

Poe Pitiful Me

Baltimore has Edgar Allen Poe. Pennsylvania wants him. "Nevermore!" cries Dr. Jeff Jerome, curator of the Poe House in Maryland. The City of Brotherly Love "can keep its broken bell and its cheese steak," he told the New York Times, "but Poe's body isn't going anywhere." He did offer them the moldering corpse of John Wilkes Booth as a consolation prize but Philly doesn't seem appeased.

The irony here is that nobody much wanted the American poet and novelist when he was alive. Sure, Baltimore named their NFL franchise after Poe's most famous poem, but hardly anybody showed up to bury him in an unmarked grave when he died in 1849. He was born in Boston but shunned by the city's intellectual elite. He wrote some of his most famous works in Philadelphia but never settled there.

Jesus saw a similar trend among the religious folk of his day. In Matthew 23.29 he berates those who build tombs to dead prophets while plotting the death of live ones. It's easy to celebrate someone after the fact, when time and trendiness have made him famous. It takes the heart of Christ to embrace the unwanted ones in the present moment.

Dr. Albert Reyes, president of Buckner Children and Family Services, challenges Texas Baptists to build ministries for the living instead of monuments to the dead. He invites us to view the issue of illegal immigration from a Kingdom perspective by asking, "What does it mean for redemptive history that the Lord of history has allowed us to have over fourteen million undocumented immigrants, primarily from Latin American countries, inside our borders?" He sites the mighty mixed and mightily mixed-up multitude gathered at God's throne in Revelation 7.9-10 and asks, "Will it matter on that day if people had legal documents authorizing them to be in our country?"

Dr. Reyes rightly poses the problem: will we in our twenty-twenty hindsight wait twenty years to build headstones in the desert and weep over the desperate dead? Or will our prophetic vision construct Kingdom responses to the huddled masses who at this moment yearn to breathe free both physically and spiritually?

I don't know the answer to the immigration problem. As Dr. Reyes himself admits that "certainly we must protect our borders and have a functional system of immigration into our country." I don't know the answer, but I do think Dr. Reyes correctly frames the question, and I look forward to hearing him, along with Dr. Jim Denison of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, challenge us with these and other issues at the Linn & Betty Self Bible Symposium on September 25 and 26.

Now or Nevermore,
Doug