STUNTZ MEMORIAL

I think the main reason Bill invited me to speak at this service is because he thought that after many years of teaching I surely can keep to a five-minute limit. Fortunately for me, Bill never attended one of my classes, which never quite seem to end on time. But I’ll try to do better today, for Bill’s sake.

The Bible says, “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” Surely the death of those who have suffered greatly, even as Jesus himself suffered greatly, is especially precious in God’s eyes.

I met Bill twenty-five years ago. I was in my final year of law school at the University of Virginia. Bill had graduated two years earlier—number one in his class, of course—and had returned to Virginia to teach after clerking with Justice Lewis Powell on the Supreme Court. He was already a legend, and was a brilliant yet unassuming teacher even in his first year. We students knew were in trouble when we made a comment and Bill’s initial response was “I don’t know about that,” or “I may be wrong about this, but …”

Ten years later, I came back to Virginia to teach for a semester. Just before I was due to start, a now-legendary East Coast snowstorm dropped 31 inches on my Philadelphia neighborhood. A friend helped me shovel the alleyway behind my rowhouse so that I could retrieve my car and get to U. Va. on time. When I arrived in Charlottesville, it too was blanketed in snow. But I was astonished to find that the driveway to my rental house was perfectly clear. Bill had arranged for a snowplow to come. He didn’t think this was anything special, just the kind of thing we do for one another.

Probably everyone here knows that Bill was one of the great legal scholars of the past fifty years. He was the pre-eminent criminal justice scholar of his generation, almost single-handedly creating much of the modern criminal procedure literature. He was also the leading Christian legal scholar, writing among other things, an essay in the Harvard Law Review that is absolutely foundational to recent Christian legal scholarship.

I had the privilege of co-authoring several articles and a blog with Bill. I say privilege, but it didn’t always feel that way. I felt somewhat like the composer Salieri must have felt in the wonderful movie Amadeus when he was helping Mozart with one of his last compositions. Salieri was a perfectly fine composer,
but he wasn’t exactly Mozart. Some of you may remember the scene. At first, Salieri can see where Mozart is heading. Yes, yes, he says, and writes down the notes. But pretty soon he’s simply stumped. He can’t figure out where Mozart will go next. This is what working with Bill felt like. I would keep up with him for a while, and sometimes even anticipate where the ideas were going; but then he would take the analysis to some new level, leaving me way behind.

Bill could make connections that no one else saw, often demonstrating that the conventional wisdom has things exactly backwards. He showed that the Supreme Court’s protections for criminal defendants—such as the Miranda warning that “you have the right to remain silent”—may actually hurt innocent defendants rather than help them; and that Roe v. Wade actually helped the pro-life movement rather than hurt it.

One of the small graces in the terrible suffering Bill endured over his last decade was that his writings about his ordeal may have touched even more hearts and minds than his scholarship did. His blog posts and articles in *The New Republic* and *Christianity Today*, as well as several interviews, have been reprinted in church bulletins and elsewhere all over the world. Many compare them, rightly in my view, to the writings of C.S. Lewis.

Bill wanted to bring his non-Christian colleagues and his Christian friends together. One of the most widely read pieces Bill wrote was an essay about how elite intellectuals and his fellow evangelicals, who are sometimes suspicious of intellectuals, have a lot more in common than they often think.

Bill was embarrassed at the thought of friends and family gathering to honor him. It was only because he loved his professional colleagues so much that he allowed them to hold a conference in his honor last spring. And it’s only because he loved us so much that allowed us to have a service like this one.

I know he understood our need to grieve—he grieved a great deal too. But I also know he wanted all of us, together, to help create a community in which we strive to honor Christ’s call to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. And he didn’t want that community ever to end.

I don’t know if there will be snow in heaven. But if there is, I’m sure that Bill is having it cleared right now, and that he will be standing there, ready to welcome us when we arrive.