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Pope John Paul II walking in procession outside the basilica during his visit to the Knock Shrine in Ireland in September 1979. Photo: PA Wire

So ran the headline of an article in the Belfast Newsletter of Saturday 25th August, the day the pope landed in Dublin. It was written by Ben Lowry, the deputy editor of the newspaper.

In the article he states two reasons for the opinion set forth in the headline.

1. 'As Christianity in the West slowly but relentlessly declines, some aggressive secular values are prevailing. The speed with which social policies have changed on issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion, and the almost hysterical way in which traditionalists are harangued on those topics, means that Christians at times seem almost to have been browbeaten into not really stating what they think on such important matters.'

I wonder how long protections for churches not to embrace such controversial reforms will stay in place, and I fear that some of their right to dissent will be impinged.'

'So it makes sense increasingly for Catholics and Protestants to work together.'

'But there is, I believe, now a much larger number of Christians, of both the two main traditions in Northern Ireland, who are beginning to see each other as allies on cultural, social and religious matters in this secular time.'

number of Christians, of both the two main traditions in Northern Ireland, who are beginning to see each other as allies on cultural, social and religious matters in this secular time.'

In a nutshell that seems to say: "When the enemy shall come in like a flood" we should join up with anyone and everyone who seems to have the slightest appearance of being a friend.

Mr Lowry continues:

'The second reason I think a senior member of the DUP should have travelled for a papal introduction is the system of government that we have here in Northern Ireland.

It is a dysfunctional one of mandatory coalition in which two contradictory constitutional outlooks have to be in power at all times.

But the fact is that the DUP have bought into that system, however reluctantly, and so they aspire potentially to be leading everyone.

On that basis there is a major imperative on the party to send someone senior to meet the Pope. However badly it would go down with fundamentalists, it ought to be much more palatable than sharing power with past terrorists.'

All that is the reasoning of the human heart without consideration of the mind and purpose of God set forth in the Bible

In this world there is only ONE purpose which is being systematically and irrevocably advanced according



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to a plan laid down in eternity and which will, in keeping with the timetable of the planner, reach fruition in due season.

That purpose is God's eternal purpose. Nowhere is that more clearly set down than in that universally beloved reservoir of Christian comfort, Romans 8:28. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Now it is very true that there are many times when to our poor limited eyesight and understanding God's way seems to be foolish and that there is a much better way things could be done.

I can best illustrate this by reminding us all of the apostles' reaction to Christ's announcement that He was going up to Jerusalem.

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee," Matthew 16:21-22.

These words were spoken with the very best of intentions and out of a troubled and loving heart. But they were ever so wrong!

"But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men," Matthew 16:23.

Peter was looking at this from a human consideration of it. He was in ignorance at that time of the eternal purpose of God as is stated in John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God's purpose of redeeming His elect entailed the sending of His Son to die for them that they might not perish.

Being in the dark about this matter, Peter and the rest of the apostolic band were dismayed by the events at the cross. That was stated pretty clearly by the two on the road to Emmaus to whom the Saviour spoke after His resurrection, though His identity was concealed from them.

"And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not," Luke 24:13-24.

This confusion was inexcusable! That is evident by the Saviour's response to them.

"Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself," Luke 24:25-27.

The Saviour would not call them fools lightly. But in the light of the many, many Old Testament prophecies



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and pictures of the Saviour's coming, the purpose of it, His death as the bearer of the sins of His people, this ignorance of two, and indeed all the apostles, was without excuse!

Of course, after the glorious descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, these early believers were very much more fully aware of the wondrous wisdom in the outworking of the cross. How sinful and egotistical it was of Peter and the two on the road to Emmaus to question, doubt and in truth ridicule the providential workings of God!

How different was Peter's understanding of Calvary when he spoke on the day of Pentecost.

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ," Acts 2:22-36.

So, what God was doing, at the first, seemed most foolish in the eyes of men but in the end His infinite love and mercy and grace was seen to be most wisely at work.

Now I say to Mr Lowry, the same mistake is repeatedly made by men when they analyse the direction of 'Christianity' in this world WITHOUT REFERRING TO THE REVELATION GOD HAS GIVEN US OF HIS PURPOSE AND ITS ADVANCE, IN THE BIBLE!

Man will always get it wrong. He will always feel that God has made a mistake and His purpose is doomed to failure. How wrong the human mind will ever be! As Paul says: "The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men," 1 Corinthians 1:25.

Out of his mistaken analysis of the course and direction of mankind, foolish man feels he must, like Peter, intervene and impose his solution upon the affairs of the world.

Taking no heed whatever of how it is God desires His work and witness in this world to advance, man launches his plan!

Hence the World Council of Churches! The wise and the so-called good felt that unity of all and sundry who were willing to wear the name "Christian" would bring about a formidable force that would combat the 'forces of evil'!

But in truth, this was not God's plan but rather the devil's plan to beguile and deceive gullible true believers into abandoning God's methodology and embrace that of human reasoning.

Again, let me illustrate this conflict of notions from the Scriptures.



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In the midst of great difficulties and hardships Nehemiah sought to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem which had been destroyed by the Babylonians many years earlier. We read in Nehemiah 2:10: "When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel." These evil men did all in their power to hinder and stop Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the walls. However, when they failed to do that by force, they changed tactics.

"Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) that Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief," Nehemiah 6:1-2.

The devil is never more dangerous than when he puts on a smiling face and proffers help!

The various ecumenical enterprises which bestride the world today give the appearance of advancing the cause of God to those IGNORANT of "all that the prophets have spoken."

Christ and His servants throughout the ages have spoken of the work of deceivers in the last days! That which so many believe is Christianity at work, namely, the ecumenical denominations, is no such thing. Rather, these denominations comprise of Bible-deniers, Christ blasphemers, and those who are prepared to tolerate such and work in harmony with them.

We have examples of that in abundance in the Irish Presbyterian Church. It claims to stand up for the Bible and yet its position on sodomy and same-sex marriage is anything but Biblical. God terms these lifestyles as abominable and worthy only of hell. The Presbyterian Church, it would appear, is happy to have such partake at the 'Lord's Table', a thing most heinous in God's eyes.

Furthermore, the eager running down to Dublin to meet the pope by the leaders of the three main churches and lesser entities from other denominations is seen by them as an expression of "Christian charity"!

They are mistaken. There are some whom the Lord would not have His people greet and fellowship with.

Heed these words:

"For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them," Ephesians 5:5-7.

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them," Ephesians 5:11.

"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds," 2 John 1:10-11.

I could multiply verses which repeat this same thesis, that is fellowship for the Christian is governed by the Word of God. Anyone who denies any of the cardinal truths of God's Word is to be refused as a Christian.

Paul said to the Galatians, "But there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed," Galatians 1:7-9.

That is strong language and it is so because great matters are at stake here. We must not allow or endorse any who proffer a false gospel, for the curse of God rests upon any that engage in such deceit.

Therefore, no matter how the logic of man sees that every one who is prepared to wear the label of "Chris-



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tian" should be assimilated into the ranks of the 'Church' in order to swell its numbers and ensure its success, God's Word teaches the very opposite.

Rather than heed man's wisdom and accept his vision for success, let us listen to what God says.

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," Luke 12:32. Let us remember the lesson Gideon had to learn. "And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place," Judges 7:6-7.

That is not the only example of how God advances His cause amongst men. He said to eleven men: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," Mark 16:15. The great Protestant Reformation was accomplished under the leadership of a handful of men. God raised up Henry Cooke to preserve the Presbyterian Church in the mid-nineteenth century from the curse of Unitarianism. What of Patrick here in Ireland whose written testimony is still extant and may be read by all in this island so that they might understand that the 'Patrick' of whom the pope will undoubtedly make mention, is not the historic figure who brought the Gospel of Christ to this land, but rather a perversion of Rome's making?

No, Mr Lowry, gathering as big a crowd as possible is not God's way to advance His truth. For Christians to abandon the teaching of God's Word and follow the schemes and ruses of men which have a certain appearance of wisdom is in truth, foolish in the extreme.

The Christian is privileged to have presented to them in the Bible how things are going to end at the conclusion of this age when Christ returns. He will not come to embrace a multitude which may well carry a flag with His name on it. No, He tells us that when He comes it will be to weed out those who undoubtedly Mr Lowry would welcome into his rescue plan. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Matthew 7:21-23.

The Saviour tells us that true Christianity will be but a small remnant when He returns. "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8. That is a rhetorical question the answer to which is obvious. The state of affairs that will exist amongst God's people at the end of this age is foreshadowed in many places.

How many believers were there upon the face of the earth when the flood came in Noah's day? How many believers were there to welcome Christ when He came the first time? These and many other 'pictures' show us what will be the state of affairs when Christ returns to this earth. There will only be a few holding firm to His truth, believing in His promises and expecting His glorious victory.

Man's wisdom has brought this world down into darkness and misery. Man's wisdom of late has legalised sodomy, promoted same-sex marriage, drugs, slavery, abortion, divorce, pornography and with it have come death, suffering, infanticide, abuse and every unmentionable form of shame and anguish.

Man's wisdom has dug hell and will fill it.

How sad it is that we should have "The Newsletter" counselling Ulster to turn from the paths of our Protestant, Bible-loving forefathers and urging upon us the path of political and religious 'ecumenical union'.

Rev Ivan Foster Rtd.

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