

Solid Ground

Enhanced

A Foundation for Building Ambassadors

Celebrating 20 Years of Ministry

November 2014

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SOCIAL MEDIA



Sometimes turning back the pages of time can help us see things right before our eyes that otherwise would have gone undetected. Sometimes we need to take our cues from saints in the past to know how to be faithful in the present. This month's *Solid Ground* recounts details of the lives of two such saints: two martyrs—one ancient and one modern—who did not fear man and whose lives, therefore, hold an important message for us.

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Stand to Reason exists to give you—and tens of thousands of believers like you—the very same confidence and clarity. With your ongoing support, we equip people to live out their Christian commitment without compromise. Your gift today will help believers stand firm when challenges come, when faith is unfashionable, and when the culture draws a line in the sand that we must not cross.

Greg Kousser





November 1, 2014

Dear Friend,

“Fear of man brings a snare,” the sage counseled (Prov. 29:25). “Friendship with the world is hostility toward God,” the apostle warned (James 4:4).

Snare are rarely placed in full view, though, and inappropriate complicity with culture is not always easy to discern. Compromise often happens quietly in seemingly inconsequential ways, frequently sanitized by an appeal to something virtuous—love, kindness, acceptance.

Sometimes turning back the pages of time can help us see things right before our eyes that otherwise would have gone undetected. Sometimes we need to take our cues from saints in the past to know how to be faithful in the present.

This month’s *Solid Ground* recounts details of the lives of two such saints: two martyrs—one ancient and one modern—who did not fear man and whose lives, therefore, hold an important message for us.

Their names are Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, chief architect of the Confessing Church holding the line against compromise under the Third Reich. Both lost their lives for their efforts.

Bonhoeffer, in particular, was a thinker. His biographer, Eric Metaxas, noted that the German pastor “wished to arrive at answers that could stand up to every scrutiny because one would have to live out those conclusions. They would have to become actions and would have to become the substance of one’s own life.”

Those actions led Bonhoeffer to the gallows. Likewise, Polycarp was willing to be torched because he was convinced that very particular theological claims were true. And they both went to their redemption with eagerness.

How could these men do this? Because they were not guessing. They *knew* the truth, and they *knew* who they were. And this changed everything.

Stand to Reason exists to give you—and tens of thousands of believers like you—the very same confidence and clarity. With your ongoing support, we equip people to live out their Christian commitment without compromise.

Your gift today will help believers stand firm when challenges come, when faith is unfashionable, and when the culture draws a line in the sand that we must not cross.

Safely in His hands,

Gregory Koukl



THE LINE IN THE SAND

By Greg Koukl

In Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, four children, poking about in the back of an old wardrobe in the attic, stumble on another world filled with peculiar delights and strange enchantments. Did you ever tumble by accident into an ancient world? Something like that happened to me recently.



I've been rummaging through old books lately. I don't mean dog-eared copies of the Hardy Boys, old tomes of Dickens, or *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*. I mean old—Justin Martyr, Augustine, Athanasius—authors whose lips have been silent nearly two thousand years, but whose minds still speak delights and enchantments every time we seek their counsel.

My browsing has been like window-shopping, except I don't wander through the mall. Instead, I peruse the thoughts of others. I spend no money, only time; all of the merchandise is free for the taking, compliments of the ancients.

Surprisingly, they have not been hard to understand. As Lewis notes, these great men—just in virtue of their greatness—are often more intelligible than their modern commentators.

Lessons from a Dying Saint

In my explorations, I stumbled upon the oldest written account of Christian martyrdom outside of the New Testament. It's very moving, and I'd like to share it with you.

[The beloved Polycarp](#), 86-year-old bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of John the Apostle, was martyred in 156 A.D. Ironically, he was charged with atheism because he denied the false gods

of Rome. The phrase "away with the atheists" was meant to be directed at Christians (considered atheists since they rejected polytheism). Instead, as you'll see, Polycarp turned the denunciation on the multitudes of true atheists.

Listen:

When [Polycarp] was brought before him, the proconsul asked if he were Polycarp. And when he confessed that he was, the proconsul tried to persuade him to recant, saying, "Have respect for your age," and other such things as they are accustomed to say: "Swear by the Genius [guardian spirit] of Caesar. Repent. Say, 'Away with the atheists!'" So Polycarp solemnly looked at the whole crowd of lawless heathen who were in the stadium, motioned toward them with his hand, and then (groaning as he looked up to heaven) said, "Away with the atheists!"

But when the magistrate persisted and said, "Swear the oath, and I will release you. Revile Christ," Polycarp replied, "For eighty-six years I have been His servant, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

But as he continued to insist, saying, "Swear by the Genius of Caesar," he answered, "If you vainly suppose that I will swear by the Genius of Caesar, as you request, and pretend not to know who I am, listen carefully:



I am a Christian. Now if you want to learn the doctrine of Christianity, name the day and give me a hearing..."

So the proconsul said: "I have wild beasts. I will throw you to them unless you change your mind."

But he said, "Call for them! For the repentance from better to worse is a change impossible for us, but it is a noble thing to change from that which is evil to righteousness."

Then he said to him again: "I will have you consumed by fire, since you despise the wild beasts, unless you change your mind."

WE DENY OUR SAVIOR IN THE LITTLE THINGS—THE PETTY OFFENSE, THE SILENT CONDESCENSION, THE HIDDEN ENVY, THE SMALL BIT OF BITTERNESS, THE MODEST MOMENT OF PRIDE.

But Polycarp said: "You threaten with a fire that burns only briefly and after just a little while is extinguished, for you are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment, which is reserved for the ungodly. But why do you delay? Come, do what you wish."

As he spoke these and many other words, he was inspired with courage and joy, and his face was filled with grace, so that not only did he not collapse in fright at the things which were said to him, but on the contrary the proconsul was astonished.... The entire crowd, Gentiles as well as Jews living in Smyrna, cried out with uncontrollable anger and with a loud shout:

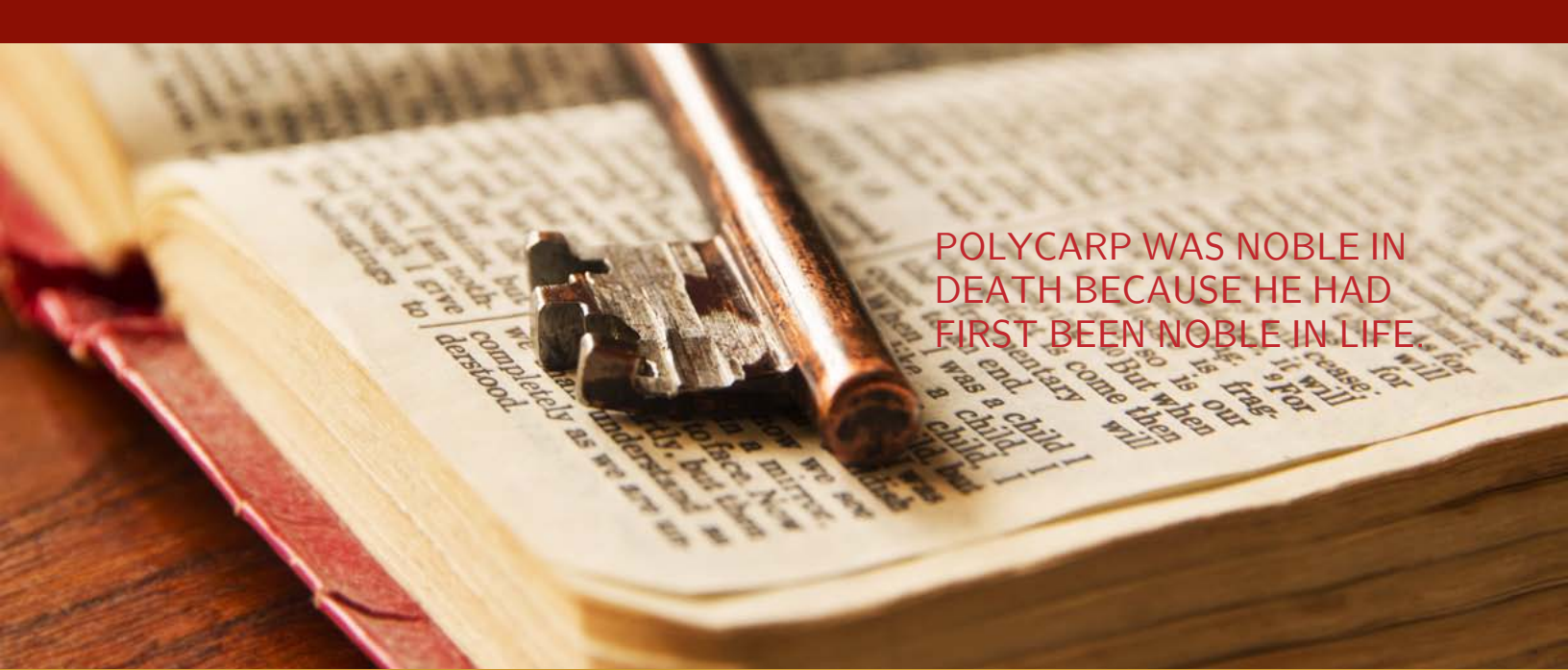
"This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, who teaches many not to sacrifice or worship..."

These things then happened with such swiftness, quicker than words could tell, the crowd swiftly collecting wood and kindling from the workshops and the baths.... When the pyre was prepared, he took off all his clothes and removed his belt.... Then the materials prepared for the pyre were placed around him. And as they were also about to nail him, he said: "Leave me as I am, for He who enables me to endure the fire will also enable me to remain on the pyre without moving, even without the sense of security which you get from the nails." So they did not nail him, but they tied him instead. [Then he prayed.]

When he had...finished his prayer, the men in charge of the fire lit the fire. And as a mighty flame blazed up, we saw a miracle.... The fire...completely surrounded the body of the martyr. And it was there in the middle, not like flesh burning, but like bread baking or like gold and silver being refined in a furnace. For we also perceived a very fragrant odor, as if it were the scent of incense or some other precious spice.

When the lawless men eventually realized that his body could not be consumed by the fire, they ordered an executioner to go up to him and stab him with a dagger. And when he did this, there came out a large quantity of blood, so that it extinguished the fire. And the whole crowd was amazed that there should be so great a difference between the unbelievers and the elect.¹





POLYCARP WAS NOBLE IN DEATH BECAUSE HE HAD FIRST BEEN NOBLE IN LIFE.

Does that last line stand out for you the way it does for me? What was that difference? For one, Caesar had drawn a line in the sand and Polycarp had said, “No, I will not cross.” He was neither intimidated nor unnerved because he knew who he was: “Listen carefully: I am a Christian.”

As followers of Christ here in the West, our lives are not at risk. Far from it. We’re not faced with the ultimatum, “Recant or die.” But sometimes in many small ways, I’m afraid, we implicitly recant with much less incentive. We deny our Savior in the little things—the petty offense, the silent condescension, the hidden envy, the small bit of bitterness, the modest moment of pride.

THE LESSON IS CLEAR: THE MOST IMPORTANT MEASURE OF OUR SUCCESS AS CHRISTIANS IS NOT OUR NUMBERS OR EVEN OUR IMMEDIATE IMPACT, BUT OUR MOMENT-BY-MOMENT FAITHFULNESS.

The small things count, though. Consider this next morsel of wisdom that also comes from the ancients: “Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.” The lesson is clear: The most important measure of our success as Christians is not our numbers or even our immediate impact, but our moment-by-moment faithfulness.

This is a wisdom Polycarp understood. The eyewitness account of his martyrdom included this statement: “He had been treated with all honor [by the faithful] on account of his holy

life even before his gray hair appeared.” Polycarp was noble in death because he had first been noble in life.

The full record of [“The Martyrdom of Polycarp”](#) is longer, and it moved me deeply to read it, causing me to take stock of my own manner of life. Will my epitaph read, “And the whole crowd was amazed that there should be so great a difference between the unbelievers and this one of the elect”?

Sometimes our most profound encouragements come not from the present, but from the past, if we choose to linger over meaningful events there. There’s something refreshing about stepping back a couple of thousands years to a place and time when the options were fewer and therefore clearer, a time when faith was less defiled and life less distracted.

I invite you now to step back not millennia, but decades—not to a simpler time, but to an incredibly complex and dangerous time for Christians—to the life of a more recent martyr whose prescience provides a lesson.

Lessons from Another Saint

In Germany on April 7, 1933, the newly minted Third Reich sought to reorganize every aspect of life along National Socialist lines by passing the Law on the Reconstruction of the Professional Civil Service. The third clause of the decree included the now infamous [“Aryan Paragraph,”](#) a legal provision prohibiting non-Aryans—Jews, in other words—from being employed in any capacity in the German state. As a result, all Jews in civil service were summarily dismissed.





The Ambassador's Guide to the Voice of God

Gregory Koukl – \$6.95 *NEW*

Paperback: 47 pages (BK397)

The notion that each Christian can receive personal revelation from the Almighty was novel in times past. Nowadays, though, listening to Christians talk about it, the experience appears to be ubiquitous. Virtually everyone seems to be “hearing from God” in some fashion these days—pastors, writers, worship leaders, even the regular folks at our weekly Bible studies—so the basic idea must be right.

But is it? Must I “hear the voice of God” in order to know what He wants from me? Is this what Jesus meant by, “My sheep hear My voice,” or what Paul meant by being “led by the Spirit”? And what if I hear nothing but silence when I listen? Does this say something about my spiritual well-being?

There's only one way to address such questions. And much rides on the answers. In *The Ambassador's Guide to the Voice of God* you'll discover what Scripture teaches about this critical topic.



Extreme Home Makeover: How Same-Sex Marriage Affects Our Families and Our Future, Alan Shlemon – \$8.95

Audio CD with PDF Study Notes (CD289)

Also available as an MP3 download – \$4.95

Never have the stakes been higher. New legislation and court decisions continue to erode traditional marriage laws, and with them, the very foundation of culture itself: the family.

With understanding and clarity, Alan negotiates the landmines of the misguided reasons and sometimes twisted logic undergirding this challenge to Western society. He likewise demonstrates the far-reaching consequences of same-sex marriage—from increasing restrictions of religious freedom to the disintegration of the family—concluding that everyone, including homosexuals, should oppose it.



Is God Anti-Gay?: And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible, and Same-Sex Attraction, Sam Allberry – \$7.99

Paperback & Companion CD Audio: 67 pages (BK382)

Includes a free CD recording of Greg's radio interview with the author

It's the hot topic of the moment. Christians, the Church, and the Bible seem to be out of step with modern attitudes towards homosexuality. And there is growing hostility towards those who hold a different view. So is God homophobic? And what do we say, and how do we relate to both Christians and non-Christians who experience same-sex attraction?

In this short, simple book, Sam Allberry wants to help confused Christians understand what God has said about these questions in the Scriptures, and offers a positive and liberating way forward through the debate.



The government policy had an additional consequence. Since the German Church was a state church, the edict had implications for pastors as well. If the *Reichskirche*² approved the Aryan Paragraph, then Jewish converts to Christianity holding leadership in local churches would likewise be discharged. Pastors all over the country would be forced out.

The general mood in the nation favored the Paragraph. This was not because every German was deeply racist. Far from it, at this stage in the rule of the Reich. Generally, they were more pro-Aryan than anti-Semitic. They were nationalists, embracing their new führer's pledge of restored respect for Germany and renewal of the glory lost them in the humiliation of Versailles.

Many in the *Reichskirche* embraced the edict heartily. A strong Germany meant a strong German Church. Though technically the Aryan Paragraph was inconsistent with the Evangelical Church Constitution, signing off on it seemed a small theological concession in light of the benefits gained by making peace with the Nazis and abetting the national program of peace, prosperity and unity: "One Reich. One People. One Church."

Remember, in 1933 the Reich's true colors had yet to be

flown. The Brown Shirts had a nasty reputation, but few could imagine the horrors awaiting Germany on the distant horizon. Some Christian leaders actually thought Hitler could be reasoned with, that clever diplomatic maneuvering might appease him and even improve their opportunities for evangelism. Anyway, they reasoned, converted Jews could form their own congregations with no serious harm done.

...AFFIRMING IT WOULD EVENTUALLY PLACE THE ENTIRE GERMAN CHURCH UNDER DE FACTO SECULAR RULE. ULTIMATELY, THE GOSPEL ITSELF WAS AT STAKE.

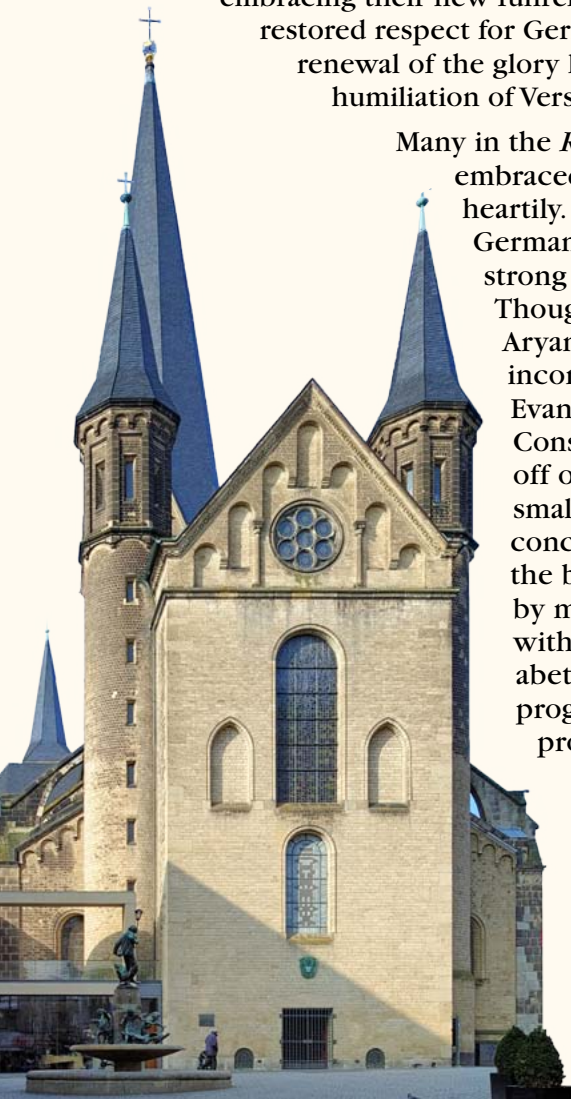
Regardless of the rationalizations, the Aryan Paragraph had enormous strategic significance for the church, something a 27-year-old Lutheran pastor saw immediately. [Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#) understood what was at stake long before most did.

Ultimately, the Aryan Paragraph would exclude every ethnically Jewish Christian from the community of God. Yet in Christ's church there was to be "neither Jew nor Greek" (Gal. 3:28). Whether they be Jews, or Gentiles, followers of Christ "were *all* baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13).

Bonhoeffer immediately saw that the Aryan Paragraph "contradicts the clear meaning of the Scriptures."³ He also saw that affirming it would eventually place the entire German church under de facto secular rule. Ultimately, the Gospel itself was at stake.

When "alien principles" rule the church, [the Barmen Declaration](#)⁴ stated, then "the church ceases to be the church."⁵ Thus, a church excluding Jews would be no Christian church at all, and compromising Scripture to increase its appeal would be to evangelize for a church that no longer had Christ.

So Bonhoeffer resisted. He reasoned, he argued, and he jajoled. He wrote letters, he preached



sermons, and he engaged. He prayed, he hoped, and he waited. Finally, when all had been done to no avail, he simply said, “No.” He would not agree to the Aryan Paragraph. He would not support it. He would not endorse it. Instead, he would oppose it with every means available to him. He would defy it, with grace and with courage. “We must shake off our fear of this world,” he wrote. “The cause of Christ is at stake, and are we to be found sleeping?”⁶

Hitler had drawn a line in the sand. Bonhoeffer had said, “No, I will not cross.” He was neither intimidated nor unnerved because he knew who he was. Can you hear his words? “Listen carefully: I am a Christian.”

Our Line in the Sand

Today in our culture we do not have an Aryan Paragraph. Jews are not being singled out for special ill-treatment; Christians are. The current source of conflict has largely been a single, general issue, but a more important one waits in the wings.

THIS IS THE PLACE WE EITHER STAND IN ALLEGIANCE TO CHRIST AND HIS WORD, OR SURRENDER TO SECULAR BULLIES WHO DEMAND WE MARCH TO THEIR RHYTHM.

The issue at present is not ethnicity, but ethics—specifically, the morality of homosexuality and the propriety of same-sex marriage. The culture dictates one direction, the Scripture another. Those faithful to Christ’s Word suffer minor slings and arrows of abuse. The mistreatment is relatively mild, for now—mostly name-calling—but even this is too much for some. They don’t see the point.

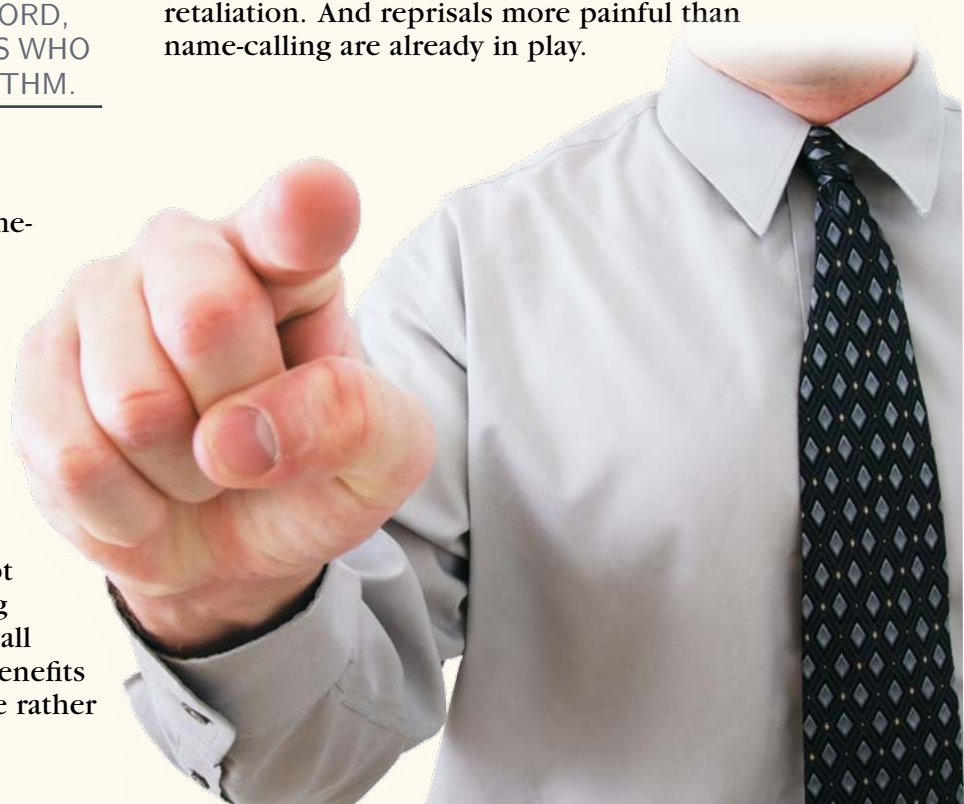
As with the Aryan Paragraph, the partnership we’re being asked to accept with the world does not entail rejecting any essential doctrine of faith. It’s a small theological concession in light of the benefits gained by showing love and acceptance rather

than what some might view as judgment and bigotry. Go with the flow. Follow the crowd. Celebrate diversity. Christianity will look so much more attractive to so many more if we do.

I’m not going to argue the legitimacy of those two issues here (I have done that elsewhere). Instead, I want you to see the strategic significance of our response in light of the larger spiritual battle we’re in.

True enough, yielding on homosexuality and same-sex marriage does not require denying any vital doctrine. No church councils have weighed in on it. No confessions address it, as far as I know. By itself, it is largely theologically inconsequential compared to weightier matters.

There is no question in my mind, though, that for our day this is our culture’s line in the sand. Cross over—celebrate diversity—and be received with open arms. Resist and face retaliation. And reprisals more painful than name-calling are already in play.



Even so, no Christians are being burned at the stake. No blood is being let here in the States. None are in prison for their faithfulness. Yet disciples of Christ are defecting in alarming numbers, the mere hint of intimidation causing multitudes—especially young people—to cross over. They don't realize what's at stake.

You see, *this is our Aryan Paragraph*, the place where our own culture learns where our loyalties lie, with men or with God. This is the place we either stand in allegiance to Christ and His Word, or surrender to secular bullies who demand we march to their rhythm.

Bonhoeffer saw the Paragraph for what it was and could not cross that line. Neither should we cross the one placed before us, for there's another line just after it, one that matters, demanding a different diversity: all spiritual roads lead to Rome; all religious paths ascend to the same summit; Jesus is *a* way, but only one among many.

This line *is* theologically significant because everything dear to us depends on the legitimacy of Jesus' central claim: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but through Me" (Jn. 14:6). If these words are not worth standing for, then Polycarp perished for nothing and Bonhoeffer wasted his loyalties on the gallows that took his life.

My fear is that any Christian crossing the first line will cross the second for the same reasons: to be "tolerant," to be lauded as loving, to escape the brand, "bigot." Though not a fool, Paul was willing to be called one for fidelity's sake, since the so-called "foolishness" of the Gospel had the power to save those who believed (1 Cor. 1:18-24). Are you willing to wear the label "bigot" for the same reason, even if it be libel?

Like Bonhoeffer, we can resist. Yes, we can reason, we can argue, we can cajole. Yes, we can write articles, preach sermons, and engage. Yes, we can pray, we can hope, and we can wait. But in the end, when all has been done to no avail, we can simply say, "No."

Putting This Solid Ground into Action

- Keep in mind, there are profound lessons on living the Christian life with faithfulness and courage we can learn from the saints who have gone before us.
- It is important to understand the strategic significance of the challenges that face us as Christians in the 21st century, to determine our response, and to be read.
- Don't grow weary in the battle. Like Bonhoeffer, we can write articles, preach sermons, argue, cajole, pray, hope, and wait. But in the end, we must simply say, "No."
- Remember you need be neither intimidated nor unnerved if you know who you are.

Your Support Makes a Difference

STR Depends on You

Our mission—no, our passion—at Stand to Reason is to help you develop as a Christian Ambassador who can handle the Word of God carefully, communicate its knowledge clearly, and defend it graciously. This is possible because faithful friends like you support STR's efforts prayerfully and financially. Your gift today helps ensure that STR continues equipping followers of Christ to promote "Christianity worth thinking about."



No, we will not teach that curriculum. No, we will not obey that law. No, we will not support those things contrary to Christ. We will not go along with those policies. Rather, we will defy them, with grace and courage. We will oppose them. We will draw our own line in the sand, a line called “Faithfulness and Truth,” and summon our rivals to cross to us. “The cause of Christ is at stake, and are we to be found sleeping?”

When the world draws its line in the sand, will you tell them, “No, I will not cross”? You need be neither intimidated nor unnerved *if you know who you are*. Tell them clearly, tell them confidently, tell them courageously. Say, “Listen carefully: I am a Christian.”

(Endnotes)

1 Lightfoot, Harmer & Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 138-141.

2The Protestant Reich Church, officially known as the German Evangelical Church. It was eventually opposed by the “Confessing Church” formed by dissident Christian pastors like Martin Niemoller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

3 Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer—Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 213. This is a fabulous read, a stirring account of the impact one courageous and deeply thoughtful Christian can have in the face of debilitating darkness.

4The watershed Barmen Declaration of 1934 was a manifesto of the Confessing Church stating its loyalty to the founding principles of German Evangelicalism that the official German Church had abandoned out of allegiance to the Reich.

5 Metaxas, 224.

6 Ibid, 219.



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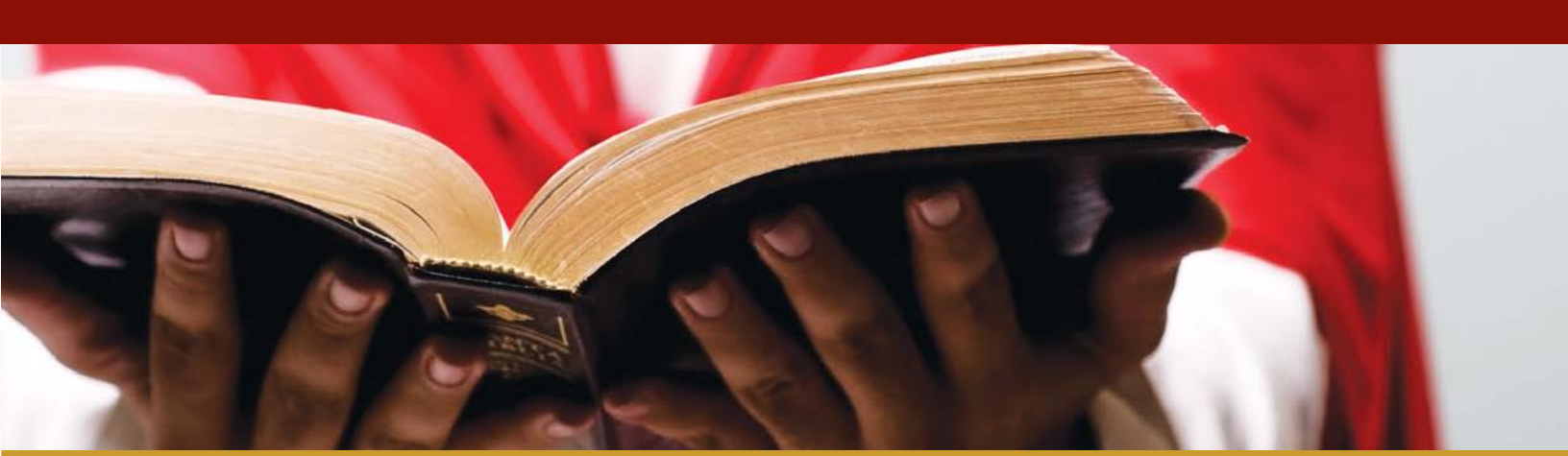
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Jesus Didn't Say Anything about Homosexuality

By Greg Koukl

If you've ever said that homosexuality is a sin, there's a good chance that someone tried to correct you with, "Jesus never said anything about homosexuality." It doesn't matter what Bible verse you believe bolsters your claim, they believe that Jesus' silence on the matter trumps all other considerations. But there are a number of reasons why this objection doesn't work.

[Click here for the full article...](#)

Stand to Reason Speakers Near You



Greg Koukl

November

[7-9](#) Chapel by the Sea, Anchorage, AK [Contact](#)

[15](#) Thoroughbred Community Church, Nicholasville, KY [Contact](#)

[22-23](#) Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA [Contact](#)

December

[14](#) Living Oaks Community Church "The Oaks" Bible Study, Newbury Park, CA 9:15 a.m. [Contact](#)



Alan Shlemon

November

[1](#) Reformation Lutheran, El Cajon, CA Time: 7-9 p.m. Topics: "Intelligent Design" [Contact](#)

[17](#) Magnolia Baptist, Anaheim, CA Topics: "Making Abortion Unthinkable" [Contact](#): Private event



Brett Kunkle

November

[10-16](#) Upland Christian Academy, Salt Lake City, UT Topic: Utah Mission Trip [Contact](#)

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