

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

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and Elijah

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Theologians and artists have depicted John the Baptist in various ways through the centuries, but what does the Bible say about him—specifically what does Jesus say about him? And what is the connection between John and Elijah the prophet?

Cornelis van Haarlem, *The Preaching of Saint John the Baptist*, c. 1602
Caravaggio, *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*, c. 1608
Titian, *Saint John the Baptist*, c. 1542
Raphael, *Saint John the Baptist Preaching*, c. 1505

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Elijah and John the Baptist

Moses writes in Deuteronomy 18:15-18:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, “Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.” And the LORD said to me: “What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.”

All of us desire to know the future so we can be prepared for it. We want to be in control of our destinies and not at the mercy of events. However, some have this desire so strongly that they set themselves up as channels through which the future is revealed.

Such people have misled many. Deuteronomy 18, along with chapter 13, warns against such people. Whether they are called diviners, charmers, spiritists, or channelers, using methods like reading tea leaves, casting lots, or conducting séances, they are to be seriously and carefully avoided because there is no godly reality to their prognostications. Those seeking to know are being misguided, putting themselves at the mercy of lying demons, or at the very least, imaginative men and women.

At other times, simply following a church tradition regarding a prophecy can also mislead a person. This occurs because someone in the past, sincerely believing he understood a particular prophecy, began preaching his belief, and many in his audience then believed

without the resources to prove the interpretation wrong. Due to frequent repetition, it came to be accepted as truth.

It is important for us to understand that prophets were not merely temporary and occasional expedients God would turn to. They played a vital and continuing role in Israel, especially in those times before the Word of God was widely distributed. This is why God makes provision for them within the law. He shows in many places that those He appoints to the prophetic office will always preach the keeping of the commandments of God as evidence of the Source of their inspiration. They will teach the conservation of past truths even as they break new doctrinal ground.

They both forth-tell—that is, proclaim a message truthfully, clearly, and authoritatively to those for whom it is intended—and they will on occasion, but not always, foretell—that is, predict events before they take place.

It is misleading to believe these verses in Deuteronomy 18 apply only to Christ. His is undoubtedly their ultimate application, but the promise and description applies to all true, God-ordained prophets. Notice some of the identifiers in these verses:

1. God established the foundational pattern for the prophetic office in Moses (“like me”).
2. God will raise a prophet up from among the Israelitish people. Later biblical sources show he might be drawn and appointed from any of the tribes and from any occupation. In other words, he did not have to be a Levite.

3. He will perform the function of a mediator between God and men (verses 16-18).
4. He will stand apart from the system already installed. He will not be antagonistic to the system, but he may be very antagonistic to the sins of those within the system, especially the leadership.
5. God will directly appoint and separate him for his office. Thus, the thrust of his service as God's representative is direct and authoritative. By contrast, the priest's function flowed from man to God by means of sacrifice—far less direct and more appealing and pleading than demanding. The New Testament ministry combines elements of both, but parallels the prophet's function more than the priest's.

Simply and broadly, a prophet is one who is given a

message by another of greater authority and speaks for him to those for whom the message is intended. Thus, Moses was God's prophet, but Aaron was Moses' prophet.

Without a doubt, when we hear the word "prophet," we immediately think of the Old Testament. This is a natural reaction because that is where most of them appear in the Bible. Our memory instantaneously brings forth names like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and David—all great men. However, without a doubt, the two greatest prophets of all time appear in the New Testament: John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. John the Baptist is the last and greatest under the Old Covenant, and Jesus Christ is the first and greatest of the New.

One will quickly concede the name of Jesus Christ, but John the Baptist? Compared to the other great Old Testament prophets, the Bible says hardly anything about him! Yet, in the judgment of the greatest One of all, John the Baptist is greater!

Great, Distinctive, Respected

In Matthew 11:7-11, Jesus says of John the Baptist:

What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You." Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Despite the greatness of the Old Testament prophets that filters through the record of their deeds, Jesus declares that none was greater than His cousin, John. In fact, several commentaries contend that Jesus' statement literally means that John was the greatest of all men, not just the greatest prophet! When we consider the greatness of the other prophets, we must marvel at how great this man was! Yet we know so little of him.

The Greek literally says He was *much* more than a prophet. Part of the reason for this is that John fulfilled the prophecy given in Malachi 3:1. No other prophet, aside from Jesus Christ, was ever the fulfillment of a distinct prophecy—and such an important prophecy on top of that! There may be a great deal more to John than we ever considered.

Luke 1:5-7, 15-17 records some features of John's birth:

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of

Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. . . . [The angel said to Zacharias,] "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

God miraculously caused John's conception and birth, even as He did Isaac's and Jesus'. Jesus' conception in a virgin woman without the involvement of a human male is an exception. Isaac and John's conceptions were normally produced except that Sarah and Elizabeth were beyond childbearing age.

John appears in each of the four gospels, and in each case, his story is subordinated to that of Jesus. This is as it should be, yet John was quite effective in what he did in preparing the way before the Christ. Even Josephus writes about him. Though Josephus pens only a vague few sentences about Christ, he devotes an intriguing, longer paragraph to John. By putting together what Josephus records with what the Bible provides, we get a picture of a vigorous man of God who was turning the small nation of Judea on its spiritual ear.

Judeans had no radio or television, but knowledge of

him spread quickly by word of mouth. His ministry appears to have been short, perhaps about the same length as the three and a half years allotted to Jesus. Some authorities feel John's ministry may have only been one year long. If so, he must have been an electrifying speaker! However long he preached, most of it occurred before Christ began His ministry.

Mark 1:1-8 gives these descriptions:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You." "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD, make His paths straight.'" John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In his dress and diet, he was distinctive from what was normal for the times. His dress was durable and serviceable—what would normally be associated with the clothing of the poorest of the land. The same is true of his diet. His diet would be unusual for us but common for the poor folk of his time.

Regarding how he lived, Luke 1:80 adds, "So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel." Mark 2:18 shows that he and his disciples lived an ascetic lifestyle. Taken together, these verses indicate that despite John's greatness, God kept him a poor man. People who live their entire lives in the desert do not usually become rich. His home, though undoubtedly not a hovel, was certainly nowhere near what we are familiar with in wealthy, modern Israel. From this we can learn that God does not owe us what we would like to have, but He provides what we need to serve His purpose for us.

We can be assured that since he had God's Spirit from birth, as Luke 1:15 states, he was in no way the almost wild man he is usually perceived as in movies. Paul says in II Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

Also note that, though John was of the Aaronic line from both parents, no direct connection is ever made between him and the already installed system of Temple worship.

Mark 1:1 says, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The Bible positions John's ministry as the starting point of Christ's gospel, not because John literally preached the gospel, but apparently because of his preparatory work to Jesus preaching it. Verse 5 records, "And all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins." This reveals the impact of his ministry: All Judea, including folk from Jerusalem, went out to hear and be baptized by him, believing he was a prophet. While "all" does not mean every last person, it indicates a sizeable majority of the population was conversant about John and his message.

Mark 11:32 provides insight as to how the people perceived him: "[T]hey [the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders] feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed." Clearly, the common people considered John a prophet, and indeed, he was. This also shows that the highest Jewish authorities were fully aware of his reputation as a prophet and feared it. We can begin to see that in many respects the magnitude of John's work was similar to Jesus'.

Mark 1:9-11 speaks of Jesus and John's first recorded contact:

It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

The "all" of verse 5 includes Jesus both as believing his message and being baptized of him. God at this time fully revealed to John who the Messiah was. However, verses 7-8 make it plain that, before baptizing Jesus, he already knew he was preceding someone. The prophecy given to his father Zacharias (Luke 1:76) had undoubtedly been communicated to him.

Despite the fact that he was no wild man, he was radically alienated from those who were part of the system God had installed during the time of David a thousand years earlier, reestablished under Hezekiah and Josiah, and then later still reinstated under Ezra following the Jews' return from Babylon.

Powerful Foes

As mentioned earlier, the prophets tended to operate outside the priestly system established by God. Nowhere

is this more evident than in the lives of John, Jeremiah, and Amos. Jeremiah 15:17 records the prophet's complaint

about his solitude: "I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone because of Your hand, for You have filled me with indignation." Amos provides us with his experience when receiving God's calling: "Then Amos answered, and said to Amaziah: 'I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said to me, "Go, prophesy to My people Israel"' (Amos 7:14-15).

John's separation from the system is clearly noticeable in Matthew 3:7-10:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Notice that his scathing attack is against both the Pharisees and Sadducees: The Pharisees had public power because they tended to be successful people in private life. In spite of this, they also had the admiration of the people. The Sadducees were largely from the priesthood and thus controlled the Temple. Consequently, they pretty much controlled the religious life of the people. Yet, because they also tended to be wealthy but haughty in disposition, the feelings of the people were prejudiced against them.

John courageously confronts the establishment's leadership. His was an unpopular message of judgment aimed directly at the powerful, and they did not take kindly to what he said. "And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him" (Luke 7:29-30).

Matthew 21:32 confirms John's rejection when Jesus speaks to the chief priests and elders at the Temple: "For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him." The powerful knew John was speaking about them, so in disdainful anger, they rejected him, while the publicans and harlots accepted his teaching.

His most powerful foe was Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee. Herod and John had an interesting relationship because Herod respected John, yet at the same time he feared what he perceived to be John's growing political power because of the prophet's popularity.

Josephus provides a bit of background the Bible lacks. Herod was married to the daughter of Aretas, king of

Petra. However, before John became a popular figure, Herod divorced her and married his sister-in-law, Herodias. This caused a problem, as Herodias was already married to Herod's brother, Philip. At this point, a convergence takes place between John's rising influence with the people and Herod and Herodias' adulterous and incestuous marriage, which clearly violates the sexual purity laws in Leviticus 18.

Mark 6:17-20 explains:

For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. For John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

Josephus writes that Herod took John prisoner because he feared the prophet's prominence, believing that rebellion against his rule was growing in response to John's preaching. Apparently, during John's captivity, he warned Herod that he and Herodias were in an adulterous relationship.

This made Herodias boil with anger. Verses 21-27 add:

Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee. And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you." He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me, I will give you, up to half my kingdom." So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!" Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. And immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison.

Thus, when a convenient occasion presented itself, she took her revenge, getting away with John's murder because of Herod's foolish timidity. Subsequently, Aretas came against Herod in war, seeking revenge for Herod divorcing his daughter. Josephus writes that Aretas soundly defeated Herod's forces. The people of Judea concluded that Herod's defeat was God's punishment for taking John's life.

More on John's Greatness

Luke gives the most comprehensive account of John's birth. Luke 1:5-25 covers the announcement of John's birth to his father Zechariah, and verses 68-79 record Zechariah's hymn of praise to God for John. However, verses 76-79 comprise a prophecy devoted without qualification to John and his work:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

From the very beginning, John and Jesus are allied in the salvation scheme. However, the Bible shows in interesting ways how John is subordinate to Jesus. For instance, in Luke 1:36, Mary and Elizabeth are shown to be related, probably cousins. Both women conceive in a miraculous way, but Mary's conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit is far more miraculous. Then, when Elizabeth greets Mary (Luke 1:39-41), John, while still in her womb, leaps for joy in the presence of our Lord in His mother's womb. Finally, Luke 1:76 shows John to be only a prophet, but verses 32-35 show Jesus to be the Son of God and Heir to the throne of David.

The apostle John subordinates John the Baptist to Jesus in John 1:6-9:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world.

To appreciate this subordination of John, we must relate what is said here to the cultural environment in which these books were written. We must consider what

the apostles wrote from the perspective of first-century Jews who witnessed John the Baptist's ministry.

In the twentieth century, we tend to think that John's ministry was little more than a blip on a radar screen. However, in terms of impact and importance, there was no true ministry greater than his except Jesus'. Thinking that John's ministry was insignificant flirts with diminishing what Jesus says about none born of a woman being greater than John.

In God's own estimation, recorded in Luke 1:15—the very first thing said about him by the angel speaking for God—John would be great! He was the prophesied messenger who fulfilled Isaiah 40:3, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God'" (see Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 1:76; 3:4; John 1:23). He also fulfilled Malachi 3:1, "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me" (see Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 1:76; 7:27).

His greatness lay:

1. in the office he filled;
2. in the subject he dealt with (repentance and true knowledge of the Messiah);
3. in his humility in calling no attention to himself and voluntarily receding into the background when the Messiah appeared (John 3:30), as well as his great zeal in performing his function;
4. in his personal attributes of character, above reproach in terms of sin;
5. in his self-denial in terms of his manner of life;
6. in his courage in the face of opposition;
7. in his lifelong service to God.

John was the crown of a long line of Old Testament prophets.

John Is *the* Elijah

The angel tells Zacharias before John's birth, "He will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). "In the spirit and power of Elijah" indicates he resembled Elijah in doing a similar work of revealing the true God through a ministry devoted to preaching repentance and the certainty of things con-

tained in the Scriptures regarding Christ. Perhaps it also includes working with a similar zeal, though he accomplished his function without miracles (John 10:41). Obviously, God does not measure a man's greatness by the miracles he does.

On two separate occasions, in Matthew 11:13-15 and again in Matthew 17:10-13, Jesus says John is the Elijah to come. Notice first Matthew 11:13-15: "For all the

prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Let him who has ears, listen! Jesus wants His audience to pay the utmost attention. To what? To the fact that John is the Elijah to come! He had fulfilled Malachi 4:5-6.

Notice, too, Jesus' introductory comment in verse 14, "And if you are willing to receive it. . . ." This strongly suggests that He was about to say something different than what His listeners expected. They supposed Elijah would appear in person! This explains why, when John was asked by the delegation from Jerusalem whether he was Elijah, he replied, "I am not" (John 1:21). Though he was Elijah in spirit and power, he was not the literal Elijah they were expecting. The Jews of Jesus' day were just as wrong about Elijah as are many today who are looking for another Elijah to appear before Jesus' second coming. Yet, Jesus gives no indication that anyone will follow John in that office.

Matthew 17:10-13 is the second occasion Jesus declared John as Elijah. Again, He gives no indication that He expected yet another Elijah to appear.

And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.

This is Jesus' commentary on Malachi 4:5-6. He is neither indicating there will be another Elijah to come, nor contradicting what He said earlier in Matthew 11. In verse 11, He speaks in a future sense because that is how Malachi 4:5-6 is written. He also did it to emphasize that the scribes had correctly interpreted the prophecy in terms of Elijah preceding the arrival of the Messiah.

Jesus begins the next sentence of His reply with "but," an adversative conjunction indicating disagreement. *But* means "on the contrary," "conversely," or "however," and it is used here to indicate an exception. Jesus makes it clear He did not agree with the scribes beyond the point that they had correctly taught Elijah must come first. He clarifies further by saying that the scribes did not recognize Elijah when he came and badly mistreated him. Matthew 17:13 clearly establishes that the disciples understood He meant that John was the Elijah of Malachi 4:5-6. In other words, Jesus is saying Malachi 4:5-6 has already occurred—the greatest of the Old Testament prophets already fulfilled it.

What about "restore all things"? Does it refer to doctrine? Not specifically. It is a very general statement. The Greek word means "to put back again," "to reorga-

nize," "to set up," "to bring back," "to reclaim." It can refer to health, authority, or government—or, for that matter, to straightening out or bringing back true conceptions about the Messiah. What did the original Elijah do? He straightened out—restored—right conceptions about who God is because the Israelites had lost sight of Him.

Who says "restore all things?" Jesus does. This is mentioned in no other place in reference to John the Baptist or Elijah. The Bible's marginal references refer us to Luke 1:17 and Malachi 4:6 where nothing is said directly about either Elijah or John restoring all things. Remember, this is Jesus' commentary on what John did. Even as Elijah restored right conceptions about God in his day, John the Baptist restored right conceptions about the Messiah, God with us.

That is not all. John, the Elijah of Malachi 4:5-6, turned the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. Logic demands this refer to his preaching as having a positive impact upon family life. Turning hearts is a fruit, an effect, that happens alongside preparing a people to receive the Messiah.

Malachi 2:14-15 reveals that in Malachi's day the Jewish community was having serious marriage problems:

Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

Family problems were extant, and they continued among the Jews down to John's day.

Secondly, this cannot refer to "the Fathers" in terms of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because they were dead, and when they died, their thoughts perished. Their hearts cannot turn to the children. What John restored in anticipation of the Messiah's coming were right conceptions about Him, and his preaching of repentance led to right relationships within human families and within the Family of God.

What is lacking in the Bible by God's express design is a detailed review of all John preached. We know only that he was very effective in what he did. We do not know all that he restored, but we can understand that he restored everything necessary for the Messiah to be recognized and received. To take "restore all things" beyond the scope of what was prophesied to be the extent of John's ministry is getting into the area of fanciful interpretations because Jesus confirms both that John was the Elijah to come and that his ministry was great. Who can argue with that?

(continued on page 15)

*“And all the people answered and said,
“His blood be on us
and on our children.”*

Matthew 27:25

Are the Jews Cursed for Deicide?

Either out of a genuine concern for justice or out of a sardonic resistance to the Jews’ petty politics, Pontius Pilate wanted to free Christ. Lacking in the end the requisite moral strength, he remanded Christ over to the garrison for crucifixion, but not until he had literally “washed his hands” of the whole affair. Matthew alone tells us that, at this juncture in the proceedings, “All the people answered and said, ‘His blood be on us and on our children.’” The phrase “all the people” probably refers to the rabble, instigated by the Temple leaders.

They did nothing other than what God had ordained from the foundation of the world. No more, no less! Furthermore, in the execution of God’s plan, *both* Gentile and Jew had a hand. Notice Acts 4:27-28, which records the words of Peter and John:

For truly against Your Holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

However, not all are given to see the hand of God so clearly as Peter and John saw it. Concerning Matthew 27:25, one former minister of the church of God commented that God would be “remiss” (that is, lax in carrying out His duties) if

He did not bring this statement on the Jews’ heads. In making that statement, he tacitly expressed his agreement with the “blood libel”—the traditional Catholic and Protestant interpretation of this passage as a self-imposed curse that God has honored over the centuries.

Properly understood, however, the peoples’ statement is absolutely *not* a curse. Moreover, God has nowhere bound Himself to chastise Jewry as a whole for the actions of a relatively few people in Pilate’s judgment hall that morning.

“The Soul Who Sins Shall Die”

The peoples’ comment indicates the strength of their conviction that Christ was an enemy of God and the nation. They were thoroughly persuaded that their actions in pursuit of Christ’s death were correct. Rather than being a curse, their statement emphasizes the *extent* of their deception. For, as sincere as they were, they were totally wrong in seeking Christ’s death, utterly blind to the reality that He was their hoped-for Messiah. Their comment was a formula: “We know we’re right, and we’re willing to die for our stance. So sure are we that we’re willing to stake our children’s lives on our position as well.”

In stating their convictions in those terms, they betrayed their lack of understanding of God’s law, for they based their statement on the incorrect

(continued on page 14)

The Blood Libel a

The Cost of Wrong Doctrine

“Anti-Semitism is inadmissible.
Spiritually we are all Semites.”
—Achille Ratti

Achille Ratti was elected Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church in 1922; history knows him as Pius XI. He occupied the papacy during a decade of missed opportunities, during those momentous years of “the gathering storm,” an expression Winston Churchill used to describe the run-up to the Second World War. Pius XI died in 1939, before the storm unleashed its full fury. Arguably, his most important achievement was the famous Concordat with the German government, an agreement the Catholic Church negotiated in 1933 in the hopes of protecting the interests of the Church from the worst of Hitler’s abuses.

Speaking in Rome to a group of Belgian pilgrims, Pius XI departed from his prepared remarks. With tears in his eyes, the ailing Pontiff—he was 81 and only months from death—spontaneously and emotionally, declared the inadmissibility of anti-Semitism based on, of all things, Semitism. He was responding to a Missal the pilgrims had presented to him, referring to the “offering of Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek.” In this context, it is clear that the Pope was aware that his audience—not only those pilgrims, but many of the Europeans and Americans who would read his comments in the printed media—was descended from Shem, and was, hence, largely Semitic. Indeed, most of them were the descendents of Abraham, as we know.

Behind the Pope’s statement lies the doctrine of *inclusion*. The Catholic/Protestant theological argument is complex, with a number of denominational variations, but the doctrine of universal inclusion goes something like this:

God loves everyone, playing no favorites. This He has demonstrated through the sacrifice of His Son and His universal gift of the Holy

Spirit. Moreover, it is His will that mankind, His agents on the earth, collaborate with Him in showing love to everyone. Everyone is included in His love, and everyone should cooperate with His purposes.

The ramifications of this thinking—its effects on social, political, and economic policy—are staggering. For instance, through the application of universal inclusion, capital punishment becomes an evil because it denies God His chance to bestow His saving grace on the felon. Capitalism becomes demonized (Pius XI was an outspoken critic of *laissez-faire* economics) because it can marginalize the poor, excluding them from the physical benefits of God’s love. Tolerance to all, no matter what his beliefs may be, becomes valuable because it reflects God’s freely given grace to everyone. In practical terms, inclusivity is the backdrop to many major decisions and directions we see today. For example, universal inclusion provides the rationale for ordaining women into the priesthood. Ideologically, it explains a good part of the thinking behind the election of an unabashed homosexual to the leadership of the Episcopal Church USA.¹ One can think of any number of other examples.

We of God’s true church understand that this doctrine, as understood by most Catholic and Protestant churchmen today, flies in the face of God’s revealed truth. God’s Word teaches that God works on a timeline—He follows a plan, which *excludes* some from His grace at certain times in history. God is working only to bring salvation to *some* individuals today. Peter’s comment that “the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God” (I Peter 4:17) implies that such judgment has not come for those currently *outside* that house. We recognize that God

and the Holocaust

takes the prerogative to exclude some from His grace today: “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated” (Romans 9:13). The apostle Paul alludes to God’s plan when, in I Corinthians 15:22-23, he affirms, “All shall be made alive. But each in his own order.” Ultimately, all people will be included in God’s work of grace, but only in His time.

Pius XI, heir to the doctrine of universal inclusion, at least recognized a common ancestry shared by European Gentiles and Jews. As we will see, his statement, however well-intentioned and sincere, failed to stop, or even to hinder, German anti-Semitism of the 1930s. It did nothing to reopen closed kosher butcher-shops, to help Jews regain their jobs in the universities or public sector,² or to derail the Auschwitz-bound trains.

The Hypocrisy of Inclusivity

Some have said that the Pontiff’s statement, uttered in September 1938, was a classic example of “too little, too late.” That is true. However, there is more to the story. At bottom, the Pontiff’s unreserved rejection of anti-Semitism failed to change history because *it did not at all square with longstanding Catholic attitudes and practices concerning the Jews.*³ In this sense, the Pope’s statement regarding the inadmissibility of anti-Semitism was hypocritical, for as one Catholic priest admits,

[B]y the beginning of the twentieth century Christian anti-Judaism, traditional for centuries, had attained virtual canonical status. In association with modern racial doctrines, . . . it had developed in many instances into a Church-promoted anti-Semitism, which in the years following the First World War grew in scope and intensity.⁴

For centuries across Europe, Catholicism taught that the Jews as a people were guilty of deicide—the murder of God in the person of Christ. At various times in its history, the Church felt no compunction to ghettoize the Jews, ostracize them, confiscate their goods, and murder them.

Given that dark background, it is not surprising that the Catholic hierarchy’s reaction to Jewish sufferings under the Nazis was at best ambivalent—at worse unsympathetic. Notice this excerpt from a 1933 sermon by Austrian Bishop Johannes Gföllner: “Nazi racial views [represent] regression into the worst kind of paganism . . . [and are] completely

irreconcilable with Christianity, and must therefore be totally rejected.”⁵ So far, so good. However, note the bishop’s quick retreat. Many

irreligious Jews [have] a very damaging influence in almost all areas of contemporary cultural life. . . . [M]any of our social and political upheavals are permeated by materialistic and liberal principles stemming primarily from Jews. Every committed Christian has not only the right but the conscientious duty to fight and overcome the pernicious influence of such decadent Judaism.⁶

The Church’s history of anti-Semitism morally compromised it, rendering it unable—indeed, unwilling—to take a stand against the ever-worsening persecution Jews were undergoing at the hand of the German government.

With some notable exceptions, the Church remained silent, even in the early days when protest may have been effective. Note the hierarchy’s ambivalence and posturing, as exemplified in this commentary on a “Holy Decree” (published in March 1928) condemning anti-Semitism, which it defined as “hatred of the people once called by God.”⁷ The commentator, a Jesuit priest, “clarifies” the Church’s position in this decree by stating that it condemned anti-Semitism “only in its anti-Christian form and mentality.” The Church rejected “excessive and extreme” anti-Semitism.⁸ However, it recognized that secularized, liberal Jews, often associated with Bolshevik and socialist causes, were especially dangerous in Christian countries. Hence, “Jews are a danger to the whole world because of their pernicious infiltration, their hidden influence, and their resulting disproportionate power which violates both reason and the common good.”⁹

The Protestant approach to the Jews was no more enlightened. Germany, remember, is (or was) a Protestant country, basically Lutheran, but with a large population of Catholics, especially in the south. Martin Luther, an avid anti-Semite, transmitted Catholic anti-Semitism into Lutheranism. His racial thinking was basically in lockstep with those of the Catholics: If the Jews suffered, it was because God was punishing them for despising Christ.

Wrong doctrine hurts, and it can hurt a lot. The virtual destruction of European Jewry provides

The Blood-Libel

no better example of this fact. For, the ancient tradition of Catholic and Protestant anti-Semitism rendered these confessions unwilling to help the Jews. That tradition was based on a totally *wrong* doctrine. It is connected to the doctrine of the “blood libel.”

The “blood libel” has its roots in a misinterpretation—and misapplication—of one biblical passage, Matthew 27:25. Near the end of Christ’s trial before Pilate, the Jews cried, “His blood be on us and on our children.” The excerpt below, taken from an article in *Junge Front*, a German Catholic Youth magazine, provides probably the clearest exposition of the Catholic interpretation of this scripture. The article was written by the magazine’s editor and published in 1933: “The cry of the people who crucified Christ, Son of the eternal God, ‘His blood be on us and on our children,’ echoes down the centuries and brings upon the Jewish community ever new human suffering.”¹⁰

In fairness, the author did make it plain that no person has the right to cause or augment this suffering. At the same time, however, the author remains silent about anyone’s responsibility to help those Jews who are suffering, to protest against the perpetration of the suffering, or even to pray for its remission.

In a later issue of *Junge Front*, another author asserts (beyond all reason) that race had *nothing* at all to do with the suffering of the Jews. The *real* reason for their persecution, he concludes, was their *decide*: “From the standpoint of sacred history their situation must be viewed as punishment.”¹¹

This view squares with that of the Lutheran confession. The leading Lutheran commentary of its day interprets Matthew 27:25 in this way:

Unhappily, this has now come to pass. . . . With their blood-guiltiness resting upon them, [the Jews] are in travail under the judgment, scattered among every nation, and the prophecy in Deuteronomy 28:26ff, has been abundantly fulfilled.¹²

In other words, Catholic and some Protestant theology understand Matthew 27:25 to be a *self-imposed curse* which explains Jewish suffering through the ages. If the doctrine is taken to its conclusion, it *legitimizes* such suffering as God’s punishment on Jews for their rejection of Christ.

The Tragedy of Wrong Doctrine

French historian Jules Isaac (1877-1963) has called this “the teaching of contempt.”¹³ Historically, it soothed the conscience of otherwise generous churchmen who, seeing the persecution of Jews in the Middle Ages and after, could simply say, “Praise God. Your suffering is just.” Given the

proclivities of human nature, the understanding of Matthew 27:25 as a curse actually *provokes* anti-Semitism. At the same time, this interpretation wrestles down any motivation a person might have to oppose anti-Semitic acts and argues against taking any action to assuage suffering on the part of Jews. After all, who wants to fight God as He implements this curse?

It would be wrong-headed to assert that Nazi racial policies were grounded *solely* on Catholic/Protestant anti-Semitism. No, those policies had a number of roots. Yet, it is absolutely true that, without this false doctrine as a part of the German religious zeitgeist, *Nazi racism would have not been able to thrive in Germany*. Those policies certainly flourished in the fertile ground of the anti-Semitism taught for centuries by the Catholic and Protestant confessions.

This is not an overstatement. The fact is, Hitler actually exploited Church-sanctioned anti-Semitism, feeling no need at all to cloak his own racism when justifying his policies to the Catholic hierarchy. *He used the Church’s traditional anti-Semitism to justify his actions*. Notice the German Fuehrer’s remarkable statement to Wilhelm Berning of the German Bishops’ Conference, April 1933:

I have been attacked because of my handling of the Jewish question. The Catholic Church considered the Jews pestilent for fifteen hundred years, put them in ghettos, etc., because it recognized the Jews for what they were. In the epoch of liberalism the danger was no longer recognized. I am moving back toward the time in which a fifteen-hundred-year tradition was implemented. I do not set race over religion, but I recognize the representatives of this race as pestilent for the state and for the Church, and perhaps I am thereby doing Christianity a great service by pushing them out of schools and public functions.¹⁴

Hitler knew that the Church’s solution to the “Jewish problem” for centuries had been the ghetto. He was, he asserted, simply carrying on that tradition.

Although some in the Church hierarchy were uneasy, the Church officially took Hitler’s racism without blinking an eye. It is true, of course: *Hindsight is better than foresight*. No one would argue that there is a manifest difference between the removal of Jewish professors from university chairs in 1933 and the ovens in 1940. Perhaps few protested Hitler’s actions in 1933 because few imagined Hitler’s actions in 1939. Historians believe that the Nazis actually did not conceive of their “final solution”—the gas chambers and the ovens—until the late 1930s.

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How to Conduct Ourselves as *Ambassadors* for Christ

To the members of God's church in Philippi, the apostle Paul writes, "For our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). While some may spiritualize this fact away, Paul's words come across as literal and real to those who understand that God has called us out of this world (John 15:19) and transferred us into His Kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

Having our citizenship in the Kingdom of God by definition makes us aliens in the physical country in which we live. Like ambassadors of a foreign government, we cannot participate in the politics of another country, a practice that would distract us from our real spiritual goal. However, we realize that the apostle Paul has challenged us to be ambassadors for Christ: "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (II Corinthians 5:20).

Do we have what it takes to be ambassadors of Jesus Christ? Do any of us know what an ambassador is supposed to do, or how an ambassador should behave? Do we know how an ambassador is expected to interface with the various publics with which he comes into contact?

A Real Ambassador

I met my first ambassador about seventeen years ago in Pasadena, California, when a fellow Ambassador College faculty member introduced me to the Press and Cultural Consulate of Finland, Mr. Jaako Bergquist. I struck up an informal conversation with him, mentioning I had lived and taught in a Finnish community up in Moose Lake, Minnesota. Since the faculty member had previously told Ambassador Bergquist that I hosted a classical music program on KBAC, the college radio station, I also informed him that Jean Sibelius—a Finn—was my favorite composer.

A week later, my colleague and I were invited to a get-together at the consulate's home in Beverly Hills. I had no idea what to expect, but I counted it as an opportunity to learn a little bit more about the diplomatic community. Through this, as well as other later encounters, I gained a better insight on what an ambassador does. Subsequently, I have had several opportunities to talk with Dr. Zion Evrony, the Israeli Consul General to the Southwest Region, when he visited Longview and Tyler, Texas.

A consulate, incidentally, is a

branch embassy headed by a Consul General and many junior consuls. The Israeli Consulate for the American Southwest region, for example, is based in Houston. Its service area includes Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. It does not have the same kind of diplomatic immunity as the main embassy in the nation's capital, but it is a real branch of an embassy, carrying on the same business that an embassy does.

Consulates are found in every major city, conducting the business of the countries they represent within the regional spheres of influence of those cities. We might draw a parallel between the embassy of a foreign country and the churches of God (whose real citizenship and headquarters are in heaven). The main embassies of Finland and Israel are located in Washington, DC, but consulates are found in New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, and a number of other major metropolitan areas.

We could consider one of God's embassies to be the headquarters of one of the churches of God with the leading pastor or evangelist serving as the Chargé d' Affaires or the Consul General. The branch consulates

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“And all the people answered and said, ‘His blood be on us and on our children.’”

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belief that God punishes children for their parents’ sins. The prophet Ezekiel speaks at length of this erroneous idea and of the misleading proverb it had engendered over the years. He quotes the false proverb in Ezekiel 18:2: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”

A question the disciples asked of Christ, recorded in John 9:2, indicates that they too were still under the spell of this false proverb. Concerning the blindness of a particular man, they ask, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Christ, not accepting the false premise of their question, comes up with a totally different reason: “that the works of God should be revealed in him” (verse 3).

The disciples in John 9—and the Jews in Matthew 27—made their statement at a time when God’s prophecy, expressed in Ezekiel 18:3, had not come to pass: “‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.’”

In Christ’s day—and down to our own!—people still believed that God punished children for the sins of the fathers. Beginning in Ezekiel 18:4, God sets forth four scenarios to point out the fallacy of this manmade belief. Notice verses 14 and 17, part of the third scenario:

If, however, [a man] begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and considers but does not do likewise, . . . [but rather] has executed My judgments and walked in My statutes—he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live!

God summarizes the teachings of these four scenarios in verse 20:

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The right-

eousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

In saying this, God is telling us that He Himself follows the law He established for us, recorded in Deuteronomy 24:16: “The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin.”

Amaziah obeyed this law when “he executed his servants who had murdered his father the king. However he did not execute their children. . . .” The writer of Chronicles then continues by quoting Deuteronomy 24:16 verbatim (see II Chronicles 25:3-4). Though Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9; Isaiah 14:21; and Jeremiah 32:18 seem to contradict this principle, these verses speak, not of God’s judgment for sin, which is always on the perpetrator himself, but of the disastrous consequences of the fathers’ sins affecting “the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me.”

Nowhere does Matthew—nor anyone else—ever tell us that God acquiesced to carry out vengeance on those who cried, “Crucify Him!” before Pilate’s judgment hall. Nowhere does Matthew intimate that God consented to punish their children over the centuries. If He had committed Himself to carry out these peoples’ so-called “curse,” He would have knowingly bound Himself to violate His own law for centuries.

“To the Jew First”

Why, then, have the Jews found themselves so often in such dire straits over the years, not only after the crucifixion of Christ, but for centuries *before*? They have been persecuted by the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Edomites, the Canaanites, the Sidonians, the Hivites, the Moabites (see Judges

3:3-12), and the Midianites (see Judges 8:1). The catalog of their tormentors includes the Persians of Haman’s time, the Greeks of Antiochus’ time, the Romans of Imperial times, and afterwards various European and Muslim peoples to the present. Their history of persecution would fill volumes.

Why?

Anciently, *only* the Israelites, of which the Jews are one tribe, were the recipients of God’s revelation: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2). God counts that revelation as a precious blessing to the family of Abraham, as Paul writes in Romans 3:1-2: “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.”

To Paul, the Jews were not cursed, but were *first*, the Greeks second (Romans 2:9-10). He took seriously his commission to carry God’s name “before . . . the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). The book of Acts records that in every town and city he visited, he went first to the local Jewish synagogue; after that, he preached the gospel to the Gentiles. Indeed, he admonished the church at Thessalonica to “become imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea . . .” (I Thessalonians 2:14).

God gave the Jews a lot. Here, the principle of Luke 12:48 enters the picture: “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

As we know from the Old Testament and as history since has demonstrated, the Jews have repeatedly rejected God, treading His oracles underfoot. Today, many are the Jews who have forsaken God and joined the vanguard of liberal secularism (read “atheism”) in the arts, law, politics, science, education—in virtually every field of human endeavor. Throughout their history, many Jews have scorned God’s revelation, pur-

posefully making themselves a profane people. So, the corollary of Christ’s principle applies, as stated in Luke 12:47: “And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

The Jews, more than any single people in history, knew God’s will, as it is expressed in the “oracles”—His revelation to them. They often have rejected it. As often as they do, their apostasy has carried with it the penalty of “many stripes.”

This cycle of rejecting God and paying the price will not go on forever. Though Jerusalem and the tribe of Judah will be “a cup of drunken-

ness to all the surrounding peoples” and “a very heavy stone for all peoples” (Zechariah 12:2-3) in the end time, the Jews will be among the first to turn to the returning Christ:

“The LORD will save the tents of Judah first. . . . And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. . . . In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for

the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. It shall be in that day,” says the LORD of hosts, “that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the [false] prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land.” (Zechariah 12:7, 10; 13:1-2)

At that time, both the burden of supposed blood libel and the cycle of rejecting God will be laid aside, and the Jews can begin anew as a people under the rule of Jesus Christ in His millennial Kingdom.

—Charles Whitaker

P E R S O N A L ►

Elijah and John the Baptist

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What about the phrase in Malachi 4:5, “before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD”? This lures people into interpreting this as occurring just before Christ’s second coming. However, the verse does not say “immediately before”—that is an assumption—it only says “before.” The apostle John writes that the world was passing away in his day 2,000 years ago (I John 2:17)! In terms of time, verse 18 is even more incredible because John says that by biblical reckoning it was already the last *hour* (Romans 13:11-12; I Peter 4:7)! It is imperative we learn to consider time as God does rather than men.

The last days began with the arrival of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist, the prophesied Elijah, appeared as one epoch ended and the next began. He was the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets, his preaching turned the hearts of the fathers to the children, and he prepared the way for the Messiah. He most certainly came before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

Only one commentary delved into the possibility of a “second” Elijah. Even as it did so, it claimed the concept was weak since Jesus made His case so clearly. Matthew 16:18, often used to support this concept, does not say quite what we assume it does. In it, Jesus proclaims, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Does this say the church will never die out? Yes, but only indirectly.

The translation of one word, “prevail,” alters the focus of what Jesus says. It could also be rendered “stand.” By

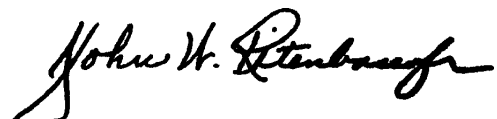
choosing to translate the word as “prevail,” it changes the church from being on the offensive against the kingdom of Satan, represented by the word “Hades,” to being on the defensive, as continually under attack.

Jesus is promising that He would enable His church to be on the offensive and triumphant against Satan and death. Is the church constantly under attack? Of course it is, and there have been several times that, as far as we know, it has almost died out, but it has always emerged triumphant and continued on.

How was this accomplished? Jesus Christ would raise up a man to preach the gospel once again. Peter Waldo is one of the clearer examples. In the process, he became the one God used to call others into His truth, and around him, He formed a continuation of the church of God. The commentary remarked that, using this interpretation, even the first-century apostles, as they took the gospel into new areas, became weak types of Elijah—as did all the men God used down through the ages, like Peter Waldo.

Each of them, in type, had to reestablish things and preach repentance in preparation for the receiving of the gospel and the Messiah. But not a single one of them was the Elijah to come because that office and prophecy—by Jesus’ own words—has already been fulfilled, and there is no higher authority.

In Christian love,



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are the individual, outlying congregations with its members serving as junior consuls. Every baptized church member's home could be designated as a branch consulate for the Kingdom of God. Realizing that we are members of God's diplomatic corps, it is important to know how to behave as a diplomat.

The first thing that impressed me at the get-together was the humble and gracious attitude and manner of our host, Jaako Bergquist. Mr. Bergquist assumed the position of a humble servant or steward, looking after the interests of his country, as well as serving and helping people like me to learn more about his country and its culture. For example, when he learned about my classical music radio program, he asked me if I would like to receive some musical recordings. Later that week, I received a package of fifteen long-playing records containing the complete symphonic works of Jean Sibelius. We played these recordings many times over KBAC and KBAU.

Jaako Bergquist was not a glad-handed super-salesman for his country, but more of an accommodating steward practicing what the apostle Paul counsels us to observe in Philippians 2:4: "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." Accordingly, the Finnish diplomat did not seem to be self-interested in the least, but was always interested in supplying the needs of others, actively esteeming others more than himself (verse 3).

A Cultural Representative

A member of the diplomatic community realizes his extreme vulnerability as a minority member of a majority alien culture. Whether we like it or not, that role fits all of us. In such a position, a diplomat must be circumspect in all his words and activities, careful not to offend his hosts or bring disrepute upon his homeland.

I was amazed at how many of the qualifications of an elder or overseer

Paul lists in I Timothy 3:1-7 that Jaako Bergquist possessed, including hospitality, the ability to teach, having his home in tip-top order, and exercising temperance and self-control. Like a busy switch engine in the Union Pacific freight yard, the industrious ambassador constantly moved from guest to guest, linking people together with common interests. At one point during the evening, he made sure I became acquainted with the Program Director of KUSC, a classical music station run by the University of Southern California. Later, he introduced to me an elderly couple from Esko, Minnesota, who had lived close to the community where I used to teach.

He made available, but did not push, the culture of Finland, somewhat like the philosophy of the Hershey Chocolate Company, which at one time relied largely on goodwill and word of mouth to advertise its products.

Occasionally, we may be afforded opportunities to assist other church of God groups with a special need. Not long ago, a local minister was somewhat vexed by intruders from other groups attempting to persuade members of his flock about the Nisan 15 Passover. Sabbath.org—one of our church's websites—contains a series of abstracts on sermons that thoroughly examines the subject. After downloading and printing these sermon abstracts, I dropped them off at the local minister's office on my way home from work. I reassured him that I did not want to proselytize or steal sheep, but only wanted to provide resources to help him defend his flock. To what extent he used those documents or how deeply his curiosity was piqued, I do not know, but he expressed a great deal of gratitude for those resources, promising that he would bookmark our site.

Another of our websites, BibleTools.org, provides another non-threatening resource to the greater church of God and the world at large, providing a lavish smorgasbord of truth and choice spiritual meat for those starving for understanding. Just pointing people to these

resources can be a diplomatic way of availing others of the culture of the Kingdom of God.

At the Consulate's get-together in Beverly Hills, there were gentle but ubiquitous reminders that we guests were at a Finnish party: abundant Finnish food, Finnish vodka, Finnish artwork, murals and paintings of Finnish lakes and forests—reminding me of northern Minnesota and of northern Wisconsin—Finnish books, and Finnish symphonic and folk music playing over speakers throughout the residence. I became extremely homesick for Suomi or Finland—and I am not even Finnish!

Gracious Speech

Besides humility and hospitality, Mr. Bergquist demonstrated diplomacy and wisdom, speaking very circumspectly, carefully considering the consequences of what he said, extremely careful not to injure the feelings of others needlessly. Later, while comparing notes, my colleague mentioned that he never heard Jaako Bergquist or any other member of the diplomatic community let his personal feelings enter the discussion. He merely repeated the official position of his country.

Likewise, we junior consuls of the government of God need to keep our pet opinions to ourselves (or at least qualify them as our own pet opinions). However, we must be knowledgeable of God's Word on any given subject, being ready to give an answer (I Peter 3:15). In addition, our words must model the gracious speech of our Elder Brother, who in John 14:10 says, "The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works."

Without scriptural backing, our own opinions are largely useless hot air. Consequently, as diplomats of God's government, we must learn to submerge our own feelings, being quick to listen and slow to speak, reflecting Jesus' half-brother's admonition in James 1:19.

The apostle Paul was perhaps one of the most skillful diplomats

the world has ever seen. In I Corinthians 10:32-33, he explains his task when he meets diverse peoples and cultures:

Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God [perhaps during the current scattering the most difficult task of all], just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Paul's mentor in diplomatic skills, Jesus Christ, had earlier proclaimed, "Woe to that man by whom the offense comes!" (Matthew 18:7). Some of us have been past masters at creating offenses, being wise as doves and harmless as serpents! As Christ's ambassadors, we must repent of such behavior.

If we want to follow the example of the master diplomat, the apostle Paul, schooled under both Jesus Christ and Gamaliel, we should look at a significant encounter he had with the philosophers at Athens in Acts 17. To begin, Paul paid the Athenians a compliment: "Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious'" (Acts 17:22).

If we were to read between the lines, Paul might be saying, "You Athenians are to be commended for your devotion to spiritual things." The King James' rendering of "religious" as "superstitious" exposes the latter word as having undergone what linguists call semantic drift. In Shakespeare's day and King James' time, this word did not have the negative connotation as it does now.

From the context of this account, it is plain that the apostle Paul was not, as some theologians like to characterize him, a feisty, wrangling, argumentative hothead. The men of Athens, who vastly outnumbered Paul and loved a good philosophical debate, could have made short work out of any know-it-all smart aleck. The apostle Paul was thus lavish in his compliments.

Throughout his ministry, he frequently resorted to diplomatic language. At one point, he acknowledged a cultural debt both to the Greeks and to barbarians (Romans 1:14). In addition to complimenting strangers, Paul continually sought out similarities he shared between him and other groups. In a conflict in which both the Sadducees and the Pharisees were breathing fire down his neck, Paul masterfully ingratiated himself to the Pharisees, reminding them that he and they shared the same view on the resurrection (Acts 23:6-8). Paul, to the right people, let it be known that he was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-39; 22:25-29).

Common Ground

We also need to find common ground, not only with people in the other groups of the church of God, but with the world at large, emphasizing (like mountains) the things we agree upon and de-emphasizing (like molehills) the things we disagree upon.

In the process of finding common ground, we dare not compromise our core values or syncretize them with the world. We should instead practice more of what the late church of God minister, Sherwin McMichael, counseled, "You don't have to tell all you know." Oftentimes, keeping our traps shut is the most diplomatic behavior of all (Ecclesiastes 3:7; Lamentations 3:28-29; Amos 5:13).

In Acts 17:23, the apostle Paul deliberately builds a bridge of common understanding and similarity, referring to something the Athenians already understood:

For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the one whom you worship without knowing [a more proper rendering than "ignorantly," another word that has also undergone semantic drift] Him I proclaim to you."

Later, in verse 28, Paul again seeks common ground by quoting from their own literature: "For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'"

The important thing to remember is that the apostle Paul started at the Athenians' current level of understanding, continually finding commonalities between himself and his audience upon which to build mutual understanding and foster growth. An ambassador skillfully demonstrates how his country and another's country share similar interests. As the late Rabbi Meir Kahane pointed out, an alliance is not so much built on friendship as on common interests.

To summarize, in successful diplomatic negotiating, points we agree upon must be stressed and any disagreements must be de-emphasized. An ambassador should never be a pushy salesman or a glad-handed public relations man. Whatever his rank in the diplomatic community, Ambassador, Consul General, Chargé d'Affaires, junior consul, envoy, or diplomat, he has the following characteristics:

1. He is a representative of another culture, another way of life.
2. In this capacity, he does not give his own opinions, but advances the positions of his home country.
3. He functions as a servant or steward, representing his country faithfully.
4. As such, he practices hospitality, courtesy, and graciousness.

Proverbs 13:17 reads, "A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a faithful ambassador brings health." As faithful ambassadors of Christ, we ought to bring health, refreshment, and comfort to the people with whom we come into contact.

—David F. Maas

(continued from page 12)

It is also true that the Catholic Church had its own very real problems with the Nazi government in the early 1930s, concerns that naturally deflected its attentions from the plight of the Jews. The German government was proposing the takeover of Church-sponsored schools, orphanages, hospitals, and asylums; it was proposing the involuntary sterilization of the mentally ill (something it carried out later on); it was proposing a law prohibiting parents from bringing up their children in their faith. In addition, by 1937, it was producing virulent, anti-Catholic propaganda. Yes, indeed, the Church had plenty of problems on its plate.¹⁵

Still, there remains a certain hypocrisy between a Pope's statement that "anti-Semitism is inadmissible" and his hierarchy's historic and unremitting oppression of Jews. The matter is driven home by a miserable exchange between two cardinals in late 1941. In a letter, Cardinal Faulhaber questioned the lack of protest on the part of the Church in the light of the "brutal deportation of non-Aryans to Poland under inhuman conditions paralleled only in the African slave trade."¹⁶ In reply, Adolph Cardinal Bertram admonished that bishops must "concentrate on other concerns which are more important for the Church and more far-reaching, . . . [particularly] the ever more urgent question of how best to prevent anti-Christian and anti-Church influences on the education of Catholic youth."¹⁷

We today, Monday-morning quarterbacks, recognize the vast disconnect between the clear-and-

present-danger to people awaiting the ovens versus the anxiety over conditions in the Catholic school system. The German Catholics of the 1930s, those Sunday quarterbacks on the gridiron, did not recognize that disconnect, blinded as they were by their ancient tradition of oppressing Jews.

Wrong doctrine, taught for centuries, had deeply implanted anti-Semitism into the minds of German Catholics and Protestants, rendering them unwilling to take a decisive stand against German maltreatment of European Jewry. This wrong doctrine was not an unimportant determinant in the history of the times, for "anti-Semitism was what made the Nazis' racist ideology . . . into an engine of death for Jews."¹⁸ "Racism alone did not lead to Auschwitz. . . . Something more was needed: hatred of Jews. Rooted in large part in Christian tradition, it was this hatred that made modern anti-Semitism possible."¹⁹ Millions of people died, to some extent *because* of the false doctrine of "blood libel" of mainstream churches, a doctrine off which Nazi racism fed.

Next month, we will take a look at anti-Semitism from another perspective, that of the German "law of ethnic groups." This was the law that provided the legal framework for Nazi racism in the 1930s. Amazingly, that same law, wearing some modern clothes, defines minority rights in today's European Union, rendering the Jews (and other minority groups) virtually without legal protection. What church is willing to protest now?

—Charles Whitaker

Endnotes

¹ Turner, Philip, "The Episcopalian Preference," *First Things*, November 2003, p. 28.

² The German government enacted the "Law for the Restoration of the Civil Service" in April 1933. This law prevented all "non-Aryans," regardless of religion, from holding positions in the civil service sector.

³ Let us be plain: Hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives were saved through the intervention of Protestant and Catholic laypeople and clerics (in Germany, Poland, France, and especially in Holland) during the years between 1939 and 1945. Many pious church people jeopardized their lives—some lost them—in their efforts to rescue and provide succor to Jews. Eugenio Pacelli (Ratti's successor, Pope Pius XII) even used his villa in northern Italy as a safe house for escaping Jews. More than a few Jewish mothers delivered their babies in the Pope's bedroom, which had been pressed into service as a maternity ward. All this took place outside the "official" silence of the Church concerning the tragedy. (See especially, Henry, Patrick, "Remembering the Rescuers," *First Things*, April 2000, p. 13.)

⁴ Rhonheimer, Robert, "The Holocaust: What Was Not Said," *First Things*, November 2003, p. 18. Rhonheimer is a priest of the Opus Dei Prelature and professor of Ethics and Political Philosophy at Rome's Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. (See also, Wistrich, Robert, "The Old-New Anti-Semitism," *The National Interest*, Summer 2003, p. 59. Wistrich, Neuberger Professor of Modern History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, writes: "The main elements of 20th-century ideological anti-Semitism were already in place by 1914. . . .")

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶ *Ibid.* "The Jewish Question," an article published in 1933 in the Catholic *Augsburger Postzeitung*, deplored "the increasing 'judaizing' of our intellectual, cultural, and scholarly life in

Germany." With typical retrenchment, however, the article continued: "There is a certain kind of Jewish intellectualism which, despite its high intelligence, mixes with the German element in a destructive and baneful way. A people striving for national and intellectual renewal is reacting in a healthy manner when it opposes this admixture, and demands that the German mind be thoroughly cleansed of Jewish influences."

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹ *Ibid.* The phrase "their hidden influence" must certainly reflect that the Church had at least tacitly subscribed to the conspiracy theories prevalent at the time. Such theories, extant in one form or another to this day, were publicized in Wilhelm Marr's *Finis Germaniae* (1879), Edouard Drumont's *La Dernière Bataille* (1889), Houston S. Chamberlain's *Foundations of the 19th Century* (1899), and, of course, in the infamous *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Ylvisaker, Johann, *The Gospels: A Synoptic Presentation of the Text in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*, Augsburg Publishing House, 1932, p. 733. This commentary was first published in Norwegian in 1905. Ylvisaker was the professor of Exegetical Theology, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota.

¹³ Rhonheimer, p. 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Is this an example of Satan's misquoting Holy Scriptures? How eerily reminiscent these words are of Christ's comment, recorded in John 16:2, that "the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<http://www.worldwatchdaily.org>

EUROPEAN DISUNITY

The development of a united Europe has seen a number of setbacks recently. In December 2003, the nations of the European Union (EU) failed to reach an agreement on the proposed EU constitution. (Incidentally, French national television accused the United States of orchestrating the impasse in order to head off the emergence of a rival "superpower Europe.") The biggest point of contention is over the distribution of power: how to prevent the large states from overriding the will of the small states—or, how to prevent a majority of small states from overriding the will of the popular majority.

Another hot topic has been whether or not to include a reference to Christianity in the constitution. Certain countries, notably Spain and Poland, were adamant that a reference to Europe's Christian heritage be included in the wording. But others, especially France with its secular tradition, were equally strong in their opposition to such a reference. The Pope has repeatedly urged the heads of state to include such a reference, but so far his voice has not been heeded.

Other controversial topics on which there is widespread disagreement include the issue of European foreign policy (whether Europe speaks with a single voice or the individual nations

maintain their own foreign policy), EU defense (whether to have a common army, what role it would play, how it would affect NATO, etc.), and the proposed mutual-defense pact (which the neutral countries, Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden, have opposed on the basis that it would threaten their neutral status if they were forced into a military response).

Because of these disagreements, an idea has arisen which is gaining some popularity. Some national leaders are in favor of a "two-speed" Europe, which would consist of core nations that could come into agreement quickly on economics, defense, and crime fighting, while the other nations could sort out their differences.

As it stands now, one thing is certain: European unity and integration is a very slow and painful process. The European constitution could possibly be voted upon again in six months, but more likely, it will be a year or more before it comes up again. Since few EU states have much enthusiasm for a project that was essentially foisted on them by Brussels insiders, a game of "pass the buck" can be expected until the ultra-federalist Luxembourg presidency in early 2005.

- According to a Eurobarometer poll released in December, less than half

the population in the European Union's member states now support the EU project. The poll found that just 48% of EU citizens viewed membership as a "good thing," down from 54% in the spring of 2003. Britain was by far the most negative state, with positive feelings tumbling to 28%, but even the French were below half for the first time after months of battles with Brussels over various issues.

- Two years after the introduction of the euro, an increasing number of EU citizens feel that the single currency has led to a hike in prices, the *EU Observer* reports. A Eurobarometer survey reveals that 89% of those polled feel that price inflation has occurred with the currency changeover, some 5% more than last year. Most dissatisfaction was found in Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and Greece. Moreover, satisfaction with the new currency has been falling steadily since January 1, 2002, when the euro was introduced. Although 51% of citizens in the 12 countries that adopted the euro do not have any problems using the euro currency, just 47%, down from 50% last year, said they were happy with the changeover.

WESTERN-MEDITERRANEAN AGREEMENT (TUNIS DECLARATION)

Even as the European Union argues certain foundational issues, an interesting coalition has risen from the shores of the western Mediterranean. The *Washington Times* reports that ten African (Muslim) and European (Catholic) countries, with a combined population of nearly 250 million and a gross domestic product of \$3.7 trillion, have implemented an ambitious plan to build an economic, political, and cultural bridge across the Mediterranean Sea. The summit participants include five European countries (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and Malta) and five African states (Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania). Delegates portray it as a "challenge and opportunity" to overcome differing levels of development and political differences and turn the Mediterranean into "a sea of peace." French President Jacques Chirac hails the agreement, known as the "5 Plus 5," as "historic." Italian President Silvio Berlusconi says it paves the way to a "permanent dialogue between Europe and Islam."

Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben

Ali, host of the meeting, describes the charter as the "beginning of a new process of cooperation and solidarity" in what was once the center of the Roman Empire. In the summit's final communiqué, the signatories jointly agreed to struggle against international terrorism, improve trade relations, and halt illegal immigration toward Europe. Plans include cooperation among the interior ministers of the 5 Plus 5 to "fight terrorism in all its forms," hold annual business forums, and create a Euro-Mediterranean bank. Participants agreed on "the importance of seeing the European Union accompany its enlargement process by a parallel supportive effort towards countries of the southern flank of the western Mediterranean region."

While this mix of nations is not a significant political, economic, or military threat, the symbolism is worth pondering: Ten European and African nations, five on each side of the Mediterranean Sea, covering a significant portion of territory anciently occupied by the Roman Empire.

U.S. Immigration

According to a report released by the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and detailed in the *Washington Times*, total immigration to the United States rose dramatically by 1.4 million in each of the past two years—of which about a third were illegal aliens. If the numbers remain unchanged, this decade will mark the most massive wave of immigration in American history, with 45 million immigrants—about 14% of the country's total projected population—forecast to live in the U.S. by 2010. The report remarks that the figures show that immigration totals are unrelated to labor needs and economic conditions in the U.S. Despite a weak U.S. economy and rising unemployment since 2000, immigration has significantly outpaced record levels seen in the 1990s and shows no sign of abating. In September, the Census Bureau said the foreign-born population in America had grown to more than 33 million in 2002, a jump of 5% in one year, accounting for 44% of the nation's population growth.

NEWS AND TRENDS Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man is coming. (Matthew 25:13)

BIBLE STUDY: THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER

In analyzing the Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24), we must consider the two parables that precede it: the Parables of the Ambitious Guest (verses 7-11) and the Feast (verses 12-14). Although all three are spoken at the same time in the same house, Jesus describes three different occasions: a wedding, a feast, and a great supper. It is evident that His entire conversation contains a single main theme.

First, Jesus tells the Parable of the Ambitious Guest, which is about a wedding and the right and wrong ways of inviting people. He adds to what He had said about the Pharisees loving the best seats in the synagogue (Luke 11:43), making it clear that humility comes before true exaltation. Those not seeking promotion are to have the important places in social life. Those who

exalt themselves will be abased, and the humble will be exalted (James 4:10; I Peter 5:6).

Then, Jesus tells the Parable of the Feast, giving his host a lesson on whom to invite to a meal. The key to the parable is, "Lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid." If the host invited only his rich friends, of course, he would expect them to offer him like hospitality, but when people act on this basis, they derail true hospitality. Godly hospitality occurs when one serves others while expecting nothing in return (I Peter 4:9).

The Parable of the Great Supper is Jesus' response to a fellow dinner guest exclaiming, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" All three parables deal with the general theme of hospitality, but the last adds humility and self-examination.



1. What spiritual principle did the guest stimulate in Jesus' mind? Luke 14:15.

COMMENT: The Jews thought the Messianic Kingdom would have an earthly prince in whose magnificent and splendid reign they would be delivered from all their oppressors to become the most distinguished and happy nation on earth. They anticipated that time as one of great happiness and joy when even the just ancient Israelites would be resurrected to enjoy the blessings of the Messiah's reign. This guest understands the "resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14) in the common Jewish way and speaks of the special happiness the Jews expected to enjoy due to their arrogant view of their spiritual state. He presumes that only Jews would receive the blessings of the Kingdom. In the parable, Jesus exposes and corrects the ignorance of those who, in their pride, misjudge their true moral condition (I Corinthians 10:12).

2. What does the first lame excuse expose? Luke 14:18.

COMMENT: This excuse raises some questions: Would a Jew buy land sight-unseen? If he had, how could he see what it was like in the dark? Could he not wait until morning to inspect it? Most likely, the man had seen it before buying it, but he was more concerned about his investment than in an invitation to supper. He represents those whose possessions require all their attention. He allows his physical wealth to rob him of spiritual wealth (James 5:1-3; Matthew 6:19-21). People sometimes plead that they must neglect obedience to God, justifying themselves as so pressed by the affairs of the world that they cannot find time to pray, read the Scriptures, or worship God (Matthew 13:22). This kind of thinking reveals spiritual blindness. God does not allow any excuse for neglecting His way of life, commanding us to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

3. What does the second lame excuse expose? Luke 14:19.

COMMENT: Unlike the first excuse, this one seems to be an unnecessary act. However, the man's tone is definite and final, even unapologetic in refusing the invitation. He never doubts the validity of his excuse, putting his work first and assuring himself that he has no responsibility to the host (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23; 12:14; I Corinthians 3:9-13). The oxen he wants to test can represent technology. Many falsely believe that advancement in technology equates to human improvement and progress.

This man's conduct shows his inclination to satisfy himself before accepting a friend's invitation. Like all sinners, he was selfish,

justifying his own worldliness and sins and refusing to accept God's offer of salvation. He represents those who are so absorbed in their work or hobbies that they set aside no time for prayer, meditation, or the weightier matters of life (Matthew 6:24). What a catastrophe it is when a job, finances, entertainment, or self-centeredness leave us no time for God and self-examination!

4. What does the third lame excuse expose? Luke 14:20.

COMMENT: This is the most insignificant excuse of all, yet such excuses are used frequently. It is amazing that people allow themselves to be excluded from the Kingdom of God with such weak reasons. The man's abrupt, brusque, and impolite excuse is empty of substance and void of thought. He represents those whose domestic cares and responsibilities control so much of their time and interest that they neglect their relationship with God.

Balanced and right marriage and family relationships never keep us from a right relationship with God. Quite the contrary, they enhance and promote it. Nevertheless, Jesus intends to teach us that the love of relatives and friends often distracts our affections from God, preventing us from accepting the blessings that He wants to bestow on us (Luke 14:26-28; 18:29-30; I Corinthians 7:29-33). For instance, some excuse themselves from appearing before God on the Sabbath to worship Him because another family member cannot or does not want to attend.

Jesus pictures God's choice in the kind of guests He desires at His table. The parable shows a progression of urgency as time grows short. The first invitation is conveyed to the Israelites simply as "come." The second, "bring in," is directed at the spiritually poor, injured, crippled, and blind, symbolizing the Gentiles without previous access to the truth. The third, "compel," affects an even lower class of people representing the spiritual fringes of this world.

None of the three invitees has any desire to fellowship, expressing the same willing captivity by the cares of this world. Many fail to realize that the invitation is from God the Father to his children, and failure to respond constitutes willful disobedience. None who so decidedly reject the offer of the Kingdom will be saved (Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-31). It is dangerous to reject the truth of God. The invitation is full and free, but when people turn willfully away from it, God leaves them to their chosen way of destruction. How important it is to cherish God's offer of the blessings of His way of life and eternal life in His Kingdom and to examine our own dedication.