

From This Corner
“Picture This”
Larry Baird



It has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words. One picture I saw frequently throughout my childhood has certainly spoken to me, and was one of many tools God used to call me to ordained ministry. It hung on the living room wall of my grandparent's farm house. I remember getting lost in it as I would kneel on the sofa over which it was displayed, soaking in every detail. I do not know the artist and subsequent inquiry has not led me to that information. It is a picture of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, leaning out over a cavernous ledge to rescue a lamb. A sinister looking eagle soars only seconds away. Without the shepherd the lamb is surely lost, either plunging into the abyss or being grabbed and devoured by the bird. Jesus himself has put himself at risk, climbing down the ledge and leaning over the canyon. His shepherd's staff and hand cling to a rock as he extends his other hand and arm to grab his object of focus.

One of my pastors on hearing me tell of this picture and its special place in my theological imagery found the print available on the internet, ordered a copy and gave it to me. It is now framed and has a place on the wall next to my desk. It still captivates me, and the depth of the abyss as it is portrayed still frightens me. What I see is a picture of both the personal and corporate reality of humanity.

The picture of course and its implications are peculiarly Christian. Contrary to popular opinion not all religions are the same. I find it hard to believe the artist felt the sheep could save itself through meditation, praying to its ancestors, some form of self-improvement therapy, or learning the power of positive thinking. I fail to believe that the artist felt the sheep could through its own confidence in progressive "sheepness" work itself out of the abyss. Clearly the shepherd and his act of saving the lamb is the only answer to the dilemma.

I apologize to no one in my belief that salvation comes only through a relationship with Jesus Christ. I believe that it is this shepherd who has the ability to snatch each individual lamb from

certain oblivion, and the only one who is capable of changing people's hearts, one at a time, to effect positive change in the world's penchant for plunging itself into an abyss of destruction and death.

I read recently that a British publisher of a children's dictionary is removing the word "sin" from its new edition. Apparently the idea is that "sin" describes nothing relevant to life as the world experiences it. Apparently therefore, there is also no need for a savior. How odd it is. I see nothing that would indicate such assumptions are based on any rational evaluation of the state of humanity. Instead I see that there is still a need for the unique work of Jesus Christ, and consequently the core ministry the Church offers. What else will pull us from the ledge of the abyss? I think the artist pictures the answer and the history of humanity lends credence.