INCULTURATION

A history lesson.

BY ROBERT SCHERRER

The pupils in Miss Becky Calhoun's Sunday school class trudged behind her on the meandering path that led to the top of Culp's Hill. The sun beat down from a cloudless sky, and Becky stopped briefly to set down her walking stick and adjust her sunbonnet. At the end of the ragged line of students, Jedediah tripped on a root and bumped into Caleb, who turned around and pushed back. "Jedediah, Caleb, behave yourselves!" said Becky. She raised her walking stick. "Do you both need a rap on the head?"

"No, Miss Calhoun," Jedediah said, staring at the ground.

"We'll be good," said Caleb sheepishly.

At the top of the hill, Becky's students gathered in a rough semicircle around an outcropping of pink granite that the locals called the Rooster's Comb. Becky perched on the rock, facing her students. From here she could see all the way to the bend of Waverill Creek and, on the far side of the creek, the small settlement of Pinewood Gulch. Becky smoothed her red-and-white checked gingham dress and began the lesson.

"Pupils," said Becky, "remember our discussion from last week. The Bible was written a long time ago, and many of the things we take for granted today did not exist at the time of the prophets and the patriarchs. Can anyone give me an example of one of our modern inventions that was unknown back in the days of the Bible? Yes, Laura."

"They did not have railroads back then," said Laura.

"That's correct. The railroad is our most important means of transportation, but it did not exist in Biblical times. And conversely, some of the things discussed in the Bible are not in common use today." Becky pointed her walking stick at Abner, who was whispering at the back. "Abner, can you think of an example?"

Abner fidgeted. "Uh, um, scrolls? Parchment scrolls? We don't use those anymore."

Becky smiled. "Yes, Abner. That's a good example. The people in the Bible wrote on parchment scrolls, but we do not." She took off her sunbonnet and adjusted the pin in her auburn hair. "We will begin with Chapter 5 of First Thessalonians, and conclude with the parable of the good shepherd. I will assume that we are all familiar with shepherds. Now who would like to begin reading for us?"

"I would," said Laura. She opened her King James Bible and began. "The day of the

Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." Laura frowned.

"What's wrong, Laura?" asked Becky.

"I'm confused, Miss Calhoun. What is a thief?"

"A thief," said Becky. "Does anybody know what a thief is?" No answer. "A thief is someone who takes something that does not belong to him."

"But that makes no sense," said Abner. "If you wanted something, you could just make it in your fabrikator."

"Oh, I see why you're confused," Becky spread her arms wide. "They did not have fabrikators in Biblical times. And we do not have thieves anymore."

"Miss Calhoun, I still don't understand," said Laura. "It says 'a thief in the night.' What is 'night'?"

"Night," Becky tapped her chin. "Of course, you're all too young to remember. Before they launched the second Sun, it would get very dark once every day, when the Sun dropped below the horizon. That was called 'night.' A few of the students nodded, but others gave her quizzical looks. "Let's continue reading. Caleb, you may read next."

Caleb opened his Bible. "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others." Caleb squirmed and glanced up at Becky.

"What does it mean to 'sleep'?"

"Sleep," said Becky.

She chuckled. "Even I

am too young to remember that. At night, back when there was night, people would lie down, close their eyes and become unconscious for about six to ten hours."

The students giggled. "That sounds very silly, Miss Calhoun," said Jedediah. "Did people really do that?"

"Yes, indeed," said Becky. "We eliminated it with genetic engineering, so nobody need waste such a large portion of the day." Some of the students muttered, but Becky continued. "Let us discuss the meaning of this text. We are instructed to be vigilant, because no one knows the day or the hour when he will die."

"I had an uncle who died," said Caleb.

"Liar," said Jedediah.

"He did too die," insisted Caleb.

"Did not."

"Did too."

"Did not."

Becky smacked the granite with her walking stick. "Silence!" she said. "Jedediah, it's true that death has become rare since we developed antagath and similar drugs. But even though we will never get old, we will all die some day." Caleb smirked at Jedediah.

"I will read our next passage," said Becky. "Please pay attention." She looked down at her Bible. "He that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep." The students began to murmur. "Who can tell me, what is a shepherd?" asked Becky.

Several students shouted at once: "I know, I know!"

"Laura, what is a shepherd?"

Laura grinned. "You are."

Becky lifted her walking stick and pointed the rounded crook at Laura. "Correct, Laura. And what is a sheep?"

"We are!" shouted all of the students in unison.

"That's right!" said Becky. She smiled at her flock and closed her Bible. "I think we've read enough for today. Let us return to town."

"Miss Calhoun, can we take the railroad back?" asked Caleb.

"Certainly," answered Becky. She gave a mental command, and a shimmering yellow rail appeared at her feet. One by one, the sheep climbed onto the force field and slid, whooping and hollering, down the hill and back home. ■

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