

OF SCANDALS, BUDGET CUTS AND FIREMEN^[1]

This world is a scandalous place. We Reformed folk have emphasized that truth to the full and have squeezed every possible ounce out of it that we could. All too often we seem more conscious of the power of the devil than of God. Most of us think of our sin more than of our being forgiven. How often do we celebrate and define ourselves in terms of the power we have been given through the new birth and the resurrection? Sometimes I get downright annoyed with our one-sided emphasis on the negative.

That said, it cannot be denied that this world *is* a scandalous place nevertheless. The economic tsunami in which we find ourselves is an example of the piling up of scandals throughout our cultures. The amazing naiveté about human nature on the part of those at the helm of the world's economy is scandalous. Note Alan Greenspan's public admission. The traps set by egocentric banks in the USA for ignorant, eager and irresponsible members of the public to become homeowners the easy way is another scandal.^[2] The continuing over-the-top bonuses to CEOs are among the most scandalous exhibition of greed and egocentrism. The contradictory decisions by the BC Government to increase the salaries of politicians while rejecting an increase in the basic wage constitute an astounding and mean home-grown scandal.

But lest we think only the highly placed engage in public scandals, we need to look at the grassroots as well. When government income has been greatly reduced, neither leaders nor ordinary citizens can expect to go unscathed. Yet, when provincial governments reduce educational grants to school districts, citizens are all up in arms. Citizens in all sectors resist cuts. That, too, is an amazing, unthinking and egocentric scandal. Where do we expect non-existent funds to come from to satisfy inflated expectations developed during a few decades of unrealistic general wealth? Absurd and scandalous.

I want to zero in on one sector that has raised my suspicion ever since a couple of experienced paramedics separately drew my attention to the mostly useless and expensive involvement of fire departments in 911 health calls, in calls that paramedics are trained to take care of themselves. They made me understand

[1] CC, 26 June/2010.

[2] Lest Canadians think they are any smarter, *after* the Americans were caught with their pants down during the economic collapse of 2008, Canadians started down the same track. Canadian financial authorities are *now* (2010-2015) warning that their countrymen are heading in the same direction, and that *after* Canadians pounded their breasts in pride for their superior financial system.

various situations I observed in downtown Vancouver. A single ambulance would suffice to help a collapsed street person, but there they were, the firefighters with their huge truck. I observed two men having a fight on the street. A 911 call produced two ambulances, two police cars and two fire trucks, a small one and a large one! One single police car would have sufficed.

I have recently learned that this situation exists in many jurisdictions due to union demands, not to actual needs. Every such fire truck involvement costs big bucks. In one West Coast city only 3% of such involvements are for actual fires. Diana Diamond recently wrote, "So we are facing a system rigged by the firefighters union for the benefit of the ...union and its members." Every jurisdiction will have its own arrangement, but my hunch is that the situation just described has its parallels throughout our country. This is a scandal.

Here we have an example of where citizens can unite to check out their local system. Perhaps in your community there is this need to demand a reduction of the exaggerated costs of inflated services to reflect the current reality of mandatory budget cuts. Perhaps your church has firemen among its members. You can begin with them. We must all accept and participate in mandatory cost cutting that is fair and just for all. Many unions are bucking this reality in two ways-- (1) They demand big bucks; (2) they buck big changes. The firemen may be the local example you can begin to work on—and then move on to others, one department at a time. If you have no professional fire department, you will have other powerful vested interest groups that will not budge(t). It could develop into an interesting and challenging Reformed approach on a *local* level, and into an experiment that might help sensitize and empower the broader community.

Yes, some scandals *can* be bucked! Don't stare powerlessly at the negatives of life and the scandals; draw powerfully and positively from the resurrection unto the new life that's already available in the here and now.