



**"Meditate  
upon these things;  
give thyself  
wholly to them;  
that thy profiting  
may appear unto all"**

**I Timothy 4:15**

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# SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE WITH REFERENCE TO MORAL ISSUES

(Conclusion)

## WAR AND PEACE

This series of articles on a wide range of church-state issues was prompted by our *Journal* editor's observations that "a great deal of attention (generating considerable tension) has been given, of recent date, to the collision of Church and State." We have tried to bring some focus to this collision in the areas of abortion and school prayer. As difficult as those assignments were, and are, they allow for some easy answers compared to a discussion of the moral issues involved in connection with war and peace. This writer claims no special insights in this area, and pleads for the sympathetic understanding of our readers if more questions are raised than answered.

In our view there is little "thus saith the Lord" on war-peace issues per se. "In our view," we say. Right here there is a radical difference between us and many others who call themselves Christian, particularly those in the Romanist and Calvinist camps (again!). To read what some professed Christians say one gets the impression that God's Word either urges and thus condones war (cf. Joel 3:9-10) or urges and thus demands temporal peace at all costs (cf. Isaiah 2:4, 32:17-18).<sup>24</sup>

The problem, of course, lies in the area of Bible interpretation. As the sainted Prof. Schaller pointed out (recall his words in the "school prayer" section), the fundamental error of the disciples of the pope on the one hand and of Calvinists on the other is their chiliastic externalizing of the Kingdom of Christ. Thus when reading and interpreting the above-mentioned Scriptures, one commanding war and the other demanding peace, the conclusion might be drawn either that the Bible contradicts itself or that it is unclear or both of these.

On our part we begin and remain with the contention that the Bible is verbally inspired and inerrant, and any problems we have in understanding it are due to the limitations of sin-blinded human nature.

The principle for us is: "The Scripture interprets the Scripture." And since Christ Himself witnessed to the Roman governor that "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (John 18:36), *they are grossly in error who, regardless of their credentials, quote Isaiah 2 in support of their pacifism or Joel 3 in support of their activism!* Neither the one nor the other know whereof they speak! Would to God that they would allow His Spirit (whose gifts they so much claim) to open their understanding that they might know the Scriptures.

Also in this arena how we ought to cherish our Lutheran heritage! Dr. Martin Luther had to, and did, treat extensively the mundane questions of war and peace. Already in 1520<sup>25</sup> the Reformer stressed the need for a Christian citizen, on the basis of Romans 13, to submit to governing authorities. And already at this early date he wrote some disclaimers against the pacifistic stance, referring for example to John the Baptist's failure to advise soldiers *against* their chosen occupation (Luke 3:14).

We need to remember that Luther lived in a day when the Roman church was enjoying the favor of, and flexing its muscle in intimate collaboration and harmony with, temporal authority. Therefore, if men's souls were to be stripped of the shackles of forced allegiance to the false-teaching, visible church of Rome, those souls had to be patiently instructed on the basis of the Word of God as to just what was the divinely-intended role of the temporal authority on the one hand and of the church on the other.

In 1523 Luther went to work seriously on these matters. In his treatise "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed" Luther taught that "we must divide the children of Adam and all mankind into two classes, the first belonging to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world."<sup>26</sup> He expanded: "Take heed and first fill the world with real Christians

before you attempt to rule it in a Christian and evangelical manner. This you will never accomplish . . . Therefore, it is out of the question that there should be a common Christian government over the whole world, or indeed over a single country or any considerable body of people, for the wicked always outnumber the good."<sup>27</sup> "For this reason one must carefully distinguish between these two governments. Both must be permitted to remain; the one to produce righteousness, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds."<sup>28</sup>

Students of Reformation history know of the Peasants' War of 1525. It is one of the most tragic portions of that history. The peasants twisted some of Luther's words to justify violent rebellion against temporal authority. In early May, 1525, Luther responded with "An Admonition to Peace: A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia." In typical style Luther chastised the peasants with the "sword of the Spirit," detailing how "victory does not consist in conquering and reigning, or in the use of force, but in defeat and in weakness, as St. Paul says in II Corinthians i, The weapons of our knighthood are not carnal, but mighty in God."<sup>29</sup> "What kind of Christians are these," he asks, "who, for the Gospel's sake, become robbers, thieves, and scoundrels, and then say they are evangelicals?"<sup>30</sup>

In mid May (since his early-May writing had arrived too late to restrain the peasants) Luther wrote a stronger rebuttal yet, titling it "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants." And once more, in late May, Luther wrote yet another open letter in which he concluded: "He who would confuse these two kingdoms--as our false fanatics do--would put wrath into God's kingdom and mercy into the world's kingdom; and that is the same as putting the devil in heaven and God in hell."<sup>31</sup>

It was in "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved" (1526) that the Reformer laid out his view of war. We shall let the editors of the Philadelphia edition of Luther's works summarize his thinking. Luther's view, they said, was that "[war] is a necessary evil. It has a rightful place in the world, but only as a means for

the repression of wrong; when used for that purpose, it is justified. He attempts to guard this doctrine against abuse by distinguishing between three kinds of war,--that of inferiors against superiors, which is never justified; that of equals against equals, which may be justified, but must never be war of aggression; and that of superiors against inferiors, which is simply an application of the police-power that belongs to the State. . . . It was on the basis of these views that Luther resisted the attempt to create a league of Protestant princes to defend the Reformation."<sup>32</sup> We leave it to the reader to investigate more thoroughly the line of the author's argumentation in this writing.

In plain words, to Luther war is not per se sin nor is it in every case forbidden to Christians. In more than one place he appeals to the Biblical record with, for example, its catalog of saints who had wielded the sword not only under the apparent blessing but even under the directive of the Almighty.<sup>33</sup>

Of course many others before and after Luther have drawn the same conclusions and not without Biblical support. And this to the consternation not only of those outside the church who jump at every opportunity to fault the church and its "religious fanatics," but also to the chagrin of liberals and Romanist-Calvinist "peaceniks" who are ultrasensitive to the general public opinion that those who claim to be followers of the Prince of Peace contradict their professed faith if ever they engage in mortal combat.

This is revealing, again, of a failure to grasp the Scripture message. Consider: "In the Old [Testament], the entire history of the Jews is a chronicle of war, and much to the dismay of moderns the scriptures frequently insisted that God was leading the armies of Israel (Deut. 20:1-4, 10-14)."<sup>34</sup> "So the Jews warred, and if one accepts the Old Testament as more than just a myth, but Divinely inspired, one must accept the fact that they warred with God as their field marshal. . . . The Old Testament is dismaying to religious liberals, but they can scarcely do better with the New. The Prince of Peace is not recorded in any of the Gospels as discoursing against war or urging a pacific comity of

nations . . . He said there would be wars and rumors of wars in the last days; that is, at the end of the epoch, so evidently He did not conclude that the church He would found would succeed in wiping out war."<sup>35</sup>

The fact of the matter remains that "Jesus did not urge the centurion to repent of his military ways; on the contrary, He praised the soldier for his remarkable faith, even though he was a Gentile. He did not say a word to the effect that soldiering is an evil profession. Even more striking is an event described in Acts in which a Roman centurion named Cornelius and his family became the first Gentile converts to the fledgling faith. The story is important because it is clearly the will of God that this centurion of the Roman Cohort be made the first non-Jew in Christianity."<sup>36</sup>

This much then ought to be clear: it is not demanded of a Christian that he be either a pacifist nor an activist ("my country right or wrong"). We submit instead that the Christian is a "selectivist." "Selectivism" has been defined as "proceeding from the fundamental premise that all wars are wrong but not that everyone's involvement in a war is wrong. The particular circumstances and situations must be evaluated on each occasion to discern which side, if either, has a righteous cause to defend." According to this view "the victim of a clear-cut act of aggression would have the right of self-defense."<sup>37</sup>

One of our nation's indirect blessings of the Reformation is that there is general understanding and appreciation of the need for the separation between temporal and ecclesiastical authority. Yet, as in Luther's day, so today there are those who insist on beclouding this principle also when it comes to war and peace issues. Various camps of Romanists and Calvinists continue to seek to dictate to the American temporal authorities on war-peace questions. What may surprise us is that some of those who claim to be heirs of Luther have become outspoken pacifists. Recently we read that "The Lutheran Church in America wrote out of denominational policy the historical doctrine of 'just wars,' replacing it with a strong statement saying all war is sin."<sup>38</sup>

What about the term "just war"? Is there such a thing, and if so, what kind of war is it? We will allow another to do our speaking here:

The classical form of the just war theory was set forth by St. Augustine in 418 in a letter to Boniface, the Roman governor and military commander in Africa. Boniface had plans to leave government service to serve in the church. Augustine told Boniface, "Do not think that it is impossible for anyone to please God while engaged in active military service."

Augustine cited four principles which underlie the theory of a just war. (1) A just war must have human justice and human good as a goal. (2) A just war must be motivated by love, even for the enemy. (3) A just war must be directed only at the agents of war without employing unnecessary violence. (4) A just war must always be a public redress undertaken by rulers in the interest of justice, never a private action.

The Lutheran Confessions endorse the theory of a just war. In Articles III and XVI of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Philip Melanchthon refers to just war as a Biblical concept. Our Lutheran fathers understood that there are times when bearing arms is a necessary and right thing to do and times when to refuse to bear arms is an evil thing.

Refinements of the just war theory have resulted in a set of seven questions which Christians have employed to determine the issue. (1) Is a particular war being waged under legitimate authority? (2) Is the war being waged for a moral purpose? (3) Is force being employed without excessive violence? (4) Will conditions after the war be better than if no war had been waged? (5) Have all other means of solving the issue been exhausted? (6) Will selective immunity be employed to avoid wholesale slaughter? (7) Will the war lead to a restoration of moral order?

Just wars employ military force to preserve peace and to insure freedom. The alternative is a



world in which we become slaves of evil men. God does not intend his world to become an Orwellian Animal Farm or a universal Gulag. He does not expect us to stand idly by while a mad Hitler enslaves the world and decimates the population.<sup>39</sup>

An article entitled "American Military Strategy in the Light of the Christian Doctrine of War" has this to say:

Underlying this Christian doctrine of war is the basic assumption that war is not simply a problem of aggression; more fundamentally it is a problem of injustice. It is the concept of justice that links the use of military force with God's moral order. For this reason Christians have believed that a defensive war to repress injustice and to defend man's natural rights and liberties is morally admissible. By means of this principle Christians have found a solution to the false extremes of pacifism on the one hand and bellicosity on the other. In addition to this fundamental principle, the Church has also taught that in addition to the right to defend one's country against outside aggression, the expected results from defending one's nation against attack must be proportionate to the sacrifices involved. This in turn involves a limitation in the use of force. Only as much force must be used to repel aggression as is militarily necessary.<sup>40</sup>

The authors of both of the preceding articles proceed to address the "fly in the ointment" question of whether or not nuclear weapons invalidate the theory of a "just" war or a "Christian doctrine" of war. The proliferation of nuclear weaponry with the capacity of these weapons to destroy so much of life indiscriminately has put the question of its use on the front burner of every discussion of war and peace issues today. And who is there in the world of men who isn't alarmed at the prospects of a nuclear war?

Yet the question remains as to whether as *Christians* we must for conscience' sake jump on the bandwagon of those who call upon our nation to lead the way in

freezing nuclear weapons, limiting or reducing them. Most fundamentally our feeling is that one weapon, be it conventional or nuclear, is hardly more godly or ungodly than another. And why should our nation's leaders be coerced, either by violent or nonviolent means, into sacrificing our deterrent capabilities versus atheistic communism which, under the bellicose leadership of Soviet Russia, has the same capacity for full-scale nuclear weaponry that we do?

We are happy to note again that there are those who feel as we do. In order to try to get a better understanding of all that is involved in these questions, our eyes settled upon the book *Who Is for Peace?* in the local Christian bookstore.<sup>41</sup> We would strongly encourage concerned readers to procure this book and study its contents. According to the book's preface its authors "distrust the simplistic utopian solutions presented by the 'peace' movement today concerning how to attain world peace through nuclear 'disarmament.'" The third of the book's three essays was of particular interest. It is an incisive critique of the United States Catholic bishops' 1983 pastoral which embraced pacifism as a matter of conscience for any "good" Romanist. The essayist's conclusion comes out at about the same place as does the man who wrote: "If neither Peter nor Jesus saw fit to condemn the profession of arms, one wonders on what moral grounds the liberals or the Fathers Berrigan see fit to do so."<sup>42</sup>

With this we will let the matter rest.

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS

The issue of conscientious objectors with regard to military service was also indicated as part of this assignment, the reason being that it too has been a subject of international attention of late. To no one's surprise, Pope John Paul II has been chiefly responsible for this. In February of this year the pope spoke to 400 young Italians in a Roman parish and, after strongly condemning the nuclear arms buildup, encouraged them to refuse military service. His words were: "On the prob-

lem of conscientious objection, I would like to say that I think it is a sign of maturity when people manage to accept a form of public service other than military service." *Christian News* (20 Feb. 1984) quotes the Religious News Service interpretive report: "Vatican experts said the pope's statement was his strongest to date on the controversial issue of conscientious objection, a concept officially embraced as a legitimate Christian option by the Second Vatican Council." The pope then told the Italian youth about a German World War II commander who was executed for refusing to shoot down civilians during the German occupation of Poland and who, on that account, is worthy of veneration by Christians.

On this subject Dr. Luther made a statement much more worthy of the Christian's endorsement. In his aforementioned treatise on "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved" of the year 1526 Luther writes (substitute "your government" where Luther says "your lord"): "A second question: 'Suppose my lord were wrong in going to war.' I reply: If you know for sure that he is wrong, then you should fear God rather than men (Acts iv [5:29]), and not fight or serve, for you cannot have a good conscience before God. . . . In all other works, too, we must expect the danger that the rulers will compel us to do wrong; but since God will have us leave even father and mother for His sake, we certainly must leave lords for His sake. *But if you do not know, or cannot find out whether your lord is wrong, you ought not to weaken an uncertain obedience with an uncertainty of right, but should think the best of your lord, as is the way of love, for 'Love believeth all things; thinketh no evil' (I Cor. xiii). Thus you are secure, and walk well before God.*"<sup>43</sup> (Emphasis ours)

## CONCLUSION

It is our hope that we have given our readers some things to think, work, and pray about in connection with the separation of church and state with reference to the moral issues treated. As we attempted to set down in the introductory remarks, there is much justifiable

concern in our country, and among ourselves as its citizens, in the area of moral issues.

Objective students of history, whether these students are Christian or not, cannot help but come away from such study with the conclusion that judgment (we would say divine judgment) was the inevitable result whenever human "wisdom" was substituted for the laws of God and man, and when these laws came to be ignored for the sake of an avowed temporal peace or for purely fleshly aims and indulgence. The fate of such civilizations as ancient Babylon, Assyria, Greece, and Rome, yea, Old Testament Israel and Judah, testify to the folly and foolishness of temporal authority seeking to prosper and survive if it allowed injustice to go unchecked and/or unpunished. And more to the point, many of those same cultures and civilizations joined the ash heaps of history due to their failure to distinguish properly between, and practice according to, the Biblical mandate which teaches that the spheres of church and state should remain distinctly separate.

True, ancient Israel and Judah were theocratic; but only until at their own insistence (cf. 1 Samuel 8:5) the God of heaven relented to their unholy desires and gave them a king like unto the nations round about them. That in itself did not mean they deserved or stood under God's curse and judgment. God, after all, consented to taking a back seat, as it were, as the people went about ruling themselves. Yet God's hand, in the person of His faithful prophets, was always on their shoulder, warning them that curse and judgment would surely follow on the heels of mankind's general apostasy and out-of-hand rejection of divine calls to repentance.

One of God's faithful spokesmen to His people of old was Habakkuk. Habakkuk called attention, for example, to the rampant injustice and resultant immorality boding evil days for the land of Judah. For example, he said: "Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth" (Hab. 1:4). As a consequence the land would have to suffer even more terrible atrocities at the hands of the fearful, idol-worshipping Chaldeans.

Habakkuk's book was written for our learning, as is brought out forcefully in the following words:

For a century the Church, speaking generally, has been denying the supernatural and the miraculous, questioning the very deity of Christ and exalting philosophy over revelation. Is the Church therefore in a position to complain if she is having a hard time now? Has she humbled herself in sackcloth and ashes? Has she acknowledged and confessed her sin? Then has our nation, the nation that has been so blessed of God, and so used of God, a right to complain? How has she requited the God who has so blessed her? Realizing the godlessness and the departure from spiritual standards that is so true of our country, have we any right to protest? Has the world as a whole any right to complain? In spite of the judgments of God upon us, has there been a humbling? Is there a spirit of repentance? If so, where is it? . . .

The lesson learned by the prophet Habakkuk was that it is no longer a question of nationalism or of antagonism to another nation. Nothing else matters except the holiness of God and sin. There is nothing to do but to humble ourselves in the sight of God. Nothing could be more disastrous, or more unbiblical, than for the Christian Church to conceive it as her main duty to oppose Communism, much less to be led into such a campaign by the Church of Rome. *There is no such thing as unity between the Church and the State. These problems must be considered not politically, but spiritually. Our one concern must be with the holiness of God and the sin in man--whether found in the Church, in the State, or in the world.* Whatever may be true of Communists, or of anybody else who is opposed to Christ, my first question must be: What about myself? Does the fact that there are others worse than I am mean that I am all right? Not as Daniel or Habakkuk say it! All of us, like Habakkuk, must confess to God: "We have sinned against Thee, and we have no right to plead any

mitigation of the sentence in Thy holy presence." Such a self-humbling in the presence of God is desperately needed.<sup>44</sup> (Our emphasis)

SOLI DEO GLORIA!

*Paul Fleischer*

NOTES

<sup>24</sup> If it is true anywhere, it is certainly true here that one can find support in the Scriptures for whichever view he chooses to espouse! In our reference here to those professed Christians who quote the Bible in support of violence, such as Joel 3:9-10, we have in mind the Wisconsin-Minnesota-North Dakota based "Posse Comitatus," one of whose supporters was quoted in the Jamestown, North Dakota, *Sun* as advocating force in the name of Christianity. This letter to the editor appeared after one of their number had slain two U.S. marshals out to arrest him for tax evasion. Then in an article "Wisdom of Isaiah under Attack in Nation's Capital" (*Christian News* Dec. 1983) a national gun lobby is reported to have sent each member of the U.S. Congress a Christmas card quoting Joel 3:10 under the picture of a pistol-wielding Santa Claus firing a pistol from his sled at a Soviet jet.

<sup>25</sup> In his "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility" treatise of that year.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," *Luther's Works*, vol. 45 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962) 88.

<sup>27</sup> Luther, "Temporal Authority" 91.

<sup>28</sup> Luther, "Temporal Authority" 92.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Luther, "An Admonition to Peace: A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia" (1525), *Works of Martin Luther*, 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) 4: 234. This is a reprint of the Philadelphia edition.

<sup>30</sup> Luther, "An Admonition" 4: 239.

31 Luther, "An Open Letter concerning the Hard Book against the Peasants" (1525), *Works of Martin Luther* 4: 266.

32 Luther, *Works of Martin Luther* 5: 31.

33 Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, 96ff.

34 Richard S. Wheeler, "The Peace Conspiracy," *Pagans in the Pulpit*, (New Rochelle: Arlington, 1974) 108.

35 Wheeler 109.

36 Wheeler 110.

37 R. C. Sproul, "The Ethics of War," *Ethics and the Christian* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1983) 75.

38 "Religious Leaders' Pacifism Aids Communists," *Christian News* 7 May 1984: 15.

39 Joel Gerlach, "The Nuclear Arms Race--A Moral Issue?", *The Northwestern Lutheran* 1 June 1982: 168f.

40 E. L. Hebden Taylor, quoted in *The Christian News Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (Washington MO: Missouriian Publ. Co., n.d.) 1: 743.

41 Francis Schaeffer, Vladimir Bukovsky, and James Hitchcock, *Who Is for Peace?* (Nashville: Nelson, 1983). Schaeffer was speaking in May, 1982, at a Washington D. C. hotel on the subject "The Secular Humanist World View Versus the Christian World View and Biblical Perspectives on Military Preparedness." The other two essays in the book are "The Peace Movement and the Soviet Union," by Bukovsky, a Soviet defector; and "The Catholic Bishops' Search for Peace," by Hitchcock.

42 Wheeler 111.

43 Luther, *Works of Martin Luther* 5: 68. The American edition (*Luther's Works* 46: 131), apparently in an attempt to clarify Luther's meaning, departs from a literal translation by rendering: ". . . you ought not to weaken certain obedience for the sake of an uncertain justice." Luther wrote: ". . . sollst du den ungewissen Gehorsam um ungewissen Rechts willen nicht schwächen" (St. Louis ed. 10: 525).

44 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith: Studies in the Book of Habakkuk* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1961) 54f.

## MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH

### How Can Christians Decide?

Because I was assigned a conference paper entitled "The Moral Ramifications of Life Support," I was forced to take a closer look at some ethical questions that keep coming up in the health care field. For example, should heroic measures always be taken to preserve a person's life? Should life support systems be discontinued if a patient's electroencephalogram shows no brain response for several days?

These questions are of special interest in our era because of the tremendous advances in medicine and medical technology. Clark-Kennedy says: "The doctor used to ask: CAN I keep this patient alive? Now he asks: SHOULD I keep this patient alive? The doctor sometimes finds himself in the uncomfortable position of keeping an old person alive, in whose case common sense would seem to say that it would be much better to withhold further treatment, and let the person depart this life in peace" (A. E. Clark-Kennedy, *Man, Medicine, and Morality* [Hamden: Archon, 1969]).

Although I cannot pretend to have come even close to understanding all these questions and their answers, I thought it might be profitable for the readers of the *Journal* to have in their hands some materials on the subject. What follows is not intended to be the last word on the subject but rather an introduction to stimulate study of the Scriptures and elicit discussion.

### THE BASIS FOR ETHICAL JUDGMENTS

First of all, then, let us look at the Christian basis for ethical judgments in contrast to the ethical principles of current non-Christian philosophies. It is obvious that ethical questions in matters of life and death are going to be answered on the basis of some kind of moral (or immoral) philosophy.



One person will answer these questions on the basis of self-interest. In other words, what decision will keep me out of trouble? Another will follow the policies of the institution, whatever they may be, regardless of his own personal feelings. Obviously, this method of decision-making can be morally dangerous. Martin Bormann defended his role in Nazi wartime atrocities by saying: I was just doing my job. If abortion or mercy killing was in keeping with the policies of the institution, the person could defend himself by saying: I was just following orders.

Another will try to make his decision in the interest of the patient, and here, of course, opinions will differ as to what the interest of the patient is. Another one will base his decision on the law of the land, whatever that law may be. If mercy killing is illegal he will not do it. If it becomes legal he will do it, even as many doctors now perform abortions since it is legal, whereas previously they would not. Since prostitution is legal in a few counties in our nation, there are those who argue that it is not wrong to practice it in those places.

Others try to base their decisions on the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12), putting themselves in the place of their patients to determine what proper procedure should be. Others answer such ethical questions on the basis of their feelings of the moment or on their intuition.

From the Christian point of view it is easy to see that *why* we do what we do is even more important than *what* we do. A Christian may come to the very same conclusion as a non-Christian on a specific question relative to life support, and yet the non-Christian's reason for doing what he is doing makes his action totally immoral, whereas the Christian's action may be moral.

## TWO ETHICAL SYSTEMS

The book *Health and Human Values* (Frank Harron, John Burnside, and Tom Beauchamp [New Haven: Yale UP,

1983]) says there are two ethical systems: deontological, stressing duty, and teleological or utilitarian, stressing the consequences of our actions. To utilitarians there is no absolute right or wrong. Ethical decisions are made on the basis of whether good results are obtained. If a decision leads to pain, ignorance, mistrust, or financial ruin, then it is a wrong decision. But if a decision results in pleasure, happiness, or good, then it is a right decision. We should know that the promoter of situation ethics, Joseph Fletcher, is also a leader in the campaign to legalize mercy killing. There is a connection.

Deontologists do not believe that right or wrong can or ought to be determined by the consequences of our actions. Other questions must be asked: Is it just? Is it faithful to a promise? Is it obedient to the law of the land or to some higher law? Act-deontologists believe each situation must be judged without any universals. Rule-deontologists stress that rules are universally valid regardless of the consequences. If certain rules have exceptions, it is because other rules have priority.

*Health and Human Values* speaks of the Divine Command theory which holds that the standard for ethical decisions is the will of God, but then goes on to say: "Many religious thinkers have rejected the Divine Command theory." There is no doubt in my mind that Christians have no choice but to be rule-deontologists. In other words, we believe that right and wrong are determined by God Himself. We determine what is right and wrong on the basis of God's holy Word. What He says is right, is right. What He says is wrong, is wrong.

Of course one danger for Christians is that they can easily fall into the trap of equating their own ideas with what God says, that is, of interpreting God's Word on the basis of their own pre-conceived notions. Kenneth Taylor's translation of the Bible is a good example of this. Another danger is legalism, that is, that a Christian does what God says for the purpose of

gaining God's favor instead of for the purpose of thanking and glorifying his Savior.

And yet it remains true that we Christians, because of our sinful flesh, must learn to identify right and wrong from God's Word. "The Holy Ghost employs the Law so as to teach the regenerate from it, and to point out and show them in the Ten Commandments what is the good and acceptable will of God. . . . We speak of good works which are in accordance with God's Law, for otherwise they are not good works. . . . [When we speak in this way] the word *Law* has only one sense, namely, the immutable will of God, according to which men are to conduct themselves in their lives" (*Concordia Triglotta* 965-967).

The moral law of God, as revealed in the New Testament, is identical with the law of God inscribed on men's hearts in the beginning. The chief moral problem in our present society is that so many say that there are no laws of universal validity and that everything is relative. The concept of values clarification as sponsored by the public schools in our country makes morality a relative thing rather than an absolute thing.

Eike-Henner W. Kluge in *The Practice of Death* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1975) makes the pertinent point: "There exists something of absolute and intrinsic value in the universe. . . . The deliberate destruction of what has absolute value is morally reprehensible."

The Roman Catholic church likes to speak of natural law, and there is indeed such a thing as natural law. "Natural law consists of rules of conduct corresponding to inclinations that God has built into the very nature of the human being" (Vincent Barry, *Moral Aspects of Health Care* [Belmont: Wadsworth, 1982]). For the Scriptural basis see the first three chapters of Romans, particularly Romans 1:32 and Romans 2:14-15.

A discussion of life support brings us into the shadowy realms of suicide and mercy killing (also known

as euthanasia) and, indirectly, abortion. If Christians guided by God's Word were the only ones involved in the question of life support, the problems would be hard enough. But the problems are compounded by the fact that, as Kluge says, we are in "a time of profound moral crisis" because natural law and God's will are being abandoned in favor of utilitarianism. Utilitarians do not consider whether an action is right or wrong according to some ethical standard, but whether it is socially useful or beneficial. But we Christians believe that there are absolute moral laws, and that these laws are to be obeyed by God's children because of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

### WHO IS A HUMAN PERSON?

Christians accepting God's Word also come into conflict with current philosophies on the question of who is a human person. Those allowing abortion argue that an unborn baby is not yet a person until viability is reached. It should be clear that mercy killing can be defended on the same basis: namely, that the being who is being killed is no longer a person.

The Christian point of view on this subject is very clear. On the sixth day of world history God created Adam and Eve in His own image (Gen. 1:26-27, Eph. 4:24, Col. 3:10), "that is, in true knowledge of God and in true righteousness and holiness" (*Brief Statement* of 1932). All human beings descended from Adam and Eve are persons distinct from all other creatures of God. Human beings are in a totally different category from God's other creatures. All life comes from God, but human life has come from God in a special way. God intended human beings to have life and fellowship with Himself. God wanted them to eat of the tree of life and live forever. Sin spoiled God's creation. But still it remains true that the killing of human beings is altogether different from the killing of animals or plants. After the Flood God said: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man" (Gen. 9:6).

In contrast to this understanding of man as a being distinct from the beasts, listen to the words of Winston L. Duke, a nuclear physicist: "A human being must have self-awareness, volition, rationality. Not all men are human. It is more inhumane to kill an adult chimpanzee than a newborn baby" (quoted in Paul Marx, *Death without Dignity: Killing for Mercy* [Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1975]).

The United States Supreme Court has used a similar argument in its legalization of abortion, namely, that the unborn child is not a person in any meaningful or whole sense. It is a short step from this declaration to say that handicapped people, retarded people, and elderly people are not persons having meaningful existence and are therefore not worthy to be kept alive.

Certain leaders in the euthanasia movement are going so far as to promote self killing or mercy killing because in their opinion it will be good (useful) for society. Such destruction of life will help prevent overpopulation. It will ease the burdens of the vegetative, the incurable, those suffering major problems, their relatives, and the government that has to pay the bills.

Some say that babies before the age of one should have no protection from the law, because their parents during this period should have the choice to accept them or reject them, as they see fit. A Dr. Francis Crick advocates compulsory death at the age of 80. All lives devoid of value should be mercifully exterminated, some say. Just think how much money could be saved. As Dostoevski said: "If God is not, then nothing is morally wrong."

There was an anti-life movement in pre-Nazi Germany that led quite naturally to Nazi excesses. In 1920 renowned persons in Germany spoke of "worthless human beings" and the useful killing of beings devoid of value. Even before the Nazis came to power, undesirables of various kinds were killed. In 1935 it was

declared that it is the duty of the state to grant life only to the healthy.

The same arguments are gaining favor in our time. Who is a person? Kluge answers: "A person is a person when his nervous system is structurally capable of sustaining rational awareness" (*The Practice of Death*). This definition could well include some animals and exclude some human beings.

It would be foolish of us to discuss specific questions of life support without taking into consideration the whole moral climate of our times. Since abortion has now been judged acceptable, euthanasia is the next goal of the utilitarians. We agree with the Rev. Paul Marx (*Death without Dignity*): "Euthanasia would not be a frightening probability if more of us still worshiped God as both author and lord of human life, if we really believed that each human being, no matter how small or old or wretched, is made equally in the image of God and is meant to dwell with Him for all eternity." But the fact is, as the Rev. Marx points out: "The Judaeo-Christian understanding of the nature and destiny of man is on a collision course with the pagan gods of expediency, utilitarianism, materialism, and hedonism."

Hear also the testimony of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian killed by the Nazis: "Life, created and preserved by God, possesses an inherent right which is wholly independent of its social utility. . . . In the sight of God there is no life that is not worth living; for life itself is valued by God. . . . The preservation of the life of the body is the foundation of all natural rights without exception and is, therefore, invested with a particular importance" (*Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge [New York: Macmillan, 1964]).

## A TIME OF GRACE

Since Adam and Eve fell into sin, their lives and the lives of their descendants became mortal, subject to death. Why then did they live so long after their fall?

Their lives and our lives as well are times of grace. God keeps us alive so that we may have opportunity to repent of our sins, hear His promise of salvation and believe it, and use the time yet allotted to us in order to glorify our Savior and share His saving Word with others. "God giveth to all life, and breath, and all things . . . that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him" (Acts 17:25-27). Taking a man's life therefore is equivalent to ending his time of grace. That is what makes it so wrong.

So also is it wrong for a person to end his own time of grace. The Christian says: "My times are in Thy hand" (Ps. 31:15). The act of committing suicide is most often an act of unbelief and despair. The person who trusts in God's forgiveness will also commit his life into God's care and let God decide the moment of the end.

A. E. Clark-Kennedy says: "According to Christian teaching individual life matters, each one just as much as every other. Premature death is an evil; suicide cowardly; sudden death a disaster. Such deaths allow no time or opportunity to repent" (*Man, Medicine, and Morality*).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer again: "A man who takes his own life incurs guilt solely towards God, the Maker and Master of his life. Suicide is a sin of lack of faith. Even suicide cannot release him from the hand of God, who has prepared his destiny for him. The Creator and Lord alone has the right to determine the end of life. Man must not lay hands upon himself. Even if his earthly life has become a torment for him, he must commit it intact into God's hand, from which it came, and he must not try to break free by his own efforts, for in dying he falls again into the hand of God, which he found too severe while he lived."

## THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF DEATH

The Christian view of death is of course different from that of the world. The Christian believes in an

eternal destiny for every person: either hell or heaven. The Christian believes that hell is a horrible destiny, to be avoided at all costs. The Christian believes Jesus' words about eternal hellfire, outer darkness, and weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Christian believes that all persons deserve such a dismal destiny because of their sins, and that the only possible escape is Jesus Christ, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

The sting of death is sin. Since Jesus has forgiven us our sin through His redemption, the sting of death is removed for the person who trusts in Jesus. Death therefore has been changed for the Christian from a gloomy entrance to eternal judgment into a joyful homecoming. The Apostle Paul wrote: "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). We have Jesus' own promise to His sheep that they will not perish, and that no one can pluck them from His hand. On the other hand, non-Christians have reason to fear death, for "he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

In view of this Scriptural teaching there may be at times a difference in our attitude towards a dying Christian and our attitude towards a dying non-Christian. The Christian has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The non-Christian has not found peace through the Gospel. Should so-called heroic or extraordinary measures be taken in the case of the dying non-Christian in order to lengthen his time of grace, even though such measures would not be needed or desired in the case of the dying Christian? Surely our decisions will be based on what God's Word says about death for the believer as well as for the unbeliever.

God's Fifth Commandment says: "Thou shalt not kill." This commandment still applies to us Christians today because it is part of the natural law and it is repeated in the New Testament. Mercy killing is killing, for it is the intentional and express termination of a life that is no longer considered worth living.



## SINS OF OMISSION

In this connection there has been much discussion concerning active and passive euthanasia. We will not get into the details here. But note that in Christian ethics sins of omission are just as sinful as sins of commission. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Jas. 4:17). In Jesus' description of the last judgment (Matt. 25) the goats on the left hand are not condemned for what they did but for what they failed to do. Likewise the priest and Levite who failed to help the man beset by thieves were just as guilty of killing him as the thieves who left him half dead.

## GOD'S WILL

In summary, then, we say that the Fifth Commandment is still God's will for us today. By the Fifth Commandment God protects that which is man's greatest earthly possession, his life. God does not forbid the killing of animal life if such killing does not inflict a loss on our neighbor. Human life is different from animal life, because man alone was made in God's image.

God, who gives life, has the right to take life. God has authorized human governments to inflict the death penalty on those who take life. Capital punishment is not a sin. But God does forbid the taking of human life in the following ways: murder, direct or indirect; killing by carelessness or neglect, as through reckless driving; suicide; abortion; mercy killing or euthanasia; lynching. The Fifth Commandment requires that we help and befriend our neighbor in every bodily need. Love for neighbor should extend to everyone, including our personal enemies.

*David Lau*

(To Be Continued)

## A PROPHETIC TIME-TERM:

bē'achārith hayyamim

( בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים )

This phrase occurs fourteen times in the Old Testament. In years gone by the debate centered around the point as to whether the term has Messianic connotations, e.g., whether "Shiloh" in the prophecy of Jacob is a *nomen proprium* for the Messiah and so brings "the last days" down to the Messianic era. The debate has shifted. "The last days" are generally recognized in conservative circles as Messianic, but a difference in interpretation persists. The traditional interpretation sees "the last days" as culminating in the interadventual era, i.e., the New Testament era of the Church from Pentecost to the second coming of our Lord Jesus. A more recent interpretation, held by the dispensationalists, asserts that "the last days" is distinctly Jewish in reference, marking specifically, but not exclusively, the time of the resumption of the prophetic clock of the nation of Israel after the alleged rapture of the Church, beginning with the great tribulation and continuing into the millennium. It is obvious that theological presuppositions do not merely influence but actually determine exegesis.

The Hebrew word *achārith* is the opposite of beginning: end in contrast to beginning, last in contrast to first, farthest in contrast to nearest, consequence in contrast to causation. The KJV translates *achārith* variously as "end, hindermost, last, last end, latter time, length, posterity, remnant, residue, reward, uttermost." Compare the following (NKJV translation): "uttermost parts of the sea" (Ps. 139:9); end of life: "Let me die the death of the righteous, And let *my end* be like his" (Num. 23:10); last in rank: "Amalek was first among the nations, But shall be *last* until he perishes" (Num. 24:20); end in the sense of outcome after a period of testing: ". . . that He might test

you, to do you good in *the end* (Deut. 8:16); end in the sense of historical outcome or consequence: "I will hide My face from them, I will see what *their end* will be" (Deut. 32:20); hereafter and so future: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a *future* and a hope" (Jer. 29:11); and end of an historical period of time: "in *the latter time* of their kingdom" (Dan. 8:23). *'ach<sup>a</sup>rith* is never independent of the preceding; thus the last is conditioned and determined by the first. When used in a time relationship, as in the phrase "in the last days," *'ach<sup>a</sup>rith* marks more than the mere passing of time; it rather points to the future characterized by the passage of significant historical events in the covenantal development of the Kingdom.

The first occurrence of *b<sup>e</sup>'ach<sup>a</sup>rith* is in the deathbed prophetic blessing of the sons of Jacob by the patriarch: "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days" (Gen. 49:1). There followed the prophetic blessing, which reached back into the past history of his sons and extended into the distant future. Thus the crime of Simeon and Levi in mercilessly slaughtering the house of Shechem (Gen. 34) would govern their future when the Lord established them in the promised land: "I will divide them in Jacob And scatter them in Israel"--an ominous prophecy that was converted into blessing for Levi when he attained unto the priesthood; but that remained a curse for Simeon in that he never received an independent portion of the land, was scattered, and declined in number and influence. "Judah is a lion's whelp," but it took centuries before Judah asserted his leadership. Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim; the first king was Saul of the tribe of Benjamin. Not until David did Judah begin to realize his blessing which would continue "until Shiloh come" and thereafter. Thus "the last days" was rooted in the past from the historical standpoint of Jacob and extended down through the centuries to the breaking in of the eternal Messianic Kingdom. The KJV translation, "in the last days," loses the historical perspective. Luther's "in künftigen Zeiten" allows for the historical develop-

ment. NIV translates "in days to come"; NASB, "in the days to come"; and Beck, "in the future."

The next occurrence of the phrase appeared some centuries later, coming from the lips of the pagan soothsayer Balaam, who had done his homework. After failing to curse Israel for Balak three times, Balaam made a final attempt to satisfy his disgruntled patron by revealing unto him the future relationship between his nation and the Israel he wanted cursed:

I see Him, but not now;  
 I behold Him, but not near;  
 A Star shall come out of Jacob;  
 A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,  
 And batter the brow of Moab,  
 And destroy all the sons of tumult.

This would surely come to pass "in the latter days." The twelve sons and their families had become twelve tribes. They were encamped on the plains of Moab, about to take possession of the land promised to Abraham. Balak's fears would not be realized in his day; the future would bring the conquest of Moab, as it was achieved by David (2 Sam. 8:2). But more: Balaam saw the Messianic King, David's Greater Son, arising from Israel and establishing His invincible Kingdom. Neither Moab or Edom, ancient enemies of the Kingdom in its Old Testament form under the nation of Israel, nor any future enemies of the Kingdom could stand; all would fall before the conquering King to come. "The latter days" were rooted in the historical situation of Israel about to enter the promised land, but reached down to the invincible reign of the King "higher than Agag," the King who was to come "out of Israel."

Moses used the expression "in the latter days" twice, both times in his final orations to Israel as recorded in the book of Deuteronomy. Israel was encamped on the plains of Moab ready to enter the promised land. In his first oration (1:6-4:40) Moses reviewed Israel's history: their initial refusal to enter the land, the judgment of the Lord upon them for that rebel-

lion--the wandering in the wilderness, then the victories over Sihon and Og, the division of the land east of Jordan, his being forbidden to enter the land, and then his serious injunctions to obey the Lord. Moses anticipated Israel's future rebellion and called upon heaven and earth as witnesses that the Lord would dispossess His people and scatter them among the nations. But when that distress would come upon them "in the latter days" (Deut. 4:30) and they would turn to the Lord, the Lord would not forget the covenant that He had sworn concerning them. The question is: What is the *terminus ad quem* of this prophecy? What period of distress and dispossession, followed by restoration, was in the prophetic picture? For Moses it was future, but what is it for us? The history of Israel, as recorded in the Scriptures and in the annals of secular history, records one dispossession and return, followed by another national judgment: the Babylonian captivity and restoration, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation some five centuries later by the Romans. After the first dispossession Israel repented (Daniel 9, also Ezra 9 and Nehemiah 9). Prior to the second judgment effected by the Romans, the Lord fulfilled His covenant and replaced it with His new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 26:28). Since the prophetic warning of Moses spoke of both a dispossession and restoration in "the latter days," those days lie within the perimeters of the Kingdom in its Old Testament form of the nation of Israel, specifically in the latter days of the first phase of Israel's history that came to a close with the Babylonian captivity. The prophecy does not extend specifically to the Messianic era.

Moses spoke of "the latter days" once again as an introduction to his "Song": "For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands" (Deut. 31:29). In his "Song" Moses used the word *acharith* in the sense of historical fate or lot or portion twice: "I will see

what their end will be" (32:20) and "Oh, that they . . . would consider their latter end" (32:29). Those exclamations are ominous, threatening judgment, but the "Song" ends with an exhortation to the Gentiles: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people" (32:43)! The Apostle Paul quoted that verse in his epistle to the Romans (15:10), finding its fulfillment in the new covenant in which Gentiles were to share the blessings of Israel. Previously Moses had foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation by the Romans (28:64-68). Consequently the *terminus ad quem* of "the latter days" in the introduction of the "Song of Moses" envisions the second phase of Israel's national history, beginning with the restoration from the Babylonian captivity and extending through the Roman judgment into the Messianic age of the Church.

Both Isaiah and his contemporary, Micah, used the time-term, "in the latter days," as the temporal framework for the same vision which the NKJV in Isaiah 2 entitles "The Future House of God" and in Micah 4 "The Lord's Reign in Zion." Both prophets summarily lift their readers from their contemporary historical milieu with its national apostasy and looming judgment to the future New Testament era. The prophecy is Messianic, but interpretations differ as to the temporal framework. For the dispensationalist these "latter days" are unquestionably the future millennial kingdom when the Son of David will sit on the rebuilt throne of David in the literal city of Jerusalem. For the traditional interpreter the "latter days" are the New Testament era when the Kingdom broke loose from its nationalistic Jewish confinement into its nonnational, universal form--the Kingdom whose citizens are both Jew and Gentile, the Church.

Jeremiah used "in the latter days" four times: 23:20, 30:24, 48:47, and 49:39. In the first two instances Jeremiah also used a related time-term, "days are coming." In chapter 23 those coming days are the days when "I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judg-

ment and righteousness in the earth" (v. 5). Those are also the days of the restoration from the coming dispersion. There follows a contemporary section on false prophets and the threat of divine judgment. That is followed by the statement: "In the latter days you will understand it perfectly" (v. 20)! The future, envisioning the restoration of Israel from the threatened Babylonian captivity and the dawn of the Messianic era, will provide the proper historical perspective for understanding. So also in chapter 30: again "the days are coming." What days? The days of restoration from the threatened captivity which lay before the people. Judgment must fall, but mercy will surely follow. Then again: "In the latter days you will consider it" (v. 24). The future, after judgment had fallen and grace had been experienced, would bring the time for proper consideration, understanding, appreciation of the ways of the Lord.

Both chapter 48 and 49 record judgments upon heathen nations. Chapter 48 contains the judgment on neighboring Moab. Yet it concludes with mercy: "Yet I will bring back the captives of Moab In the latter days, says the Lord" (v. 47). Chapter 49 contains judgments against Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, and Hazor, and finally on Elam. But again there is that concluding strain of mercy: "But it shall come to pass in the latter days: I will bring back the captives of Elam, says the Lord" (v. 39). When were the captives of Elam brought back? Surely captives from Elam returned with Zerubbabel, but Luke also reports that Elamites were present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9). The "latter days" reached ahead into the New Testament Messianic era of the Church.

Ezekiel used "the latter days" as the time frame for the attack of Gog and Magog upon "My people Israel." Gog and Magog are the subject of chapters 38 and 39 of Ezekiel. Thereafter they drop out of prophetic sight until the twentieth chapter of Revelation when Satan is released to deceive the nations, which are called "Gog and Magog," and to gather them for a final assault upon

"the camp of the saints and the beloved city" (Rev. 20:8-9). The "Gog and Magog" of Ezekiel's day were quite possibly the Scythians (Josephus renders "Gog" with "Scythians") and other fierce tribes whose territory bordered the Black Sea and lay in the Caucasus. Five centuries later the Apostle John wrote of the assault of Gog and Magog as lying in the distant future. In prophetic language the Gog and Magog of Ezekiel that terrorized the Kingdom in the form of the restored nation of Israel were symbolic names for the future enemies of the Kingdom in the New Testament form of the Church. Thus chapters 38-39 form, in addition to the contrast with the foregoing chapter 37 and the following chapters 40-48, the dark and threatening counterpart to the glorious description of the Kingdom in the Messianic age of the Church (Isa. 2 and Mic. 4). The "latter days" point to the latter days of the present era.

Daniel used the term twice. The first occurrence is in the Aramaic section dealing chiefly with the kingdoms of the world, specifically Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the Great Colossus. Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream as a revelation of the God of heaven concerning historical developments "in the latter days" (2:28). The *terminus a quo* was the contemporary reign of Nebuchadnezzar. The *terminus ad quem* was the fourth empire (Rome) during whose existence the Stone cut without hands would strike and utterly destroy in judgment the Great Colossus, which symbolized all the anti-Kingdom-of-God kingdoms of this world. That judgment was immediately followed by the initiation of a period of growth in which the Stone became an earth-filling Mountain. The judgment occurred at the cross and empty tomb when the prince of this world, the great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 12:3), was judged. The Stone commenced to grow at Pentecost. Both the judgment upon the kingdoms of this world and the growth and development of the Kingdom are encapsulated within a brief period of time, which historically fell between Good Friday and Pentecost, the consummation of both the judgment and the Kingdom yet to occur at the Lord's second coming and the initiation of the eternal era.



The second usage of the term by Daniel occurs in his fourth and final vision in chapters 10-12. The heavenly messenger informed Daniel that he had come "to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days" (10:14). As the vision unfolds the *terminus a quo* is again the contemporary historical situation--this time the era of the Persian empire. The *terminus ad quem* is the time "when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered" (12:7), that is, the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation of the Jews by the Romans in AD 70. This interpretation presupposes a natural continuing historical prophetic flow between verses 35 and 36 of chapter 11 on to the end of the vision at 12:3, rather than a leap after verse 35 to the end of the present era.

Hosea used the phrase once. He ministered unto the Northern Kingdom of Israel that was led into captivity by the Assyrians (721 BC). The covenantal promise was borne by the house of David in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Despite the fact that Israel had rebelled against Judah and had gone its own way, Israel would yet one day enjoy the blessing that would come from Judah: "Afterward the children of Israel shall return, seek the Lord their God and David their king, and fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days" (Hos. 3:5). Those "latter days" would be the breaking in of the Messianic era when the people who sat in darkness would see a great Light, and the Light would dawn to those sitting in the region and shadow of death (Matt. 4:15-16).

In summary the time-term "in the latter days" is used in a threefold way, all of which are interrelated:

1. A sudden translation into the Messianic era: Isaiah 2:2-4, Micah 4:1-5, and Hosea 3:5 as an era of blessing; Ezekiel 38:16 as the closing end of that era when enemies threaten; and Jeremiah 23:20 and 30:24 as the future time for understanding.
2. The period of time running from the contemporary time of the prophet into the Messianic era: Genesis 49:1-27 (cf. v. 1), Numbers 24:15-19 (cf. v. 14), and Daniel 2 (cf. v. 28).

3. The first or second "latter days" of the Kingdom under the form of the Old Testament nation of Israel: Deuteronomy 4:30--first period; Deuteronomy 31:29, Jeremiah 23:20, Jeremiah 30:24, and Daniel 10:14--second period.

In further summary:

1. The term is philologically consistent in the Old Testament (the only variation being the Aramaic form in Daniel 2:28) in contrast to varying forms of the corresponding expression in the New Testament.
2. The term is always covenantal, pointing to the future from the backdrop of the Kingdom in its Old Testament national Jewish form.
3. Its *terminus a quo* is variable, as early as Jacob in Egypt or as late as Daniel under the Persian empire.
4. Its *terminus ad quem* is also variable, either extending through the Old Testament form of the Kingdom to its New Testament Messianic eternal form, or extending to the conclusion of the first or second stage of the Old Testament Kingdom, i.e., the period terminating with the judgment by Babylon or the judgment by Rome.

## OTHER OPINIONS

Leupold: ". . . the phrase points to the future, including the Messianic future. But it points not to this only but to any preceding part of the future as well, as long as this future is covered by God's promises and is a part of the divine developments culminating in the days of the Messianic age" (*Exposition of Genesis* 1167).

Keil and Delitzsch: ". . . the Messianic age of consummation . . . But we must not restrict 'the end of the days' to the extreme point of the time of completion of the Messianic kingdom; it embraces 'the whole history of the completion which underlies the present period of growth,' or 'the future as bringing the work of God to

its ultimate completion, though modified according to the particular stage to which the work of God had advanced in any particular age, the range of vision opened to that age, and the consequent horizon of the prophet, which, though not absolutely dependent upon it, was to a certain extent regulated by it" (*Pentateuch* 1: 387).

Graebner: "The `last times,' the `latter days,' and similar expressions are terms applied by the Scriptures to the time which elapses between the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost and the return of Christ in glory" (*War in the Light of Prophecy* 41).

"Millennialism refuses to accept the Latter Days as identical with the era of the Christian Church and throws all the events predicted in Daniel and Ezekiel to the period just before the ushering in of the millennium" (Graebner 76).

In response to a millennialist, who asserts that "after many days" and "in the latter years" is a Hebrew idiom pointing to the close of the present dispensation: "This is the basic error of the entire [millennial] system. The fact is ignored that the `Latter Days,' `Time of the End,' etc., are phrases that do not point to the close of the present dispensation but definitely signify the present dispensation, the entire age of the New Testament Church, the time from Pentecost to the Day of Judgment" (Graebner 82).

Note: Graebner is correct in rejecting the contention that "in the latter days" refers to the close of the present dispensation, but he fails to include the historic development of the Kingdom from its Old Testament to its New Testament form.

Walvoord: He has a comprehensive discussion on pages 60-61 of his commentary on Daniel. "Taking both the Old and New Testament uses together, it is clear that the latter days for Israel begin as early as the division of the land to the twelve tribes (Gen. 49:1) and include the first and second advent of Christ. The

last days for the church culminate at the rapture and resurrection of the church, and are not related to the time of the end for Israel. . . . Daniel actually does not deal with the age between the two advents except for the time of the end, and the New Testament does not clearly use it of the present church age."

Note: Walvoord includes the historical development of the Kingdom, but limits it to the nation of Israel. As a dispensationalist he sees no prophecy of the Church in the Old Testament. Accordingly, "the latter times" leapfrog over the entire Church age, resuming count after the Church has been raptured and the great tribulation begins.

Dispensationalists are futurists. They see the first prophecy of the great tribulation already in Moses' first oration when he warned of "distress" to come "in the latter days" (Deut. 4:30). The visions of Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 concerning the "latter days" do not apply to the Church but to Israel in the millennium. Gog and Magog of Ezekiel are an end-time Russian assault upon the restored nation of Israel. The Stone striking the Great Colossus in Nebuchadnezzar's dream occurs after the rapture of the Church at the second coming. The final vision of Daniel also leaps from the days of Antiochus Epiphanes to the end-time great tribulation. Consistently "the latter days" exclude the Church from the prophetic view.

## NEW TESTAMENT

The standard *b<sup>e</sup>rach<sup>a</sup>rith hayyamim* of the Old Testament assumes a variety of forms in the New Testament—*ēv* with the dative plural of days with or without the article, *ἐπί* with the genitive. *χρόνος* and *καιρός* are substituted for *ἡμέρα*. The roots of *b<sup>e</sup>rach<sup>a</sup>rith hayyamim* in the covenant history of Israel in the Old Testament fade away, for prophecy has been converted into fulfillment. "The last days," from the viewpoint of the prophets, are seen as in process of fulfillment from the perspective of the apostles.

Acts 2:17: Pentecost is generally acknowledged as the beginning of the New Testament Church. The apostles were speaking in languages they had never studied. The visitors from all parts of the world were amazed, some questioning what this phenomenon could be and others ready with ridicule. It was Peter who was chosen by the Holy Spirit to set the record straight and give the proper perspective. He said, "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." He didn't say, "This is like or similar to what was spoken by Joel," as some dispensationalists interpret. He definitely identified the phenomenon of tongues as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. In so doing Peter paraphrased the indefinite time-term of Joel, "afterward," with "And it shall come to pass in the last days." The covenant promises with their long history dating back to Abraham, repeated to Isaac and Jacob, embedded in the national consciousness of Israel, were being fulfilled before their very eyes and ears. Prophecy had been converted into fulfillment and realization. "The last days," seen from afar and awaited with longing (Jacob: "I have waited for your salvation, O Lord" [Gen. 49:18]), had come; the Messianic age had arrived.

Hebrews 1:1: "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son . . ." One age stands in sharp contrast to another, the past in contrast to the present, the time of the prophets in contrast to the time of the incarnate Word. All history is divided into two eras, the incarnation being the historic event that separates. The future connotation of *b<sup>e</sup>,ach<sup>a</sup>rith hayyamim* has been converted into a continuing present of the last days.

Peter: In his two epistles Peter used three time-terms, each one having its own peculiar emphasis within the greater time framework of the interadventual era. In the opening doxology of his first epistle Peter describes the pilgrims of the Dispersion as those "who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (καίρῳ)" (1:5).

Salvation is at once both complete in Christ, yet not completely revealed by Christ; possessed by the believers, yet not fully experienced. The believer lives in the tension of the present and future. The past resurrection generated his present new birth that gave him salvation, but experiencing the glory of that salvation awaits the future--"the last time," the end of the present era which will merge with eternity.

Later in the same chapter Peter speaks of the redemptive work of Christ who "indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1:20). Peter took a giant stride from eternity over the prophetic time (v. 10) to "these last times," the current age. Here Peter used χρόνος which marks the flow of time.

In his second epistle Peter warned "that scoffers will come in the last days [in last of the days]" (3:3). Here the more indefinite χρόνος and καιρός become the definite daily experienced flow of time, the ἡμέρα. The adjective "last" is used as a noun--in last of the days. The general time frame is the New Testament inter-adventual era, as "last" indicates, but the emphasis is on a danger that is not vague or general but a daily threat. The danger was real nineteen centuries ago in Peter's day; it is an ever-present danger for us today, as it will continue to be until the end of the days. Jude gives a parallel warning, after referring to "words which were spoken by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ." He sums up their words thus: ". . . that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts" (v. 18). The "in last of the days" of Peter becomes "in last time" for Jude.

Paul: He also warns against that which is to come "in last days." 2 Timothy 3:1f.: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be . . ." The future tense of the verbs shows that Paul had in mind the last days of this current era, the interadventual era.

John: He reduced the time concept from days to the last hour: "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). The "last hour" for John was the present hour, the era in which he was living. John appealed to the recognized fact that "many antichrists have come" to sharpen his warning that Antichrist is coming.

In summary: The holy apostles used a variety of terms--in the last days, in last days, in these last days, in last time (καιρός), in last times (χρόνος), in last of the days, last hour, in last time (χρόνος)--to characterize the current interadventual era that is moving on to its consummation at the coming of Christ.

The day of His return, which marks the beginning of eternity, is denoted by our Lord as "that day" and "the hour": "But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 24:36). In His earlier eschatological address (Luke 17:20-37) Jesus spoke of "one of the days of the Son of Man" (v. 22) and "the days of the Son of Man" (v. 26). The "days of the Son of Man" will commence "in the day when the Son of Man is revealed" (vv. 30-31). The Apostle Paul adopted the terminology of his Lord and applied it when he addressed the Athenians in the midst of Areopagus and assured them that God "has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained" (Acts 17:31). This is "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5); "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ," on which the Corinthians will appear blameless (1 Cor. 1:8); and "this Day" that Paul warns should not overtake the Thessalonians as a thief (1 Thess. 5:4).

*Paul F. Nolting*

## ON THE USE OF BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

(Editor's note: This presentation is passed along as an example of how a pastor might approach this sometimes sensitive issue in his congregation.)

### THE NEED FOR TRANSLATIONS

The Apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 14: 9, 11: "Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For ye shall speak into the air. . . . If I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me" (KJV).\*

The Bible was originally written in the language of Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). Even most pastors, who have been trained in those ancient languages, are not able to understand easily the bare reading of the Bible in Hebrew and Greek. All of us need translations of the Bible into language that we understand easily.

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#### \* Abbreviations used:

|        |                                        |
|--------|----------------------------------------|
| AAT    | An American Translation (William Beck) |
| KJ II  | King James II Version                  |
| KJV    | King James Version                     |
| LB     | Living Bible (Kenneth Taylor)          |
| NASB   | New American Standard Bible            |
| NEB    | New English Bible                      |
| NIV    | New International Version              |
| NKJV   | New King James Version                 |
| RSV    | Revised Standard Version               |
| TEV    | Today's English Version                |
| M-text | Majority text                          |
| N-UB   | Nestle and United Bible text           |
| CLC    | Church of the Lutheran Confession      |
| ILC    | Immanuel Lutheran College              |



Ever since the transition was made from the language of our European ancestors (whether German or Norwegian) to the language of the United States, the Bible translation most commonly used in our church services has been the KJV of 1611—probably according to a revision dated 1769.

It was difficult for our fathers to abandon the German and Norwegian translations in favor of the KJV. After all, the German and Norwegian translations were the work of Lutherans, whereas the KJV was the product of Calvinists, who could not altogether be trusted to keep their doctrinal bias out of their translation. Nevertheless, the KJV gradually won its way into the hearts and memories of our people, even though it has never been regarded by us as a "perfect" translation.

## THE NEED FOR A NEW TRANSLATION

There are at least three problems connected with our continued use of the KJV.

Problem #1: It is a fact that the KJV has become increasingly hard to understand as the American language continues to change. Those brought up on the KJV will not have major difficulties, but we must consider also those persons coming to us from the outside who have not had KJV training and also the children who are not trained in our schools. The KJV as read by our people at home and as read from the pulpit and lectern in our services is no longer completely intelligible to a portion of our members.

Problem #2: There are a few places in the KJV where the textual basis of the translation is inferior. For example, there are only a very few copies of the Greek New Testament that contain the words of 1 John 5:7-8. Martin Luther recognized already in his time that "the Greek books do not have these words" (*Luther's Works* 30: 316). For a few other examples of this, see the list in the *Journal of Theology*, December, 1982, p. 35ff.

Problem #3: More and more congregations, Lutheran and otherwise, are making use of translations other than the KJV. Some of the newer editions of Luther's *Small Catechism* use other translations. If we attempt to hang on to the KJV exclusively, we shall perhaps find ourselves isolated. Persons coming to us from other denominations, from other Lutheran church groups, and from other CLC congregations, as well as ILC students, will be used to other translations and will have increasing difficulty understanding the language of the KJV.

Therefore it is necessary that we consider alternatives other than the exclusive use of the KJV in our church services. What are the options open to us?

## THE TWO TEXT PATTERNS

We must recognize that English-language translations of the Greek New Testament follow two patterns. Up until 1870 or so most English translations followed the so-called traditional Greek text found in the majority of the Greek copies that are available to us. Since 1870 most English translations follow a Greek text popularized by scholars named Westcott and Hort that is dependent particularly on two ancient Greek texts that were not available to earlier scholars, namely, the Vaticanus and the Sinaiticus. There are many minor differences between the two kinds of Greek text, and a very few more important differences, although there are no doctrinal differences between the two kinds of text. In choosing an English translation of the Bible we must first of all choose which Greek text we are going to follow.

The determination of the original Greek text involves a vast amount of research. Assignments given to me by pastoral conferences of the CLC have forced me to study some of this research. I have not been convinced by my studies that the Westcott-Hort Greek text is superior to the traditional Greek text. It seems to me that the traditional Greek text needs correction in a few places--see the above-mentioned *Journal of Theology*

article. But it also seems to me far safer and more sensible to retain the basic traditional Greek text rather than to adopt the Westcott-Hort text, which at times is based on rather meager evidence.

#### TRANSLATIONS OF THE WESTCOTT-HORT GREEK TEXT

Among translations that have been widely accepted in Lutheran circles must be included the NIV, the NASB, and the AAT. All three of these translations follow the Westcott-Hort Greek text rather than the traditional text.

Questions may arise unnecessarily in some places because of the following of this type of text. For example, a footnote in the AAT says: "The two oldest and best manuscripts lack Mark 16:9-20 but end Mark's Gospel with v. 8." An NIV footnote says: "The two most reliable early manuscripts do not have Mark 16:9-20." An NASB footnote says: "Some of the oldest manuscripts omit from verse 9 through 20." The NASB footnote is truthful, but the other two footnotes imply that the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are the "best" manuscripts or the "most reliable" manuscripts, which may not necessarily be true. It seems wiser to stick with the traditional text here rather than to make a revision on the basis of just two manuscripts. The NKJV footnote on this verse says that verses 9-20 "are lacking in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, although nearly all other manuscripts of Mark contain them." Other passages to check in this area of study include John 8:1-11, Luke 2:14, and 1 Timothy 3:16.

The three translations listed above, NIV, NASB, and AAT, are all good translations made by persons who accept the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and the deity of Jesus Christ. This sets these translations apart from paraphrases, such as LB and the Phillips translation, and from translations made by persons who do not have such a high view of the Bible, such as RSV, NEB, and TEV. Yet we must be aware that the NIV, NASB,

and AAT are translations of a slightly different type of Greek text, and that is why we must consider the matter very carefully before we make a change in the direction of the regular use of these translations.

If we are ready to make a change in the Greek textual basis or are ready to make some changes in these three translations to adjust them to the traditional Greek text, then we should be aware of the advantages and the drawbacks of the three translations mentioned. The AAT is the work of a Lutheran scholar, William Beck, who uses very simple language in his translation. His work in the Old Testament Messianic prophecies is especially to be commended, but it is my opinion that his simple language is sometimes a bit clumsy and not really idiomatic English. Another problem with the AAT is that it is not widely known nor accepted.

The NASB is probably the most accurate of the three translations. But the English is sometimes awkward just because of this attempt at accuracy. The NASB is a good study Bible but not always the easiest to understand.

The NIV is generally regarded as the most likely translation to replace the KJV. The new Wisconsin Synod catechism uses the NIV for its memory passages. It is a smooth translation but probably not as accurate as it should be in some cases. Another area of concern is that NIV's principal translators, as well as the translators of NASB, are Reformed rather than Lutheran in their theology. It is possible that in places their theology had an effect on their translations, but this is true of the KJV also.

## ANOTHER OPTION

What options do we have if we are unwilling to give up the traditional Greek text but still want to use a translation that is up-to-date in its language? Some years ago KJ II appeared on the scene, but its influence was limited and copies would probably be hard to obtain today. But as of 1982 the NKJV is available and is

certainly worthy of our study. It attempts to retain the sentence construction and wording of the KJV wherever possible, while at the same time updating the language and removing words like "thee" and "thou." The Greek textual basis is the same as that used for the KJV, but through footnotes one can easily determine what the traditional or majority text is (known as the M-text) as well as the text that was used as the basis for AAT, NIV, and NASB (known as the N-UB text). There are very few differences between the NKJV and the M-text, basically the same differences referred to in the *Journal of Theology* article mentioned above.

In my opinion the chief danger in the use of the KJV, obsolete language, would be avoided by the careful use of the NKJV. And still we would not be setting ourselves on a course that would take from us either the traditional Greek text or the phraseology of the KJV that is embedded in our memory. The harmony that has been used in our Lenten services this year is my own harmony compiled chiefly from the NKJV versions of the four Gospels. I think that it sounds like the KJV while at the same time updating the hard-to-understand language of the KJV.

In view of all the above, my conclusion is that the text used in our Bible Class and in our confirmation instruction should continue to be the KJV for the time being. But the pastor should be permitted to use the NKJV, particularly the M-text, for Gospel readings and particularly epistle readings in the church service when, in his judgment, the KJV text presents difficulties in understanding for a large portion of the congregation.

At the same time we do not want to fault other congregations and other pastors for making use of NASB or NIV or AAT in their services for their own reasons.

*David Lau*

(Note: Pastor Lau is the pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Eau Claire, where the ILC students attend services while school is in session.)

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