can't imagine that the reaction of unbelievers is different. What this says is, this church is more concerned about putting on a good show** than building a Christ-like character in the lives of the members, more concerned about people attending than people being changed. This is particularly true for the "C&E Christians" - if the church is satisfied to draw them to a church service once or twice a year (maybe in the hope that they will attend more frequently, once they see what a fun place it is), rather than driven to impart more Christianity than mere "identity", then what good is that?

So the question of "Is the Christmas Eve Service worthwhile?" comes down to what kind of church it is, and what kind of Christians are attending it. If the church is only about "attending", or drawing a crowd to affirm a sense of "success" or to provide enough donations to perpetuate its existence, or if the attenders are attending for cultural or traditional or habitual reasons, then the Christmas Eve service is just an emotion-based religious experience. If the church is really about Jesus, and the attenders are really seeking to have God conform their lives to the image of Christ, then the Christmas Eve service is really a *worship service* - it and the lives of the members are the kind of testimony that the secular world needs to see.

It's possible that the CFF service we missed had that character; there is much about that fellowship from what I have seen so far that impresses. So it's possible we did indeed *miss* something good. I can't say that for most of the Christmas Eve services I've attended in other churches here and elsewhere. Which probably explains the ease with which we came to the decision to pass on it.

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* Yes, I've heard the denunciations of Christmas as having pagan holidays, from the date (December 25, originally the "Festival of the Invincible Sun") to Christmas Trees. I say, phooey; whatever pagan connotations they once had is *NOT* in play after fifteen centuries of Christian ascendancy. I just don't have much patience for the Christmas debunkers.

** There is a church in Tucson whose Christmas Eve service we went to, which has a real spectacle of a service, including live animals walking down the aisles to the stage. It's hard to escape the notion that this church is trying to put on a good show to attract potential members. The same could be said for churches that put on a big musical production, with little apparent value beyond entertainment. However, there is another church that puts on a walk-through recreation of the Christmas Story, and issues tickets, first to unbelievers and second to Christians who intend to invite their unbelieving friends. I have a lot of respect for that operation!

December 7 2009: Preaching Up a Rope

For many centuries, preachers have been preaching sermons to congregations. According to Frank Viola ([Pagan Christianity?](#)), this started around the Third Century, when Greek rhetorical practices entered church culture. Maybe, probably doesn't matter; it is here now, and from where I stand, it has precious little value.

Note that here I refer to the "preacher". This is different than "pastor", or "overseer" (bishop) from Scripture. The "preacher" is a role that the pastor takes on to the end of delivering a sermon on Sunday morning. From what I gather from talking with various pastors, "preaching" involves knowing the needs of the congregation and combining this with the biblical understanding one has acquired from seminary and personal study in order to produce a 20-40 minute oration that communicates a teaching about the need. There is a good bit of time required to prepare a sermon, and in some cases, it is the primary effort of the pastor during



his work week in the office. I guess there are some pastors who are more "preacher" than "pastor" for this reason. I think in some larger church cases, there may be several pastors, and one (the most publicly visible) is the "teaching pastor" who really does devote all his time to preparing a sermon. And sometimes writing books. Make your own judgment here.

At some points in the past, there may have been preachers who delivered sermons that actually *did* accomplish or at least facilitate life-change in the congregation. I suppose Martin Luther did, at least to the extent that his sermons actually taught Reformation principles to his audiences. Ditto for John Calvin. I would like to think Jonathan Edwards contributed to the Great Awakening in early America with sermons like "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God". Maybe Billy Graham's crusades, with their thousands of respondents, largely owe their success to his sermons. However, those are isolated points which say nothing more than that God can use whatever He wants to accomplish His will for a given time and place. For the most part, the vast majority, if the pastor desires to see life-change in his church members, his sermons fail to do the job.

Push/Pull Model

"You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."

One way to look at this problem is to see scripture-fueled life-change (what pastors would like to see) as a rope. You can pull a rope. You cannot *push* a rope. It doesn't work.

When a preacher preaches a sermon that he thinks is what the people need, he is *pushing* life-change to the people. If the people don't want life-change, all the pushing in the world isn't going to make it happen. On the other hand, if the people *do* want life-change, then maybe they will seek for it in the words of the sermon (among other places). They will be *pulling* life-change! Then, it works!

(And hopefully, when this happens, the pastor doesn't congratulate himself on the greatness of his sermons (I think this is often the case), and that the people don't celebrate the pastor and the greatness of his sermons (I think this is more often the case).)

So the objective of the pastor *ought* to be cultivating the desire for life-change in his people, so that his sermons (which then would not

require so much effort to be (perceived as) useful) wouldn't take so much effort, and also, or much more so, that the people would learn to feed themselves in personal devotion, and in smallgroup Bible studies, and the like. Of course, how does the pastor succeed in cultivating this desire for life-change? Guess what won't work? **Sermons!**

(But guess what he's most likely to try? **Sermons!**. "When your favorite tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.")

True Worship

This really points out another problem. *Pushing* doesn't work, but *pulling* does. People who want to experience life-change will be *pulling*. But if it isn't working *now*, or in the vast majority of cases (at least in the West), this says that there aren't very many people who want life-change.

But Jesus Himself says (John 4:23) that God searches for those who will worship "in spirit and truth". We are told (Romans 8:29) that God wants us to be "conformed to the image of His Son". If people don't want to be conformed to Jesus' image, if they aren't worshipping "in spirit and truth" (that is, the church service is *supposed* to bring about life-change, but the people don't want it, so they are there for some other reason, so they are not being truthful, or seeking His Spirit)... then **they aren't worshipping**. The service is a sham, the sermon is a waste of time*. Activities during the service - such as music performance or pageantry or sermon preparation or video projection arrangements - actually just prop up an exercise in hypocrisy. This goes right along with the need for the pastor to do *something besides preaching sermons* to foster a desire for life-change - and thereby produce true worshippers.

(* Well... I was going to say, "and people who *do* want to experience life-change may be better off looking elsewhere", but if they really are *pulling*, they will achieve this in spite of the false worshippers there.)

November 22 2009: Reformed Church in America



One of the reasons we chose to start attending at Central Baptist is that it was much more of a "neighborhood church" than the more-downtown church we had been attending. But when we moved into this house eighteen years ago and started familiarizing ourselves with the neighborhood, we noticed a little church building about four blocks to the southeast:

[Rosemont Community Church](#)

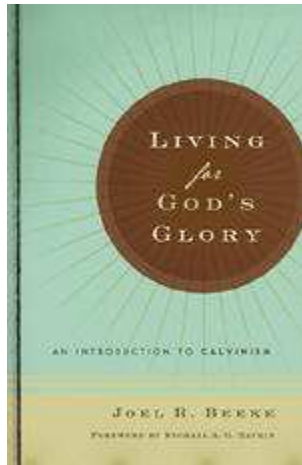
When we were "church shopping" a while back, we didn't bother with Rosemont Community Church, because the name of the pastor on the marquee was "Judy Marvel". That indicated right there that this was not a church that takes the Bible seriously*.

(* Which is my position on I Timothy 2, which spells out pretty clearly that women should not be in an office of spiritual authority, and why. But more to the point later...)

Recently, I noticed that the marquee changed, that there is a new pastor, and a website address listed. So I checked it out, and discovered that Rosemont Community Church is part of the [Reformed Church in America](#), which is the oldest denomination in North America, coming out of the Dutch Reformed Church which was imported with the original Dutch settlers of New York (formerly New Amsterdam).



Crest of the Reformed Church in America



Now, this "Reformed" business threw me. I have started reading this book, *Living for God's Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* - my thoughts later, when I finish it - and I was understanding that "Calvinism" and "Reformed" were pretty much the same. Well, maybe "Reformed" descends from "Calvinism", the same way "Southern Baptist" and "American Baptist" both descend from a common root, but are *very different things*. Calvinism (classically) takes the Bible seriously - literally. Kind of like Southern Baptists claim they do (but are not typically Calvinistic).

But then, Presbyterianism is basically Reformed, from when John Knox took the Calvin flavour of Reformation to Scotland. Today, the PCUSA is one of the most "liberal" denominations in North America, up there with The Episcopal Church (TEC) and the United Methodist Church. The PCUSA, TEC, and UMC have by-and-large embraced the homosexual agenda, and it seems the Reformed Church in America is [dealing with it, too](#). The PCUSA, TEC, and UMC are bleeding members at an accelerating rate, as members who value Biblical truth over denominational loyalty leave for more conservative fellowships. It seems the Reformed Church in America may be [suffering from the same problem](#).

How could a denomination that has such excellent Reformation roots (in Calvinism) come to a place where the ordination of women is accepted and the normalization of homosexuality is even considered? In this book, in chapter 3, "The Marrow of Calvinism", the author makes a very telling point:

This kind of God-centered passion has been mostly lost because of our backsliding and the theological errors of our day. In many so-called evangelical churches, the fear of God has been lost and thus, in a real measure, so has a biblical understanding of the love of God. Evangelicalism has become man-centered and, as a result, promotes a view of God that is far less than the reality set forth in Holy Scripture.

But even many who delight in Reformed truth seem to have lost their sense of the awe of God. As in the broader evangelical culture, God-centeredness has given way to man-centeredness in many Reformed circles. **We aim too**

often at giving people what they want instead of following the example of the great Reformed evangelists, whose first objective was to confront men and women with God's greatness and majesty.

Too many of us today present God as more user-friendly than His own Word does. We want to make people feel comfortable, so we avoid telling them anything that will make them uneasy. We are so concerned about losing our young people that we never ask them to gaze on the holiness of God or challenge them to live out that holiness in the childlike fear of God. We condone materialism, worldliness, and triviality because we have so little sense of an ever-present, infinitely holy God.

Written by a Calvinist who recognizes the heading of his beloved Reformed churches. Quoted by an Evangelical who sees the same movements in his Southern Baptist churches.

November 22 2009: Hope for a Church

For the past few months, Central Baptist has held "family meeting time" instead of Sunday School, about a half-hour before the formal service, to discuss where we are going as a church and whether we should restart Sunday School. These meetings occur once or twice a month, and draw a modest attendance - more than the "prayer meeting" which occurs at this time when we are *not* having a "family meeting time", but less than Sunday School in former times. The "prayer meeting" generally consists of me and the pastor and two to three others, and most often, the subject of the prayers is sick people, or people with job needs or who are travelling. The usual Baptist sort of thing.



I have taken two notable observations from these family times. One is the main "theme" or "value" or "selling point" of Central Baptist, which is a subject that keeps coming up: We are a "friendly, welcoming,

loving fellowship". We should be inviting people to Central to enjoy our "friendly, welcoming, loving" environment. Which I maintain doesn't really go beyond the ten-minute "welcoming time" during the Sunday Morning "worship" service, unless you are an old-timer and have developed deeper relationships with other members.

Chapters two and three of Revelation contain letters dictated by Jesus to the Apostle John. It has long been an evangelical pastime to cast the various church conditions described onto contemporary churches. Usually, the "Luke-Warm Laodicean" condition is applied. But let's try this one on for size:

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false; I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Revelation 2:1-5

Here is a church who performs "works" - like packaging Thanksgiving Feast food boxes for needy families, or putting together shoe-box gift boxes for "Operation Christmas Child". Or providing sports equipment, craft supplies, and copy machine paper for a nearby public elementary school. Or "adopting" a refugee family from Iraq. Or even the traditional religious works, like meeting for "worship" service on Sunday morning, or doing cell groups with other adults or Youth and Students. Here is a church that applies itself to doctrine, and listens to the pastor's sermons, or goes to Sunday School classes, or attends Bible Studies during the week. Sounds good so far.

But the heart of the church is "being friendly and welcoming and loving". Not **JESUS**. We encourage one another to invite people to come and experience the friendliness and the love, not to experience the reality of the Lord Jesus who is manifestly at work in our lives.

I think it fits. Maybe Central is in the pattern of the church of Ephesus, and we are in danger of "having our lampstand removed", or ceasing to be a church. We are *certainly* aware of our danger of failure - hence the "family meeting times".

My other notable observation? Pastor Travis said something arresting at the last "family meeting time: "Who is concerned about the direction Central is going?" It was a rhetorical question, intended to provoke reflection, and it was met with reflective silence. My reflection is: If he had asked for a show of hands, everyone would have raised their hand. Raising your hand is easy. Even if you weren't particularly concerned, you would probably raise your hand out of peer pressure. So what would be a better indicator of who really *was* concerned? Maybe attendance at the "prayer meeting"? Maybe serious, passionate prayer for revival and the state of the church, rather than the usual recitation of sicknesses and physical needs?

Jesus expects us to prioritize our "First Love". What is that? What *love* should be *first*? Perhaps the Great Commandment - "Love God with *all* our heart, soul, and mind" (Matt. 22:37-38). If True Christianity is a *relationship* rather than a *religion*, then maybe we as a church should prioritize on developing our personal - [and corporate](#) - relationship with Christ. Which consists mostly of *communication*. Which in this context is... [prayer](#).

Now, what hope would we have that this return as a body to prayer would ensure the survival (or more, the *flourishing*) of our church? In logical terms, returning to our "First Love" is a necessary but not sufficient condition for revival. If we offered authentic prayers for revival and spiritual prosperity, what hope would we have of an answer?

Jesus has given us promises of answers to prayer. For instance:

And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.

I John 5:14-15

And more simply:

If you ask anything in my name, I will do it.

John 14:14

So if we ask things that are in the Will of God, or "in his Name" (what He authorizes), we should be assured of an answer. And what then is the Will of God?

In this letter, Jesus is expressing His *WILL* that the church of Ephesus *not* cease being a church. By warning them of what they lack and what they need to do, Jesus declares that He loves this church and desires it to remain and prosper.

Now, I note that Jesus requires **action** from the people as part of the healing of their church. This "doing something" is clearly not just more religious works, like they are already doing, but is a return to relationship. Prayer is a big part of that return to relationship, but there is more to it than that, of course.

Therefore, if:

- We restore our individual and communal relationship to Christ to primacy (over other interests such as "friendliness" or "community service" or "social activism")
- We return to **individual and corporate** prayer as part of this restored relationship to Christ
- The subject of our prayers is predominantly the accomplishment of our mission as a church (over other subjects like physical needs)

Then we can have hope for the survival - and *flourishing* - of our church.

October 15 2009: A Snakey Creationist

Last night, I attended a *great* lecture of the [Arizona Origins Science Association](#). The guest was Dr. Rick Oliver (PhD Biology), and the subject was [Snakes](#). There were two really two subjects of the lecture this night.

#1: Testimony of a Former Anti-Christian

Dr. Oliver told us (in an engaging but sporadic fashion) his story, which started as a young kid from Kentucky in bib overalls (before they were fashionable) whose family moved to Los Angeles, where he went to school. In a few years, he overcame his "hick" image and participated in sports and developed a keen appetite for science. When he started High School, he was delighted to find himself in a biology class taught by the football coach who had a degree from Pepperdine.

Previously, Rick had been brought up in a "Christian" home, although nothing had been done to correct his mis-impression that if you were

- Born in America
- Prayed before meals
- Went to church

then you were a Christian. So when the teacher asked, "who here is a Christian?" (Rick raised his hand along with a few others), apologized for his upcoming loss of faith, passed out the darwinist textbook, and started teaching evolution, it didn't take long for Rick's "Christianity" to evaporate. Much like the young people today who don't have an adequate basis for their faith (as explained in Ken Ham's book [Already Gone](#)). Much to the consternation of his mother, who argued with him briefly, hit him with the massive family Bible, and settled in for a long prayer campaign. But the experience formed in Rick a passion to disprove Christianity and champion "science" and evolutionism.

From 14 years old as a High School freshman til a month after his 40th birthday as a PhD in Evolutionary Biology, Rick Oliver studied evolution, taught evolution, and belittled and downgraded his Christian students. He confessed that he had an *agenda*, that he was emotionally involved in the issue... *just like Charles Darwin*, whom he explained adopted an anti-Christian stance after the death of his



daughter. It wasn't until the mounting evidence from the Mt. St. Helens eruption got him to rethink his positions that he came back to his childhood faith.

#2: Poisonous Snakes - Tough Problem

After realizing the time was getting away, Dr. Oliver got into his main topic - poisonous snakes. In particular,

Snakes: Designed to Kill

Design: The snake exhibits clear characteristics of *design*. A problem for evolutionists.

To Kill: Why would God design in the capacity for such efficient killing? A problem for creationists.

He started with some useful information:

- Snakes aren't graded on the toxicity of their venom, but on the number of bites attributed to them. Thus, while the coral snake and the Mojave rattlesnake and the diamondback rattlesnake are among the poisonous snakes in the Southwest, the Mojave rattlesnake is much more dangerous than the coral snake, which has much more toxic venom, because more people are bit by the Mojave rattlesnake. In fact, very few (if any) bites from the coral snake are even reported. Similarly, the King Cobra and Black Mamba snakes are the most deadly in the world, because they are (1) in locations with large human populations, (2) the people mess with them (including Hindu worship), and (3) inadequate medical facilities are available.
- 98.5% of all snake bites are non-accidental (that is, people were messing with the snakes). Furthermore, 99% of all snake bites are suffered by males from 5 to 25 years old. Do we get a picture here? Reminds me of my crazy uncles, who captured rattlesnakes and kept them in cages in the garage - my uncle Dick was bitten two or three times. Furthermore, unless you are allergic to the venom (if you are allergic to bee stings, you are likely allergic to venom), it is unlikely to kill you. There is greater danger from gangrene appearing as tissue around the bite dies. Snakebite kits are useless, a false hope. Stay calm and reduce the degree to which your circulation moves the venom throughout your body. 9-1-1 is your friend.

- Snakes (and venomous lizards, such as the Gila Monster) come in two types of venom - Hemotoxin (attacks the circulatory system) and Neurotoxin (attacks the nervous system). How did two different types of toxins evolve? Furthermore, snake species with both kinds exist in intersecting habitats. This presents a problem for the "survival of the fittest" principle, along with the question of why there are poisonous snakes and nonpoisonous ones.
- Pythons are actually more dangerous than poisonous snakes, and Dr. Oliver won't allow them in his labs. They do their constriction thing very fast - a strong human will be suffocated in under five minutes. Furthermore, their teeth are like barbs, and their jaws lock. You'd have to cut the snake's head off and pry the jaws open to get the teeth to disengage.
- The venom is actually part of the snake's digestive system - a very aggressive digestive enzyme. When a snake strikes an animal, it lets it go to allow the animal to move around, allow the victim's circulatory system to move the venom around, and facilitate the process of digesting the victim from the inside out. Snakes engulf their prey and digest *all* of it; hence, the venom is an important part of this total-digestion process.
- Studies indicate that the venom is also very good at breaking down plant matter - this suggests an answer to where the snake's deadly capability may have come from originally.
- Why a rattle? Why would evolution produce a warning device for humans? (Doesn't work for dogs - my friend who lives in Vail with three large dogs tells me the rattle *attracts* the silly dogs). And how could the snake develop the behaviour of using the rattle? Snakes can't hear!

The last point Dr. Oliver made was, while snakes strike animals and let them go, as described above, when they strike birds... they *don't* let go. How can they know to do this?

Design.

During the question and answer time, someone asked about the "snake" in the Garden of Eden. Dr. Oliver responded that the Hebrew word in Genesis is actually "serpent", or "reptile", which could include lizards or even dinosaurs. Or the "dragon" which is identified with

Satan in Revelation, at the other end of the Bible!

A very interesting and enjoyable evening!

October 14 2009: Lessons from *Valkyrie*



We recently rented and watched the movie [Valkyrie](#) (yes, I know... Like I said, I'm a "trailing edge" type). Pretty good. Nothing outrageous or offensive, which is unusual for Hollywood. In fact, as a story of conscientious rebellion against the mesmerizing far-left leader, it's kind of an ironic film for Hollywood, who seems to be mesmerized by our current far-left leader. But that brief comment aside, the film says a lot for spiritual subversives and rebels in our day. I gathered a number of lessons from seeing this film:

#1: Optimism is Good, but Realism is Better

At the very beginning of the movie, Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg is introduced as a German Army officer who has been banished to the North Africa campaign for his growing outspokenness against the Nazi regime. All the other military men around him seem to be confident that victory is just over the horizon.

Question the status quo; analyze the situation. If the cause is hopeless, recognize it, accept it, and plan accordingly. Don't keep "drinking the Kool-Aid", or succumb to peer pressure of the others who are satisfied with the way things are, or fear their judgment or censure.

If everyone else seems to be on board with the cause, then maybe what needs to be done needs to be done out of sight. Being above-board and outspoken may be counter-productive and self-defeating.

#2: If you are a Realist, you are Not the Only One

Eventually, Stauffenberg returns to Germany as a war hero. The cabal of officers and politicians who are plotting the overthrow of the Nazi government approach him and enlist him.

If your analysis is correct, there will be others who have come to the same or similar conclusions. You will not be able to change anything

without them, nor they without you. The trick is finding them - or being found by them. Discrete searching is in order.

#3: Family is Not More Important than Mission

When Stauffenberg realizes that his family is in danger, particularly if the plot fails, he sends them to a remote town. There is a tearful parting when they leave.

Sometimes the best service to your family involves the sacrifice of family relationship. Provide for their safety and sustenance, but don't defect with them. Stay on station, in spite of the fallout.

This lesson has been learned by servicemen throughout history. Stauffenberg is now a German hero, and the Reformers who sacrificed so much, sometimes even their lives, are no less.

#4: Planning is Important, but Action is Necessary

Several times, Stauffenberg is portrayed as a man of action who rebukes his betters for their timidity. There is a suggestion that the success of the coup may have been ruined by the initial indecision of his co-conspirators.

Action without planning is useless and certain failure, but planning without action is an empty intellectual exercise. At some point, the analysis must end, a plan be drafted, and *enacted*.

#5: Be Prepared to Accept Failure

At the very end, the assassination is proven to have failed, Hitler is still alive, and the conspirators are captured. Some are hung, some are shot. As Stauffenberg faces the firing squad, he looks them in the eyes and shouts a patriotic phrase just as the guns go off.

It would seem that Stauffenberg was a Catholic, and a true Christian. You would think that God would bless the efforts of a Christian who was trying to end the bloody reign of an atheistic, Jew-destroying monster. But He didn't. You would think that God would have blessed the efforts of the earlier Reformers. He didn't, and they ended up being burned at the stake. I suppose success or failure of one's efforts aren't what count so much, and we are judged by God by what we did in the circumstances, whether we fought (and were martyred) in the cause of Truth, or we blindly or fearfully surrendered to the status quo.

So the important thing is to keep your eyes fixed on God, and if He in His sovereignty does not bless your efforts and you fail, to accept failure without bitterness or fear. Face the guns bravely.