

Christmas Meditation

“Peace on Earth”

The phrase “Peace on Earth” appears prominently at this time of the year, on cards, in song, and yes, also in editorials (often of the secular kind). This seems to be one of the few Biblical phrases that still echoes in the hearts of men through the ages since it was first proclaimed. Why such a strong yearning for this blessed state?

From bombs in Bosnia to bloodshed in biblical lands, reality seems so much different. Strife, misery, and bloodshed are the constants in a daily plethora of news. The dove of peace is a symbol that often appears in bedraggled form in editorial cartoons.

The world’s sorry plight brings to mind the plaintive song from the Messiah, “Why do the nations so furiously rage together ...” How many will listen to these words again this season and yet fail to recognize the context of Psalm 2 where we read that the “Lord has them (the rulers) in derision”. In that same psalm the rulers are warned to “serve the Lord with fear”, for “his wrath is quickly kindled.” Such advice is not likely to find its way into most year-end editorials of the secular kind.

Not only is there a hankering after peace in the affairs of the nations, but also in society in general, in our local communities and even in the churches. Peace then is seen as an absence of strife, of discord, disputation and recrimination. In itself, this is an admirable, understandable desire. Many seek to accomplish such peace through legislative means (crime legislation), conflict resolution mechanisms, counseling and the like. Even within our own church walls we see increasing efforts in such directions.

Do we still know why we celebrate (!) Christmas? Do we still know that the Prince of Peace came in the form of human flesh in order to effect reconciliation between man and God, to restore the covenant he made with His people Israel and to usher in the new covenant based on His sacrificial blood?

Only when we (individually and collectively) confess our sins and plead for forgiveness, can we experience true peace and joy through His grace. We may (and must) rely on the “mighty Counselor”, the “Prince of Peace”, the head of the new covenant, in order to experience the promise and reality of peace in our lives. In the closing words of Psalm 2, “Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

H. J. Ludwig

Is the Truth Worth It?

By Wes Bredenhof

What things are dear to you? I mean, really dear? Probably things like your family, your friends, maybe some of your possessions. I'm sure that somewhere in there, hopefully at the top, is your faith. Your faith in Christ should be the dearest thing in your life. More aptly put: Christ should be the dearest person in your life. After all, He is your Saviour, your Lord, and your King. He suffered and died for you and all of God's people nearly 2000 years ago and now reigns in heaven to return one day again.

Because we love Christ, we strive to obey Him in all things and at all costs (John 14:15). Oftentimes this is not an easy thing to do. Many times Christians have to do and say things which are not pleasing in the eyes of the world. Our requests for our worldly acquaintances to abstain from misusing the Name of the Lord are often met with disdain and ridicule. Our steadfast refusal to work on the Lord's Day is often the object of worldly scorn. Christians are different—and they often have to pay the price for it.

But yet our duty to proclaim the gospel truthfully marches on. We cannot slack off on things which are dear to our hearts. If things are amiss in the world around us, we have a duty to speak up. If the truth is dear to us, we must stand up for it - at all costs, even at the threat of persecution or death. Christ warns us in Matthew 10:22 that if we stand up for Him we can expect to be hated, persecuted, and even put to death. In the face of this we must be bold in our proclamation of the truth: "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." (Matthew 10:27, 28)

Historical examples also abound for us to demonstrate how important it is to be bold. We could think of the early heroes of the faith- the apostle Peter, who supposedly was crucified upside down for confessing Christ. Think of Polycarp, who when the Romans were about to bum him, boldly stated, "I have served Him for eighty-six years and He has never done me any wrong. Why then should I blaspheme against my Lord and Saviour?" Or what about Hugh Latimer, whose famous words as he was burnt at the stake with Nicholas Ridley still provide inspiration: "Be of good courage, brother Ridley, and play the man: for we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

We could bring to mind many other martyrs as well, but we could just as easily recall those who were not martyred for their faith. Think of bold Martin Luther, who as one man stood nearly alone before the whole Roman Catholic church. There was John Calvin, whose name was often given to the house pets of his enemies in Geneva. Think of solid Klaas Schilder, who not only withstood the Synodical church but also the powerful Third Reich.

How could all these men be so bold? What made them hold to their beliefs so strongly that they were willing to die for them? It was an unwavering faith in Jesus Christ, the free gift of God, worked in their hearts through the Holy Spirit. He has revealed to us in the Bible the truth of the gospel, and we must stand up for it and defend it whatever the costs. Dr. Cornelius Van Til, a well-

known Reformed theologian, said once that we must be “bold before men and humble before God.” Van Til never died for his faith and he was never involved in any large scale denominational conflicts. However, he was lambasted enough for the solid Reformed theology which he both lived and taught. In spite of all that, he was a bold man. Boldness is an indispensable attribute for the Christian, just as humility is.

However, let no one think that bold-ness is antithetical to humility. It is possible to be very bold and yet remain humble, difficult though it may sometimes be. Indeed, that is what the Lord requires of us (Proverbs 28: 1 and Ephesians 6: 20). We must always be willing to defend the truth, but never arrogantly. We must speak the truth boldly and in love (Ephesians 4: 15). This love will sometimes manifest itself in bold and righteous indignation, as it did when Christ threw the moneychangers out of the temple in Mark 11:15. Other times it will show in great sadness, as when our Lord mourned over Jerusalem in Luke 19: 41. However it may be shown, it is clear that we must be bold.

Admittedly this is not always an easy thing to do, especially in church life. When you see things slipping in the church, it’s not always easy to stand up and point it out, especially if you’re a younger person in the congregation. You run the risk of being called arrogant, of being labeled as a radical, someone who makes a bigger deal out of things than they really are. You may be patronized beyond belief, degraded, threatened and maligned. Is it then worth it to defend and promote the truths of the Bible? By all means! Not to do so would be treason against our Lord and Saviour.

The purity of the church is preserved through the actions of those who stand up for the truth and will boldly do so no matter what the consequences might be. If we see the church slipping in doctrine or conduct (and that also includes our individual brothers and sisters), we are not to be apathetic - we must speak up with audacity. Will we be so daring as to stand up for the truth if and when the time comes? Dr. Van Til, when asked at the end of his life what was most important to him, replied, “To be faithful to the end!” I hope and pray that this will be as important to each of us as it was to Van Til. May we all be rewarded with those much sought-after words of our Saviour, “Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” (Matt. 25: 23)

COMMENTS ABOUT THE NIV

By Tim Gallant

The MV leans heavily on the minority (“oldest and best”) manuscripts of Alexandria. Even this phrase “oldest and best” has been used often to overthrow the credibility of the majority text. I only make one comment: I would have a lot more confidence in the majority text, because the faithful church was the repository of these. Egypt was a heresy centre from day one. Dr. Nelson Kloosterman has done some excellent work in the line of defending the majority text, work that unfortunately seemed to be ignored by the Canadian Reformed committee.

Second, although I would hesitate to be overly dramatic and point-blank assertive, I firmly believe that those who prefer a dynamic equivalent (“idea for idea” translation) to a “literal” (“word for

word”) version are doing themselves no favour. Although I grant that languages do not have 100% correspondence (each word in one language does not necessarily correspond to another word in a different language, with both words having identical fields of meaning), and thus an absolutely literal translation is an impossibility, nonetheless we must grant that the margin for error with the dynamic equivalence approach is escalated dramatically. The result is that the Bible is much more at the mercy of the theology and personal ideas of the translators. This can be borne out by studying any dynamic equivalent translation, and comparing it with a literal one, or with a text in the original language.

It is true that a dynamic equivalent version tends to be easier to read. But I believe this defense is one of the worst kinds of cop-outs. We ought to strive to adjust our reading level to the level of the revelation God has given us, rather than attempt to drag His revelation down to our level. It is true that in a sense that is what we are doing with INTERPRETATION, but again we see that interpretation of an interpretation is far more prone to error than interpretation of infallible revelation. It seems to me that the job of a translation is, well, translation, rather than interpretation. I realize I’m making this sound more black and white than it necessarily is (interpretive choices are always necessary in translating), but we must see the very big distinctions that are present between the kinds of translations available to us.

A TALE OF PRESENT DAY

SUFFERING

I just wanted to share a blessing with you which we experienced yesterday (Lord’s Day).

Our friend from Trinidad, Michael, who now lives in Toronto, came for our church service, and for family devotions. He brought along two lady friends, one who is from Jamaica and one lady who has recently come from the Ukraine, and who is hoping to immigrate. They were all wonderful, and we had a truly blessed time and fellowship with them. Just before they left, Vera, the lady from the Ukraine, told us about her home church in the former communistic Russia.

The things that she told us were very moving. She said that when persecution became stronger, that churches split and there was much arguing, some wanting to obey the officials (being scared) and others wanting to stand up for the Word. She then went with the group who were going to stand up for God, no matter what. She remembers clearly the officials coming in and yanking children out of the fathers arms, and beating them and dragging the fathers out **BY THE HAIR OF THEIR HEAD** along the floor! About 300 Christian men were jailed and among them an 18 year old boy who led the Bible Study. Some of these men were in jail for 32 years. Others died in jail.

Vera is 39 years old, so everything was very clear in her mind. We were not talking with someone ancient.

Among many things she told us was that the Christians who were underground were very happy. They lived very close to God and saw great things happen. She said that when they were found out

where they were meeting, the KGB would come to disrupt their meetings, and the whole congregation would start singing a prayer based on Matthew 16:18 “and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The KGB would then stop. They were angry, but it was as if the Lord had put a wall in between them and the people. They would not come nearer, and would just listen. The congregation would just keep singing this most awesome song. Many times the KGB would be stopped by the singing of the Christians.

She then stopped and sang this most beautiful song in Russian for us. (Trish picked up the tune and then accompanied her with it on the piano.) It was enough to make your spine tingle and break you into tears.

The Christians would also gather outside of the jails and start singing to encourage those who were inside. The KGB would be furious, but it was as if their hands were tied, they couldn't seem to touch those that were singing!

She said that many times also when they were found out that they would all kneel in the middle, and she said it was as if that God said to the KGB that these people are holy, you may not touch them and then the KGB would go away again.

On Sundays, they had to meet secretly of course. Everyone would go to a huge transportation terminal and only three people would know where the meeting would be held. You would know who these three people were and you would somehow get close to them and he would whisper to you and tell you what bus to take and where to go. She said some-times that you would be going back the same way you had just come. They started meeting in the forest because the KGB could not say “This is our forest, get out!”

The thing she says she wants to stress is that the time of persecution was a time of happiness. Christians are happy then she says. Now these same Christians are still trusting in God in the same way because of the extreme poverty. She herself is a nurse and the youngest of her family and single, so she came on a visit just two years ago, and stayed in Canada.

The Lord willing she will come again this weekend and I am sure we will hear more of what happened in the underground church. It left us all feeling very emotional. Could we do it, could we go to jail for our belief? Be beat up? Leave our loved ones and perhaps die in jail like many did? Its one thing to read stories about these things and quite another to hear it from someone who was there.

One thing that Vera said that makes her very sad is that when she came to Canada that Christians here know so many new sins; and that they even take the Bible to justify them. Amongst the underground Christians, she said that there was no divorce, no remarriage, no talk of homosexuality, or lesbians, no rock music, or so-called Christian rock music. She said the music was very reverent to God. She says that here at parties amongst Christians the emphasis is on food. There the emphasis is on fellowship around the Word.

I hope you didn't mind that I took this time and space to share this with you. It sure makes you appreciate your freedom more and it also makes you sad that we take everything so for granted.

Yours in His service,
Thea Van Dixhoorn

Letter to the Editors ...

Dear Reformed Polemickers!

Now that may sound somewhat irreverent, but, believe me, dear brother, it is meant from the heart! This other person who wrote you a letter of encouragement (published in the Nov. 10th issue) and who addressed you with "Dear Gentlemen" gave me a boost to address you in this way.

I am strictly opposed to this "brotherhood-of-man under the fatherhood-of-god" idea, so why must I continue to address my fellowmen as brothers and sisters in the Lord all the time, just because we happen to belong to the same "denomination"? In the long run it may prove to be even blasphemous in the eyes of our Lord.

I am so thankful that the Lord is raising up voices among His people, as He has always done in the history of His Church according to His promises; voices of warning and a call for return: "... to the law and to the testimony..." (Isaiah 8:20), and He uses the most vulnerable and feeble people, who were always in need of a boost by other feeble people, and believe me dear "Gentlemen", a contribution such as "The Twenty-Third Channel" will not do the job, and by the way, this little piece of art had already been contributed to the other paper, called "Information" under VARIA (June 17, 1995). I also doubt that translations such as "The Open Tap" (K. Schilder in 1921) in Reformed Polemics will bring the younger generation any further on the road to Reformation. It actually took Prof. Schilder 24 years trying to shut off the tap, and by that time he must have realized that there was too much mopping up to do. When, finally in 1944, the Lord used Prof. Schilder and others to lead His people out of the hierarchy and unfaithfulness of the prominent Church leaders, the mopping up could really begin. Yet then it was found that the taps could never be completely stopped from dripping, and that the leaking and the mopping up would be a continuous process. Prof. Schilder called it "Doorgaande Reformatie" - Reformation without Interruption. That is why I am sending you a few small contributions, which may fortify you in the efforts to fulfill the difficult task the Lord has put on your shoulders in this time of great falling away.

By this I do not mean the downfall and apostasy of modern Christendom in general, which is sometimes called (also by some of us) Judean Christianity, for that is a kind of "Christianity" with a small "c" and for that reason has to be put between quotation marks, as Christ and His Church are being left out of the picture. I hope this letter plus the two poems may spread some light on all the confusion the churches are in and that this modern tower of Babel building in the Church of Jesus Christ may soon be interrupted so that the Lord will cause a return to the Word of God, and the Testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yours in His service,
Mrs. Heetebrij

Ode to Reformed Polemics

Somebody criticized “Reformed Polemics”
I do not like its warnings and advice;
I want a periodical to speak on
The joys of life and everything that’s nice

How odd that somebody like to ride on
A road that never warned of grief ahead?
He would be crushed like ancient Tyre and Sidon
Foolhardy, unsuspecting, hopeless, dead.

“Reformed Polemics” points to the Highest pleasures
Releases many beams of light
Through clearest Lighting which the dust of ages
Has failed to dim with treason of the night

Shine on “Reformed Polemics”, until the glory
Of Christ’s return shall bum away all dross;
Fight the good fight of faith to wing the story
Of life for ever through His Cross!

Minding Media The Christian Compromiser

Go on, guess wrong!
Be loud, be vulgar, do
What monster Advertizo tells you to!
Make noise and call it song!

Stoop down into the dirt
And say it’s clean
Make our religion cheap and mean
And when the harm is done

Beyond correction or repair.
Assure us modems it was fun -
For those who do not think
Or really care.

Preach compromise with hell
And in the sorry end
Insist that it is well
Because it has been popular

For liberals and for socialists
And least denominator czars
Who cloaked in arrogance
Argue crime natural

And vice a moral instinct
of the human soul,
All this accept, then wonder why

This world is such a tragic mess
But at least have shame.
That it's deliberately done
In Jesus' Name.

by A. Heetebrij