

OF  
**THE GREATER  
DANGER**

*THERE IS AT THIS TIME,  
THAN IN THE BLOODY AND DISTRESSING  
TIMES OF THE MARTYRS<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

You know that big, fat book on your bookshelf? Yeah, the one you take down and read a little from every couple of years. Yes, I'm talking about *Martyrs Mirror*.

Did you ever wonder what got into Thieleman J. van Braught to compile all those stories? He tells us why in the preface. A century had passed since Dutch Anabaptism had begun its bloodstained career. But the blood flowing on the chopping block had since ceased, and wealth and worldliness now abounded. (Those two are old running buddies, not?)

Thieleman decided to try to stir up his people by reminding them of their history. The fruit of his labors is called *Martyrs Mirror*.

Listen now as Thieleman pours out his heart. I wonder what he would say to *our* generation?

**T**hese are sad times in which we live. Nay, truly, there is more danger now than in the time of our fathers, who suffered death for the testimony of the Lord. Few will believe this, because the great majority looks to that which is external and corporeal; and in this respect it is now better, quieter, and more comfortable. Only a few look to that which is internal and pertains to the soul, and on which everything depends: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Mt. 16:26

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1 When Israel under Pharaoh, in Egypt, had to burn brick and to perform other hard labor for the king, they remembered God, yea, cried unto the Almighty, so that God was moved to compassion, Ex. 1, 2, 3, etc. But when God had delivered them, and brought them into a goodly land where it went well with them according to the body, they forsook the Lord and became wanton. De. 32:15 This difference is found to exist also between the times of oppression and the times of freedom.

These times are certainly more dangerous. For in those days Satan came openly, through his servants, even at noon-day, as a roaring lion, so that he could be known, and it now and then was possible to hide from him. Besides, his chief intention then was to destroy the body: but now he comes as in the night, or in the twilight, in a strange but yet pleasing form, and in a two-fold way lies in wait to destroy the soul. First, to trample under foot and annihilate entirely, if this were possible, the only saving Christian faith; secondly to destroy the true separated Christian life, which is the outgrowth of faith. Ps. 91:5,6

He reveals himself on the one hand as an angel of light, (2 Co. 11:14-15) as a kind, pleasant, yea, even divine messenger, with humble countenance, downcast eyes, plain garb, and living in seclusion from the throng of the worldly-minded, even as the holiest people, yea, the martyrs of God, formerly did. His words are modest, trembling, and full of contrition—seemingly coming from deep meditation, inward fear, and apprehension, lest he might speak amiss or untruthfully. Meanwhile, and before one is aware of it, he seizes hold and tears like a wolf in sheep's clothing, robbing the innocent lambs of Christ of their precious faith, which he pretends to be of small importance. But without this faith it is impossible to please God; (He. 11:6) nay, without which we—according to the words of Christ—shall be condemned. Mk. 16:16 For Paul says whatsoever is not of faith is sin. Ro. 14:23

It grieves us to the heart that we must live to see these times and therefore speak in this way. O Lord, strengthen our faith! Help Thy weak, trusting lambs, that they may not be led into error nor moved from the foundations of the most holy faith.

On the other hand, through his instigation, the world now reveals itself very beautiful and glorious, more than at any preceding time, in a threefold pleasing form—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.<sup>2</sup> Almost all men run after her, to worship her as a queen supreme. But all are deceived thereby; yea, many who have drunk of the poisoned wine of her lusts from the golden cup of her iniquities and deceptions die a spiritual death.

As the first objective is aimed at the faith, so the second is directed against the true Christian life. Here lies great danger. Who shall escape these snares? He that would at

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2 John, the friend of Christ, has presented the deceptive, beautiful appearance of this world in its threefold view of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. 1 Jn. 2:16 Solomon portrayed the same as a harlot or wanton woman, who allures young men unto her; who is loud and stubborn, and whose feet abide not in her house; but where those who follow her are led, as an ox to the slaughter, to certain destruction, nay, to death and hell. Pr. 7

no time be taken unawares by it must indeed be cautious and watchful. But our very flesh seems prone to it. Here must be fasting, watching, praying, and calling upon God for help, otherwise there is no escape.

Many of the ancients who supposed that they had been circumspect and observed their duty, were deceived hereby.<sup>3</sup> Some were lulled into a careless sleep, so that they paid no heed to themselves or to their vocation; others were brought to despair of the divine truth; others were drawn away totally from God. Some died a spiritual death; others died both spiritually and bodily. And some have plunged themselves helter-skelter into the abyss of the disfavor of God, to be punished by Him soul and body, forever.

These things which we tell you are no riddles or blind speeches, for we speak the truth, or the Word of God must be false. But as the Word of God cannot lie, what we have said is certain and infallible since God in His Word bears witness of it, yea, declares it emphatically and abundantly. Other histories which make mention of this we pass by in silence and dismiss them altogether, because we do not hold them in equal estimation with the Holy Scriptures. It was the world and its lusts that of old caused all the great calamities of which we have spoken. And not only this, but it has also caused thousands who live in various cities, countries, kingdoms, empires, yea, on the face of the whole earth, to mourn, weep, and wail on account of their natural misery as well as on account of their experiencing the wrath of God in their souls because of the magnitude and enormity of the sins perpetrated by them.

It certainly was through worldly lusts that the old world perished, and that Sodom, Gomorrah, Zeboim, and Admah were consumed, overthrown, and totally destroyed by fire from heaven. It was because of lusts that in forty years, through serpents, fire, and other plagues, the wanton and lustful people of Israel perished to the number of over 600,000 in the wilderness. Because of lusts, the mighty maritime cities, Zidon and Tyrus—whose ships were trimmed with embroidered, silken sails from Egypt; whose rowers sat upon benches of ivory; where incalculable riches were bought and sold and, from carnal incentives, almost inconceivable arts practiced—were reduced to a heap of stones and so leveled to the ground that the fishermen stretch out their nets to dry on the rocks upon which these cities stood.

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<sup>3</sup> The following and other misfortunes which were caused by worldly and carnal lusts cannot be numbered. O, that Solomon, the wisest among the children of men, might have known, conquered, and taken care of himself in this respect.

I will not now speak of Jerusalem, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, and other mighty licentious and luxurious cities, which, with all their inhabitants who had in this respect sinned against God, have borne His wrath and felt, to their destruction, the plagues of His afflicting hand; for this would consume too much time.<sup>4</sup> O awful judgments of God! O pernicious worldly-mindedness! O corroding and cankering luxury, that drags after yourself such a train of unspeakable miseries! Help, Lord, that our soul be delivered from all these dangers!

But what danger would there be if none but the open enemies of God and His holy truth were guilty in this matter? What harm could be done if they alone, and no others, would arouse and call down upon themselves the wrath of God? For then every pious and serious soul would beware of their example as of a savage beast, venomous serpent, or deadly basilisk.<sup>5</sup>

But now such is the state of things that many professing Christ—who, as they say, would be glad to be saved; and who, therefore, though they are not truly enlightened, glorify and praise God and His Word with their mouth—show nevertheless (to the seduction of the simple) that the world is their dear friend. Yea the world lies nearest to their heart, since most of their works are directed to its service, that they may thereby partake of its glittering but deceptive reward.

Hence arises that shameful and vast commerce which extends far beyond the sea into other parts of the world (see Ezekiel 27),<sup>6</sup> but which notwithstanding cannot satisfy those who love it. On the contrary, it brings great danger, that that which has already been gotten may be lost, others defrauded, and they themselves, both in soul and body, stripped and robbed of their possessions.

Numerous large, expensive, and ornamented houses, countryseats of splendid and towering architecture, parks magnificent as a paradise, and other embellished pleasure-grounds—which are seen on every hand—indicate this love of the world in no small degree. Da. 4:29-30

The wearing of clothes from foreign countries,<sup>7</sup> whether of foreign materials, uncommon colors, or of

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<sup>4</sup> See Josephus on the Jewish wars; also Egesippus, Eusebius, and Pamphilus.

<sup>5</sup> [Ed. note] A mythical reptile that could kill someone by just looking at them.

<sup>6</sup> [Ed. note] The author may be referring to the fact that some Dutch Mennonites were stockholders in the Dutch East India Company, called by some “the first multinational corporation,” the first company to offer stock, and (arguably) the first megacorporation.

<sup>7</sup> [Ed. note] At that time, foreign-made clothes would have been more costly and mainly for the upper class. Today, in

strange fashions as change in the course of time according to the custom of the openly worldly-minded (which are as changeable as the moon), and which custom is followed by many humble and seemingly plain people, confirms greatly what we have before said about loving the world. Ge. 35:2; Ze. 1:8; Is. 3:16-24

The giving and attending great dinners, lavish banquets, and wedding-feasts (though one may never be found in taverns or tippling-houses), where everything is in profusion, and where the beneficent gifts of the Lord that should not be used otherwise than with great thankfulness (and of which a portion naturally belongs to the poor) are squandered and consumed without the least necessity, even by those who are considered sober and temperate. This is an irrefutable evidence of a sensual and wanton heart, and proves also that those who have much to do with these things cannot be free from blame of living after the flesh. Such a carnal life certainly has no promise of salvation. On the contrary, many severe threatenings of the wrath and displeasure of God—nay, of eternal damnation—are recorded in the blessed pages of the Word of God, which contains nothing but the truth. Es. 1:3-8; Da. 5:1-3; Lu. 12:19,20; 16:19

O how different is this from the life of a true Christian, who has forsaken himself and his lusts. How great the step that is between their walk and that of the holy martyrs, who delivered up not only their carnal desires, but also their bodies and lives, unto death for the Lord's sake! But how great a difference will also be between the two classes afterwards. The former, having had their good things in this life, shall be shut out from the true, heavenly riches. But the latter, because they have love to God, and have renounced and abandoned their possessions (which might have led them into sin), shall be admitted to the true enjoyment of the heavenly riches and pleasures, and that forever and ever. Mal. 3:18 Here they shall obtain what is recorded concerning the end of the luxurious rich man and that of poor Lazarus: that the rich man, when he saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, while he himself was in hell, received this answer to his doleful lamentations: "Son, remember, that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." Lu. 16:25

Nevertheless, these and similar evil examples are constantly presented to our eyes. They are the more pernicious and dangerous for the reason that some worldly-minded people pronounce them to be "non-essentials,"

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the USA, foreign-made clothes from "3<sup>rd</sup>-world" countries are often more economical and are often seen as "cheap, lower class" clothing.

"unimportant" ... and therefore allowable. It is the same with them as with the fruit from the tree of knowledge, which stood in the midst of Paradise, and was pleasant to the eyes, but deadly in the use; for whoever ate of it had to die. Ge. 2:17

O that Satan would show himself as he really is, and that the world, too, might come forth without disguise or mask. Then certainly no one possessing reason would allow himself to be deceived by them. For in Satan nothing would be seen but deadly snares, traps, and murdering daggers for the soul, poisoned arrows wherewith to destroy everything good in man, through unbelief, apostasy from God, impenitent obduracy, and despair. These are followed by a train made up of the fears of hell and horrors of damnation. In the world men would perceive nothing but vanity, mingled with much vexation, sorrow, grief, and misery, and this in such abundance, that if as many tears could be wept over it as there is water in all the sea and all the rivers, yet the weight of the true sorrow that springs from them could not be adequately expressed; for they draw after them not only temporal, but also everlasting miseries.

But, O how lamentable! All this is hid under a beautiful appearance. Satan appears to be a prince or king, and the world a noble princess or queen. The servants and handmaids who follow them as pages and maids of honor appear as cavaliers and ladies, reveling in joy and delight. As regards the soul, however, they are poor and deformed; yea, poorer than beggars, and without the true joy which delights the upright soul in God.<sup>8</sup>

There is, therefore, great danger of being deceived. O, ye upright children of God, be on your guard!<sup>9</sup> Let your simplicity be coupled with prudence. Your faith as well as your life are the targets. If Satan gain the mastery over you, your precious faith—which has been commended to your keeping as dearly as your soul—is ruined. If ye are overcome by the world it will soon put an end to your

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8 It is a very lamentable fact that the things loaded with danger are not as they appear, and appear not as they really are. Is not the fish caught with a bait in which is concealed the hook? Are not the birds ensnared in the net in which berries or grains of corn are scattered for them to eat? Certainly! Is it to be wondered then, that blind, carnal, and worldly-minded men are deceived and led into perdition by the wiles of Satan and the alluring lusts of a deceitful world?

9 Meanwhile the prudent knight and valiant champion of Christ must be on his guard and constantly in arms so that he may neither by the one nor by the other be diverted from his noble watch over his soul, which has been entrusted to him, and thus be led away and cast, either in soul or body, or according to both, into the direful abyss of perdition.

Christian and virtuous life, without which latter the best of faith is of no avail. Watch, therefore, my dear friends, equally well for both, for the one is as important as the other. Faith without the corresponding life, or the life without the faith, can, will, and may not avail before God. They are like two witnesses who must agree, and of whom the one cannot stand or be received without the other.

Knowing then that we must care for both, there remains nothing for us but to do it. However, this work must certainly not only be begun, but also finished, according to the example of the steadfast martyrs of God. This finishing—whether it be brought about in a natural or a violent manner according as liberty or persecution brings about—we must comfort ourselves, since it is certain that the crown is not to be found in the beginning or in the middle, but at the end.<sup>10</sup>

But as necessary as it is to finish well, so necessary it is also to begin well, and, having begun, to go on well; for without a good beginning and a good progress it is impossible to attain to a good end.

We speak to you, then, most beloved in the Lord, who have begun with us, received the same faith with us, and with us as a token of this have been baptized.

Surely we have made a vow to the Lord, which we cannot recall, as David sings: “Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High.” Ps. 50:14

We have, through faith, received Christ, the Son of God, as our Prophet, Priest, King, Shepherd, Friend, and Bridegroom; and in this we must go on and grow stronger. Paul teaches this to us, saying: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught.” Co. 2:6-7 Hereby we have come from the darkness of ignorance to the true light of knowledge, which we are commanded to keep in perpetual remembrance. In this direction tend the words: “But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.” He. 10:32 In short: “Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” Ph. 3:16. “Building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life . . . 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 our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” Ju. 20-21,24-25, Is. 40:30,31; Ph. 4:13

10 O that this would be considered, as it should!

We would now commend you, beloved brethren and sisters, to the Lord and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. Our work, which has been done for your benefit, is now finished in this respect. That you may make good use of it is our friendly desire. Remember us always in your prayers, until we depart this life (Philippians 1:23) that God may be gracious unto us now and in eternity. We hope, on our part, to do the same for you. O that God would grant that we all, without one missing, might behold one another face to face in the kingdom of God! 1 Co. 13:12

Meanwhile we rejoice in the salvation of the Lord. It sometimes seems to us as if Heaven had come down upon earth, or that we were ascending from earth to heaven. 2 Co. 12:1-12 Or, that we, who are still among men, held communion with God and His holy angels; or that eternal heavenly joy and glory were offered to us; nay, that we had a foretaste of those things which mortal eye hath never seen, nor ear heard, nor heart experienced in this life.<sup>11</sup>

We walk no longer upon earth with our thoughts; nevertheless, we are still encompassed by a cloud of earth, a body of clay, a heavy load of the soul. O, that we were free from it, and that our soul, liberated from this load, might return to God in heaven—her true origin!—like a freed dove which has been confined in a strange place returns to her nest and abode. But we must wait for this until the time comes that God has appointed.

Let us then be patient together, most beloved in the Lord, till the day come, which, if we remain faithful unto the end, will assuredly bring us that which we here wait for in hope. Then the tears, which we—sighing and longing for the highest salvation of God—have wept here shall surely be wiped away from our eyes. Then shall we no longer see through a glass, darkly, but face to face. Then shall the heavenly be shown us no longer in thought or in spirit, but it shall be given us, and we shall be made participants of it by experience alone, in truth and in deed. O great and precious subject! We can go no further: our reason cannot comprehend it; our earthly tongue cannot express it!

Yours very affectionally in the Lord,

*TH. J. VAN BRAGHT*

Dort, July 25, 1659

11 These things can appropriately be understood to have been caused by meditation and holy contemplation; and in like manner the passage: “For our conversation is in heaven.” Ph. 3:20