From Uplook, 1999

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0-0! The Humbling of Man (January 1999)

From Uplook, January 1999. Editorial.

Is the millennium bug a blessing in disguise?

How ironic if the downfall of modern man were by way of two zeroes (see Y2K Bug, p. 11). I recognize that mathematicians object to calling a zero nothing, but I can't help but think of the words of Paul: "…God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and…things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:27-29).

It is not a happy thing to anticipate the economic and social chaos which could be brought on by the shortsightedness of some computer programmers. Remember what we are instructed to pray (1 Tim. 2:2). But if it were to happen, why would God allow it? For that matter, why has God allowed plagues, natural disasters, wars, epidemics and pestilences throughout history?

Harry Lacey, in God and the Nations, writes: "…the providences of God govern the circumstances of nations, causing hard times to follow evil practices and better conditions to be the fruit of righteousness. These happenings are intended to be a voice to the nations, and by means of these variations and circumstances God speaks more solemnly to men than by His words. These experiences operate on conscience, making men ask, almost in spite of themselves, what they have done to deserve calamity when it comes upon them."

The Black Plague, beginning in the early 1300s, swept the world. By 1400, it had killed 40 million Europeans, taking one quarter of the world's population. Its cause? A microscopic bacterium, Y. pestis. Its agent? A flea bite. Yet one of the results of the plague was the conversion of Wycliffe: "It was like the sound of the last trumpet to his heart…Solemnized with the thought of eternity, he spent days and nights in his cell, and…came forth a champion for the truth" (Miller's Church History, p. 551).

At the time of his conversion, the lives of churchmen were scandalous. The pulpits were posts given often to the third sons of landed gentry (the first received the estate; the second was commissioned in the army). When the plague struck, many of the city pulpits were abandoned; clergymen fled to family estates in the country—just when multitudes were facing death and wanted a word from God! Yet just then came true evangelists, often called Wycliffe's poor priests, who crisscrossed the nation with the gospel. Only eternity will tell the results.

Like the Philistines, modern man has an exaggerated view of himself and his accomplishments. How did the Lord humble the Philistines? By opening the tectonic plates under their feet? Nothing so substantial! The Philistine priests gave instructions appropriate to God's means of humbling them: "Ye shall make images of your hemorrhoids, and images of your mice that mar the land; and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel…" (1 Sam. 6:5).

The law of cause and effect has its part in humbling man, yet God is often seen as the active agent in visiting

nations with calamity. The reasons are more complex than we could understand, certainly in time, yet one reason is revealed: “When men are cast down, then thou shalt say, There is lifting up; and He shall save the humble person” (Job 22:29).

“Civilization” has distracted man from seeking after God. Perhaps if all his computers and radios and TVs and factories and offices were shut down for a while, he would have silence enough to hear the voice of the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar, driven from all his material things, discovered this: “Now I…praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase” (Dan. 4:37).

If the West will not seek the Lord in prosperity, perhaps He will bring them adversity. It worked for those in Psalm 107. “Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble… Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death… because they rebelled against the words of God…Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses” (Ps. 107:5-6, 10-13).

If God chooses to use such a crisis to wake thousands of our countrymen to flee to Him, would we not agree with His plan? Is it possible that mice and fleas and bacteria can bring glory to God? Yes, and zeroes, too!

Panic Attack 2000 (January 1999)

From Uplook, January 1999. Article.

People who take the Bible seriously sometimes can't be taken too seriously. Be careful with that apocalyptic literature! Especially when the author sells gold coins or generators.

I'm not old enough to remember the widespread panic at the end of the last millennium (Oct. 98 Uplook, p. 24). But I do recall the book, 88 Reasons (why the Lord will come in 1988). Some Christians put their pets to sleep so they wouldn't starve to death when their owners were raptured. P. S.: He didn't come in '88.

And remember the John Todd tapes, full of "insider" information on an international Satanic conspiracy, from the President on down? Todd, supposedly an ex-witch, was touted by Jack Chick, the consummate sensationalist. Turns out that Todd was having one over on a gullible Christian public, all the while running a witchcraft supply store.

At that time, many assembly believers were frantic. Some told me they weren't going to have children, to bring them into such a world. I had to address the subject in many assemblies where I travelled. My message?

We should not be amazed: An international conspiracy? Of course! Paul talks about it in Ephesians 2:1-3, and we were once part of it, "But God…" delivered us from it.

We should not be angry: Many Christians were viewing their political leaders with outright hostility. Are they on

the enemy's side? Many are, just as Nero was. But Paul told us to "honor the king." Peter told us to pray for them. Today there is much anti-government rhetoric among the Lord's people. Christian "fundamentalists" are often considered dangerous, sometimes due to our "speaking evil of dignities."

We should not be afraid: "Fear not, little flock," said the Lord. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Lk. 12:32). We have a good Father looking after us. "Fear ye not…ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt. 10:31).

As I looked at recent issues of some Christian magazines, the phrase came to me, "…who mind earthly things" (Phil. 3:19). One ad invited believers to an open house in a Y2K community in the hills of Virginia. On the back cover is an ad for gold coins. Another magazine offers wood burning cook stoves on its cover; inside you'll find rain barrels to store drinking water, a recipe for squirrel stew, and a helpful comment on how to make phone books suitable alternatives to toilet paper. All I didn't find was "How to turn your vacuum cleaner into an AK47 assault rifle."

If only we could get as passionate about the lost all around us! If our society-as-we-know-it does collapse at 12:01 on January 1, 2000, will you be found huddling in your basement with just enough dried food and gold and drinking water to look after you and yours for six months or a year? Joel Belz asks (in World magazine) what you will do when your neighbor drops in, looking for food. Or a young couple with a sick baby. Or three ruffians in a pick-up truck. Some are advocating the use of guns to protect your horded supplies.

After evaluating the various views on the Y2K possibilities, Dave Hunt concludes: “In our opinion, there will be problems, but not nearly of the magnitude we are hearing. Fear can easily sidetrack Christians from the real tasks in these last days…We are not to be anxious for tomorrow but to trust in our Lord for we do not know (nor do the ‘pundits’) what a day may bring forth…It is only prudent always to have extra food and water, flashlights, medical supplies and other items on hand that could be helpful in an emergency. Beyond that, Christ gave very specific commands and promises in Matthew 6:25-34. We suggest meditating upon that passage and obeying it.”

What do these words mean?

Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Matthew 6:31-33

Messiah on Display (February 1999)

From Uplook, February 1999. Editorial.

The attendant saw the lambskin scroll, but I saw the Lamb.

The land of Israel may have more museums per capita than any other country in the world. But of all the museums in the country, none can compare with the Shrine of the Book and its sacred treasure. Designed to mimic the clay lids of the jars that contained the world-famous Dead Sea Scrolls, the museum houses Israel's greatest national treasure.

You've heard the story. A teenage Ta'amireh Bedouin, Muhammed Ahmed el-Hamed, eased himself into a cave on the eastern edge of the Judean wilderness. He was seeking treasure—and what treasure he found! The first three manuscripts he found included the now-famed Isaiah Scroll (IQIsa). These scrolls were sold for £P7 ($28.35) to a monk in the Syrian Orthodox Church, the oldest extant manuscripts of the Scriptures—older by 1,000 years!

But the monk, Butrus Sowmy, didn't know that. He needed help to decipher the strange letters. He thought he could find that help at the American Schools of Oriental Research, on Saladin Road just north of Herod's Gate. Due to the Jewish-Arab tensions at the time (it was only months before the birth of the state of Israel), many of the personnel at the School had gone elsewhere. John Trever, studying the plants and animals of the Bible, had been appointed Acting Director.

On a cold February afternoon, Sowmy and his brother, Ibrahim, laid three scrolls of cream-colored leather on Trever's desk. One was considerably larger than the other two, about 10 1/2" long and 6" in diameter. To this manuscript the scholar first turned his attention.

It unrolled easily. Because he had left his camera at the Palestine Archeological Museum, the best Trever could do was meticulously copy a few lines of the scroll and, using this, seek to determine what he was looking at. The script was puzzling to him. Finding a well-preserved section, he painstakingly reproduced the text from a portion near the bottom of the fourth column from the end.

After the two men had left with their precious cargo (having no idea how precious it was), John Trever and another Fellow at the School, William Brownlee, began examining the precious scrap. What could it be?

The lines that were copied included the double occurrence of an unusual form llw'. Literally, it would be translated, "by not." The Hebrew dictionary gave five columns on the common word lô', "not." At the end was a paragraph including every reference to llw' in the Old Testament. Two references in Chronicles didn't match; nor did another in Amos 6:13. But the next reference showed two occurrences in Isaiah 65:1. Trever writes, "With growing expectancy, I turned to it (in his Hebrew Bible). There, word for word, and almost letter for letter, was exactly what I had copied from the manuscript! It was a scroll of Isaiah, without a doubt!"

A facsimile of this 24-foot scroll occupies the central place of honor in the Shrine of the Book (see inset). On my first visit there, I asked the attendant if he could

show me the section of the scroll which we call chapter 53. As I began to quote it (in case he was unfamiliar with this portion), he turned on his heel and stalked off, spitting out the words over his shoulder, “You Christians! You’re all the same!”

What irony! Of all the ancient Bible scrolls discovered at Qumran, the best preserved was the roll of Isaiah—and he, the most eloquent and exacting portraitist of the suffering Messiah! I, one of the despised goyim, had discovered Israel’s Light, and He had illuminated my dark Gentile heart. Yet here, on public display in the heart of Israel—a heart still veiled in unbelief—was her most majestic portrait of Him.

Oh, the verse that showed John Trever he was holding in his hands the book of Isaiah? Isaiah 65:1 declares: “I am sought of them that asked not for Me; I am found of them that sought Me not: I said, Behold Me, behold Me, unto a nation (goy) that was not called by My name.”

Seven centuries after Isaiah laid down his pen, Paul, who met the Messiah on the Damascus Road, quoted this verse (Rom. 10:20). It was God’s intention, he said, that by saving Gentiles the Lord would move the hearts of Israel to seek their own Messiah. “Behold Me!” He pleads to us. If we do, those who would never think of looking in Isaiah—whether Jew or Gentile—will see the same lovely likeness of Him reflected in our lives.

Who Cares When Saints Suffer? (March 1999)

From Uplook, March 1999. Editorial.

A floodtide of Christian persecution is sweeping the world.

It's happening as you read these words. Somewhere a Christian is dying for his faith. Christian women are being raped. Christians' children are being sold into slavery. It is happening to our own brothers and sisters —torture, imprisonment, harassment, starvation, to say nothing of banishment, family destruction, literature bans, and prohibition to meet as believers. I confess I am ashamed, sheepish, to write about this rising tide of suffering saints because I know nothing about such things personally. But I would be more ashamed not to say something.

The problem is not an isolated one—a Christian imprisoned here, another dying there—though if we depended on the Western media, even most Christian publications, we could easily come to that conclusion.

It's difficult when reading the statistics to distinguish nominal Christians from true believers. (While this is a crucial difference, it is not always noticed by the persecutors.) In their shocking, up-to-date, well-documented book, Their Blood Cries Out, Paul Marshall and Lela Gilbert cite the following:

• In more than 60 countries, Christians are harassed, arrested, tortured or executed, specifically because of their faith.

• More than 600 million who take the name Christian live under political restrictions on religious liberty (they had more than Western hand-slapping in mind).

• Perhaps 225 million of those suffer “severe state interference in religion, obstruction, or harassment.”

• Quoting David B. Barrett’s International Bulletin of Missionary Research (Jan. 1996), it suggests the average rate of martyrdom at something close to 150,000 professing Christians per year!

Our response can only be, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge [their] blood…?” (Rev. 6:10). Heaven’s answer to those martyrs is given: “…They should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled” (v. 11).

We can hardly be surprised that much of the Christian world suffers such antagonism. The Lord warned: “If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also” (Jn. 15:20). What should be surprising is how easily we get off in the West. The answer may be obvious (2 Tim. 3:12).

Some suggest we pray for persecution here, to bring purification of the church. It may come, whether we pray for it or not. But Paul instructs us to pray that we might live “quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.” I suspect that times of persecution bring with them another set of problems beside the obvious—a temptation to bitterness, not only against oppressors, but against fellow believers who collapse under the weight; disruption of family life with children removed from believing households to be raised by the state;

doubting God's care when fellow believers starve to death (as in Angola recently or in North Korea today)—David may not have seen it (Ps. 37:25) but others have. We could hardly wish such things on anyone.

Does God care? Calvary tells us He does. Then why does He allow such suffering? The Cross gives us one answer: "Unless a corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone: but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit" (Jn. 12:24). In the book, By Their Blood, James and Marti Hefley trace Christian martyrdom through the 20th Century (until 1979). In it they recount some of the results of the martyrdom of the Ecuador Five. Not only were many of the people saved, but one of the killers, Tona, was himself martyred in taking the gospel to a downriver tribal group. In his dying breath, he whispered, "I forgive you. I'm dying for your benefit." By such sacrifices the Church still overcomes.

But do we care? Do we pray for the sufferers—and persecutors? Can we be better informed? Are there other ways to help? Read on; if you're asking such questions, this Uplook is for you. And "Remember those…in bonds, as bound with them; and those who suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body" (Heb. 13:3).

Countdown to Reality (April 1999)

From Uplook, April 1999. Editorial.

The Big Bang of 2 Peter 3:10 will make a few changes.

I was recently taking my daily constitutional, and was stepping it out along an impeccably kept marble concourse. It was in a shopping mall of the ritzy, glitzy variety—Phipps Plaza in Buckhead, on the north side of Atlanta.

Having been in the advertising business for several years, I tend to notice the varied attempts to woo money out of our pockets. For some reason, I noticed this one.

In large, bold type were the banner words, HISTORY IN THE MAKING. Beneath that were two photographs. The one on the left was an old black and white, of a street musician with drums on his back and a harmonica poised before his lips. He looks dolefully, disinterestedly toward the camera. The other photo, in full color, shows an upscale bistro-type restaurant.

Then the copywriter explains: “A hundred and twenty years ago, folks at Riverside used to spend Saturday nights at jamborees on the town square, sipping a local concoction known as Forester’s Wild Root Ale and listening to the foot-stomping music of Zebulun ‘Harmonica’ Harris and his jug band…” The ad goes on to tell what’s happening now at Riverside: a new development of apartment homes. Toward the bottom there was the expected contact information.

Then there was one more line, in very small print. “Disclaimer: Any resemblance between this account of

Riverside 120 years ago and actual fact is purely coincidental."

So they had told the truth—more than we suspected—when the lead caption read: "History in the making"!

This trend of tailoring history to your advantage might be expected from unscrupulous ad men. But post-modernist historians are also being "creative" in their rewriting of history these days—sans the disclaimer.

Politically correct descriptions supposedly attempt to repair centuries of discrimination. Now anyone who wishes may select, delete, or adjust "facts" to their heart's content. "Since we can never know absolute truth," they say, "all we can do is construct fictions, interpretations, rhetorical models that can persuade others."

There is, however, absolute truth and only one true Historian. His records are accurate and final. How different His view of history is from man's. We catch a hint of this as we read the Bible. For example, Luke 3 begins:

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto—none of the above, but to—John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness (vv. 1-2).

Some of the greatest empires in history by man's reckoning don't even appear on the pages of Scripture. Others show up only because they dared to touch the

apple of God's eye, the Israelites. Abraham and his family gets a detailed look; the great Hammurabi perhaps receives a single reference. The fishermen from Galilee are stage center in the New Testament; Nero and the Roman government only appear as walk-ons. The Lord Jesus never once mentions Pilate or Tiberius or Herod by name; but He called "His own"—Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, Simon Peter—"by name" (Jn. 10:3). It won't be CNN or the London Times, USA Today or the Toronto Globe & Mail that will be the final arbiter of truth. One whose titles include "Author and Finisher" will do the last edit on this world's history. Little things done for the Lord—a word of witness, a comforting note sent to a weary saint, a rebuff (or something worse) suffered for His sake, an intercessory prayer uttered in the night watches—will mean more in the cosmic scheme than military battles or political campaigns.

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come…" (1 Cor. 4:5). "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be…?" (2 Pet. 3:11).

The Man on the Center Tree (May 1999)

From Uplook, May 1999. Editorial.

His body was prepared to do God’s will—even death on a cross.

My wife and I had occasion recently to visit the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens which sit on a peninsula jutting into Sarasota Bay in sunny Florida. The gardens are noted for their bromeliad and orchid collection (there are 2,500 different kinds of bromeliads in the world, they told us, and 25,000 different kinds of orchids, not including hybrids). It is a breathtaking display of “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). There is also a fernery with some of the 10,000 species of ferns that occur worldwide. A bamboo pavilion highlights the largest of the grass family, and there are banyan and palm groves, a wonderful hibiscus garden, and a large display of succulents (including a wide variety of North American cacti).

As we relished the tropical air, the riot of color, and the exotic aromas that wafted past us, we came to the furthest point of the walk at the end of the peninsula. There spreading its branches by the water’s edge was a bo tree, ficus religiosa, or so said the sign at its base.

Why the term religiosa? The sign explained:

Sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists, the bo tree is the most revered tree in the world. The Buddha meditated for six years under a bo tree and there received the enlightenment. Bo trees are planted near temples in

India because of this association with the Buddha, and near homes to assure happiness and prosperity.

I appreciated receiving the information on the plaque, but I must beg to differ. The bo tree is definitely not the most revered tree in the world. There is another tree, dear to the hearts of untold millions, once planted on the brow of Golgotha. What fruit it has borne! The life from that tree has been grafted into a multitude of others, bringing eternal blessing. Of this tree Peter could write: "And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. But God raised Him from the dead" (Acts 13:28-30). What a tree!

It was this very point that Peter was driving home at Pentecost when he said: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:30-31). Now technically, the Lord was hanged on a tree and slain, not the other way around. But Peter was reminding the people of their own well-known history. The book of Joshua, in recording the conquest of Canaan, recounts the execution of the Canaanite kings and their being hanged on trees (Josh. 8:29; 10:26). The Lord Jesus was the only "King of the Jews" who was slain and "hanged on a tree." The leaders of the Jews had wanted the Lord to die at the hands of the Romans because the Romans executed by crucifixion. The Sanhedrin wanted Him under the curse of God. But, by a happy circumstance, God wanted Him under the curse of God as well! Paul explained the

necessity of the Lord dying on a tree: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal. 3:13-14).

Later in life, the one who had rebuked the Lord for even suggesting that He would die on a cross (Mt. 16:22) now understood the significance of the tree and the sweet fruit it would bear: “Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness…” (1 Pet. 2:24). What did the Buddha ever do for our sins?

There is an eternity of difference between a man who “received the enlightenment” and the Man who is “the Light of the world.” Who but Heaven can measure the distance between a man under a tree and the Man on the tree? It is Calvary’s tree, when planted near the heart, that “assures happiness and prosperity.”

Four Mysteries (May 1999)

From Uplook, May 1999. Bible study.

A biblical mystery is a truth unknowable except by revelation which God has withheld until an appropriate moment in history. There are four concerning the body.

If we find a tour through the human body breathtaking and mind-boggling, what can we do with these four mysteries but fall down and worship!

The Incarnation Body

The mystery of the incarnation body of Christ is spoken of in poetic symmetry, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).

Who of us can understand the wonder of it? The God of whom it is stated, “Will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee…” (1 Ki. 8:27) took up residence in a body. How could the little Babe upheld in the arms of a young virgin be upholding all things by the word of His power? Great indeed is the mystery.

Yet Paul, seemingly alluding to Bethel, “the house of God” with its pillar and angels and revelation of God in glory, tells Timothy that occupation with the Man Christ Jesus is the true secret to being transformed to be like Him.

The Mystical Body

The link between Christ and His Church is so intimate that Paul, by the Spirit's inspiration, uses the relationship between a body and its head to show the organic oneness, and between a man and woman in marriage to show the bond of love as the secret of that oneness. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the saviour of the body…He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church…For this cause shall a man…be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:23-32).

The Unified Body

Unless we were Jewish believers of the first century, we could hardly register the shock they would, when hearing Paul expound his "knowledge in the mystery of Christ." What was it? "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3:6).

It was not a mystery that Gentiles could be saved. There were many examples in the Old Testament of that: Rahab, Ruth, Uriah, to name a few. But what happened in the house of Cornelius was revolutionary. Until that occasion, Gentiles came in through the back door, so to speak, as proselytes to the Jewish faith. Now the Cross had leveled the ground. The middle wall of partition had been demolished, the enmity abolished (Eph. 2:14-15), and far-off Gentiles and nearby Jews who believe have equal "access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18). We also have the same citizenship, foundation, and

habitation (vv. 19-22). Like Solomon's temple, with "Jewish" stones and "Gentile" timbers, today Jews and Gentiles, "fitly framed together," grow "unto a holy temple in the Lord" (v. 21).

This is "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26-27).

The Glorified Body

"Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye…the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

If it is a great wonder that Christ came to us in the lowly garb of a human body, and is linked with us as Head to body in the Church, and is now in us, the hope of glory among the Gentiles, then who can anticipate the unfettered joy when "we shall be like Him"? Then shall the sons of Adam truly be manifested as the sons of God (Rom. 8:19).

What’s Wrong with This Picture? (June 1999)

From Uplook, June 1999. Editorial.

Like the German painter, have we left out the most important part?

The Palestinian Authority issued a commemorative stamp in May featuring the Wye River Accords with a picture of Yasser Arafat and President Clinton signing the document. The scene is from a photograph taken at the event, held at the White House last October. But Benjamin Netanyahu, recently defeated Prime Minister of Israel, who was in the photo, has been removed from the picture on the stamp. It almost seems prophetic.

This reminds me of an article I wrote for a Sunday school paper twenty years ago:

Adolph Friedrich Erdmann von Menzel was born in Breslau, Germany, in 1815 and died in Berlin in 1905. In between those dates, he became renowned for his fine paintings. He studied a little in the academy and more often by himself. At eighteen, he published his first work, a group of lithographs called An Artist’s Wanderings. It immediately attracted attention and Menzel was quickly catapulted to fame.

Around 1836, his work as an illustrator opened with four hundred pictures for a book on Frederick the Great. In these paintings, Menzel showed himself to be both original and historically accurate. In later years, he painted a staggering eight hundred more for other works on Frederick.

Definitely one of the outstanding German artists of his day, Menzel received the Order of the Black Eagle in 1899. But obviously I'm not telling you this because you have a consuming interest in German painters of the last century.

In the Berlin art gallery hangs a painting by Menzel of Frederick the Great talking to his generals. But in the center of the picture, there is a small, bare patch. The work is obviously unfinished. A faint charcoal outline indicates the artist's intentions. He had skillfully and tediously painted in each general in his uniform, but had left the king till the last. Perhaps he thought he wasn't ready to portray the king in this crowning work of his life. He wanted it to be just perfect. But Menzel died before he was able to finish.

Isn't that like so many people today? They put in all the generals and leave the King to the last, with good intentions that grow more faint every day. They mean to put the King in the center. Someday. But somehow they never get around to it and eternity looms ahead with their hopes as faded as the charcoal sketch on Menzel's canvas.

The search is going on today — a search for Christians willing to put the King first. The King Himself said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33).

Is the King in your life just a faint outline, shrouded in good intentions? Or is He evident in all His vibrant glory, a living reality—the King in the center of your canvas?

This issue of Uplook features articles about biblical portraits of the Church. The illustrations are varied—a

pastoral scene with sheep on the hillside; a domestic view with a bride getting ready for her wedding day; a construction site with a building rising to completion, to name a few. But what links these diverse word pictures is the central Figure in each one.

What is a bride without a bridegroom? A flock without a shepherd? A building without a foundation? A body without a head? Yes, what indeed! Tragedies every one.

Am I overstating the case by saying that the Church in the West, Laodicea-like, has every imaginable accoutrement (and some unimaginable, like teeth fillings reputedly turning to gold at the Toronto Airport Church!). Drama, praise bands, mass rallies, mega-buildings—rich and increased with goods, in need of nothing. Except the Man standing outside the door.

Acts 2:42 is a great place to start in defining local church life, but it should not be the end of it. The mechanics of the assembly are important—how, where, when, how often we do things. But the dynamic is essential. You cannot have a New Testament assembly without New Testament life. And “this life is in His Son.” Our motive, our focus, our resources, our objectives, are all to be found in the One who knocks at the door. He’s asking to come in. Does anyone hear His voice?

Bone of His Bone (June 1999)

From Uplook, June 1999. Article.

Eve portrays the first “bride of the wounded side”; the Church is the second one.

It is well known that the Ephesian and Colossian epistles are, in large measure, mirror images. Their overall layout is very similar: after a greeting, thanksgiving and prayer, Paul gives a doctrinal section where he discusses the gospel coming to the Gentiles.

After that, both letters teach us about Christ and the Church as the Head and His Body. But Ephesians emphasizes the Body and its relationship to the Head, while Colossians stresses the Head and His ministry to the Body. Ephesians underlines the unity of the Body; Colossians portrays the preeminence of the Head.

Following that, Paul in Ephesians teaches us our responsibility regarding our unity in the Body; in Colossians, he explains what our unity with the Head means practically.

Both epistles then give exhortations to relationships within the households of believers, followed by a call to be careful and prayerful, before Paul gives his concluding remarks. In all, there are perhaps a dozen parallel passages in the two books.

One of the most helpful is cross-referencing Ephesians 5:19 with Colossians 3:16 where the verses provide a kind of equation. The variables are “Be filled with the Spirit” = “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

However, the most breathtaking complements, surely, are Colossians 2:9-10 and Ephesians 1:22-23. Here are these tremendous statements:

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness (pleroma) of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the head…” (Col. 2:9-10).

“[God] hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness (pleroma) of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23).

How do we understand such breathtaking truth? Paul says in Ephesians 5, “This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” That we are complete in the One who is the fulness of the Godhead is a fact that fills our sky. But how can it be that we are the fulness of the One who is the fulness of God? Surely this lies beyond our horizon.

The Colossian epistle is considerably shorter than the letter to the Ephesians, so in Ephesians Paul has time to develop not only the Church as the Body (a picture shared with Colossians) but also the Church as a building and as a bride. It is this third illustration that I think may help us begin to grasp Ephesians 1:22-23.

When Adam was the only human being in existence, his body was complete in itself. But Adam had no earthly companion with whom he could fellowship. So three great steps were taken to rectify this predicament, to give him a help suitable for him.

First, in Genesis 2:21, we see the bride being born through the “deep sleep” of Adam, corresponding to the

death of Christ. It was a volitional act of temporary separation to make the bride possible.

Second, though perfectly distinct from Adam, Eve was a part of Adam, formed out of him from “the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man” (Gen. 2:22). Eve, like the Church, was the bride of his wounded side. Adam called her Woman (meaning “out of Man”) because out of his fulness his bride had been made for him.

Third, the Lord God “…made (or builded) He a woman.” The woman was bone of Adam’s bones, flesh of his flesh, yet God saw Eve as a distinct creation: “in the image of God created He them” (Gen. 1:27).

Even so, there was an organic union; they were seen as sharing a common life. As F. A. Perigo writes: “And as they were looked at as one—‘He called their name Adam’—the people of God are never looked at apart from Christ; they have no life in themselves. Christ is our life” (Bridal Aspects of the Church, p. 10).

How does this Edenic scene help us with Ephesians 1:22-23? Simply in this way: Until Adam’s sleep, he was complete in himself. But in order to have a companion, he gave up his rib. From that point on, there was a sense in which he was not complete unless Eve was with him—because she had his rib! Bone of his bone, she had his life in her.

The “last Adam” is infinitely superior to the first (see 1 Cor. 15:45-49). However, there surely is still a similarity between the “living soul” of Adam and the “life-giving spirit” of Christ.

One verse that links the old and new order of things is found in Genesis 2:24 and repeated by our Lord in

Matthew 19:5. “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.” Of course the Lord Jesus never left His Father as to relationship and communion. He Himself was, and is, ever “the Son of man which is in heaven” (Jn. 3:13), as He stated while talking to Nicodemus. Yet “for this cause,” the Son left His Father’s house and laid His glory in the dust that He might give to us of His life. “Of His fulness we have received” and so are complete in Him.

But there is a sense (and only a sense) in which the Man in glory is alone today—though surrounded by angelic servants and sitting at the Father’s right hand. He still awaits His Bride. And it is not good that the Man should be alone.

In this sense it appears that the Church is “the fulness of Him.” He gave His life to us; we have life from the Life. We are now the Body of Christ. We are “one flesh” with Him in that “both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one…” (Heb. 2:11).

The Adam-Eve relationship is applied to us in the New Testament in various practical ways. As noted, it instructs us as to the sanctity of marriage, showing how intimate, interdependent, and permanent the marriage union was designed to be.

Paul also uses this first marriage to teach the man-woman order in the church (1 Cor. 11:3-12). Yet more spectacular than the truth itself are the mental gymnastics some commentators take in telling us this passage is only applicable to the cultural scene in first century Corinth. They mention temple prostitutes who shaved their heads. Where is that verse? It must be

there because everyone quotes it—but I can't find it! Instead I find a divine order established in the first creation but overturned by rebellion. That same order is to be re-established in the new creation, yet the same rebellion lurks in the hearts of people today who will "wrest the scripture" rather than cling to it.

How good it would be if, in this egocentric age, we would apply this principle at the highest level: "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1 Cor. 11:8-9). The Church finds its life in the Man at God's right hand who stooped to the earth to have her. She was made for the Man: for His pleasure we "are, and were created" (Rev. 4:11).

Again F. A. Perigo insightfully writes: "Why is Ephesians the topstone of Paul's letters? The appreciation of Christ forms a basis in the soul for all divine truth. We find that while Judas valued Him at 30 pieces of silver, the Ephesians in Acts 19:19 give as their appreciation 50,000 pieces of silver! To such a company of saints, Paul declared the whole counsel of God."

A Bridal Show

There are many other Bible brides that display some of the characteristics of the Church. Here are a few of them:

1. Sarah: the pilgrim bride who shared the hope of things to come

2. Rebekah: the enriched bride who loved her bridegroom unseen

3. Rachel: The beloved bride, the fruit of her bridegroom's labor

4. Asenath: the Gentile bride who shared her bridegroom’s throne

5. Ruth: the redeemed bride who bears Obed (meaning worship)

6. Priscilla: the laboring bride who worked sacrificially with her bridegroom

Corpus Christi (June 1999)

From Uplook, June 1999. Bible study.

The relationship between Christ and His Church is so close that Paul dares to use the head and the body.

Four key passages paint for us the portrait of the Church as the mystical body of Christ: Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 10–12; Eph. 1–4; and Col. 1–3. Taken together, they present to us four great principles.

Unity without Unanimity

The one body has many members (1 Cor. 12:12, 20, 27; Eph. 4:4; Col. 3:15) for “the body is not one member, but many” (1 Cor. 12:14). There are ten systems of the body (skeletal, muscular, digestive, circulatory, etc.) which provide the unifying benefits of common life in the body. Yet the various organs are allowed to be individuals, with their own ministries within that one body.

Practically applied, Paul states: “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Col 3:15). At the beginning of the verse is a passive act of submission to the divine resource that will captivate our hearts if we simply allow the Lord to carry on. At the end of the verse is an active bringing to mind reasons to be thankful of the believers in my local assembly. In between is the solid fact that it wasn’t my idea, this being in one body—I was called to it. It was God’s idea.

Diversity without Division

How often we see things through our own gift: If you aren't doing what I'm doing, the way I'm doing it, you aren't doing anything of value! "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:4-5). In fact, the more I minister to the body with my gift, the more I have a vested interest in other parts of the body. As I contribute to the general life of the aggregate, my life becomes their life, and vice versa.

There is amazing variety in the Body, not all of it obvious to the eye. How often we think little is happening in our assemblies because we see little happening. But of course I don't see you digesting your dinner (nor do I want to), or supplying your extremities with fresh oxygen, yet these are the secrets of a healthy body.

Just so, says Paul. "…those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness…but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked: that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another" (1 Cor. 12:22-25).

Allegiance not Atrophy

Our loyalty to the Head ("Holding the Head," Col. 2:19) is manifested by our communion in the Body. And each first day of the week we are to proclaim again our fealty to our risen Head by partaking of the emblems. This is a weekly confirmation of what should be a daily reality:

“The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body…” (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Our recognition of the vital role of our glorious Head, however, does not cause us to leave all the work to Him. He has chosen to work through His Body, not independently of it.

The Church “is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:23). We should not ask Him to do things we have been instructed to do; nor should we attempt to do by our energy what He has said He will do. Praying once a week at our prayer meeting: “Lord, save souls,” is a sickly response to His commission to go, show and tell. Of course we should pray, because there are aspects of evangelism that only He can perform, but our part (done by His strength, of course) is our part.

Co-operating not Competing

It’s a good thing my left foot never tries to race my right foot to the door. And though I am right-handed, my left hand has never expressed any desire to dominate by snatching objects from its partner. “If the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor. 12:16-18).

There is not one “selfish” organ in the body. Each is there for the well-being of the others. So it is with His Body: We are to minister “for the perfecting of the

saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12).

Illuminating Living (June 1999)

From Uplook, June 1999. Bible study.

John on Patmos saw seven assemblies in Turkey. They looked like lampstands shining in the darkness.

It could be anticipated that the Revelation (or the Unveiling) would pull back the coverings that stand between us and the future, between us and the real world, and take us on a tour of the temple in heaven (of which the earthly models were mere “figures of the true”). What began as a long desert march has reached its final glorious destination.

The ark is there, seen to be what it always was—the throne of God. The altars are there (the brazen in 8:5, the golden in 8:3 and 9:13). The laver or sea (note Rev. 4:6 with 1 Ki. 7:23-25) the censer with its incense (8:5), and the Lamb as if freshly slain—all are there (can you find the table of showbread?). Of course the priests are there, after the order of Melchizedek, a kingdom of them! And the singers with their songs fill the book.

The Light in the Darkness

The tabernacle also had a menorah or candelabra, with one main stalk and six branches, each of the seven crowned with a light. It was beaten out of pure gold, and made to look not like an olive, but like an almond tree (see Ex. 25:33-34; 37:19-20).

Why the almond? We might find help in Numbers 17:8, where Aaron’s rod budded. It suggests resurrection since the rod, once cut down, came back to life—a new kind of life where time is no restriction, for buds,

blossoms and almonds appeared together. This was also true of the lampstand.

The Hebrew word for almond is derived from a root meaning “to hasten,” appropriate because the almond is the harbinger of spring, being the first to blossom. In Jeremiah 1:11-12, the Lord explains the prophet’s sighting of an almond tree by saying, “Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten My word to perform it.”

The Unity of the Lamps

When the Lord introduces the seven churches in Revelation 1-3, He shows them as lamps. They, like the menorah in the tabernacle, are the only light in the darkness. But here they are not linked to each other, as with the branches on the tabernacle candlestick, sharing a common base. What unifies the seven churches is the Figure in the midst.

Notice that it is not the responsibility of the lampstands to remove other lampstands from fellowship: “Remember…and repent…or else I will come unto thee quickly,” says the Lord, “and will remove thy candlestick out of his place” (Rev. 2:5).

The Purpose of the Lamps

Lamps are not purchased to illuminate themselves. Nor are these lamps intended to do so. It is the privilege of each local assembly, standing on its own base, answerable to the Lord, to show Christ to the world.

The lamps of Revelation 1-3 are golden, not the simple clay lamps used by the common people in Jesus’ time. The allusion seems to point to the Old Testament lamps, which shone “before the Lord” in the holy place. It is His

desire “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15).

What an honor for us that the One who is the Light of the world and the little lamps scattered throughout the world share this ministry.

The Function of the Lamps

But how do the lamps work? In the book of Zechariah we have the description of another lampstand which uses oil as fuel for its light. There God taught the prophet this principle: “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:1-6). A better lesson could not be learned by Christian churches today.

All the beauty we can see in our physical world is a result of light. In fact the colors we see are not in the objects but in the light itself. In the moral world, all beauty is resident in the One who is the Light of the world. Our society desperately needs to see something of that beauty. Perhaps we could claim two desires expressed by the psalmist: “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple” and “let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it” (Ps. 27:4; 90:17).

Pillar Power (June 1999)

From Uplook, June 1999. Bible study.

Let's take a trip to Bethel. See what we can learn at the foot of the ladder to heaven.

Fleeing for his life, young Jacob had travelled over the undulating road from Beersheva on the edge of the Negev. Skirting old Salem, he had made it about twelve miles further north before the sun slipped behind the hills and "the Supplanter" bedded down for the night at what the Scripture calls simply "a certain place" (Gen. 28:11).

The man who would some day receive from God "the land whereon thou liest," as he would soon be told, made a pillow of stones and fell into a fitful sleep.

He dreamed. In the dream he saw a tremendous ladder reaching from where he lay all the way up to heaven. And "behold!" angels ascended and descended on its rungs.

Above the ladder stood the Lord Himself, and He began to speak to Jacob in his dream. "I am," He said, "the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac… and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. 28:13-15).

Awaking from his slumber, Jacob cried, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not!" (v. 16). Calling it "the

house of God" and "the gate of heaven," Jacob turned his pillow into a pillar and named the place Bethel.

So we have God and His house, angels and the ladder, a pillar the patriarch raised up, and the ground on which Jacob lay—promised to him and to his seed.

Two New Testament passages shed light on this Genesis scene: John 1:51 and 1 Timothy 3:15-16.

John 1 introduces us to the Light that illuminates the darkness of sin's interminable night and of a Word spoken in the stillness. Like Jacob's confession—"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not!"—so "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not" (Jn. 1:10).

Verse 51 leaves us in no doubt as to the ladder linking heaven and earth: "And He saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

We have a stone in John 1 as well, one of many stones to be built into the house of God. When Andrew brought his brother to Messiah, Jesus said, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (v. 42). Later this Stone would write: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

Paul no doubt was also thinking of this roadside scene when he wrote to Timothy: "…that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is

the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. 3:15-16).

If we are going to behave properly at Bethel, we will need to understand the following:

1. We are always in the presence of God, whether we are aware of it or not. Practicing the presence of God is one of the secrets of holy living.

2. The church should be known for its pillar, not a pillow. It is high time to awake, as Jacob did, and to catch a glimpse of the glory.

3. The pillar was anointed with oil as Jacob made a vow to remain true to God. He wandered far from Bethel, but when the Lord brought him back, he once again anointed the pillar and was restored in fellowship.

4. The word for "ground" might well be understood as the foundation of a pillar. But this was no Roman pillar. It was a cairn raised up on the ground Jacob had been promised. The Greek work used for ground in 1 Timothy 3 is from the same root as the word Paul used for the ground to which Paul fell on the Damascus road (Acts 22:7). The pillar was the memorial; the ground was the inheritance, like the ground on which Jacob lay, but now a spiritual possession of the people of God.

What do we need to see at Bethel if we are to behave ourselves in the midst of our crooked and perverse nations? Again 1 Timothy 3:16 describes the span from earth to glory, but now the angels are observers. It is the Son of God Himself who comes to us in incarnation and who has ascended for us in glory. Great is the mystery!

Unique (September 1999)

From Uplook, September 1999. Editorial.

We learn about Him by comparisons, but He really is incomparable.

The dictionary defines unique as “being the only one, without a like or equal.” Strictly speaking, something cannot be “somewhat unique” or “very unique.” According to Oxford, the word fell into disuse in the 17th and 18th centuries, no doubt because there was little opportunity to use it in a world where so few things are unique. It was entered in the 1818 edition of Johnson’s Dictionary as a foreign word and characterized as “affected and useless.”

By the middle of the 19th century it found new popularity, but with its popularity came a broadened use. Ignoring its roots (Latin, unicus; French, unus, one), the word was applied as a comparative, meaning simply unusual or peculiar.

Something could now be “fairly unique.”

But I want to speak about Someone who is unique in the absolute sense. In His class there is only one. Of course the Bible is filled with comparisons of Him. He is stronger than the strong man (Lk. 11:22), chiefest among ten thousand (Song of Sol. 5:10), the First Begotten of the dead (Rev. 1:5), the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), the Firstfruits of them that slept (1 Cor. 15:20, 23), the Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14), greater than Abraham, Jacob, Jonah, John, Solomon, Moses, Joshua, and the rest. Yet there are ways in which He is beyond all comparison.

The Lord Jesus is unique in His person. There is no other God-man in the universe. By Him there will be a great host of godly men and women in heaven, but only One who is fully God and fully man. He will bring many sons to glory, but there is only one Son who ever came from glory. He is God in every sense and man in every sense (sin apart, of course). Thus in His cross-work, He—the infinite God—could provide the infinite price necessary for divine satisfaction; He—the true Kinsman—could die for mankind, tasting death for everyone.

The Lord Jesus is unique in His incarnation. No one ever arrived on this planet as He did. He who made the worlds arrived on this little speck of dust. He who fashioned His creatures of flesh and blood partook of flesh and blood. But His arrival was a choice He made. As David Anderson-Berry puts it, “For once in all of history the door between time and eternity opened inward” and He stepped on purpose into this world.

He is unique in His life. The Lord Jesus had the only verifiably perfect life. His friends (who knew Him in His most private moments) said He did no sin, that in Him is no sin. His enemies grudgingly confessed, “He saved others…” and “Never man spake like this man.” The judge at His trial declared, “I find no fault in this man.” His executioner exclaimed, “Truly this was a righteous man!” Even the demons spoke out one day, “What hast Thou to do with us, Thou holy One of God?” And God broke a 400-year silence by saying, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

He is unique in His offices and ministries. There is only one Saviour. There is only one Mediator between God and men. There is only one Forerunner leading God’s

people within the veil. Who but Jesus can at the same time say, “I know what it’s like to be weary,” and at the same time offer rest to the weary? Who but Jesus can at the same time be a sympathizing Man and an all-sustaining God?

He is unique in His death and resurrection. No one else could say, “No man taketh [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (Jn. 10:18). He proved it when they came to take Him in the garden and were literally blown off their heels by His “I am.”

No one else could die for another’s sins, but He died for the whole world. No one else could be at the same time a sin and trespass offering as well as a peace, meal and burnt offering—and completely satisfy God with that one offering. No one else surpassed the law’s requirements, opened the way into the holiest, answered the Old Testament types, and fulfilled the Scriptures as He did.

The Lord Jesus is unique in His present position. He is a Bridegroom awaiting His Bride, a King awaiting His kingdom, a Judge awaiting the Judgment. He shall not wait a moment too long. The day is coming when the Unique One will, before all, ascend the steps to His throne. Then in a moment uniquely His, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess His uniqueness—“the only one, without a like or equal.” He is Lord!

News from Northfield (September 1999)

From Uplook, September 1999. Article.

The weather was fine. Wish you were there.

The farmer's field where the Northfield tent is pitched just outside the pretty seacoast town of Newcastle, Co. Down, Northern Ireland, is a parable in itself. Once a peat bog that nobody wanted, it was reclaimed and made useful by local Christians who believe that God can salvage and remake lives just like that. They could take as their theme the Psalmist's testimony: "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings" (40:2). In conversation with me, Austen Alexander, who owns the field, said with a smile, "I get my best crop from this field."

Long before the tent is raised by a crew of 40 local believers, the work is well in progress. Months of prayer are invested at local assemblies and by friends around the world. Then as the time draws near (each year the meetings are held for two weeks beginning with the July 12 weekend) articles and ads are placed in local papers; posters are installed in shops; signs are placed strategically around the area; every home in a five-town area is visited with a personal invitation; friends, relatives, and acquaintances are pressed to come.

Being a resort town, hundreds throng to Newcastle for this two-week holiday period. As well, Christians from other areas of the North and South of Ireland, and elsewhere, are encouraged to stay in the area at hotels,

B&Bs, or to pitch a tent or park a caravan (travel trailer) on the same field, where restrooms and showers have been installed.

A ministry meeting is held each morning of the first week from 11:00-12:00. The second week mornings had some sessions for young people. Also each morning and afternoon children's meetings were held in two area trailer parks with Colin Sheldon (Dublin, Eire) giving the talks. He was assisted by a Gospel Literature Outreach (GLO) team under the direction of John Speirs (Motherwell, Scotland). Brother Speirs also assisted each night with the gospel meeting (preaching the last four nights) and in the open-air times at the promenade when weather allowed. The GLO team also did visitation in the area. One day, the tent was filled with disabled, for singing, gospel, and afternoon tea.

A prayer tent (see lower photo, center of picture) was also reared where 50-80 believers met each night for close to an hour to pray before the gospel was preached. That tent, equipped with close-circuit TV, was also used for overflow when the 1000-seater was too small.

Who can tell the results of two weeks of concerted effort like that? With 800-1200+ each night and scores of unsaved, only heaven will tell the full story. We do know of four who asked for baptism (19 were baptized last year), some were restored (one woman after 40 years!) and nine (including three children) professed to be saved.

How serious is prayer when we see people getting saved! How great is our joy when we rejoice with heaven over sinners repenting! What fellowship is like "fellowship in the gospel" (Phil. 1:5)! Let us pray that we

see an outbreak of such gospel vision all across our land!

Born by the Railroad Tracks (October 1999)

From Uplook, October 1999. Editorial.

Confessions of a zero-point Calvinist

I grew up in a passionately evangelistic assembly where we were taught the railroad track view of divine sovereignty and human freedom. I deeply admired the brethren who taught me the Word and consider it one of the best Bible schools I could have attended. These men took every word of the Bible seriously. They did not harp on particular doctrines and did not press exotic views.

It was not Calvinism we heard, for man could freely accept or reject the gospel. Christ died for all, and the gospel was offered to everyone. However, having accepted Christ, we were told, a new believer discovered that he was destined for heaven before time began. Was it a real choice? Yes, they insisted. He must repent and believe the gospel in order to be saved. But could this elect person actually choose to perish? Theoretically, yes, but actually, no. God had elected him. These are parallel truths, they told us. Like railway tracks, they appear to meet at the horizon but they would only actually “meet” in the mind of God. I could not help wondering what would happen to that train of thought when the lines actually met. In these discussions I felt more like an engine spinning in the round-house. I saw the words “elect” and “chosen” in the Bible, but what did they actually mean?

In those days I rarely heard the words Calvinist or Arminian. But a caricature developed of the two views:

Calvinists believed God saved you and you couldn't lose it; Arminians believed you chose to be saved, so you could also choose to "unsave" yourself. And everyone was in one camp or the other, it was said. If that definition held, I would be with the Calvinists. But it doesn't.

Don't get me wrong. Some of my friends are unabashed Calvinists. Others reject the tag but believe the teaching, or most of it. And I'm surrounded by fine, hard-working Calvinists in Grand Rapids. (In this area of the country I regularly tiptoe through the TULIP.) As well, many of the representatives of evangelicalism—R. C. Sproul, D. J. Kennedy, John Stott, J. I. Packer, and now John MacArthur—promote Calvinistic soteriology.

John Calvin (1509-1564) systematized the teachings of the Reformation, largely based on Augustinian theology. Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a scholar in the Reformed Church (who admired Calvin), questioned certain of his teachings. His followers called on the Dutch theologians to consider whether Calvin's teachings were biblical at five points. At the Synod of Dort (1619), Arminianism was rejected, and the answer stated five points as the Church's position. But after careful study, I find myself a 0-point Calvinist. Here's why:

1. Total Depravity (Inability): The notion not that every man exhibits his depravity as thoroughly as he could, but that the guilt of Adam's sin rests on everyone, and the corruption of sin extends to every part of man's nature, making him incapable of responding to God's offer of salvation. The Calvinist believes man is not only separated from God but insensible to God, "unable of

himself even to stretch forth his hand to receive salvation" (Baker's Dictionary of Theology, p. 109). Thus God must quicken man before he can believe.[1] What does Scripture teach? That man has been damaged in every part by the Fall, and does not seek God by his own initiative (Rom. 3:10-18). But God has come seeking sinners. How many sinners? The world! His light lightens every man who comes into the world. Paul could preach to the pagans at Mar's Hill: "He [is] not far from every one of us," and "God commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:27, 30).

The verse, "There is none that seeketh after God," is an important verse, but it is not the whole Bible. What of "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found…" (Isa. 55:6)? See also Acts 15:17; 17:27. But, says the Calvinist, man is dead and cannot respond to the offer of the gospel. Reformed scholar Loraine Boettner writes: "If any person believes, it is because God has quickened him; and if any person fails to believe, it is because God has withheld that grace."[2] Yet the passage which is the basis for this view (Eph. 2:1, 5) speaks of the dead walking, and having a manner of life. It is true that man is spiritually dead, but to think of death as inability to receive God's gift is wrong. Death in the Bible is separation. Man is still morally responsible and capable of responding to invitations—"come," "believe," "trust," "receive"—the list is extensive. The Judge at the last trial declares the basis of His judgment in John 3:16-19 —not because they are non-elect, or because they were not given faith,[3] but because they chose darkness over light. See also Jn. 20:31; 2 Thess. 2:10; Heb. 10:39.

2. Unconditional Election: This is said to be the act of God in eternity, to choose to save certain ones whom He

fore-loved, entirely apart from any cause in them or choice by them. God has indeed chosen some (Christ, Israel, the Church) but for a role—to be the means of accomplishing His purposes. The basis of that choice is found in 1 Corinthians 1:23-31 (see also Jas. 2:5).

Dr. James Orr states: "Electing love, one comes to see, is never election to the exclusion of others, but election with a view to the future larger blessing of others."[4] M. R. Vincent, in his Word Studies in the New Testament (Vol. IV, p. 16) writes, "Election…and the kindred words, to choose, and chosen or elect, are used of God's selection of men or agencies for special missions or attainments; but neither here (1 Thess. 1:4) nor elsewhere in the N.T. is there any warrant for the revolting doctrine that God has predestined a definite number of mankind to eternal life, and the rest to eternal destruction."

It should be noted that multitudes in Israel (including Judas Iscariot[5]), though elect, perished, while some non-elect (like Rahab and Ruth) were saved. The election of Christ obviously had nothing to do with His being saved.

What of "chosen you to salvation" in 2 Thessalonians 2:13? Lightfoot, Kittel, and Arndt & Gingrich all concur that this is not the usual word for election. Plummer writes: "The verb (eilato) is rare in Bibl. Grk., and is not used elsewhere in N.T. of election by God…It does not imply predestination to final salvation…"[6] The word "chosen in the Lord" (Rom. 16:13) is translated as "eminent" by Vine[7] and by Young as "the choice one."[8]

Believers are not elected and therefore put into Christ any more than Israelites were chosen and therefore put into Israel. In the last dispensation election was based

on natural birth; now it is based on spiritual birth. The sphere of our choosing is “in Him” (Eph. 1:4). How does one come into that sphere of privilege? “…through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13; see also 1 Pet. 1:2).

3. Limited Atonement: This idea that the death of Christ was only for the elect, that His death not only provided salvation, but accomplished it for the elect alone. But what does Scripture teach? That God so loved the world (Jn. 3:16); that He is the propitiation not for our sins only, but for the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2); that the “righteousness of God…is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe” (Rom. 3:22). The last invitation in the Bible says: “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

4. Irresistible Grace: The notion that everyone on God’s “list” will be saved and cannot resist God’s grace when He “sweetly force[s]” us in. This because God’s sovereignty cannot be thwarted. But what does Scripture teach? The Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem, saying, “I would [willed]…ye would not.” Why was He weeping? He wanted them; they did not want Him. He let them have their way. To those in His day, Jesus said: “Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life” (Jn. 5:40). They might have had life, but they would not come. Stephen declared, “Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did” (Acts 7:51). Notice also Heb. 10:29.

5. Perseverance of the Saints: At first this appears to be the biblical doctrine of eternal security. But this point teaches not merely that the saints will persevere (or be preserved, more correctly) but that the proof that you

are a saint is that you persevere. This is necessary in the Calvinistic system because if not only the provision but procurement of salvation is all of God, how do I know when I am saved? As stated in Baker's Dictionary of Theology, "The fruits which accompany salvation supply to us men the proof of God's election" (p. 179). While it is true that fruits supply proof to others: "…by their fruits ye shall know them," a recipient of the gospel does not need to wait until fruit develops in his life to assure him that he is saved. God's promise is our own proof: "as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name."

God sovereignly chose to give man a will. Christ has fully provided salvation for all who will receive His gift, a gift to which we contribute nothing. The Spirit must initiate the process, and has done so—He has come to convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Faith comes to the individual, not as a special gift to some, but by hearing the Word of God. There is no merit in the sinner's empty hand receiving this wonderful gift. To believing sinners come all the blessings; to God be all the glory.

Endnotes

1 Are sinners quickened (or regenerated) before they believe? "Heareth…believeth…hath everlasting life" (Jn. 5:24). See also the order in Lk. 8:12; Jn. 20:31; Acts 16:31.

2 The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, pp. 166-167.

3 Is faith the gift in Ephesians 2:8? Not according to Alford, Robertson, Bruce, Vine, Sir R. Anderson, and

others (Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom by Samuel Fisk, pp. 32-36).

4 Sidelights on Christian Doctrine, p. 34.

5 “I have chosen you” (Jn. 15:16) must be put beside Jn. 6:70.

6 Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, pp. 75-76.

7 Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.

8 Young’s Literal Translation.

God’s Sovereignty in Action (October 1999)

From Uplook, October 1999. Bible study.

Here are four aspects of God’s sovereign choice. They have nothing to do with man’s choice (a vital issue in itself). Three common impediments to understanding these truths: a) we come with preconceived ideas about their meaning instead of allowing the Word to speak for itself; b) we confuse these truths as if the words were interchangeable; c) we are seeking to understand with finite minds what is infinite. Yet there is something for us to enjoy in these truths or God would not have revealed them. As much as possible, we must let the Word define both the words and their relationship to each other so that our understanding is consistent with God’s revelation.

1. Foreknowledge, prognosis (7x): That aspect of God’s nature that allowed Him to design the plan of salvation before time with all facts at hand. Knowing man’s rebellion, Israel’s failure (Rom. 11:2), their rejection of Messiah (Acts 2:23), and the personal failures of His people, God nonetheless devised a plan that would overrule man’s stupidity and accomplish it in spite of us. It determined His elective scheme regarding Israel (Rom. 11:2), the Christ (1 Pet. 1:19-20), and the Church (1 Pet. 1:2). Romans 9:11 declares that no failure on man’s part could thwart the overall purposes of God. (The word cannot mean fore-loved as used in Acts 26:5 and 2 Pet. 3:17.)

2. Predestination, pro-orizo (6x): Before time began, concerning the terminus of time, it is an act of God based on His foreknowledge (Rom. 8:28-30) whereby He makes the goal of adoption certain for the believer (Eph. 1:5). This necessitated the pre-planned death of Christ (Acts 4:23-31). It involves the utilizing of hidden wisdom (i.e., what man calls foolishness and weakness) to accomplish it (see 1 Cor. 1:20-2:16). It ultimately leads to two great blessings: to be sons in all the privileges and responsibility of such a position (Eph. 1:5), and to be like the Son Himself (Rom. 8:29). God's predetermination guarantees that present circumstances will work in us to produce conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:28-30) and guarantees our inheritance in the future as well (Eph. 1:11).

3. Election, eklektos (51x): God (for reasons explained in 1 Cor. 1 & 2), in blessing mankind, sets to one side all firsts and chooses all seconds that the plan might be based solely on grace. The word is used to describe the divine choice of Christ (Isa. 42:1; Lk. 23:35; 1 Pet. 2:6), angels (1 Tim. 5:21), Israel (Rom. 11:28), the twelve—including Judas (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 15:16; Jn. 6:70; Jn. 13:18), the Church (Eph. 1:4), and the remnant in the Tribulation (Mt. 24:22, 24). This selection is for a role, to bring blessing to the widest possible number. In this age, the sphere of the believer's choosing is Christ (Eph. 1:4) and is linked to God's foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:2). See also Jas. 2:5; Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Pet. 1:10.

4. Adoption (son-placing) whyothesia (5x): This is the ultimate goal God has set for the believer (Eph. 1:5) at the end of time, bringing us into eternal realities. We are made sons at the moment of salvation and thus already have received a spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:14-15), but

the son-placing will occur at the time of the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23). By clinging to the law, Israel failed to enter into sonship (Rom. 9:4), a privilege into which we come by the work of Christ (Gal. 4:1-7).

I Don’t Care for Daisies, Either (November 1999)

From Uplook, November 1999. Editorial.

I’m not an Arminian, please.

Last month we considered Calvinism’s view of salvation, forming the acrostic T-U-L-I-P. But someone has observed that Arminians have a flower, too—the daisy: “He loves me; He loves me not.…” This refers to the question in the fifth Arminian point which wondered about the possibility of true believers losing their salvation. More of that later.

It is a danger-fraught process to set in concrete a system of theology and then attempt to fit every scripture into it. F. F. Bruce (ironically just after he tells us he is “an impenitent Augustinian and Calvinist”) states:

There is a great danger, when once we have adhered to one particular school of thought or adopted one particular system of theology, of reading the Bible in the light of that school or system and finding its distinctive features in what we read. (From the Foreword of God’s Strategy in Human History, by R. Forster and P. Marston.)

Whether consciously or unconsciously, we arrange Bible information in our heads in some systematic way as we attempt to understand “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). Yet the Word of God is not a systematic theology text. We often find ourselves dissecting the butterfly to find out how it flies,

only to discover that we have, by our dissecting, made sure that it will never fly again.

When we consider God's ways with men, what we are seeking to understand is a miracle. In response to Nicodemus' query: "How can these things be?" the Lord Jesus said, in effect, "Nicodemus, if you can't track the movements of the wind, how will you trace the moving of the Spirit? If you can't understand natural birth, how will you grasp spiritual birth?"

Yet God has taken great pains to explain something of His ways in salvation. He has used pictures, types, and shadows in the Old Testament; He has given many step-by-step conversion stories in the Gospels and the Acts; and Paul especially has written tirelessly, under the Spirit's tutelage, of the amazing anatomy of salvation.

We ought to have a ravenous hunger to know what has happened to us as a result of being saved (and what can happen to everyone who will "repent and believe the gospel"). Others certainly have been curious about our salvation: "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently…which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Pet. 1:10, 12). You remember that the prodigal's older brother had to ask a servant what was going on in the father's house. Would it not be a sad thing if we found, on arrival at the Father's House, that the angels knew more about our salvation than we?

The fatal flaw in Arminianism is the so-called "falling-away doctrine." The Arminians who pled their case at the Synod of Dort first raised a doubt concerning eternal security in their fifth point:

Whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginning of their life in Christ…of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our minds.

But they stated without equivocation in their "Opinion of the Remonstrants":

True believers can through their own fault fall into horrible sins and blasphemies, persevere and die in the same: and accordingly they can fall away and get lost.

This introduces with it a host of errors. For example, if I, having truly believed, can lose my salvation through committing some "horrible sins," did Christ's death not cover those sins? No, say the Remonstrants:

…we heartily reject the following doctrines…namely… that all present and future sins are now forgiven.

The Remonstrants are honest when they call these statements "Opinions." Often those who believe one can "fall away" from Christ (really "fall out" of Christ!) argue their case not so much from Scripture as from logic. Their two main points: i) they know some who they say were true Christians who cast off their belief and now repudiate the gospel; ii) if you believe in eternal security, nothing will hold you back from going out and living like the devil. It is "harmful to piety and good morals." Such thinking harbors four fatal flaws:

1. It elevates human discernment to the level of divine omniscience. Of the Lord we read, "…Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for He

knew what was in man" (Jn. 2:24-25). Peter, assuming such knowledge, declared, "And we [including Judas] believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." But Jesus answered, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (Jn. 6:69-70).

It is "the Lord" who "knows them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19). But just as certainly as the Lord knows, the Christian shows, for the verse concludes, "And let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

However, the evidence is sometimes misleading. In the story Jesus told of the four kinds of soil, three of them appeared to give acceptance to the seed. Later it was seen that one piece of ground actually preferred weeds to the good seed, and only later did the superficial acceptance of the shallow ground become obvious. Only one type of ground represents those who are truly saved.

2. It misses the true motivation for holiness in the life—love to Christ cultivated by the Spirit through the Word. No amount of guilt or slavish fear can produce godliness. That experiment was tried with Israel and proved legalism to be useless in producing holiness.

At this point Calvinists and Arminians sound strangely similar. Does it not remind us of the devil's logic regarding Job, to say that people would never desire a relationship with God unless forced into it? The devil thought Job was being paid off for his relationship with God. The Calvinist thinks a person must be "sweetly forced" into salvation or he would never come willingly. The Arminian believes a sinner may come willingly to Christ, but must be held in that relationship through fear of losing this not-necessarily-eternal life. To see how

similar the positions are, listen first to an Arminian, respected Lutheran commentator, R. H. Lenski:

Referring to 1 Cor. 9:24-27: What a calamity when a professing Christian finds himself “rejected” in the end! How much worse when one of the Lord’s own heralds has this experience!…The fact that he is an apostle is not yet proof to him that he will be saved (1 & 2 Corinthians, p. 388).

But prizes and crowns, rewards for faithful service, should not be confused with the gift of salvation. Yet Calvin sounds amazingly similar in his observations:

In short, [Paul] says that what they had attained so far is nothing, unless they keep steadily on; because it is not enough that they once started off on the way of the Lord, if they do not make an effort to reach the goal.

So it is that while many churches espouse Calvinistic soterology officially—Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Presbyterian—many in the pews have concluded that the perseverance of the saints means just what it says—that you must persevere if you are to be saved. And no wonder when Calvin comments thus on 1 Timothy 4:16:

The zeal of pastors will be greatly increased when they are told that both their own salvation and that of their people depends upon their serious and earnest devotion to their office (Commentaries, Vol. 3, p. 82).

How refreshing to turn from the surmisings of men to the clear declaration of Scripture: “Therefore [justification] is of faith, that it might be by grace” (Rom. 4:16). His grace in every way is undeserved, and our faith in Him, once placed in Christ, is maintained by His High Priestly ministry: “I have prayed for thee, that thy

faith fail not" (Lk. 22:32). "Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded (disappointed, put to shame)" (1 Pet. 2:6).

3. It makes a false distinction between sins that can cost you your salvation and others which you can commit without jeopardizing your security, strangely like the Catholic system of venial and mortal sins, which puts some sins beyond the ability of Christ to cleanse. But He "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity" (Titus 2:14). "There is…no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

4. It denigrates the cross work of the Lord Jesus. Are not "all present and future sins…now forgiven" to every true believer? "And you…hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col. 2:13). See the resemblance between the Calvinist and Arminian again. The middle point of the Tulip declares that Christ died only for the elect, not for all men. The Arminian believes His death is sufficient for all men, but not for all sins. In both cases, they believe in a limited work of Christ on the cross. If this is so, the promises of God cannot mean what they say. Leaving mere logic aside, hear the certain statements of the Lord: "…whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life…He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (Jn. 3:16; 5:24).

Thus in the multitude of those who profess to believe the gospel of God's grace, precious few have both assurance

and eternal security. I am so happy to be one who does, and it stirs my heart to love Him all the more. I am neither a Calvinist nor an Arminian. I am content to rest on the sure word and work of my blessed Saviour.

Grave New World? (December 1999)

From Uplook, December 1999. Editorial.

This is no time to “congregate in holy clubs or survival camps.”

It’s a moot point that the 21st century begins on January 1, 2001, not 2000. In fact, due to the mixup in changing to the Gregorian calendar from the Julian in 1582, we’ve actually been in the new millennium for several years already. But it isn’t just the passing of this significant date that we have slept through. Joseph Stowell writes:

A culture that wants to do what it wants to do must somehow dethrone a God who rightfully calls men to live under His authority…Like Rip Van Winkle, we in large measure slept through these last four decades, and as the alarm clock rings to usher in the twenty-first century, we wake up to notice how dramatically different our world is now…[1]

Different indeed! Our world has cut loose from its moorings, wanting no one at the helm, and is being blown by the winds of change directly into the teeth of the last great storm.

President Ronald Reagan gave us the definition: “Status quo is Latin for ‘the mess we are in.’” And what a mess it is. In seeking to select the top three “hot spots of the new millennium,” USA Today reporter Barbara Slavin chose from “among a depressingly high number of candidates.” The article goes on to list 38 “countries in conflict” where disputes led to more than 1,000 deaths in a one-year-period during the last decade. P. S. “More than 1,000” would include the mass genocide in Kosovo,

Burundi, and 43 years of war in Sudan leading to the deaths of 1.5 million! (Nov. 1, 1999, p. 11.)

Things are no brighter at home. We have our own 1.5 million figure—the unborn babies aborted in America alone each year since 1975. The wide acceptance of the evolutionary model has led to the devaluing of human life, bringing with it the growing threat of euthanasia and the Pandora's box of cloning and genetic manipulation. The "harvesting" of fetal tissue and organs is becoming a profitable sideline for abortion clinics.[2]

I hardly need to repeat the dire societal ills listed in our daily newspapers: rampant crime, family breakdown, the "gay" agenda, uncontrolled illegitimacy… As Mohandas Gandhi observed, "Wildlife is decreasing in the jungles, but increasing in the towns." Yet just when society desperately needs a word from God, Christianity is being censored by the monopolistic media and, as John Whitehead states, "privatized" by the government:

In Utah, homeowners conducting private Bible studies in their own homes were accused of violating zoning ordinances. In Illinois, a kindergartner who was grieved about having to cross out the word "God" in her spelling book was chastised for writing "I love you God" on her tiny palm to show her remorse…In Texas, teachers have been enjoined from participating in any prayers at their high school or at its extra-curricular events.[3]

C. S. Lewis remarked, "The world says, 'You can be religious when you are alone,' and then adds under its breath, 'And we'll make sure you are never alone." But as Decision editor Roger Palms notes, "The world wants us to keep Christianity private. They should have

thought of that before they crucified the Lord in public." This is no time to retreat. Christianity has met paganism before, and swept the field in the first century. Our Lord's command is still in effect: "Occupy till I come." The entertainment gospel, political gospel, social gospel, health and wealth gospel, are shams. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4). Busyness, superficiality, compromise, and worldly distractions are the scourge of the church in the West.

But returning to the following seven Cs would demolish the devil's strongholds again: clean lives who take sin seriously; clear thinking about the real issues; courage in the face of mounting opposition; compassion for a lost and lonely world; commitment to the life of the church, manifested by sacrificial living; confidence in the inerrant Word of God for all matters of faith and practice; and Christ-centeredness that looks to Him alone for "all things that pertain to life and godliness." Our world needs us now because it desperately needs to meet Him.

Notes

1 Shepherding the Church in the 21st Century, Victor Books, 1994, p. 17

2 See World magazine, Oct. 23, 1999, pp. 16-19

3 Religious Apartheid, Chicago: Moody Press, 1994, p. 157

Great Expectations? (December 1999)

From Uplook, December 1999. Article.

We must understand our times to be good witnesses.

The coming millennium is a strange mix of the Beginning and the End. It proffers scientific breakthroughs, communication at lightning speed, perhaps greater length of life—mixed blessings at best. We sympathize with T. S. Eliot: “Man is advancing progressively backwards.” Here are some trends to watch for in this downward spiral.

Globalism/Tribalism: The internet, media coverage, and rapid travel keep shrinking the planet. We can visit the Taj Mahal or climb Mount Everest in person, watch someone do it while we sit at home, or “experience” it through virtual reality.

Of course the results of sin travel that quickly, too. Wars on the other side of the world can be observed as they happen. Pornography ad nauseam is a mouse click away. And plagues can travel by jet from one continent to another in a few hours.

But nations are fragmenting as fast as the economy is globalizing. For centuries, colonialism held tribalism at bay. Now tribal wars have resumed, not with bows and arrows but with Uzis and surface-to-air missiles. Bosnia, Burundi, Chechnya, Sudan—most countries of the world are affected. Evidently iron and clay don’t make for a stable foundation.

Technology and Superstition: You would think that as the human race harnesses the secrets of the universe,

witchcraft and superstition would disappear. The opposite is happening. There are more fortune tellers in France than medical doctors; Asian businessmen won't buy a house in Vancouver without approval on the luck value of the street address; many won't do business if the horoscope is against it. New Age powerbeads are the rage (popularized by the Dalai Lama). So-called earth religions gain popularity and official recognition.

Science, once the domain of realists like Newton, Boyle, and Kelvin, who accepted the laws of nature (cause and effect, biogenesis, thermodynamics) now is the domain of those weaned on the idea of evolution. Relativism is their world view.

Can We, not Should We: If we are mere products of chance, let's improve our chances! Less than 50 years ago, Watson and Crick discovered the basic structure of DNA. The Human Genome Project anticipates having all the chromosomes mapped in three years. This data is intended to help cure disease, alleviate suffering, and prolong life. But there's more.

C. S. Lewis wrote in 1965 in The Abolition of Man: "Man's conquest of Nature, if the dreams of some scientific planners are realized, means the rule of a few hundreds of men over billions upon billions of men." Did he overstate the case? Geneticist Bentley Glass stated in his president's address (1971) to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, "No parent will in that future time have a right to burden society with a malformed or mentally incompetent child." Chilling indeed.

Smarter and Dumber: It seems that as we gain access to more facts, we lose the ability to make sense of them,

“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). The best sound systems are tuned to the worst music. We spend millions trying to make contact with extra-terrestrials while terrestrials starve. We have developed communications tools par excellence, but have nothing worth saying.

Tolerance and Persecution: How is it possible that the tolerant are so intolerant of Christianity? Because the Christian message declares Christ to be the only way. We are watching East meet West. The so-called Christian countries in their surfeit of blessings have forgotten God. Al Gini, writing in Business and Society Review, says, “In 1917 America and the world experienced the… influenza epidemic that struck down an estimated 20 million victims. Today we are all suffering from a pandemic of Affluenza (the disease of consumerism) (Fall, 1999, p. 257). Now the West embraces Baha’i (any religion is OK), Hinduism (we are every religion), Buddhism (no religion is OK) and Islam (only our religion is OK). Buddhism has a tenfold increase in 40 years; mosques are sprouting across the landscape; Baha’i has followers in more countries than any but Christianity.

Meanwhile in the East, millions are turning from these empty forms to Christ. Korea is now considered a Christian country, one of the major mission sending nations. More Christians in China sat down to remember the Lord this past week than in all of western Europe.

Ecumenism and Fragmentation: Expect to see continued fractures in Christendom over social and doctrinal issues (as prophesied in 1 and 2 Timothy). At the same time watch for the monotheists of the world trying to

link arms. The syncretizing of Christianity with other beliefs will produce personal designer religions.

It makes me homesick for heaven. Only one Man has the answers. So come, Lord Jesus!

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