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SUPPORTING THE ENLARGEMENT OF A PRESBYTERIAN WITNESS LOYAL TO SCRIPTURE AND THE REFORMED FAITH

Unacceptable Alternative

People who have never had the experience of working with children who are being rehabilitated into our society after the correction of a congenital defect often tell me that infants with such defects should be allowed to die, because their lives can obviously be nothing but unhappy and miserable.

It has been my constant experience, however, that disability and unhappiness do not necessarily go together. Some of the most unhappy children I have ever known have all their physical and mental faculties; on the other hand, some of the happiest youngsters have borne burdens which I myself would find very difficult to bear. Our obligation in such circumstances is to find alternatives for the problems our patients face. I don't consider death an acceptable alternative.

—C. Everett Koop

See p. 7

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON FOR NOVEMBER 5
DEVOTION FOR NOVEMBER

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Mailbag

UNBALANCED PRESENTATION?

You express surprise at the resurgence of postmillennialism in America. But it is also surprising to read your remarks concerning the same (Sept. 6, *Journal*). The article hardly seems to reflect the same well-studied charitable manner of many other articles of yours down through the years.

Concerning "newspaper exegesis," the Copernican revolution and escha-

tology: Conclusions of science have indeed influenced and helped shape churchmen's views of *nature*. And also, sad to say, current events appear to influence some churchmen's views on *last* things. But can we legitimately argue from the former to the latter? Are current events a legitimate influence on our understanding of *Biblical doctrine*? We can respond to the newspaper headlines in one of three ways: 1) *Ignore them* and turn to the sports page (eschatological indifference); 2) *Escape them* by hoping for a secret Rapture to excuse the Church from concern or work (and theonomy as well); 3) *Face them* and build in faith for God's Kingdom—in view of such promises as "The meek shall inherit the earth."

Postmillennialists are still waiting for the day in the 20th century when they will receive a balanced presentation of their views.

—(Rev.) Paul Doecke
Chatsworth, Cal.

RE POSTMILLENNIALISM

Concerning the editor's good-natured polemic against postmillennialism (Sept. 6, *Journal*), please permit me a few remarks.

The editor is surely correct to insist that "the fundamental issue of hermeneutics" is the heart of the matter. And certainly an aspect of sound interpretation must be a consideration of the context, because a text without its context too often becomes a pretext.

With this in mind, let us consider a passage cited both in the article and editorial which allegedly indicates "that the world will *not* be a righteous world at Christ's return, that evil will be rampant." I refer to Luke 18:8.

Here we have the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow. Clearly our Lord's purpose in giving this parable was to declare the necessity of instant, persevering, believing prayer by His people.

But what of the 8th verse? "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" Now Scripture is clear that Christ's second advent and the end of the present age is only one of several instances in which He "comes." Throughout history He comes in judgment on nations, peoples, and individuals. For example, the destruction of Jerusalem prophesied in Matt. 24:2, 15-28 and fulfilled in 70 A.D. Given the context—the plea for righteous judgment—there is reason to believe this is the nature of the "coming" alluded to in the 8th verse.

Finally, "shall He find faith?," means specifically the faith He has just been commending, that is, the faith that perseveres, that does not faint in prayer. The basis for this prayer of faith is the certainty that God will vindicate His people speedily. So we ask: Does not this have reference to God's people in every generation, and not just at Christ's second advent?

—Charles Dykes
Clinton, Miss.

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THIS WEEK—

VOL. 37, NO. 25, OCTOBER 18, 1978

THIS WEEK'S FEATURE—CHRISTIAN ACTION COUNCIL 6

THE SLIDE TO AUSCHWITZ..... 7

Losing respect for life—of the unborn, the aged or the feeble minded—takes a nation toward ruin.

by C. EVERETT KOOP

ABORTION 'HARD CASES'..... 10

Even so-called abortion 'hard cases' classify as murder under the sixth commandment.

by FREDERICK T. MARSH

BICENTENNIAL LEGACY?..... 12

Under the guise of patriotism, many ideas flourish that can move to destroy our country

by CARL BOGUE

DEPARTMENTS—

Editorials..... 14

The Layman and his Church..... 15

Sunday School Lesson, November 5..... 16

Devotion for November..... 18

Book Reviews..... 19

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EDITORIALS

The Exception Establishes the Rule

Abortion has become big business, worldwide.

In some nations, such as Japan and England, abortion now is a significant factor in population control. We have received letters from Presbyterians in Japan, supporting unrestricted abortion as "the one single factor that has kept the population of Japan from overcrowding these islands."

The Presbyterian Church US, of course, has been in the abortion business for years. Thousands of abortions have been paid for out of a special fund administered at the PCUS General Assembly level. Nobody is saying, but the circumstances indicate that most of these have been performed on college coeds.

The PCUS is on record, and has repeatedly rejected efforts to change the record, in favor of abortion when a family's economic circumstances dictate a limitation of children.

At the other end of the spectrum, those who take "pro-life" positions

have tended to react to the opposite extreme. The last General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, for example, went on record against abortion at any time, ever, for any reason. It so voted after hearing a medical doctor say that even in the case of tubal pregnancies, danger to the life of the mother is quite remote—an opinion, incidentally, not generally shared by obstetricians we've talked to.

We are inclined to think that conservative religious groups would gain a more receptive hearing and have a larger influence if they didn't try to take absolutist positions in reaction to the admitted evils in human society.

War is hell. But "peace" Churches have not won many converts to the absolutist position that it is wrong to fight any time, anywhere, for any cause. They rather bring reproach upon themselves for exaggerating the case all out of proportion—especially

when they welcome, like everyone else, police protection for their communities.

The law of God is good, as Paul said, and should be emphasized against every tendency to turn grace into antinomianism. But to take respect for God's law so far that you resurrect the Pharisees' preoccupation with "every jot and tittle" of the Old Testament case and penal codes is to obscure if not obliterate an otherwise valuable point.

Reverence for life is a part of every Christian's beliefs and essential to the survival of any civilized society which cares enough to want to avoid the horrors of a Nazi-style "master race" mentality.

Altogether apart from the Christian viewpoint, it is a sociological fact that when life becomes cheap *before* birth, it follows as the night the day that life will become cheap *after* birth.

But Christians do not win converts to their viewpoint by taking absolutist positions in this matter. To deny the principle that abortion is justified when the life of the mother is at stake—or when pregnancy follows rape—is to go too far.

A Christian wife who was raped by a burglar may decide, in consultation with her husband and in prayer, that she will not seek medical attention. That is her (and his) privilege. But to say that this is what God expects is to go beyond Scripture *and* common sense. [†]

Support for the Virgin Birth

The Biblical basis for the acceptance of the virgin birth of Christ comes primarily from the accounts in Matthew and Luke. However, when unbelief proposes that Paul did not agree to this, we must demur. From Paul's life and writings appear indications in the book of Galatians that Paul supported the teachings of his close friend Luke.

Paul wrote that three years after his conversion, he went to Jerusalem to visit Peter, staying with him 15 days (Gal. 1:18). The Greek verb rendered see or visit is the root from which we get our word history; it means to gain knowledge of by visiting. Paul also saw James, the Lord's brother, and no doubt gained knowledge from him.

Then Paul spoke of James, Cephas (Peter) and John as giving him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship

(Gal. 2:9). Thus Paul had opportunities to learn about the Lord Jesus from the men who were closest to Him and to His mother, Mary.

The apostle said that God sent forth His own Son, made of a human mother, made under the law (Gal. 4:4). Thus for emphasis he repeated the verb rendered in the *King James Version* as "made." Other uses of this verb used expressly to refer to Jesus' birth are found in Romans 1:3; Philippians 2:7-8. This Greek verb generally means to become, or to be made, as the King James renders it.

Paul used a different verb for the births of Ishmael and Isaac (Gal. 4:23, 29). That verb is properly used of men begetting children. Thus, although Paul mentioned the birth of Jesus four times, he always avoided

(Continued on p. 22, col. 3)

Uncomfortable?

It is frequently said that unless the Gospel makes men uncomfortable it has failed in its intent. Certainly this is true as one phase of the Holy Spirit's work.

One of the weaknesses of contemporary theology is its failure to make men uncomfortable at the place where such discomfort should start. Such theology does not seek conviction of sin (yes, we mean a sense of guilt before a holy God); it even deplores it.

Under the burden of truth which God imparted, Jeremiah cried out: "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule



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and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8).

Throughout the book Dr. Hobbs underscores the idea that Genesis tells us about the origin of all things—the first man, woman and child, the first question, the first worship, the first temptation and sin, the first city, and so on. The stories of Sarah and the patriarchs are told with spiritual insight and explanation. [T]

'Hard Cases'—from p. 12

tionally causes the death of another (Num. 11:9-15, 22-28, especially v. 23), which seems to be the role of the unborn child in this case.

It must be remembered that we are dealing with *two* lives; we cannot truly assign greater or lesser values—both mother and unborn child are given to us by the Lord; the unborn child, though still hidden, is our own "flesh and blood."

The Christian cannot kill for the sole reason of removing danger to another. When he is faced with the imminent death of two people, he still does not choose to kill. He chooses instead to preserve the life God has given.

Such difficult situations should increase our appreciation for the goodness of the Lord in giving us life, both physical and spiritual. As we live with those who seem to complicate our lives, humanly speaking, we should see God's grace and mercy and take the opportunity to practice His love in our lives. [T]

Editorial—from p. 14

the verb which properly refers to men's begetting children. This avoidance suggests his support of the virgin birth of Christ.

Then Luke said that he got his information for his Gospel, including the birth stories, from those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word. Luke certainly included Paul among the ministers of the Word.

As we reconstruct the matter, then, Paul learned of the wonder of Jesus' birth from his conferences with Peter, James and John. He conveyed this information to Luke, the beloved physician, and Luke embodied it in his Gospel, written for Theophilus to defend Paul and his mission (Luke 1:1-4).—WILLIAM C. ROBINSON. [T]