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Prophecy and Irony

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Prophecy and Irony

Surprise! That's what the Lord sometimes gives his people. Surprise is a form of irony, irony is a form of aesthetics, and the aesthetic in both God and man is ineradicable. The man who is truly wise is always ready for God's surprises, not prepared perhaps, but ready.

Dr. Peter Steen, of Christian Educational Services, Pittsburgh, Pa., spoke last September to Dordt College students and faculty on the presence of Daniel in the book of Revelation and the ironies on God's Word.

Biblical apocalyptic literature contains both prophecy and irony. The prophet Daniel, said Steen, may be seen through the lens of the kaleidoscopic wisdom of kings. Ezekiel, and Solomon.

The beasts in the book of Revelation reflect the horn of Daniel 7. Revelation 13 and 14 command the reader to "have the mind of wisdom" by taking heed to the Daniel who had dreams and interpreted them. Jesus came as the latter day Daniel.

The key to Daniel's presence in Revelation, said Steen, is the *lamb*. The word *lion* is to be read as *lamb*, the Lamb who achieved victory through death.

Christians, said Steen, must follow the Lamb who was slain and made alive. The Lamb is not overcome; He overcomes. Those who would destroy the world destroy themselves. This irony is expressed in Daniel 7 where the little horn wages war. God's people are overcome by the anti-Christ; in Revelation the beast overcomes the saints.

In the war of Christ versus Satan it isn't always easy to know who is doing what, but God is always in control. That is the irony—God is always wiser than the serpent.

God's irony is expressed in many ways. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," we read. The punishment fits the crime. If a person thinks he can get away with something, he will get it back, often ironically. Irony is an interpretive principle of aesthetics, and God is aesthetic.

In aesthetics obviousness is sin. So, said Steen, man must be wise, knowing the future is not obvious. God uses irony to test Christians, so the wise man is unshakable. "With God there is no kitsch. Even God's enemies are done in with class," said Steen, because they never know when He is going to "get them." Look at the irony in the book of Esther: Haman hangs on his own gallows. People who set out to trap Daniel themselves fall into the lion's den.

The wise, said Steen, realize God is always teaching, and the wise live by faith. It is necessary to understand this if we want to persevere in national, international, and "big time" public witnessing. We must export light. We are not to stay in small communities but rather we must export our light to the world. We must share.

Revelation gives us what we need to persevere during this big time. The struggle is not individual only; it is among nations. In order to risk and to walk in faith, "we have to know what's up." We must look at the way God educated his people. He presents challenges of faith to maximize our faith, yet the Christian always knows that God is in command.

Steen spoke of end time, the mystery of the burning up of creation. The earth's burning up he might understand, he said, but the beautiful heavens-----why? Surprise, however, will be ours when God makes his new heaven and new earth. It is a mystery to

us, but our God deals in many mysteries.

Until then we are called as Christians to venture on into the great unknown. Only with faith and trust can we venture forward in certainty—to witness not merely to individuals but to the public everywhere. We are in big time, Steen repeated frequently.

Persecution will increase, to the point of life itself possibly; yet only through death will we be victorious. This is the ultimate irony.

For these reasons, said Steen, Dordt must train its students for the whole world. Dordt must also bring the world into its halls in an experimental way. Dordt must take care not to seal students off from the world and to

destroy them by preventing this exposure to the world in controlled fashion.

The Lord will push us into the great war by forcing us to witness; we cannot shrink in worldwide outreach. Daniel and Revelation provide the background with recurrent themes of irony. God's irony is such that what we seek to protect we may destroy.

This irony, Steen concluded, is no laughing matter. We live in serious times, big time. Christ suffered; we have to suffer with Him.

"Must we be carried to the skies / On flowery beds of ease? / While others fought to win the prize / And sailed through bloody seas?"