



"Watchman, what of the night?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

THE SHADOW OF "ARMAGEDDON"

[Recently, I received from a retired minister of the Church several articles of real thought and challenge. I wrote to him asking if I might use these in one of our monthly thought papers. I also told this saintly elder in Israel that I wished to give credit to the source. He replied as follows:

You certainly may use any material you wish in your thought papers (which by the way, I appreciate very much and keep on file) Giving credit or not; I am indifferent to that. "Gedanken sind zollfrei." "Thoughts are exempt from custom duty." Inasmuch as they are true and valuable, they all have one author - the One who identifies Himself with "Truth." And if false, they have their own father whom Jesus identifies clearly.

We might all profit from adopting such a philosophy. The following articles down to the author's name, reflect this minister's convictions and concerns.]

Readers of the Bible and, in particular, students of prophecy cannot help to be impressed with the news that sprouts from their radios in these months. Their headlines featuring names such as "Egypt, Sinai, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq (the site of ancient Niniveh, Babylon and Ur) and, above all, the tiny state of Israel with heavy emphasis on its capital, Jerusalem, the nerve center of the present commotion. In short: the ancient Bible world convulsed by feuds whose roots may be traced as far back as Old Testament times.

To get the full impact of what is gathering, however, we are bound to add another feature: in the wings, on opposite poles of the action, loom the profiles of the two superpowers of our time, monitoring their clients and feeding them with deadly hardware while themselves poised to throw their massive might into the arena at any moment deemed crucial to their interests.

Here then, we come on a fuse planted on a land-neck that binds three continents together; an explosive proliferating in all directions of the compass containing all the elements of the "Armageddon" of Bible prophecy! An immediate neighbor of the scene expresses his concern in these words. Referring to the recent Sadat-Begin talks, King Hussein of Jordan declared:

If these talks fail, we are at the end of the road - at the end of hope for peace. We will be heading for disaster in terms of this area and of the whole world. (Time, Jan. 30, 1978, p. 38)

To assess the gravity of the situation more accurately, however, we shall call on one of God's accredited witnesses. In the eleventh chapter of his prophecy, Daniel sketches the history of the Mediterranean countries from the time of ancient Medo-Persia, via Greece and Rome, to a point when "the king" that "shall do according to his will" in a passionate, climacteric move will "plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain (Jerusalem); yet he shall come to his end and none shall help him." (Daniel 11:36-45) Continues the inspired text: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, everyone that shall be found written in the book." (Dan. 12:1)

The march of events, here outlined by the prophet, culminates in "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation." For a short time, Satan will be given an opportunity to give a demonstration of what the world would be like if he had unrestricted control. "Satan will have entire control of the finally impenitent." (Great Controversy, p. 614) This is also the time to which Jesus points in His great prophecy on the Mount of Olives - "upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." (Luke 21:25-26)

The world has passed through many crises. This generation alone has witnessed two world wars. Since then, it has seen wars on the Asiatic, African, and South American continents. At the time of writing these lines, there are fightings in Cambodia-Vietnam, in Ethiopia-Somali, in Zaire. There are tensions between China and the Soviet Republic, between the two Germanys; there are labor troubles in many countries. Crime, violence and vice walk the streets of our cities at noon and at midnight. They propagate boldly and blatantly on TV screens, on newsstands and billboards. We are suffering from an epidemic of kidnapping, guerilla warfare and terrorism! Behold the world, puffing and sputtering like a volcano about to erupt! "But the wicked are like a troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith the Lord, to the wicked." (Isa. 57:20-21)

Serious as these crises are, they recede to second and third places when held against the crisis in the Mid-East. In the light of prophecy it is not a crisis on the American continents, nor in Europe, nor in Asia that ripens into the "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation." It is a crisis shaping and festering around the tiny state of Israel and the city of Jerusalem that ripens into the "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation" and sparks the "Armageddon" of the Bible. It is this singular feature that makes any crisis in that particular part of the world-map heavy with destiny, triggering "Armageddon." In prophecy these two events are banded together as closely as is the shadow with the substance, the ark to the flood, and the handwriting on the wall to the fall of the city!

There have been moments in history when Providence focussed all eyes on Israel. One such moment occurred in the days of Solomon. God fitted him with judiciary, administrative, executive and artistic ability, moreover, with a keen trading instinct, that drew the attention of the world. Kings and queens, statesmen, philosophers, scholars, artists, craftsmen, merchants and traders sought counsel and knowledge at the feet of this living "university." (I Kings 4:34; 11:23-24) It was thus

that the world was brought into contact with God's people and the message of salvation.

Another such moment occurred in the year 31 A. D., on the day of Pentecost, following the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Scriptures cite more than fifteen language-groups which were represented on that occasion, listening to the message of Peter and the apostles. "Every tongue was represented by those assembled." (Acts of the Apostles, p. 39) It was an experience destined to touch off a moment which would carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations under the sun within one generation.

And once again in our days, all eyes are trained on the Mid-East. The creation of a Jewish state in 1948, after a suspense of nearly two thousand years of oppression, humiliation, climaxing in an Auschwitz and "Dachau," has aroused the jealousy of Israel's traditional enemies - the Arabs, the descendants of Ismael. They challenged Israel's right to exist as a nation. This cancerous relationship might be shrugged off as a "family quarrel" which needs not concern the rest of the world. However, another factor, peculiar to our time, magnifies the event and converts the Mid-East into a subject of universal concern. The syphoning of oil and natural gas, perfected to a high degree of efficiency during the last four decades, coinciding with the heyday of the automobile, the airplane, the space age and the plethora of mechanical gadgets, all of which depend for their function on oil and gas as the body depends on the bloodstream for its life, has given the Mid-East an economic and political clout whose impact is felt around the circle of the globe. It has propelled the Mid-East nations once more onto center-stage! For centuries the sluggish, anemic, inconsequential segment within the concert of nations, the Mid-East has now and suddenly become a telling and crucial factor of the scenario.

Once again, then, in the Providence of God, all eyes are focussed on that unique stretch on the earth's surface - the homeland of the greatest personalities of the race, the scene of the most exalted chapter in the history of the entire universe, the state of God's personal intervention in human affairs, its soil, indeed, watered with the very blood of the Creator and moistened with His tears! Here is a phenomenon that appeals to man's historical, political, materialistic, cultural, and religious instincts!

The Antediluvians scoffed at the ark and its builders; the flood took them away. Lot's wife could not bring herself to cut loose from Sodom; she lingered. Her reluctance sealed her fate. A golden wedge entranced Achan; a hail of stones buried him. Two talents of silver and two changes of garments made Gehazi a leper for life. Samson was beguiled by a heathen girl; he became the sport of his enemies. The rich young ruler clung to perishable possessions while in the presence of Him who offers riches imperishable. Passengers there were on the Titanic who ignored the lifeboats hanging on their davits to take them off the fated liner. They lingered in the lounges and sauntered on her decks trusting in "she cannot sink" - a shibboleth drilled into their ears and minds by an arrogant propaganda. But sink she did - within hours the waters of the Atlantic closed over her.

DEPART YE, DEPART YE FROM THEM, TOUCH NO UNCLEAN THING: GO YE OUT OF THE MIDST OF HER: BE YE CLEAN, THAT BEAR THE VESSELS OF THE LORD. (Isa. 52:11)

How earnest, how insistent is this call! Jacob, in the fear of God, buried the idols

of his household under an oak (Gen. 35:1-4). The Ephesians, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, burned their books (Acts 18:18-19). Moses turned his back on the treasures of Egypt, choosing rather to cast his lot with a despised and down-trodden people which was heading for "no-man's land," the wilderness! What about us who claim to believe in the imminence of Christ's second coming? Does our life testify to the genuineness of our profession? Should we not, too, turn away, separate and "come out" from everything that stands in the way between ourselves and the gates of heaven? Should not we, at this late hour, take an intensely earnest look at our intimate self? Then, too, at our furniture, our pantry, our wardrobe, our bank account, our book shelves, our discotheque, our correspondence file, our picture gallery, our social circle, our time schedule, our hobbies and our priorities? How do these square with the "Blessed Hope" which we, as a people, profess? How would the unseen Witness evaluate them? Would your neighbor or the "outsider" who observes discern that "Blessed Hope" in us? Would he feel encouraged to enter with you and me into that blessed experience?

THEREFORE BE YE ALSO READY: FOR IN SUCH AN HOUR AS YE THINK NOT THE SON OF MAN COMETH.

How many a soul has stood on the platform, forlorn, disappointed, defeated, and stunned, watching the last car of the outgoing train disappear behind the curve of the track or the silvery wing of the plane melt into the distant cloudlet! How humiliating, how hopeless, how desperate, how irreversable! It is for that reason that Christ bids us BE READY, not "Get" ready. Between "being ready" and "getting ready" stretches an eternity!

"For all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: It might have been."

Look then -

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. (Heb. 12:1)

Choose then -

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:15)

Trust then -

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God and Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. (Jude 24, 25)

Triumph then -

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing. (2 Tim. 4:6-8)

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MODERN ISRAEL - A MIRACLE

On May 15, 1948, the British Mandate over Palestine was relinquished. On May 16, Chaim Weizmann was elected President of the new state of Israel. Thus, thirty years ago, the State of Israel was re-formed after an interval of almost 1900 years of oppression, humiliation, of Ghetto-life, or Dachau and of Auschwitz! Within 24 hours the young state was attacked by the armies of five Arab states (Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq), which protested her right to exist as a nation; it was an attempt at national infant-slaughter!

At the time, Israel was not a military power. The defenders on which it counted were a citizen-army, made up of miscellaneous and sundry elements; escapees from the ghettos of Europe and Hitler's ovens; small shopkeepers, dealers in old clothes and old furniture, pawnbrokers, money-lenders, auctioneers, troopers, showmen, fiddlers, pedlars, etc. - an army devoid of military training, fueled, however, by a zeal and motivation that outweighed all shortcomings; steeled with the fiery patriotism of the Maccabees and the valor of the Masada-heroes!

Three wars were to follow: the Sinai campaign of 1956, the six-day war of 1967, and the "Yom Kippur War" of 1973. From all four wars Israel emerged victoriously, fighting against greatly superior forces. The greatest triumph was achieved on Wednesday, June 7, 1967, when Israeli paratroopers took the old, walled city of Jerusalem: the historical city, the city of sacred memories, containing Mt. Moriah (which bears the footsteps of Abraham and Isaac), the city of David and Solomon, of Hezekiah, of Jeremiah, of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah; the city hallowed by Gethsemane and Calvary, moistened with the tears of the Creator and watered by His very blood. What spot on earth is there more significant to the whole human race and to heaven itself!

Today, we hear the blasts of the ancient Shofar rise from the ancient city, calling the world's attention to the last battle in the age-long controversy between the forces of good and the forces of evil. Do you hear and recognize their message? Do you take them to heart? May God help each reader of these lines to hear, watch, to prepare and to triumph:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the

breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints. (Eph. 6:10-18)

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THE TITANIC

In the early dawn of Monday, April 15, 1912, the liner "Titanic" foundered in the icy-cold waters of the North Atlantic. She was the greatest ship afloat at that time, the pride of the Cunard-Line: she was on her maiden trip and she was declared to be unsinkable, or as one of her crewmembers expressed it: "God Himself could not sink her" - a claim no other floating craft had ever made. But sink she did, struck by an iceberg that tore a gash of 300 feet into her starboard and sent her into the deep. She carried 2207 souls on her decks; over 1500 perished (about 70%!). Two tragic factors stand out in this drama of the seas: while the "Titanic" admitted over 2000 souls to her decks, she provided life-boat capacity for only one half (1178) of them. And again: through the hours of her last day (Sunday, April 14) she had been receiving six warnings from ships traveling in the opposite direction, cautioning her of the presence of icebergs - the last warning telling her, in fact, exactly where she might expect one of these icy monsters. In the meantime the temperature dropped ominously from 43° to 31°! Ignoring these warnings she plowed forward at "full speed ahead" through night and fog. The captain was in pursuit of the "Blue Ribbon of the Atlantic" award given to the liner that would achieve the fastest transit across the Atlantic, a prize keenly coveted by the great shipping companies competing with each other.

What a price to pay for a cherished priority!

Elder Henry E. Baasch
Silver Spring, MD

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THE JEWISH NATION - A SPIRITUAL "TITANIC"?

"The Jewish people cherished the idea that they were the favorites of heaven, and that they were always to be exalted as the church of God. They were the children of Abraham, they declared, and so firm did the foundation of their prosperity seem to them that they defied earth and heaven to dispossess them of their rights. But by their lives of unfaithfulness they were preparing for the condemnation of heaven and for separation from God." (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 294)

What think ye? Does modern "spiritual" Israel believe and teach the same thing?

SIGNS OF THE TRENDS

"Madras, (RNS) -- Touching scenes were witnessed here when the world-famed statue 'Our Lady of Fatima' visited Madras in the course of its global tour of peace and goodwill. Thousands of Catholics, many of them sick, came to Madras for a glimpse of the statue. The pious and the penitent converged on the St. Mary's Cathedral, where the Lady of Fatima image was displayed for public veneration. There were exclamations of ecstasy from some, as hands rose in supplication. Many wept."

The statue had been taken in procession from the airport to the Cathedral. After it had remained in veneration for a few hours, it was escorted to the Lourdes Shrine in Perambur, 30 kilometers from Madras, where many thousands worshipped.

"Our Lady of Fatima is especially venerated by Catholics in Madras. When the city was bombed by Japanese during World War II, the then Archbishop of Madras, Louis Mathias, reportedly prayed to the Lady of Fatima to save the city. He vowed to erect a shrine in her honor if his prayer was answered. Madras was saved. Though bombarded constantly by the Japanese, the city suffered relatively minor damage." (May 12, 1978, p. 9)

Comment: "As we near the close of time, there will be greater and still greater external parade of heathen power; heathen deities will manifest their signal power, and will exhibit themselves before the cities of the world; and this delineation has already begun to be fulfilled." (Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 116, 117)

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"Aschaffenburg, West Germany (RNS) -- Two Roman Catholic priests and the parents of a young woman have been found guilty of negligent homicide in the death of the couple's daughter during protracted exorcism rites. . .

"According to the indictments, Miss Michel died of 'highly advanced' malnutrition and dehydration in her parent's home in the village of Klingenberg, near here, after refusing nourishment during the months-long exorcism." Miss Michel was a student at the University of Wuerzburg, and had received medical treatment for epilepsy between 1969 and 1975. But failing to be cured, she came to believe that she was possessed of demons. Her parents, Joseph and Anna Michel, also came to believe that she was possessed, and consulted with a local Catholic priest. "On his advice, 82-year-old German Jesuit Father Rodewyk, an authority on exorcism, was called in for consultation." The Jesuit expert recommended formal exorcism to the Bishop of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, who in turn appointed Fathers Alt and Renz to carry out the ritual.

"The two priests who performed the exorcism maintained in their court testimony that Miss Michel had been possessed of six demons, including the spirits of Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, Roman Emperor Nero, and Judas Iscariot.

"In tape recordings of the exorcism rites, played in court, Miss Michel's voice was harsh and distorted. Some observers said her voice sounded like the voice of the 'possessed' child in the movie, 'The Exorcist,' which had been showing in West Germany for the previous two years -- as if another person were speaking from within her." (April 24, 1978, p. 10)

St. Louis (RNS) -- "A former supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus told a national gathering of Roman Catholic religious here that 'the Church was founded by Christ, not as a democratic but an authoritative body.'" John W. McDevitt was addressing a national congress on the theme - "What Ever Happened to Religious Life?" - sponsored by the Institute on Religious Life in cooperation with the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

McDevitt declared that "Christ did not make provision for a democratic poll on His doctrine, with the option to accept the pleasant and reject the difficult, to embrace Mount Tabor but repudiate Calvary. He told His apostles to teach 'all things' that He had told them. Christ wanted His followers to accept totally of what He taught." He continued - "in the days when our Church spoke with one voice the average loyal Catholic had ever before him uniform guidelines, adherence to which would achieve divine salvation. However, today he is completely confused when misguided clerics and religious go forth and preach a distorted analysis of Vatican II and challenge the magisterium." Mr. McDevitt indicated the cause for the problem was an "unreasonable doubt and false theology" of which the priesthood and sisterhood of the church were suffering. (April 25, 1978)

Comment - How familiar the cause - "unreasonable doubt and false theology" - when we take a look at our own church. Liberal thinkers are casting doubt - beyond reason - on our positions regarding Creation, Prophecy, and the Spirit of Prophecy; and theologians are projecting false theology in regard to the Incarnation, and Righteousness by Faith. Result - Confusion!

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Swindon, Eng. (RNS) - "Ecumenism took a new upward swing when 400 people from six churches representing five denominations covenanted together to become one church in this western English town. The members came from the Baptist Tabernacle, the Church of Christ, the Methodist Central Hall, Sanford St. United Reformed Church and Trinity United Reformed Church and the Church of England.

"Chairmen at the founding meeting asked the members if they were ready to become one church. They signed their names as founding members before receiving Communion in the presence of the invited representatives of the denominations... Teenagers were among those who formed the new congregation and parents who covenanted brought their children forward to be greeted and blessed."

While a central church complex is being built - furnishings from all participating churches, either sold or demolished, have been brought to Trinity where they are presently meeting to show in a practical way that all of the uniting congregations have contributed to the new structure. (April 25, 1978, p. 22)

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XI - 9 (Sept., 1978)

SEPTEMBER CONVOCATION - Sabbath, September 2. The Sabbath School will be at the regular time - 9:30 a.m. to be followed by the Hour of Worship at 11 a.m. In the afternoon, a report of the meetings in California will be given, and a continuing study on "What Can I Believe?"