

The Population Crisis: Haas

Preaching and the Last Days: Bradford

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Preaching and the Last Days

EUGENE BRADFORD

In the Scriptures we read the prediction that "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine." Has that time arrived? Elsewhere Paul appears to say that the time had already come. Even before his warning to Timothy, he told the Corinthians that the preaching of the cross was foolishness in the minds of those who are perishing.

Paul was correct. Uncounted thousands have despised the preaching of the cross of Christ, and the time came long ago — even in Paul's day — when men rejected straight teaching. Controversy over doctrine and preaching is the stuff that much of church history is made of.

Yet each age must face these matters anew. Final disposition of them is yet to be made. In the latter part of our century the old conflict between truth and error has taken on stark, new dimensions reflecting the state of our times. Preaching has come under new attack along with many of the traditional patterns of the church of Christ.

The sermon as authoritative proclamation is considered by many as obsolete. Prescriptions for substitutes spring from the liturgical movement and from those who would introduce dialogue, folk music, interpretive dancing, and a variety of visual aids to worship. No doubt many obsolete sermons are being preached, stale in method, lacking in currency, unimag-

inative in the art of communicating to modern man, good only in the treatment of insomnia.

Let the preacher beware. In an earlier time he could sometimes get away with shoddiness in the pulpit. Today many of those who sit in the pews are as well educated as the minister — or even better. You cannot fool even some of the people some of the time. And of course, as it has ever been, you can never fool the Lord whose Word you are called to proclaim.

What about Preaching?

If the criticism were directed merely against poor preaching, we should be quick to second that criticism. One does not have to be overly-perceptive, however, to sense that the main thrust of the attack on preaching is not against poor preaching, but against preaching as such. This alerts us to the real issue.

The whole concept of authoritative preaching, including the giving of factual information and the proclamation of God's warnings and invitation, is being more seriously controverted in our time because of wholesale rejection of an independent, self-contained, self-revealing God speaking to helpless, imperiled men of Jesus Christ who was crucified and raised from the grave to be the only Saviour. Preaching is foolishness because it is the preaching of the cross. It is only incidental that some preaching in which

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the cross does not receive its due is also rejected.

To deal responsibly with this opposition to preaching in an increasingly hostile world it is my belief that the Christian ministry must be seen in eschatological perspective. There are two reasons. Only if we see preaching eschatologically will we understand its full significance and bring our best to the task. Moreover, only if we look at the preaching task in this way will we be able to cope adequately with the new forms of opposition.

We shall concern ourselves, then, with the subject "Preaching and the Last Days," giving attention to the *urgency*, the *peril*, and the *privilege* of preaching in the last days.

The Last Days

The New Testament clearly indicates a division in the days of God's revelatory acts and his dealing with men. According to the Letter to the Hebrews, God in old time spoke to the fathers through the prophets, but in the latter part of these days has spoken to us in a Son. The speaking in the Son is the climax of God's speaking to men and it is bound up with the Son's making purification for sin. Later in the same letter Christ is said to have "appeared once in the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

In similar vein Peter in the day of Pentecost views the climax of revelation and redemption when he declares the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. Joel had simply said, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh . . ." (Joel 2:28). Peter, however, in explaining the Pentecostal phenomena, introduces Joel's prophecy by saying, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh . . ." (Acts 2:16, 17a). Joel's general term "afterward" is changed by Peter to "the last days."

The same perspective comes to expression in Paul when, after referring in I Corinthians 10 to the divine judgments which came upon the Israelites for their wilderness sins, he says that "all these things happened to them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (I Corinthians 10:11).

Urgency

Returning to Peter's proclamation on Pentecost we can note how he relates "the last days" to the preaching of the gospel and the urgency of that task. The sound as of a mighty, rushing wind, the tongues as of fire, the wonderful works of God being proclaimed in a variety of dialects are only a part of Joel's prophetic word finding fulfillment that day. Sons and daughters shall prophesy, young men shall see visions, and old men shall dream dreams. But these striking gifts are bound up with the appearance of "wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and illustrious day of the Lord comes" (Acts 2:19, 20).

Obviously Peter was proceeding on the premise that the era known as "the last days" had commenced, and that bound up with that era were three intimately related matters: the gift of the Holy Spirit for the proclamation of God's Word, the warning of mani-

festations of God's judgments to culminate in the great and illustrious day of the Lord — surely to be identified with the coming of the Son of man on the clouds of heaven, and the grand promise that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).

Against this background, and after Peter had indicted his audience for the slaying of Jesus, whom God raised up, the Jews cried out in deep conviction of their guilt, "Brethren, what shall we do?" To this Peter responded in clear terms with the demands and promises of the Christian gospel: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord God shall call" (Acts 2:38, 39).

Preaching Indispensable

The preaching mandate, then, is to be fulfilled in this last period of history, introduced by the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, and culminating in his second advent at which there will be accomplished the divine restitution of all things. That the preaching task is extremely urgent is seen in the fact that through Christ, the only Saviour, sins may be forgiven and blotted out, turning sinners are refreshed by the presence of the Lord among men, and Jesus Christ will come again for the complete renewal of all creation according to God's holy counsel. Failure to respond to the call to repentance and faith will surely result in irreversible divine judgment.

The Apostle Paul based his life and ministry on this urgency and insisted that the preaching office is indispensable. In Romans 10, after echoing the words of Joel — "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" — he piles up rhetorical

(continued on page 118)

The Rev. Eugene Bradford, a Christian Reformed pastor in Illinois, gave this message at the 41st opening exercises of Westminster Seminary in September. A 1941 graduate of the Seminary, Mr. Bradford is a member of its Board of Trustees. His address, here slightly condensed, is marked by the eloquent conviction of a fervent preacher of the Word of God.

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The Population Crisis

JOHN W. HAAS, JR.

The possibility of world population crisis is receiving much current attention. In the eyes of some observers this problem is mankind's most pressing difficulty — one which will ultimately affect the people of the rich as well as those of the poor nations. In this article we will outline the scope of the problem, consider the issues from a Christian perspective and suggest ways in which the Christian may help in correcting what would appear to be a tragic course of events.

THE PROBLEM

Any serious discussion of overpopulation must be based on the raw data of population and food production. We are somewhat handicapped in this respect due to the imprecision with which we can number the people alive today as well as chart the pattern of past population growth. The potential for food production, innovation in food technology, and the extent to which new food supplies can be developed and effectively distributed are little more than guesswork at this point. With this lack of definitive information and the global scale of the problem, it is not surprising that there are a wide variety of views on this subject and its potential threat to mankind's well-being.

On the one hand, it is possible to hear those who predict a world cataclysm which cannot be prevented. At the same time there are others who view fears of overpopulation as groundless and consider population control programs not only as unnecessary but, in fact, a threat to world economic development. However, a middle view is appearing as a growing consensus which considers that rapid population growth poses a serious threat in the near future but that we have the means for erasing the danger before it gets out of hand.

In the millennia following the command to Noah "be fruitful, multiply and populate the earth" world population grew comparatively slowly. Except for a relatively few local situations, the hazards of ordinary living prevented man from little more than replacing himself. A high mortality rate in infants and disastrous epi-

demics almost offset the tendency for large numbers of children in the family. Life expectancy of 22 years at the time of Christ rose only to about 35 years during the Middle Ages and remained close to that level until about a century ago.

Three Score and Ten

The improving standard of living resulting from the industrial revolution and a surge in the development of medical science led to marked increase in life expectancy in Europe and America to the present estimated 70 years. Population increased relatively sharply in these nations, but this growth was offset by a generally declining birth rate which served to moderate the effect of the declining death rate.

Prior to World War II life expectancy for people living in non-western lands often was no higher than it had been for western Europeans during the Middle Ages. After World War II medical practices which had been slowly developed over many decades were rapidly introduced into the world's less developed nations. The results have been most remarkable. In

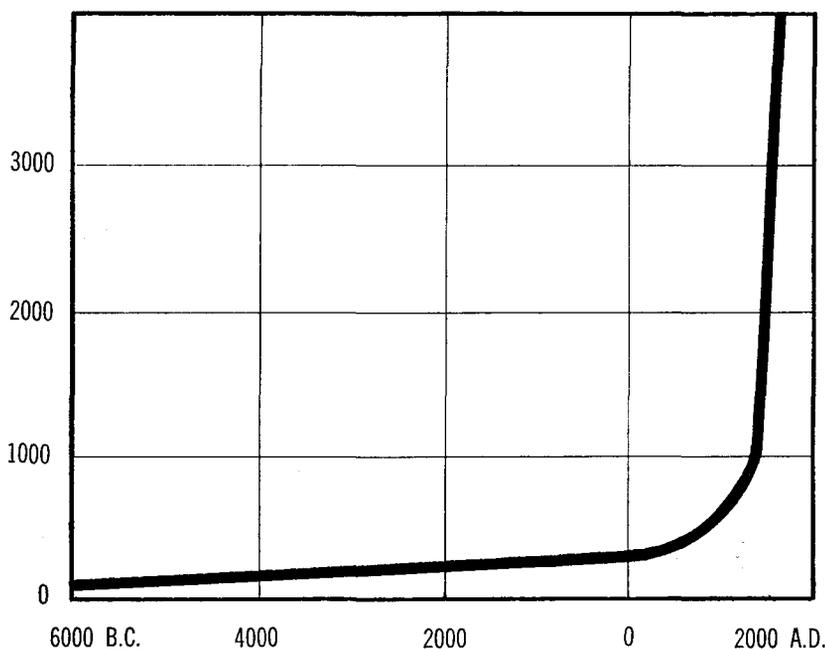


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Ceylon the death rate fell by 40 percent in just one year following widespread use of DDT to combat mosquitoes. In two decades the life expectancy of a young woman in India has risen from below 30 to 47 years.

Similar examples could be repeated ad infinitum. The net effect of these public health measures on populations with high birth rates has been an ex-

ESTIMATED WORLD POPULATION, MILLIONS OF PEOPLE



plosive growth in population in nations which are least able to cope with the attendant problems. In these lands the death rate has dropped markedly but birth rates have remained about constant in contrast to the more balanced situation found in the Western nations. As a result the population in non-western nations is rising twice as fast as that of the industrial nations.

For the United States the question is one of amenities and aesthetics rather than survival. If its population rose from the present 200 million to one billion it would be only about as densely populated as France and Poland are today. With three billion it would be no more crowded than England, Belgium and the Netherlands at present.

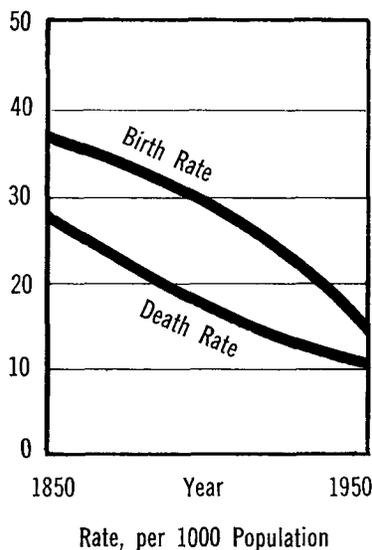
The Underdeveloped Nations

The critical issue is found in the underdeveloped nations. Here the high degree of illiteracy, a lack of national unity, a primitive agricultural society and social tradition make any attempt at solution difficult. These lands are already those least able to provide for more people. Their primitive agriculture in many cases can no longer maintain current population let alone provide food for new mouths. The result is an ever widening gap between food production and need.

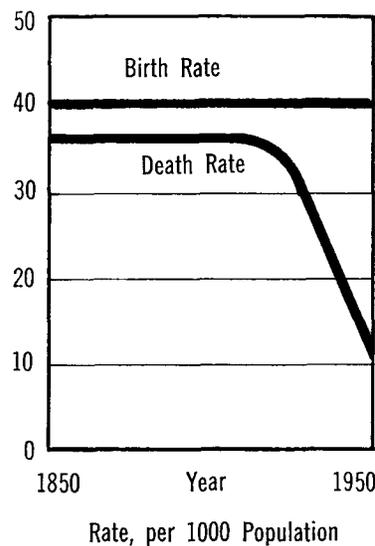
Today the population of half of the world's nations lives on the brink of starvation while that of an additional quarter suffers from serious malnutrition. As a result, much of the population of these lands is permanently tired, weak and vulnerable to disease. Physical growth is stunted, mental development retarded, initiative sapped, with the result that ability to contribute to or participate in economic programs is limited. We are seeing the fulfillment of the prediction of Malthus in 1798 that "the power of population is greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man."

It is clear that leadership for solution of this problem must come from the more developed nations. A two-pronged approach involving vast expansion in food production and a means for halting population growth is required. The question then relates to the willingness and the ability to develop and employ these approaches in time to prevent major catastrophe in much of the world.

COMPARISON OF BIRTH AND DEATH RATES FOR (A) DEVELOPED AND (B) UNDERDEVELOPED NATIONS



(A)



(B)

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

It is difficult to gauge the attitude of the Christian community to the plight of the poor. Few of us have experienced or seen the effects of extended malnutrition. On one hand we feel a surge of sympathy on seeing a picture of a starving child, yet we tend for the most part to back off from any serious personal involvement with poverty in our local area let alone in other nations. Do we find comfort in the statement of Christ that "the poor you have always with you"? Do we view the problems of the unfortunate as punishment for sin or as the result of laziness?

Is our lack of involvement due to a fear that the preaching of the gospel would be subordinated and that we would be following the path of the liberals? Should our efforts be directed only to those "in the faith" or those whom we would attract to "the faith"? Is there a basis for Christian action regardless of the spiritual state of the recipient?

History records the names of numerous Christians who have given of their lives and substance to help the unfortunate. Medical stations established through church agencies and independent groups have often provided the first modern medicine in the underdeveloped nations. It is estimated that 300 to 400 million dollars

is annually provided through church related groups for the social needs of the poor. We are aware of orphanages, leper colonies, food programs, and missionaries who have impoverished themselves in their efforts to meet the physical needs of those about them.

Concern

These efforts, scattered and small in comparison with the need, reflect an attitude of concern and responsibility on the part of some Christians. Even a cursory look at Scripture reveals an abundance of references which assume an attitude of compassion on the part of men of God. It has been said that "a generous friendly humanitarian interest in people breathes from every page of Scripture."

Isaiah 58: 6, 7; Ezekiel 18: 7, 16; Deuteronomy 15:11 and such New Testament passages as James 2:15, 16; and the example of Christ exhausting himself in ministry to the physically as well as the spiritually needy—all point to this concern. It would seem clear that if the Christian man has the mandate to enter society, to join with believer and non-believer in the common tasks of mankind, he must join in the battle against what is called man's greatest peril—impending overpopulation.

Of the measures suggested to deal with the problem, none has posed

more difficulty than the use of family planning methods. Although Protestants do not live under the edict of a Papal encyclical prohibiting contraceptive birth control, many Christians have been unsure or have a "bad conscience" as a carry-over from ill-conceived notions of an earlier day concerning the use of these devices. Christian medical practitioners have not provided a consistent view on the question and the reticence toward discussion of sex in the church or in print by the Christian community has forced the individual to obtain information and come to his conclusions on the basis of advice from secular sources.

Crisis of Values

No perceptive observer of the present scene can fail to agree that Western man is experiencing a serious crisis of values particularly in matters relating to human sexuality, and that the present hectic search for sensate or sensual rather than creative experience will result in the devaluation of sex. A spirit of materialism as well as an unnatural fear of overpopulation can easily lead to coercive methods of control.

Perhaps the best of recent expressions on the subject has come from a 1968 conference of 25 evangelical scholars in theology, medicine, law and sociology. The 1000-word document "A Protestant Affirmation on the Control of Human Reproduction" and a comprehensive book sponsored by the Christian Medical Society, *Birth Control and the Christian* (Tyndale House, 1969) reflect a thoughtful consideration by men who shared a common acceptance of the Bible as the final authority on moral issues. Although one may not agree with all the views expressed, this work should prove helpful as a point of reference in developing a position.

The "Affirmation" considers that "the prevention of conception is not in itself forbidden or sinful provided the reasons for it are in harmony with the total revelation of God for married life." "Disease, psychological debility, the number of children already in the family, and financial capability are among the factors determining whether pregnancy should be prevented." "The method of preventing pregnancy is not so much a religious question as a scientific and medical question to be determined in consultation with one's physician." (See Ed. Note)

A CALL FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Several courses of action appear open for a concerned Christian community. Each Christian and his church should consider what can be done in his community for the physically as well as the spiritually poor. While there are few cases of starvation and the spectre of famine does not face America, there are many around us who need help. The increasing affluence of our people does not appear to be reflected in our response to the basic needs of the church for support of preaching the gospel let alone in giving of time and money to the poor. The magnitude of the problem is more than can be solved solely by the action of churches and individual Christians — yet our present tokenism should see large improvement. We can help at the local level and give strategically on the world level.

Another means of Christian action lies in the political realm. It is clear that the prevention of massive famine in a significant portion of the earth will require an effort unprecedented in human history. The nations rich in natural resources and technology must bear the brunt of this effort. The United States has a maximum responsibility. We must employ our reserve productive capacity and technological expertise in a way which will make the Marshall Plan and Foreign Aid Programs of the past small in comparison.

This nation has the capability. The question is one of priorities. A nation must weigh carefully its commitments to war capability, space travel, and its own social problems in the perspective of the population threat. Here public morality and conscience come to bear. We must ask whether food production, technology and national resources should be used to benefit only the people of the nation in which they are found or should these resources benefit all of mankind.

It would seem that at the very least the Christian should encourage his

Ed. notes: A mimeographed paper "Ethics and Birth Control" by Dr. Robert D. Knudsen is available from the author, c/o Westminster Seminary, Bookstore, Chestnut Hill, Phila. Pa. 19118 for 25 cents. Dr. Knudsen presented the paper before an annual convention of the American Scientific Affiliation several years ago.

congressman to support activities on a national scale to attack the problems in other nations. The burden of help will fall on the United States. It appears that the ability to help is present. Will the Christian play a part in mobilizing this assistance?

A third area of approach involves the encouragement of Christian youth to enter those professions which can contribute to meeting the challenge. Undergraduate backgrounds in such areas as biology, chemistry, geology, economics and related social sciences are preparatory for more specialized graduate study in medicine, agricultural science, marketing, etc.

The problems attendant to a rapid increase in human population appear as a challenge to the Christian as well as to the non-Christian. Will we join in the battle?

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ROBERT E. NICHOLAS: Editor-Manager

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Preaching and the Last Days

(continued from page 114)

questions in courtroom-like argument: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent?" (Romans 10:14, 15a).

But acknowledgement of the urgency will be made only if history is not seen as open-ended. Like all the able-bodied feverishly sand-bagging the river-banks before the torrential flood-waters roll down upon a village, preaching is to be done in preparation of the awful certainty that Jesus Christ will judge the living and the dead when he appears in the full manifestation of his kingly authority. None can escape his judgment, neither living nor dead. Therefore, preach the Word, Timothy. Be instant, that is, be on the spot, be on hand, to preach the message, in season, out of season.

"Out of season"? Is the preaching of the Word ever out of season? Are not the "last days" the season for the urgent preaching of the gospel? Obviously so. Well then, what is the nuance of the expression "out of season"? What is Paul getting at? Surely he is thinking of adversity. The time will come when they will not tolerate sound teaching. Their ears will itch to hear teachers who satisfy their godless propensities and desires. So insatiable will be their desire for ungodly teaching that they will go out after countless false prophets.

Out of Season

Looking around us today, we must inevitably conclude that the Word of God is "out of season." Therefore it must be preached. Because the cults are attracting ever larger numbers, preach the Word! Because the "new morality" appeals to so many of the young generation, preach the Word! Because scientism claims to have discredited the first chapters of Genesis, and the authenticity of the Bible as a whole, preach the Word!

Because Bultmann and his followers teach that the real Jesus can be discovered only after tearing away the so-called "myths" of the gospels, preach the Word! Because more people are reading their horoscopes than ever before, preach the Word! Because young people are seeking release through psychedelic binges, preach the Word!

Preach the Word when it is expedient; preach the Word when it is inexpedient. Christ is coming again! Preach the Word to those who love it; preach the Word to those who despise it. Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead! Preach the Word when you receive the plaudits of men; preach the Word when you are reviled and persecuted. Christ is coming in power to put down all his enemies and reign in glory. "Preach the Word; be instant, in season, out of season . . ." (II Timothy 4:2a).

From apostolic times the question has been asked, "Where is the promise of his coming?" (II Peter 3:4). It is said that scoffers will ask this question in "the last days." But oftentimes Christians also seem dubious about the second coming. All things continue the same, and we seem to have at best only a dull hope of his coming. It is granted that we are in "the last time," but so was Apostle John — "We know that it is the last time," he said. Perhaps our actions are declaring: John was surely wrong; let us not make the same mistake. Let us not press the panic button.

Christ Is Coming

Christian brothers! do not doubt the second coming; do not think by your indolence you can postpone the date. Remember that "the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). And if the long-suffering of the Lord suggests that he is delaying his coming, do not make the mistake of thinking he has abdicated as Judge. Be assured that the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief and with it the terrible fiery judgments of a just and holy God.

With this prospect before us, Peter calls us to holiness and godliness, admonishing us to be waiting for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God. Rather than actually delaying his coming, our Lord speaks of the shortening of the days of tribulation for the sake of his elect, and many times over he speaks of the suddenness of his return.

Certainly, then, there is great urgency in the matter of the preaching of the gospel, and with each passing day of these last days that urgency is multiplied.

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EDITOR

ROBERT E. NICHOLAS



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Along with this greater urgency there is increasing peril. One need only read the accounts of the work of Peter and Paul to realize there were dangers from the beginning. And certainly the long history of Christianity is replete with suffering and martyrdom. For a long time, however, the opposition to Christianity has been such as to raise the question whether it is actually perilous any more to preach the gospel.

As a matter of fact, by and large the Christian minister is respected as a professional man. He is called upon to pray at civic functions, the swearing stops when he enters the barber shop, he even receives discounts at some department stores and free passes to major league baseball games. One might conclude that the ministry is not only safe, but a pretty good thing.

Doubtless this kind of treatment of clergymen is due in part to the good effects of the gospel on our society. Surely great segments of society have respected ministers because of their God-given task and because of the beauty of the gospel they preach. But when deference to the ministry is not accompanied by faith and godliness, it is necessary to conclude that it is mainly a mere "form of godliness" which is utterly powerless and meaningless.

Historic Christianity, if it is not completely ignored by the academic community and the mass media, is mostly caricatured and lampooned. In countless novels evangelists and orthodox preachers are held up to ridicule. Very often all conservatives are put in the same bag. Fundamentalists, of whatever stripe, are more or less associated with rabid anti-communism, racism, and crusades against miniskirts, pornography and sex-education in the public schools.

Neglect

Sadly enough, it is easy to understand how this has come about. Conservative Christianity has largely abdicated its responsibility to speak the gospel positively with reference to the ills of modern society, with the result that the poor, the oppressed minority groups, and the confused younger generation have pretty much tuned the church out. Mass evangelism, whatever value it may have, has not stimulated converts to Christian communal action. Congregations committed to the historic Christian faith have been more historic than Christian, contemplating the ecclesiastical navel rather than moving beautiful feet to carry the fullness of the gospel to all of society with its horrendous problems.

Re-action has marked the church, so that we must sadly note that many who profess to believe the Scriptures castigate black men — even Christian black men; they believe the war in Viet Nam is a holy crusade; they scream that medicare is communist-inspired; they will not admit bearded seminarians to their pulpits; they cast aspersions on all who miss their bi-weekly visit to the barber. And this is supposed to be Christianity.

It is with deep dismay, then, that we must note that those who proclaim the Christian faith are very often improperly associated with those who have gone off into the periphery to become, in many cases, harmful, radical re-actionaries. In many instances this causes faithful servants of Christ to suffer abuse and scorn. The ever-present danger is that such servants of Christ will lose heart and retreat in despair all the while the last days hasten relentlessly on to the great and illustrious day of the Lord.

Approaching End

The problems of mankind have intensified so much that we can have no doubt that the end is approaching. "Even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time!" (I John 2:18b). The present lull in the violence of black men *has* to be the *quiet before the storm*. The anger of oppressed minorities is boiling, and it will almost certainly boil over in fierce revolution. Open occupancy will not solve the problem; larger relief payments and job-training programs will not turn the tide; head-start started too late, and the upward-bound project is not getting off the ground. There is almost no

hope. The time is too short.

Only the gospel speaks significantly to the strife-torn, racist society in which we live. And it is so sad to see Christians full of fear and hate in these last days! It is catastrophic when ministers, called to preach in the last days, fail to speak out in terms of the healing gospel which unites in one body in Christ men of every race, kindred, and tribe.

The crass secularism of these days is also a constant threat to the ministry of the Word. Men are caught up, as by a violent whirlwind, in the materialism of the ungodly. Christians sometimes are little different from non-Christians when it comes to honesty in business. Men do not see their work as vocation, but only as a means to money and the things money can buy. Compromising social and business relationships lead many Christians astray, and the advance of the kingdom of God means less and less to them. Parents fail to engage in truly Christian communication with their children with the result that the generation gap exists even where the bonds of covenant love and Christian stability ought to prevail.

Sickness in Society

All this ought not to surprise the Bible-believer. Paul warns Timothy — and us — that there will be great deterioration in the last days. People will love themselves and money. They will brag and be proud. They'll blaspheme. They'll disobey parents. They'll be ungrateful and unholy, without love, never forgiving an enemy, slandering. They'll be without control, wild, with no love for what is good. They'll be treacherous, reckless, proud. They'll love pleasure and not God. They'll have the semblance of godliness, while abjuring its power . . . The Scriptures have been fulfilled in our time!

Such sickness in society has not come about without cause. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul wrote that "the Spirit says clearly that in the later times some will turn away from the faith as they listen to spirits who deceive and to what devils teach and are taken in by the hypocrisy of liars branded in their consciences as the devil's slaves." Although this prediction has been fulfilled in a measure from time to time, in our own day we feel its application with climactic force.

For more than a half century — and longer in Europe — humanistic phi-

losophy has distorted true theology, and higher criticism of the Bible has made insidious inroads into the pulpit, with the result that there is little consciousness of God's authority and almost total denial of human guilt and depravity. Consequently the preaching of the cross is foolishness, the proclamation of salvation through the blood of Christ, the Son of God, is bitterly scorned, and the ravages of sin have continued to exact the heaviest tolls from human life.

Ministers have been deposed for denying the illicit authority of church councils where the Bible is rejected as the rule of faith. Others have compromised and today sadly mute the liberating gospel's resonant sound. But servants of Christ, none other than Jesus, your ascended Lord, calls you to keep the faith in the presence of such conditions. "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them" (John 16:1-4a).

Threat and Danger

Let us underscore the thesis that the very conditions which point up the urgency of preaching the gospel are, on the one hand, clear signs that the second coming of Christ is approaching and the judgment of God is ready to fall, and on the other hand, threaten those who preach the gospel. For example, the breakdown of family relationships is a matter calling for the persistent and compassionate proclamation of God's healing love in Christ. As in the days of Noah, men are eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, without reference to the fear of the Lord. The increase of homosexuality and divorce gives evidence that many men and women are "without natural affection." The generation gap, greater than ever before, fulfills Paul's prediction that children will be disobedient to parents.

Yet when the light of God's law is turned on such matters as intemperance, unholy friendships, sexual permissiveness and perversion, and lack of family discipline, many react adversely and, like as not, they will

opine that the minister ought to be "saving souls" or "getting after the real sinners" or "fighting communism" or anything else but meddling.

When the Lord's messenger proclaims the gospel in such a manner as to make clear that white men and black men are made one through faith in Christ and ought to live together in love in the one household of faith, he is accused of "preaching the social gospel" or of "stirring things up." Indeed, there is no quicker way of incurring the ire of white, middle-class parishoners.

Suffering and Privilege

It is dangerous to preach the gospel in these days if you really preach with plainness. The mystery of iniquity is working, and although it is being held back, the evil one is using every wicked way to deceive those who are perishing because they refuse to love the truth and be saved. The predictions of our Lord recorded in Matthew, chapter 24, are on the way to being fully realized: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake . . . And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:9, 11-13).

But after this dire prediction our Lord sets forth the evangelical mandate for the end time: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). Now that so many signs of the end are appearing in bolder relief, we are bound to expect that the preaching of the gospel must be carried forward against great odds and in the face of bloody persecution, whether the blood flows literally or figuratively.

Recently I heard a story about a pig and a hen taking a walk together one bright morning. It happened that they came upon a broken-down cottage from which they heard coming the cries of hungry children, their mother telling them there was no food left in the house. Moved with compassion, the chicken turned to the pig and said, "We surely ought to do something for that family. Let us make breakfast for those poor starving children." "Fine," said the pig. "What do you propose should be the menu?" "Well," said

the hen, "How about ham and eggs?" The startled pig stepped back and grunted, "Wait a minute! For you that would be only a contribution; but for me it would mean Total Commitment!"

Believe also that the very Lord whose saving work you proclaim ordains that you should suffer, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Philippians 1:29). Let us take courage from the noble example of Peter and John who, after being beaten and threatened for preaching Jesus, departed from the council "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).

The privilege of preaching is intimately related to the role it fills in God's grand purpose and program which speeds on to completion. What is that program of God that makes service in it such a high privilege? In considering the question, we must first assess the full significance of the great change of operation inaugurated at the commencement of the last days. The word of salvation was no longer just for the Jews, but it was to be addressed to all men regardless of distinctions. Our Lord announced it a number of times, and his point is perhaps best summed up in the words, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16).

God's Program

The Apostle Peter at the time of the conversion of Cornelius was made to accept the fact that God had granted also to the Gentiles repentance unto life, and Paul and Barnabas, speaking to the unbelieving Jews made solemn announcement of this aspect of the divine purpose: Since you have rejected the Word of God and have disqualified yourselves from everlasting life, we now must turn to the Gentiles, "For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldst be for salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47).

This epochal change was formally recognized in the apostolic council at Jerusalem when the conversion of the Gentiles was interpreted as fulfilling the prophecy of Amos: "After this I will return, and will build again the

tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:16-18).

Mystery Revealed

"That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Ephesians 3:6) is the great mystery, formerly hidden, but now revealed by the Spirit, and it is the grand reality that shaped Paul's ministry and must indeed shape the work of all who are called to serve the Lord in the last days. The gospel proclaims that the work of Christ on the cross abolishes the enmity between Jew and Gentile, reconciling both to God, and making of the two one new man. Thus God has revealed his purpose to be "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are in earth" (Ephesians 1:10).

How honored are those servants of Christ whose calling it is to uncover this mystery to the races of men estranged from God and from one another! Still more touching is the task seen to be when we recognize that with every turning sinner coming to faith in the Lord Jesus, the church which he loved and for which he gave himself is being prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, soon to appear before her Saviour without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish.

Courage, brothers; if you are called of God to proclaim his good word of salvation, speak out with confidence, with the authority of the Holy Scriptures, with dignity befitting Christ, with unbounded joy. It is your high privilege to be his direct agents in gathering in his chosen people to be his redeemed bride. Be urgent, be persistent, redeeming the time in these evil days, and you may be assured that he will give you whatever protection you need for the fulfillment of the mandate he has given you.

The Saviour's Prayer

Those who take up the exalted task of spreading the gospel must remember two very important things. The first is that the Saviour whose name

you herald prayed for his disciples, and, we may be sure, continues to pray for his servants today. Hear his words to the Father for you: "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. . . . As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:14, 18-21). And you know, fellow-Christians, that the prayers of the Son are the will and command of the Father, with whom he is one.

The second thing to remember is that in answer to the prayers of the Son the Father sends the Holy Spirit to accompany the preaching of the Word and to work effectually in the human heart as God wills. He convicts

the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He guides us into all truth. He takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. He glorifies Christ. He begets sinners to everlasting life through his mighty power. Our rhetoric, our logic, our oratory will never change a sinner, but the Holy Spirit can and does effectually work faith in the most blind and obdurate sinner to whom we may present the gospel.

One day God's program will be fully accomplished. The evil last days will give way to the great day of the Lord. Then there will be no more preaching. Every heir of grace will enter into the fulness of his heavenly inheritance and the Lord Jesus will present to himself his spotless bride, resplendent with the beauty of holiness. Those who have been privileged to hold forth the word of life in the last days will rejoice that they have not run in vain nor labored in vain. On that day their ears will ring with joy as they hear the Lord say "Well done, good and faithful servant: enter into the joy of thy Lord."

OPC 36th General Assembly Report Concluded

THE EDITOR

A little more than half the remaining 22 hours of Assembly business was given over to two complaints. This concluding report will concern itself largely with the first. Mr. Eckardt, chairman of the temporary committee on the complaint against the Presbytery of Wisconsin (now Midwest), reported in summary as follows:

In September 1968 Mr. Marston preferred charges against Mr. Breisch in regard to his position on the fourth commandment. After a preliminary investigation to determine whether judicial process ought to be instituted in accord with the provisions of the Book of Discipline, a motion that "proof of the charges shows the commission of an offense" was lost at an adjourned meeting.

Mr. Marston gave notice of intention to file a complaint against this action of Presbytery, and at a special

meeting in November 1968 a complaint signed by Messrs. Marston, Mahaffy, Worst, DeGraaf, and C. Roskamp was considered. "On motion it was determined that . . . the previous action of the Presbytery be sustained." Mr. Marston then gave notice of intention to carry his complaint to the General Assembly.

The committee recommended that the Assembly find the complaint properly before it and that the following resolution be adopted:

Whereas the Presbytery of Wisconsin did resolve, determine and decide by vote the question of doctrine and discipline proposed, in that on motion it found that proof of the charges and specifications would not show the commission of an offense; and . . .

Whereas the position of Mr. Breisch by his own admission "clearly conflicts with the teaching of the West-

minster Standards that the first day of the week is, from the resurrection of Christ, appointed by God as the Christian Sabbath"; and

Whereas proof of the charges and specifications must also show an offense against the Word of God; and

Whereas there has been and still is much disagreement as to what the fourth commandment requires of God's people under the Gospel; as is shown by a comparison of our Standards with, among others, the teachings of John Calvin, the comments of Ursinus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, in his *Commentary on the H.C.*, and the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566; and is further shown by the fact that the Reformed Ecumenical Synod is undertaking a comprehensive study of the Sabbath question, by the debates within the Reformed Churches of New Zealand on this question, and by the statements of men within our own denomination, most notable for this case those men who are the authors of Paper #3 presented to the Presbytery of Wisconsin, who declare that Mr. Breisch's views are "a possible interpretation of Scripture";

Therefore be it resolved that this Assembly deny the complaint of Mr. Marston et al. against the Presbytery of Wisconsin; and

Be it further resolved that the Assembly elect a committee of five to study the extent to which the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms faithfully reflect the Scripture teaching in regard to the fourth commandment and to report to the 37th General Assembly.

After a few abortive attempts to amend the committee's resolution by deletions and insertions so as to re-

verse its intent, followed during the course of a lengthy debate by substitute motions and proposed amendments thereto, a final substitute was proposed:

That the Assembly sustain the complaint against the Presbytery of Wisconsin and declare that proof of the proposed charges and specifications would show the commission of an offense; and that the Presbytery be instructed either to prosecute Mr. Breisch . . . or fully inform the complainants and the 37th General Assembly why it regards the charges as not constituting an offense.

On motion the substitute was amended by deletion of its first half by a vote of 53 to 40, with a number of men asking that their negative votes be recorded.

At this point (it was then Friday afternoon) the commissioners apparently realized that, as one man put it, they were "getting into an intolerable situation" and could not resolve the matter at this Assembly. A motion prevailed to elect a committee of five to make a study as suggested by the original resolution "and to refer the substitute and the original motion to this committee, which shall act as a board of inquiry with regard to the matters concerning this complaint; and that this committee report to the 37th Assembly."

Eighteen men were nominated, of whom six were given permission to withdraw. Elected were Messrs. Gaffin, Mitchell, Knight, Davis, and Lewis, with Mr. Hills as alternate.

Sabbath Question

Your reporter would like to comment on the nature of the debate on this important question—a discussion

which was deeply moving at times but which tended to wander in the course of parliamentary maneuvers. Through no one's fault the Assembly seemed ill-prepared to deal with this complex subject in the time available.

Although Mr. Marston, as spokesman for the complainants, was twice given an extension of time, he was still subject to the ten-minute rule for speeches. There is no recognized procedure by which a complainant can make a systematic presentation of his case. Nor was the Presbytery prepared (or expected?) to summarize its reasons for deciding that a trial was not warranted, although it was indicated that certain papers had been sent to the clerk and that six hours of tapes of its debates were on hand. The Assembly could hardly spare that time.

Problem of Handling

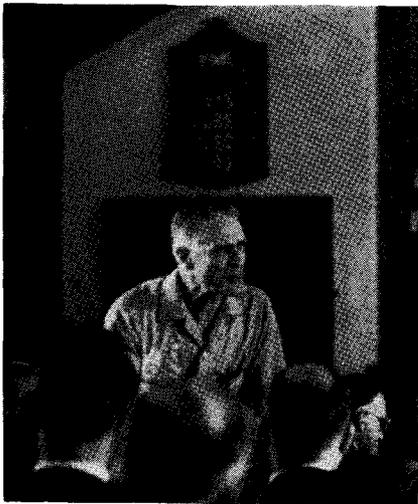
In short, there was no hearing of the case in any formal way that might have led to a possible decision, but rather an undirected debate such as might follow any report by a temporary committee of the Assembly. It would seem to be a wise move to seek to devise some more formal procedure for handling such matters as complaints or appeals on matters of substance that may come to a General Assembly. Is it time to consider some type of "board of inquiry" or "permanent judicial committee" (a suggestion made to your reporter)? Such a committee, meeting prior to an Assembly, might at least set forth guidelines for any particular case, depending on its nature, the extent of documents, witnesses to be heard, etc.

A good deal of the discussion on this complaint either skirted the heart of the matter or raised legitimate related questions about which there was often sharp difference of opinion—the question of what is involved in subscription vows, for instance. Mr. Kuschke asserted that we are without doubt "bound by our subordinate Standards on this Sabbath doctrine. . . I do not hold that we are bound by every word, but we do subscribe to the Standards rather than to a system of doctrine," he said. "We cannot possibly allow a rejection of the Westminster position on the Sabbath and still call ourselves Presbyterians. It is not an open question."

Mr. Woolley, on the other hand, differed radically, insisting that "such is not the position of all Presbyterians

Messrs. Davis, Clowney, Breisch, Bettler chat during a recess.





Mr. Atwell makes a point in debating the issue.

and has not been so accepted by all Presbyterians in this country. . . It is a sad occasion to see any attempt to change the terms or understanding of what is meant by subscription, by unilateral action."

Differing Opinions

Mr. Hills, like others, was astonished to think that "we do not really know after all these years what the Bible teaches on the Sabbath. Are we in doubt about the day appointed as the Christian Sabbath?" he asked. "If we take away this day we cannot maintain our Christian churches or our nation. If the foundations are destroyed what will we do?"

And there were those who, in calling attention to such passages as Romans 14:5-6, Galatians 4:10, and Colossians 2:16-17, were not sure "beyond a shadow of a doubt" that Mr. Breisch's position was contrary to Scripture. It was pointed out that his practice was not in question, only views which he had willingly set forth at the request of Presbytery as a tenable position.

Mr. Davis called attention to the statements of several Reformed creeds other than Westminster, noting also that "the area of the relationship between Old and New Testaments does involve some of the most difficult questions." He objected to the suggestion that we were in danger of repudiating the whole Sabbath concept. "Of course we are a confessional church," he said, and confessional liberty in areas of divergent views in our Reformed heritage—take escha-

tology, for another example—"does not at all imply that we are not."

Some, however, like Mr. Atwell, rejoicing in the integrity of the church in its zeal for the Word of God written, maintained that on this matter "we are deciding whether we are a confessional church: whether we can include those who hold a view altogether apart from our Standards. . . If we don't believe that ordination vows bind us to what is set forth in the Standards, then we must change the Standards or change the vows," he held.

Mr. Breisch expressed appreciation for the concern shown for himself and for the Word of God. He pleaded that all might love and stand for that Word with humility. "Men have differed on points of interpretation derived from good and necessary consequences of Scriptural teaching," he stated. "That others cannot point to the same conclusion brings in question the matter of necessity. In that light this issue is before us. . . What have we understood in taking our vows? Obviously there are dangers in the view that allows for some confessional liberty, but equally there are dangers in the direction of narrowness. . . I am not intending to defend my position now. Reference has been made to trust in the sovereignty of God, and this has been a very personal thing in recent months," he concluded.

As noted earlier, the outcome postponed a decision for at least a year, and perhaps that was the best the Assembly could do under the circumstances. (As this report is being prepared word comes that Mr. Breisch has accepted a call to serve a home mission effort of the Christian Reformed Church in Corvallis, Oregon, site of Oregon State College. He is thus removed from further direct concern in the complaint and study now before the special committee of five.)

Other Matters

A complaint from three elders against the Presbytery of the South having to do with certain actions related to the Galloway Church was heard much more briefly. The committee's report was approved, sustaining two specifications. No amends were asked.

A number of significant actions of the Assembly were noted in the preliminary report in the June issue. Some

others in brief: The Committee on Radio and Television was authorized to spend up to \$3,000 to further explore various approaches to an OP radio program. . . Sessions were urged to place Westminster Seminary on their budgets for consistent support. . . A report from the Committee to Study General Assembly Size was sent to presbyteries and sessions for study. . . The final report of the Committee to Study the Doctrine of Guidance was presented, and the Committee dissolved with thanks for its arduous labors.

The matter of a church paper was placed on the docket of the next Assembly in connection with the report of the Committee on Christian Education. . . The Assembly by resolution acknowledged the untiring labors of Elder Lewis Roberts for his many years of service as controller-business manager for the committees of the church.

At long last the 36th General Assembly adjourned at 4:30 Saturday afternoon. The 37th meeting is scheduled to begin on Monday evening, July 6, 1970 at the First Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Portland, Oregon. Pastor Albert Edwards and members of the Session are the Committee on Arrangements.

Is It Time to Think of Revision?

Trinity Hymnal has become a byword in Orthodox Presbyterian circles. Since 1961 we have had the blessing of the use of what many have called the finest hymnal available. It is rich scripturally, poetically and musically, and is a valuable help to church, family, and personal worship.

In six printings over 50,000 copies have been distributed to more than 250 congregations, including those of many other denominations. High praise has been the response, although its full resources have not been realized without some effort on the part of users of the hymnal.

The General Assembly of 1969 appointed a Committee on Revision of *Trinity Hymnal*. Minor corrections have been made in successive printings, but after twelve years in preparation and nine years of usage, is this hymnal in need of revision? Should not a hymnal be expected to serve for twenty or thirty years at the least?

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Keeping in mind (1) that we now have what we believe to be a high quality hymnal and (2) the immense difficulty of implementing the use of a revised version incorporating substantial changes — e.g., the cost and the use of two different versions — the Committee is asking itself many questions. This article is intended to bring these questions to the church's attention.

After nearly a decade are we now able more objectively to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of *Trinity Hymnal*? Considering the time required for evaluation, and to fashion an eventual revision, it is really too early to begin now? Are there, for instance, hymns that should be added to give better coverage of scriptural teaching? Are there contemporary settings of psalms or hymns that should be included for the twentieth century church? Or other settings for strength or variety? Might there be some deletions desirable on account of difficulty, non-use, or some other reason? Will changes in format or indexing be beneficial?

Your Committee hopes to receive the suggestions and comments of those who have used (or rejected) *Trinity Hymnal*. The few already received have been helpful. Brief questionnaires are being sent to each church to help generate your responses. Will interested readers please direct their replies to the Committee on Revision of *Trinity Hymnal*, 7401 Old York Road, Philadelphia, Pa. 19126.

We hope to make a clear recommendation of direction to the 1970 General Assembly which meets next July in Portland, Oregon. Meanwhile we ought to be truly grateful for the work of many gifted men which is now proving so great a blessing to our churches and others through our hymnal.

— WILLIAM E. VISS
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

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