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ADUMBRATIONS OF OUR LORD'S RETURN

ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

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Major movements in history are usually preceded by adumbrations of their approach. In secular history World War I was preceded by a century of political and military rumblings and eruptions between the time of the Congress of Vienna and that of the assassination at Sarajevo. World War II was preceded by two decades of travail between the time of the revenge at Versailles and the rape of Poland. In Biblical history the destruction of Samaria in 722 B. C. by the Assyrians was foreshadowed by more than two hundred years of apostasy, idolatry, conspiracy, and unholy alliances, from Jereboam I to Hoshea -- all the subject of repeated warnings of impending judgment by a longsuffering God. The subjugation of Jerusalem in 606 B. C. by the Chaldeans did not occur until God had forewarned the rulers of the Southern Kingdom that unless they forsook their evil ways and returned to the God of their Fathers, they faced an inevitable rendezvous with death.

This principle of preparation for approaching crises in history was evident in a striking fashion prior to the first advent of our Lord; an event so momentous that it became the focal point of history. "It was that toward which all that went before was moving, and from which all after-time is dated."¹ God had prepared the earth in a most remarkable way before He sent His Son into the world.

The heathen world had been prepared for His advent. Philip Schaff has emphasized the thoroughgoing inadequacy and hopelessness of its "skeptical philosophy and popular infidelity."² Its preparation was largely a negative preparation, demonstrating the complete inadequacy of natural religion to aid man in his struggle against himself. Although there were evidences that natural man had some yearning after God, sin went on unabated toward its morass of corruption, superstition, avarice and debauchery. The worst of which man is capable became the norm of a heathen world abandoned by God to its own degrading passions and reprobate mind. Left to itself, "the world by wisdom knew not God" (I Cor. 1:21). The dark picture which St. Paul, in addressing the Romans, draws of heathenism is fully sustained in the writings of Seneca, Tacitus, Juvenal, Persius, and other heathen writers of Rome's literary guild, and shows the absolute need of redemption. "The world," remarked Seneca, in a famous passage, "is full of crimes and vices. More are committed than can be cured by force. There is an immense struggle for iniquity. Crimes are no longer hidden, but open before the eyes. Innocence is not only rare, but nowhere."³ Thus heathenism, by its very nature, was a religion that was

groping after an unknown God, but groping in futility and frustration. It was desperately in need of a vital contact with Deity and a reconciliation with the Unknown God. Its conscience, though perverted and depraved with awful guilt, nevertheless still stirred within, and still sought satisfaction which only Christ could provide.

Imperial Rome had been prepared for His advent. This was apparent in several remarkable developments. Roman conquest of the Mediterranean world, and vast reaches beyond from the Euphrates River on the East to the Atlantic Ocean on the West, and from the Sahara Desert on the South to the British Isles on the North, provided a uniform climate for communication and transportation, making intercourse between nations, so vitally necessary to the life of Christian missions, possible. Roman law and government were a priceless aid to the establishment of the Christian Faith. Roman engineering and road building were so skillful and enduring that several examples are still in use today. Roman legions and Roman law dissolved the national barriers between nations and brought the civilized world together in a common family pattern, with Rome, the Eternal City, playing the part of a great paternal godfather.

The Hellenistic world had been prepared for His advent. Its literature, art, philosophy and science had reached the highest level that the ancient world had produced, without the aid of divine revelation, so that its Classical Period became the model for succeeding centuries of civilization. Yet, how impotent it was really to liberate man from the shackles of his inherent corrupt nature. Whereas Rome united the Mediterranean world through law, government, and engineering, Greece united the world which was to provide the cradle for the Savior, and for Christianity, by a language so beautiful and so copious that it became the vehicle for the revelation of God's Word (directly for the New Testament; indirectly for the Old Testament), and understood and used throughout the whole civilized world in commerce and trade as well as in letters and learning.

The Hebrew culture had been prepared for His advent. The Hebrews were the custodians of the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1-2). They retained and disseminated the knowledge of one true God throughout the Roman world, for there were Jews in every nation and country under heaven, according to Dr. Luke in his Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:5, 9-11). They kept the Messianic hope vitally alive amid the darkness of the idolatrous Greek and Latin cultures. They had a few devout souls who yearned for the fulfillment of the promises made so long before to Abraham. Among them were Zacharias and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary, the venerable Simeon, and the adoring Anna.

On the other hand, the unhappy situation of the dispersed Israelites, and the impotence of the forms and traditions of their religious philosophy only served to magnify their need for a visitation from heaven, and help set the stage for the advent of the Messiah.

Thus was the way for Christianity prepared on every side, positively and negatively, directly and indirectly, in theory and in practice, by truth and by error, by false belief and by unbelief. . . by Jewish religion, by Grecian culture, and by Roman conquest; by the vainly attempted amalgamation of Jewish and heathen thought, by the exposed impotence of natural civilization, philosophy, art, and political power, by the decay of the old religions, by the uni-

versal distraction and hopeless misery of the age, and by the yearnings of all earnest and noble souls for the religion of salvation.

'In the fulness of the time,' when the fairest flower of science and art had withered, and the world was on the verge of despair, the Virgin's Son was born to heal the infirmities of mankind. Christ entered a dying world as the author of a new and imperishable life.⁴

In like manner, there is to be a full preparation for the second advent of our blessed Lord. That He is scheduled to return to earth in due time needs no more amplification than that already given in the Word of God. On this there is an embarrassment of riches, as the French would say. Such statements as, "I will come again"; "This same Jesus. . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven"; "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds. . ."; "Behold I come quickly. . . Even so, come, Lord Jesus," and scores of similar passages are overwhelming in their testimony to that blessed hope.

There is a striking similarity in the language pointing to each advent in the matter of preparation for its finalization. This similarity rests on the word "fulness" which is used in both accounts. It is derived from the Greek word plērōma which signifies the practical realization of an ideal. The Apostle Paul had used it to call attention to the preparation that preceded the first advent of our Lord, writing in Galatians 4:4, "but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son. . . ." We have given a brief review of such preparation in the Latin, Hellenistic and Hebrew cultures in which God had made all things ready for the realization of the ideal concerning the coming of Jesus Christ in his first advent. Now we shall give some attention to its significance in connection with his second coming.

Our Lord made reference to an extended period of time that will come to its fulfillment simultaneously with his return; that is, it will come to the full realization of its ideal in God's purpose for that period. Jesus identified it as "The Times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). Without attempting to be critical, we simply state that we understand this to be the period extending from 606 B.C. when the Chaldeans sacked Jerusalem and brought an independent Jewry to its terminus ad quem. Since then Israel has been cast away (Rom. 11:1, 15), and the Gentiles have had the dominant role in les affaires internationales. Jerusalem, the beloved city of David, has been repeatedly trodden down of the Gentiles, and will continue to be, said our Lord, "until the Times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). There is that word "fulfilled" again. It signifies that all things necessary to bring Gentile dominion to a state of complete readiness for the hurling of the Stone from the Mountain of God at the base of the Gentile image (Daniel 2:34, 45) have come to their maturity, and thus have prepared the heathen nations for their long deserved judgment. That Stone is the Lord Jesus Christ, rejected by the builders, but now to be seated upon the throne of his father David, from which he will rule in glorious majesty over the house of Jacob forever.

Before the hour of his triumph shall come, however, there will be world-shaking developments as men unwittingly vie with one another in fitting the pieces into the prophetic scheme which is such an enigma to the uninformed but tremendously precious to those who give serious

attention to this valuable portion of God's Word. Admittedly this may not be the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man cometh, but then, on the other hand, it just might be that the scepter of Gentile power is about to be sheathed, and the Armed Warrior of the Lord is about to unsheathe the sharp sword with which he shall smite the nations in their final effort to frustrate his coronation.

It is our plan to examine four major developments of the twentieth century that belong to the kind of conditions which will prevail on a global scale when the Gentiles shall have come to their fulness, and God will send his Messiah to bring peace and tranquility to this sin-cursed creation.

ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

A significant phenomenon that challenges the attention of all serious students of current trends in the light of eschatology is twentieth-century ecumenical theology. It is global in its objectives and influence, and has a parallel significance with several developments that are capturing the minds and energies of increasing numbers of men of dedicated purpose. Our aim in preparing this lecture is to take a long, hard look at ecumenism and evaluate it by means of the revelation of the prophetic Word.

Definition of Ecumenical Theology

We believe we could give a reasonably accurate definition of Christian theology in its historical and Biblical tradition. But to try to define ecumenical theology is somewhat like trying to pinpoint a star in the Milky Way, so saturated is the field with all shades and hues of theistic and atheistic philosophies, from that of the conservative theologian who affirms his belief in the great doctrines of historic Christianity to the "God-is-dead" philosophies of Robinson, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, Altizer, Van Buren, Heidegger and others.

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in 1950 defined "ecumenical" as the word that is properly used to describe everything that relates to the whole task of the whole church to bring the Gospel to the whole world.⁵ This may be an acceptable statement on the word "ecumenical" itself, but it is inadequate as an acceptable definition, from our point of view, of ecumenism as it marches under the dynamic genius of the men who direct its course and determine its objectives. Our concept of the movement, in a practical sense rather than in an idealistic frame, is that it is a system which professes noble sounding aims and objectives on the one hand, and practices a liberal, radical theology on the other hand. Hence it appears to talk out of both corners of the mouth at the same time. Our statement has reference to that brand of ecumenism which is most vocal and dominant in guiding its direction. It seems to have a supernatural compulsion to bring about a one-world church. Its avowed objective is to develop a massive structure for begetting certain social and political programs, and to devise ways and means for bringing them to maturity.

Trends in Ecumenical Theology

The lines that accompany and condition ecumenism are as diversified as the variegated shades of coloring seen in a day's scamperings of a chameleon. We have seen the little creatures change from bright green to dark green, then to a reddish hue, and thence to a dark gray. We have observed the same sort of adaptation in the mad scamperings of the twentieth century secularized, would-be theologians with their "God-is-dead" faddism and existential nihilism and pessimism.

The limited time factor does not permit an extensive analysis of every viewpoint harbored in the ecumenical pantheon. Yet it does seem worthwhile to take a careful look at its most salient features. In this effort we are attempting to combine its practical theological ramifications with its dogmatic theological tenets.

Ecumenism embodies the spirit of compromise to a dangerous degree. Several areas which seriously affect the vitality of the church and the fulfillment of its mission authorized by Jesus Christ are set forth for examination.

It compromises the principle of Christian unity
in the interest of ecclesiastical union.

The Apostle Paul has given us a heptad of unities in his letter to the church at Ephesus, with the admonition to keep their spiritual unity in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). He wrote, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4-6). We look in vain here for a uniting of all shades of theological theism and atheism, working together in a common organizational structure.

Our Lord, himself, in a most solemn and sacred setting, prayed to his Father for those who were to believe on him through his Word, saying,

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. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou has loved me" (John 17:21-23).

Here is a sublime expression of true Christian unity, resulting from a vital personal faith in Jesus Christ whom the Father sent to secure our release from spiritual bondage by being delivered for our offenses and being raised again on account of our justification (Rom. 8:25). The subsequent transformation of such lives through a vital union with the Father and the Son should make such an impact upon the world that it might know that Jesus Christ was sent by the Father to be the sole answer to its sin problem.

Now compare this concept of Christian unity with the ecclesiastical union being forged by the champions of ecumenicalism.

. . . union as now sought by ecclesiastically minded churchmen, presently and ultimately involves an organized system, controls, disciplines, and legalities. In fact, organic union becomes an absorption, a take-in for holding purposes, whether of memberships or of properties. Of course, such arrangements can be made on generous considerations. It may be argued that all uniting together gain one another, and in a sense that may be true. But something is lost in the gaining.⁶

For Baptist churches, of which Dr. Bradbury was a member, and for more than thirty years was editor of the Baptist journal Watchman-Examiner, ecumenism meant the end of distinctive Baptist doctrine and polity. Bradbury correctly observes, "When Baptists concede or blur their distinctions, they no longer remain Baptists, except in name. And they may not retain even that."⁷

This confusion of Christian unity with ecclesiastical union has been one of the vicious tenets of this new brand of theological thinking. Doctrines once held precious and vital to the spiritual vitality of a body of believers now become minimal or "out of step" with Space Age theology. Unfortunately, their demise sounds the death knell for the quality of Christianity that once swept across the most powerful empire that the skills of men had produced up to that time, and, in spite of the most vicious opposition that pen and sword could devise, won a place in the sun for the Galilean Peasant, as the world so often categorized the Lord of Glory.

It compromises the headship of Jesus Christ
in favor of the headship of the church.

He is the supreme Head of the Church. This is one of the cardinal doctrines of Christian dogmatics. The Scripture declares concerning him, "And 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 of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). It is elsewhere affirmed by Paul, "And he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18). The subjection of the Church to Christ is a bedrock precept in the holy Scriptures. Paul wrote, "as the church is subject to Christ. . ." (Eph. 5:24), signifying that it is so subject. The context would lead us to the conclusion that this subjection is the supreme pattern for a well-ordered home--wives being in subjection to their own husbands as their constituted head just as the Church is subject to Christ, her divinely ordained Head. Only when our Lord's authority is recognized in unquestioned obedience does the church come nearest to her fulfillment in showing forth "the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Pet. 2:9).

Imbedded within the heart of ecumenism, it seems to us, is a strong tendency to replace this headship of Jesus Christ by an ecclesiastical organization which steamrollers its way toward objectives that are inimical to the true spirit and purpose of the Christian Faith. Although

There are without doubt large numbers of God-fearing men within the movement who fear or deplore such a development, the Establishment moves in the direction of a self-empowering organization, with a human head that, in practice, relegates the true head of the church to the position of a mere figure-head at best. The spectre of totalitarianism raises its dreaded visage in the minds of many, and ecclesiastical totalitarianism is more to be feared and dreaded than political totalitarianism, "for a monopolistic church extends its control over the hearts and consciences of men as well as over their political structures and social institutions."⁸

To be sure, such an ecclesiastical monster doesn't stalk abroad in full view today. It is of more tender age and innocent appearing behavior. Its pronouncements seem to be ethical in design and purpose, but what appears in its wake already? "Its foundation is a minimal statement of belief, which is an indication that we are beginning to die from our center to our extremities. Its development is organic, with a united Christendom in view. All such ecclesiastical programs assemble under a dominate council. The fluidity of free Christianity is moving toward a disciplined order for the sake of solidarity."⁹

This tendency may be seen in various developments within the movement itself. Church union and world ecclesiastical politics do not begin in a grass-root swell or impulse, but are the result of actions taken by officers and "empowered" boards from above.

It compromises the Scriptures as an infallibly true and authoritative revelation
from God with a fallible witness that must be adjusted to satisfy the
crass instability of relativistic philosophy.

In the latter there are no absolutes, no genuine authority, no reliable standards! Little wonder that Dr. Roger L. Shinn, dean of instruction at Union Theological Seminary recently declared, "In the 25 years that I've been studying theology, I've never seen the situation so chaotic."¹⁰ One of the most vocal men engaged in downgrading the Word of God is Rudolph Bultmann, New Testament professor at the German University of Marburg. This learned authority insists that the New Testament must be expurgated of all myths if it is to mean anything real to the layman of today. He argued,

For the modern man, the world of the Gospels seems as different from our world as Mars. The New Testament universe is a snug house with hell in the cellar and heaven upstairs. Angels from above and demons from below constantly busy on the ground floor, and the end of everything is momentarily expected, with the graves giving up their dead for judgment and the Messiah streaming clouds of glory in the sky.¹¹

This, according to Bultmann, is the language of mythology. It may have been acceptable in Biblical times, but not to modern man. To expect moderns to accept it as true is both "senseless and impossible. . . No one believes any more in a local heaven or a local hell."¹² We seem to sense that Bultmann, in his demythologizing the Bible, has fallen into his own trap, or, as Dr. Alva J. McClain used to say in Theology classes, Bultmann "has been hoist on his own petard." He has been mythologizing what he claims to be demythologizing. His revisionism appears far more fantastic than the subject which he is endeavoring to adjust to his theories.

In an article entitled "Is Protestant Christianity Being Sabotaged from Within?," Ilion T. Jones, professor emeritus of practical theology at San Francisco Theological Seminary, quotes an observation concerning current trends in Protestant theology which he gleaned from his reading, to the effect that, "Much of what is going on at present on the Protestant scene gives the impression of being willing to jettison whatever is necessary in order to appeal to modern mentality. It is not the task of Christians to whittle away their heritage until it is finally palatable to all."¹³

Whenever the church has made a vital impact for the greatest good it has stood upon an infallible book that was her final authority, recognized as a revelation from God, whose human authors spake or wrote as they were moved by the Spirit of God, which Word is forever settled in heaven. Even so let it be in the hearts of God's people!

It compromises the Biblical view of a sovereign God with a humanistic view that tends to make him little more than the figment of man's imagination.

This school of theological nonsense has some unique technique for ruling the living God out of his heaven and into the limbo of non-existence. In an article on "The New Liberalism" by Klaas Runia, vice-principal and professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological College, Australia, appearing in Inter-Varsity magazine HIS, the demise of God at the hands of the apostles of the New Liberalism occurred in three stages, namely: a) God first appeared in the Bible as a God up there in a localized heaven above the earth. Even the most learned and scientifically-minded writers of the Bible, as Moses, Isaiah, Luke and Paul subscribed to this view of God. But, according to Dr. J. A. T. Robinson, author of the small best-selling book Honest To God, and representative of these God-killers, the idea of God being in the sky was discarded for a more sophisticated concept, namely: b) God was conceived as being not up there, but out there. He is still a personal being in this view. He is the one who created the universe and is keenly concerned with its operation and preservation, and even visited it in Jesus Christ. This is the God of theism, admittedly so by Dr. Robinson. But he is unsuited to this highly scientifically-oriented Space Age. So now God is no longer out there; c) he is in or deep underneath, an expression which seems to us, to be a new way to state a pantheistic concept of God. Yet, upon further reading, one becomes aware that it is in reality a denial of any objectively existing God at all: hence the rise of current "God-is-dead" atheistic theology.

We had originally intended to treat this atheistic philosophy at some length, and had been reading literature on it, including The Death of God, by Altizer and Hamilton, but lack of time for presentation, and sufficient motivation hinders us, especially after reading such comments on this subject as those of Karl Barth and Harry Emerson Fosdick. Barth labeled "God-is-dead" theology as a bad joke, and called its proponents "theological playboys who have studied neither the Bible nor the history of theology."¹⁴ Fosdick said, "I thoroughly disagree with the "God-is-dead" theology. It is a weak movement--there are only two or three leading figures in it and a few followers. It has received attention out of all proportions because the dramatic phrase "God-is-dead" has a certain shock value that has been exploited by the mass media. In this age of advertising we are conditioned to accept slogans in place of ideas."¹⁵ May we just add a word about the Bultmann demythologizing school by way of putting it in its proper perspective.

At the Montreal Faith and Order Conference of the World Council of Churches in 1963, a Russian Orthodox churchman told New Testament scholars of the Bultmann school (which contends that the miracles of the Bible are myths) that "in Russia we do not need theologians to tell us" that the gospel miracles are myths: This is part of the Communist creed.¹⁶

We may not minimize the immediate number and influence of this ilk of theologians as does Dr. Fosdick, but we agree with him in his general observation. Be that as it may, they have found a shelter under the ecumenical umbrella, where they poison the atmosphere with their sulphuric propaganda, and we are troubled no little by it, remembering the words of St. Paul, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9).

It compromises Biblical evangelism
with social and political reform.

Regeneration of the social structure is the new order of the day instead of new birth for the individual. Dr. Jitsuo Morikawa, secretary of evangelism of the American Baptist Convention, is reported to have said, "God has already won a mighty redemption. . .for the entire world, therefore the task of the church is to tell all men. . .that they already belong to Christ and that men are no longer lost."¹⁷ This is strange sounding language in view of the impassioned appeal of Paul for men who, by nature, are at enmity with God, to be reconciled to him (Rom. 8:7; II Cor. 5:20). John, the apostle of love, insists that men do need the evangelical experience to qualify them for seeing and entering the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5, 7). Morikawa apparently has the concept of evangelism that it is not individual men but the social structure in which men live together that needs to be saved. He claims,

The redemption of the world is not dependent upon the souls we win for Jesus Christ. . .There cannot be individual salvation. . .Salvation has more to do with the whole society than with the individual soul. . .We must not be satisfied to win people one by one. . .Contemporary evangelism is moving away from winning souls one by one to the evangelism of the structures of the society.¹⁸

Secretary Morikawa fails to recall John's account of how Jesus evangelized the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob (John 4:1-27); of his witnessing to Nicodemus by night (John 3:1-18); of Luke's account of our Lord's evangelizing Zacchaeus as he was dining in the home of that Internal Revenue Chief (Luke 19:1-10); of Philip's leaving a city-wide evangelistic effort to witness to a lone Ethiopian homeward bound from Jerusalem to Addis Ababa (Acts 8:26-39); and of Paul and Silas' at midnight giving the Word in music, prayer and personal instruction to a frightened jailor in the Philippian prison (Acts 16:25-34)--all cases of souls being won "one by one" and thereby leading to the "reconstruction" of Roman society in due time. Thank God that he still has many devout men in the conciliar movement who fervently believe in the salvation of the individual through the ministry of evangelism, but, unfortunately, they are not in the main stream of the movement where they get the headlines, nor are they guiding the ecumenical ship as it sails toward its inevitable confrontation with God.

In our opinion, Biblical evangelism by the ecumenical organization is doomed by the very nature of its philosophy. Its inclusivism guarantees this fact. Roman Catholicism is not evangelical in either its doctrine or ecclesiastical policy. Eastern Orthodoxy is no more so, nor are the saddlemen in the National and World Councils of Churches, even though they may put on an apparently sympathetic front for public attention and for news purposes. Their basic theology is inimical to the true Biblical concept of evangelism, personal or public. An indication as to which way the wind is blowing on this front may be observed in an article appearing in HIS magazine in which a quotation from The Alliance Witness appeared under the caption "Proportions." It read,

There are 3,400 Canadian missionaries serving overseas, reported the Toronto Daily Star, and almost 75 per cent of the Protestants are from the small evangelistic denominations. The Anglicans have one missionary for every 40,000 adherents; the United Church one for every 15,000; Presbyterians one for every 10,000; Evangelical Baptists one for every 270; and Plymouth Brethren one for every 80.¹⁹

Admittedly, evangelism languishes today. The trend is to "explore" what evangelism is rather than to do the work of an evangelist, and men in increasing numbers go to a Christless hell for want of someone to tell them of his redeeming love. Ecumenism is more interested in involvement in social revolution and political pronouncements, and in attempts to hush prominent evangelicals whose outspoken criticism of individuals might bring the wrath of the Communist world upon our heads.

Prophetical Significance of the Trends in Ecumenical Theology

Let us remember that we are combining dogmatic theology with practical theology in this study. It may be profitable to us at this point to review some of the more prominent features of this global phenomenon, in making the transition to its prophetical significance.

Its Decisive Inclusivism

Under its bigtop one may find Pentecostal pastors and Romanist priests walking arm in arm: representatives of two polar extremes in theology and philosophy. Communistically-dominated Russian Orthodoxy sits down to sup with American conservative evangelicalism. Brash Young Turks in the vanguard of the "God-is-dead" atheistic theological fraternity may sit in good standing by the side of men of devout wills and purposes in ecumenical sessions and together determine its objectives and policies. How can these things be? "Can two walk together except they be agreed?," asked the prophet Amos (Amos 3:3).

Its Devisive Evangelism

We have already written of this vital Christian purpose of the church. There are widely divergent views in personal evaluation of the liberal ecumenical attitude toward Christian evangelism. Dr. John A. Mackay, president emeritus of Princeton Theological Seminary, claims that the program is in line with the Biblical concept of world evangelism. Of course,

he speaks for the ecumenistic viewpoint. On the other hand, speaking as one who seriously questions the Biblical quality of the inclusivist philosophy, Dr. John W. Bradbury labels the inclusivist spirit as being merely sociological rather than soteriological. We tend to feel as does Dr. Bradbury.

Its Defective Authority

Attacks upon the authority of the Bible are no new thing for rationalistic playboys. They have had field days for centuries, using the Word of God as their game symbol. How ludicrous they become in their antagonism to God and his blessed Word may be seen in the extreme philosophies they express, from Hegel's "God is everything," to Marx' "God is Nothing"; from Robinson's "Honest to God," to Altizer's "God is Dead." Although we hesitate to disagree with the Preacher in Ecclesiastes when he wrote that, "There is no new thing under the sun" (Eccl. 1:9), we may have found one exception to that wise observation: we have found a breed of men who deny the Biblical concept of God, yet insist that they are Christian theologians! Even though such men rule God out of existence and relegate his Word to the museum, they still want to be identified with Christianity. This appears as ridiculous to us as it would be to find a medical school having on its faculty men who are Christian Science practitioners instead of medical men who are skilled in the techniques of disease detection, therapeutics, and surgery; or of a law school staffed by men who deny the validity of jurisprudence in a civilized society.

Small wonder that men are disturbed by what they see and hear! "Never in my life," declared Elton Trueblood, professor of philosophy at Earlham College, "have I known a time when the attacks on the Gospel were as vicious as they are now. I see about me a far more militant atheism than I have ever known, and I see it pressed with evangelistic fervor."²⁰ Billy Graham has expressed his conviction that "the daring wickedness and unbelief of the modern world, when seen alongside of divine judgment on earlier civilizations, may perhaps signal 'God's last call' to a generation at the brink of destruction."²¹ Charles Malik, former chairman of the United Nations General Assembly, a devout Christian, has pointed out that even though there has been as yet in the Western world no formal, official stand taken against religion and against Christ, "we see very virulent movements of secularism and atheism."²²

Hence the authority of God's Word has been largely replaced in and out of the organized church by the authority of the individual who has been "brain-washed" by the philosophy of relativism, just as the Israelites were in the period of the Judges, when there was no king to exercise authority over them, and "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 21:25). Every student of the Old Testament knows how socially and spiritually decadent Israel was during that period of her history. The very ones who have contributed the most toward creating this condition cast about frantically to find a scapegoat upon which to lay their guilt, but they look in the wrong direction. Hence they look in vain for a purgative that will cleanse their stuffed bosoms of that perilous stuff that weighs upon their hearts.²³

Its Denominative Drift

Ecumenistic proponents continually exert pressure to debase the principle of denominational identification and distinctions in the interest of organic union. Denominationalism is

made to appear as a sin and a scandal, and only by an amalgamation of all ecclesiastical bodies into a vast all-inclusive organization can this sin and scandal be expurgated from Christendom. History gives the lie to this philosophy. A great concentration of national and international power, wealth, and political influence tends to produce a hierarchy with a human head who not only administers the business affairs of the structure, but also exercises control over the minds and consciences of men. God forbid!

Evidences of drifting in this direction can be given in multiplied number. Dr. Bradbury has indicated several such trends in the American Baptist Theological Division. He reports that pressures toward ecumenicism are channelled through the seminaries, ostensibly so that from there it will be funnelled down through the various levels of the Baptist ecclesiastical bodies. It must be pointed out that the ruling has real teeth in it--monetary teeth!

It is a truism that coming events cast their shadow into the foreground. It is also a fact that the time lag during the adumbration of coming events has been tremendously reduced in this Space Age. Both concepts are of interest to the student of eschatology, especially in relation to our Lord's return. Current ecumenism, tending toward an inclusivist policy; with a strong drift toward social and political objectives; harboring a dominant liberal philosophy and theology; often exhibiting an intolerance toward opposition; and possessing a dynamic urge for building a global ecclesiastical structure, causes one to be alert to possible eschatological developments.

It seems to us that an over-all Satanic intelligence is directing the ecumenical movement with purpose and forethought. We draw this conclusion because of what we see, or think we see, in its character and objectives. It appears to us to be moving in the direction of that complex end-of-the-age pattern woven into the Word of God.

There will arise a coterie of apostate religious leaders. The Bible has a wealth of prophetic statements which point to this fact. The Lord Jesus made it part of his answer to the inquiry of the quartet of disciples on Olivet (Matt. 24:23-26). The Apostle Paul emphasized it in his second letter to the Thessalonian Church (II Thess. 2:3), and in his first letter to Timothy (I Tim. 4:1-3). While the latter two references include religious teachers only by inference, we are confident that such apostasy from the Faith is, in actuality, the result of the ministry of such men. The Apostle Peter presents a scathing indictment of false teachers who should arise within the body of believers and lead many astray with their distinctive heresies and pernicious traffic in the souls of men (II Peter 2:1-3).

There will be a commitment to religion without any basic dynamic. The perilous latter day conditions described by Paul to Timothy include the fact that men will be "keeping up the forms of religion but not giving expression to its power" (II Tim. 3:5, Williams Tr.). This means that men, in global proportion, would give lip service to religious impulses, but would deny the genuine basis of an effective religious philosophy and spiritual experience: that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. "Avoid such people," admonished Paul!

The vocal leadership of the ecumenical movement, and the direction we see it headed, is consistent with that prediction, in our opinion.

There will be a major turning to fables (myths) in place of truth in religious emphasis. The leavening influence of apostate teachers within the One-World-Church movement, and among its forerunners, has guaranteed the validity of Paul's indictment of latter day ecclesiastical philosophy. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths" (II Tim. 4:3-4, N.A.S.). Need we say anything more in support of the conclusion that the diffusion of this attitude is global within the framework of Christendom?

There will develop a religious hierarchy that will reign over a world ecclesiastical system. It will be the consummation of the false, atheistic, corrupt religious philosophy that began in Cain and has developed with tremendous appeal to the natural man whose mind is at enmity with God since the catastrophe that wrought such havoc in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve fell through disobedience and unbelief (I Tim. 2:14). The full expression of this corrupt religious drive will be made through the False Prophet (Rev. 13:11-18), and the Scarlet Woman (Rev. 17:1-18). In these the ambition that originated in Satan (Isa. 14:13-14); was renewed through the instrumentality of the serpent (Gen. 3:1-6); and was reemphasized through myriads of evil agents within the human family, of whom Judas Iscariot was a typical example (John 13:27), will ascend to its highest level of expression. Around them will the devotees of a One-World-Church (religion) rally. This philosophy will receive its greatest thrust after the Church is caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and so forever be at his side (I Thess. 4:16-17).

Most certainly we are witnessing the kind of religious trends that one day will produce the False Prophet and the Scarlet Woman, with their bestial systems. To those who will argue that our attitude and conclusion are based more upon fear than fact, let us remind such that what we fear will become, in God's own plan, a fact. Hence, in the meantime we are committed to obey our Lord's instruction to "watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh" (Matt. 25:13), and, "Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh" (Matt. 24:44). To the careless and indifferent, Jesus warned,

But ever be on your guard, so that your hearts may not be loaded down with self-indulgence, drunkenness, and worldly worries, and that day, like a trap, catch you unawares. For it will come upon all who are living anywhere on the face of the earth. But ever be watching and always praying, so that you may have strength to escape all this that is going to take place, and so that you may take your stand in the presence of the Son of Man (Luke 21:34-36, Williams Tr.).

No man may know the day or hour,
The Lord will come in matchless power.
So while we watch with upward glance,
We strive His purpose to advance.

Some men will scoff in unbelief,
E'en though this truth in bold relief
Throughout God's Word appears so clear,
That His return is drawing near.

He's coming soon, oh blessed day,
 For which we're taught to watch and pray.
 He's coming soon, oh blissful day,
 When peace on earth will come to stay.

DOCUMENTATION

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