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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

Thief in the Night

by Terry James

No scriptural proof-text in God’s Word more clearly points to the first of the two phases of Jesus Christ’s Second Coming than does the following: “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2). We who hold to the pre-Trib Rapture viewpoint are often accused of being deceivers. We are condemned by our detractors as leading astray Christians alive now—if they live to see it—who will be required to endure the tribulation, thus to wash their robes clean in preparation for inheriting God’s Kingdom.

We are castigated for foisting upon innocent, gullible believers a “secret rapture” that will somehow lead these Christians to take the mark of the Beast (Revelation 13:16-18).

I’m not precisely sure of their “reasoning,” but I think they claim this because they are convinced that the ones who fall for the Rapture viewpoint won’t be able to recognize Antichrist when he comes to power. We who teach the pre-Trib rapture, so the accusation goes, would have falsely led these people to think the Church would not be here when Antichrist is on the world scene.

Almost all who are antagonistic to the pre-Trib Rapture doctrine teach that the “elect” will have to endure part or all of the seven-year tribulation era. Those who hold to a post-Tribulation Rapture, or a no-Rapture position, believe that Christ will come back at the end of the Tribulation, at Armageddon. They hold to the notion that that is His only return in the Second Coming. Other views have Christ returning when the earth is perfected and made ready, but we won’t go there in this essay.

Let us look at only the pre-Trib Rapture and the post-Trib Rapture positions for the purpose of exploring what is meant by the “thief in the night” references in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Peter 3:10.

These two viewpoints—the pre-Trib, and the post-Trib—offer the greatest contrast to examine in consideration of the second advent of Jesus Christ, within the overall belief that Rapture will, according to Bible prophecy, happen before Christ’s foot actually touches down on Planet Earth.

The pre-Trib view of Rapture says that Christ’s Second Coming is in two phases, separated by at least seven years. The post-Trib rapture view says that the Rapture and Christ’s coming back to the Mount of Olives will occur almost simultaneously—certainly with no more than a matter of days separating the two events. The post-Trib position says there is no “secret” Rapture. Christ’s coming again will be fully seen in the heavens by all, including Christians who will be watching for Him to break through the darkness of that hour.

We agree that the Rapture of the Church (all born-again believers in Jesus Christ for salvation since the Church Age began at Pentecost) will be anything but a “secret.” The world will instantly go into cataclysmic chaos at the moment that stunning event takes place. The imagination is hard-pressed to fathom the ramifications of what will happen when millions suddenly vanish. Every child below the age of accountability will be gone in that mind-boggling instant of time. I am convinced that all babies (including those in the wombs of their mothers) will be instantly in the presence of Christ in the clouds of glory.

Every corpse of every dead Christian will be raised to join with his or her soul to meet Christ in the air in that atomos of time. (atom-splitting time – md) The Rapture will be mystifying, and to some an inexplicable phenomenon, but it will not be a secret. It will happen before the eyes of a stupefied planet of left-behind earth-dwellers. This declaration that Jesus will call His Church to be with Him seems audacious to many. But, it didn’t seem so to the Apostle Paul. He was quite confident—even adamant—in his prophecy concerning the “mystery” he had been given by the Holy Spirit to instruct all believers down through the Age of Grace (Church Age).

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

He explains what will take place next, in that stupendous fraction of a second:

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

Jesus Himself told of this “mystery” Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 15:51. The Lord explains what happens after believers—both the bodies of the dead and those who are living—are caught up in the air to be with Him:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:1-3)

So, the Rapture will take place. Believers and the bodies of those who died during the Church Age will be “caught up” in one single moment of time. “ALL,” not “some,” will go instantly to be with Jesus, who will then take them into heaven, where He has been preparing their dwelling places since He ascended from the Mount of Olives.

Again, the pre-Trib position on this joyous event is that it is imminent (could happen at any moment), and will happen before the Tribulation Period begins. The post-Trib position says that it happens at the end of the most terrible time in human history, just as Jesus Christ is returning from heaven at Armageddon.

The pre-Trib view holds that it will occur at an unknown time. It will be a stunning, sudden, and unannounced-to-the-world-at-large break-in upon business as usual on Planet Earth. The post-Trib proclaims that it will occur following all of the horrors of the judgments outlined in Revelation.

The pre-Trib view says that the world at large (left-behind earth-dwellers) won’t see it coming. The

Rapture will cause all left on earth to wonder what has happened. The post-Trib view says that all eyes will behold Christ's coming again to a hellish planet, and the living and dead saints will then be gathered to Christ.

The defining thing to consider in thinking on the two diametrically different views of the Rapture and Second Coming is wrapped up in the term "thief in the night." The Apostle Peter again uses this mysterious term, first used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:2:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. (2 Peters 3:10)

Peter is saying here that the day of the Lord—that time when God and His Christ, His Son, takes over this fallen planet—will begin like a thief in the night. It will be a sudden, catastrophic break-in upon a world doing business as usual. (Read Luke 17:26-29 to understand how things will be going along as usual when Christ comes back.)

This description hardly fits the post-Trib view, or any other view that says Christ will Rapture His Church during a time of unprecedented trouble (Jeremiah 30:7; Matthew 24:21). This indicates that it will be a total surprise, because a thief in the night doesn't announce his coming with great, cataclysmic fanfare. The break-in is swift, stealthy—a totally unexpected event.

Peter foretells in these passages that the "day of the Lord" will then run its course, until the remaking of the heavens and the earth. The Rapture will begin this "day of the Lord," which will then run at least 1,007 years.

This is the first phase of Christ's Second Coming. The Rapture occurs like a "thief in the night." The second advent, when Jesus' foot touches down on the Mount of Olives, is the second phase.

There are those who say with vehemence that it is blasphemous to equate Christ's coming again as being like the break-in of a thief in the night. How dare we liken their Lord to a "thief"!

Really? Here's what Jesus, the Creator of all things, said about this matter:

But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. (Matthew 24:43-44)

Looks like a pretty good case for the Lord's sudden intervention into the nefarious affairs of this increasingly wicked world, does it not? That thief-in-the-night moment could happen, literally, at any moment. Certainly, signals of the Tribulation are beginning to come to pass.

And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. (Luke 21:28)

School District Threatens to Call Police if Christian Distributes Bibles on Campus

By Heather Clark on July 22

LA HARPE, Ill. — A school district in Illinois has reportedly advised one of the nation's most conspicuous Church-State separation groups that it has disallowed a local Christian from distributing Bibles on a street near an elementary school and told the man that the police will be called should he come on campus.

The Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) sent a letter earlier this year to the La Harpe Community School District to complain that elementary school principal Lila McKeown includes references to Christianity and/or Scripture in flyers that are distributed at staff meetings. It also claimed that McKeown permitted an individual to offer Bibles to students.

"When Principal McKeown regularly promotes Christianity to teachers, and distributes passages from the Bible at official district-sponsored events, employees will conclude that their government employer is endorsing religion over non-religion and Christianity over all faiths," the correspondence read.

It also asked that the district halt the Bible distribution as allowing the handout would "entangle" the school with religion and "alienate" those who do not identify as Christian.

"If the district was unaware that this Bible distribution was taking place, we request that the district take action and instruct all teachers that they may not permit third parties to distribute religious literature to students on school property during the school day or while students are entering or leaving the building," FFRF wrote.

An attorney for the La Harpe Community School District soon responded to the atheist activist organization, advising that McKeown would discontinue quoting from Scripture in any form of school communication. However, it also noted that she knew nothing about the individual who reportedly distributed Bibles near the school.

While the person's name or affiliation has not been provided, the attorney outlined that the individual was actually offering Bibles on the street, and that section of the street belongs to the school district. FFRF had incorrectly stated in its correspondence that the distribution was occurring at the doors of the elementary school, hence its reference to students "entering or leaving the building."

"This individual was clearly informed that North D Street is a part of the school district campus and cannot be used for Bible distribution activities," the response read, advising that a "cease and desist" letter was sent to the person.

Moreover, the man who distributed Bibles was told that should he come on campus, the police will be called.

"This individual was warned that law enforcement would be called should he or any affiliated persons come onto the school district campus for the purpose of distributing Bibles to students," the letter to FFRF read.

FFRF has applauded the development, remarking that "[r]eligion is inherently divisive and has no official place in a public school where staff and young students hold varied beliefs—and no belief at all."

However, as previously reported, in 1791—just four years after the signing of the U.S. Constitution—Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and vice-president of the Bible Society of Philadelphia, said in expressing his disagreement with deists who were opposed to using the Bible in schools:

“In contemplating the political institutions of the United States, I lament, that we waste so much time and money in punishing crimes, and take so little pains to prevent them. We profess to be republicans, and yet we neglect the only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government, that is, the universal education of our youth in the principles of Christianity by means of the Bible, for this divine book, above all others, favors that equality among mankind, that respect for just laws, and all those sober and frugal virtues, which constitute the soul of republicanism.”

The first textbook used in the American colonies even before the nation’s founding, “The New England Primer,” was largely focused on the Scriptures, and was stated to be popular in public and private schools alike until approximately the early 1900’s. It used mostly the King James Bible as reference, and spoke much about sin, salvation and proper behavior. “Save me, O God, from evil all this day long, and let me love and serve Thee forever, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Thy Son,” it read.

Noah Webster’s famous “Blue Back Speller” also referenced Christianity, including God-centered statements in reading lessons such as “The preacher is to preach the gospel,” “Blasphemy is contemptuous treatment of God,” and “We do not like to see our own sins.” Webster, a schoolmaster, is known as the “father of American education” and strongly advocated teaching children the Scriptures. Many of the Founders’ children are stated to have learned to read from the primer.

The End of European Christianity?

pnw.com

Christianity in Europe is under assault from all sides, from waves of Muslim immigrants and declining European birthrates to reduced church membership and the breakdown of traditional families. The much talked about rise of the “nones”, or religiously unaffiliated, also reflects how this vision of a spiritually-empty postmodern Europe lost its way.

Europe is home to millions fewer Christians than a few short decades ago, but a new study from the Pew Research Center and research done by the British academic Stephen Bullivant both call into question the Christianity espoused by many Europeans.

The Pew Research Center conducted a telephone poll with 24,599 European adults selected at random. Just under 12,000 of those surveyed considered themselves Christians, though the rate at which they practice their faith is the first factor that the study considers. Not all Christians find the time to attend Church weekly or otherwise engage with their faith community, but for European Christians this lack of engagement is becoming all too common.

For this study, Pew set the minimum level of attendance at once per month to be considered a practicing Christian, a standard that is met by 18% of French and UK subjects, 28% of Austrians, 22% of Germans, 10% of Belgians, 9% of Finns, 9% of Swedes and 14% of Norwegians.

Unsurprisingly, Italy stands out at 40%, but even that is well under half for a country that is at the center of the Catholic Church. The median number of practicing Christians, across all of Europe, is a mere 18%. Non-practicing ‘Christians’, on the other hand, make up a median of 46% of the total

European population and the unaffiliated 24% of all Europeans (other religions still account for less than 6% of the total, though these numbers are not uniformly distributed).

The 46% of Europeans who identify as non-practicing Christians is significant not only because their numbers continue to grow compared to practicing Christians, but because they hold beliefs that stand in stark contrast to orthodox Christianity.

They are overwhelming in favor of gay marriage and support abortion at a far higher rate than practicing Christians; two political issues that set them at odds with traditional Christian values.

On a more fundamental level, despite the fact that the non-practicing 'Christians' consider themselves to be Christian (91% baptized and 81% raised as Christian), they no longer believe in the God of the Bible.

image: http://www.prophecynewswatch.com/images/ads/TCC_banner1.jpg

Declaring belief in some numinous, spiritual force that fits their imagined belief of what they would like God to be, they most often reject the stories, events, lessons and message of the Bible. In essence, they occasionally dress themselves in the trappings of Christianity without encumbering themselves with any of the beliefs, theology or morality of the Christian faith.

Those who attend Church at least once a month do believe in the God of the Bible and, importantly, also pass this belief and the accompanying moral practices on to their children.

Those who are practicing Christians intend to raise children in the faith, as well, but there is little chance of that for those who are non-practicing Christians. Raised in homes that are Christian in name only, many from the coming generations will have only superficial contact with what is quickly becoming the religion of their ancestors.

European churches have reached a crisis point not only from outside but from within as millions of Christians drop out or drift away. They may still see churches as important to social cohesion and helping the poor, but for tens of millions they fail both in belief and practice for what the Bible describes as a follower of Christ.

Stephen Bullivant found that unlike generations past when the European norm was to identify culturally as Christian, despite differences of belief or affiliation, that societal custom is no longer acceptable. Now, the norm in many parts of Europe is to be unaffiliated and the religious increasingly see themselves as "swimming against the tide". As Bullivant points out, in many European countries "religiosity is no longer seen as normal or natural."

Bullivant's study looks disproportionately at younger Europeans, but this is precisely the demographic group that can indicate great changes to come. He believes that Christianity will survive into the next few generations, but with a much reduced core of true believers amidst an ever-growing population of non-believers and Christians-in-name-only.

Increasingly isolated, he predicts that Christianity will hang on in a Europe that has no place for their traditions, no place for their Christian morals and no place for God.

Footnote: of necessity, this article references a people-group identified as 'non-practicing Christians'. Please understand, as do we, that this is an oxymoron.