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In reply refer to 9A24.80

Dear Ruth and Billy,

I don't know for sure how to start this letter. I would like to pour out my gratitude for your great support across the years. Or, you may prefer that I report on my wife's worsening cancer, or my own recent stroke.

But I had better get to the point. Nelson Bell and John A Mackay are the two people after whom the annual \$5,000 Nelson-Bell prize is awarded. I sort of doubt that you have yet seen the acceptance speech Roberta and I gave at that time—at the PC(USA) General Assembly breakfast meeting of Clayton Bell's valued organization, Presbyterians For Renewal, at which time, this year, she and I were the recipients of the prize.

I am not so proud of that speech that I expect you would want to read it for its eloquence but rather because in my old age it raises an issue which eclipses most of the insights I have had in my now nearly 75 years. I can't expect you to accept every new idea I get. But this thought is profoundly more important, and extremely urgent. I ask only that you read it.

Roberta and I seized the occasion in this recent, august moment, facing 300 key evangelical leaders at this GA breakfast, to present the most inspirational and yet disturbing idea that has ever emerged in my thinking. I'll grant you I would not be thinking in this novel direction if Roberta were not slowly dying of a preventable disease—cancer of the bone marrow. But Billy, you too, have been attacked by a degenerative disease, and both you and Ruth could be attacked at any moment by a swarm of chronic diseases that have been around for centuries.

The difference is that now, today, all of these diseases could be eradicated completely—to the glory of the Lord.

The problem is we are not doing it. Why? Mainly because our prized Christian tradition skipped a beat 1,600 years ago and gulped down a heresy that blinds us to this concern of God. But I don't want to repeat what is in the talk. I would not suspect a massive heretical element in our Christianity if I had not seen in missionary work how blind people can be to heresies deriving from their own pagan background. Same with us!

Yours, faithfully, Ralph