

Endtime Signs Of Opposition To God

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Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.
Professor of Theology, Andrews University

Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Forum:

The volume of responses received from the last ENDTIME ISSUES (No. 19) surpassed my fondest expectations. It is evident that many of you were encouraged by the story of the providential way in which the Lord led Pastor David Hill to accept the Sabbath and join our SDA church. A good number of you also emailed me messages expressing appreciation for the Bible study on the prevailing deception of spiritualism. I believe that this is a very important endtime issue which we need to address more fully in the future.

I was hoping to post Pastor David Hill's personal testimony, but I have not received it yet. I called him a couple of times, but there was no answer. He may be out of town. I will be sure to share Pastor Hill's testimony as soon as I receive it.

Pastor Jeddy Hooker of the Newark SDA Church, gave me a brief report about the special meeting which took place at his church last Sabbath afternoon, June 5, 1999. The meeting was well attended not only by Adventist members, but also by former members of the Church of the Living God as well as by four current bishops of the latter church. One of the bishops in attendance was from Surinam, a South American country.

The meeting was presided by the Elder Harold Lee, President of the Columbia Union Conference, and by the President, Secretary, and Treasurer of the New Jersey Conference. Contrary to what I had been told and wrote in my previous newsletter, only Pastor David Hill was accepted into full membership of the SDA church, since he has received Bible studies on our fundamental SDA beliefs. His members who were present for the special occasion, will be accepted into membership at a later date after receiving an adequate preparation.

Pastor Hooker informed me by phone that this coming Sunday, June 13, there will be a special meeting at the New Jersey Conference office presided by Elder Lee, President of the Columbia Union. The purpose of the meeting is to dialogue with over 30 bishops of the Church of the Living God who have shown an interest for accepting the Sabbath and joining our SDA church. Pastor Hooker told me that a special meeting is planned for September which will be attended by a larger number of church leaders from the Church of the Living God and other churches.

Pastor Hill requested copies of my latest book THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE to donate to all his bishop-friends who have become interested in the study of the Sabbath. To this end I sent him a complete complimentary case of 40 copies. In accordance with Pastor Hill's instructions, I have also mailed some copies of the same book to his bishop-friends overseas. Let us pray that the Lord may richly bless Pastor's Hill endeavors to share the new found truths with his fellow bishops and church members.

Update on Pastor Allen Stanfield

Another note of interest is the three pages testimonial I received from Pastor Allen R. Stanfield of the First Baptist Church, in Lucerne Valley, California. In ENDTIME ISSUES No. 15, I told you that Pastor Stanfield attended the Sabbath Seminar I presented on February 12-13 at the La Sierra University SDA Church. On Friday evening someone introduced Pastor Stanfield to me and I gave him a complimentary copy of my latest book THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE.

In his report Pastor Stanfield relates how he became interested about the Sabbath. He writes: " I remember years ago having a copy of the book FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY by Samuele Bacchiocchi. The book was given to me in a box of books by a Sunday-keeper when he found I would be studying for the ministry. I began exploring the book, thinking that I had found the "Golden Egg" documenting the authority for Sunday Worship. Instead I found it leading me in a direction I refused to go. After all I was studying to document the legitimacy of Sunday Worship and I did not want to be confused by 'facts.' But now [years later] I found myself willing to seek the truth."

"I searched for the book but I could not find it. I called the Seventh-day Adventist Book Store in La Sierra, California to ask about Bacchiocchi's book. I was informed that Bacchiocchi was scheduled to speak at La Sierra Church University Church that very next weekend. We attended with some friends and one family from our congregation. Our friends sought out the pastor of the La Sierra Church whose mouth fell open when I was introduced as the pastor of a First Baptist Church. He said: 'You mean a Sundaykeeping church?' "

The pastor later brought Dr. Bacchiocchi to us where we visited near the back of the church. . . . Dr. Bacchiocchi made a gift of his book THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE which he autographed as we visited. I, a Sundaykeeping, non-Adventist pastor was proud to be given a pre-sale copy. I was excited as I shared the book with my people and said we had a copy before our Seventh-day Adventist friends, around the corner, had an opportunity to purchase one."

This book so impressed Pastor Stanfield that he later ordered a case for the families of his congregation. He writes: "We (the church staff, their families, and others both inside and outside the church) decided to study and pray for a period of six weeks before taking any action (some coveting to fast at least one day a week). We also agreed that we would individually search the Scriptures and pray without sharing or trying to influence one another."

After six weeks of diligent Bible study the church met for a special business meeting on Wednesday, April 21, to vote on whether or not to become a seventh-day Sabbathkeeping church. The overwhelming majority voted to accept the Sabbath and to move their church services from Sunday to the Sabbath. "All but one Sunday School Teacher," writes Stanfield, "became Sabbath School Teachers. Praise the Lord." On Saturday, April 24, the First Baptist Church of Lucerne Valley held its services on the Sabbath for the first time.

What I found surprising in Pastor Stanfield's report, is the favorable attitude of his Southern Baptist Director with whom he shared his new found conviction together with some Sabbath literature. Pastor Stanfield writes: "although this was his [Southern Baptist Director] first encounter with a Southern Baptist Church wanting to be Sabbathkeepers, he [the Director] would not have any problem with our continuing in the Southern Baptist Association and living our conviction to worship on the Sabbath."

The rediscovery of the Sabbath by some Protestant churches is a unique development of our time. In the next issue I plan to report about the rediscovery of the Sabbath by some Methodist and Pentecostal churches. At a time when the Sabbath is being attacked in an unprecedented way by the Pope, Sundaykeeping scholars, and former Sabbatarians, it is encouraging to know that numerous Christian churches and groups are rediscovering the Sabbath. Within the last 30/40 years over 300 seventh-day Sabbathkeeping churches and groups have come into existence. One day I may write a book on REDISCOVERING THE SABBATH.

COMMENTS ON THE SABBATH SCHOOL LESSON: "Encounter" - June 5-11

This week lesson focuses on Satan's attempts to tempt Christ to sin and on what we can learn from Jesus' experience in resisting temptation. Unfortunately I have not

addressed this important subject in any of the 15 books I have authored. This means that I will limit myself to share few simple extemporaneous reflections, rather than an in-depth analysis of the subject done previously.

The First Temptation of Eve

It is enlightening to compare Christ's temptation with Eve's temptation. In both cases there are THREE SIGNIFICANT COMPONENTS to which 1 John 2:16 alludes: "The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life." These three elements were present in Eve's temptation. The lust of the flesh, that is, an inordinate desire to satisfy appetite, is reflected in her confession that "the tree was good for food." The lust of the eye is noticeable in the woman's admission that the tree "was a delight to the eyes." The pride of life is present in the statement that "the tree was to be desired to make one wise." Temptations to sin are inspired by the deceptive promise to satisfy our sensual perception: it tastes good, it looks good, it makes me feel good, so it must be right.

The method used by the Tempter was to sow seeds of distrust and unbelief in Eve's mind by questioning the validity of God's instruction and treating it as an infringement upon their liberty. "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" (Gen 3:1). Then he went on assaulting directly by reassuring her: "You will not die" (Gen 3:4). On the contrary, "You will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). Eve yielded to this temptation through DECEPTION, Adam joined in the transgression through AFFECTION for Eve (Gen 3:13-17; 1 Tim 2:14).

The tempter approached Eve presumably because he thought she was susceptible to doubt since she had not been instructed directly from God. Moreover she could effectively reach the heart of Adam.

The Biblical account suggests that the nature of the first temptation consisted of doubt, unbelief, and pride. These three factors led to the first fatal disobedience. Eve doubted God's goodness, she disbelieved His warning, she coveted the knowledge not intended for her. The first sin manifested itself in the MIND as unbelief, distrust in God, in the WILL as the desire to be like God, in the HEART as an unholy satisfaction to eat God's forbidden fruit.

Essentially the first temptation was the inordinate desire to make self rather than God the ultimate concern. The external act of partaking of the fruit only served to give formal expression to the internal desire to prefer self to God.

The first temptation suggests that temptations appeal to legitimate needs and desires. Sin occurs when these desires are fulfilled in a way contrary to God's will. This happens when people place the fulfillment of their wills before the will of God. In this area Jesus serves as our perfect example, because He refused to satisfy His needs or fulfill his desires in any way that would violate the will of His Father.

Christ's First Temptation

In many ways Christ's first temptation is similar to that of Eve. Like in the case of Eve, Christ's first temptation was an appeal to satisfy appetite (not by partaking of the forbidden fruit) by turning stones into bread (Matt 4:1-4). The intensity of Christ's temptation was much greater than that of Eve, since the appeal to satisfy appetite was made after 40 days of fasting.

Christ's first temptation was a test both of the reality of His incarnation and of the nature of His kingdom. His fasting and hunger reveal that Christ was a real human being who was not using divine powers to overcome His human difficulties. His continued commitment to fulfill God's will even in the face of intense hunger, shows that His kingdom was to be of the Spirit and not of the world (cf. John 18:36).

Christ's Second Temptation

Like in the case of Eve, Christ's second temptation appealed to the "lust of the eye." In the case of Eve, it was the forbidden fruit that was "a delight to the eye." In the case of Christ it was the temptation to delight the eyes of the Jews through a spectacular jump from the Temple parapet (Matt 4:5-6). To throw oneself unnecessarily into danger means to act presumptuously, and not to trust God's protection. Christ recognized the implications of the temptation and responded: "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (Matt 4:7). Christ chose to reveal his Messiahship not by astonishing "the eyes" of His people, but by the working of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

Christ's Third Temptation

Like in the case of Eve, Christ's third temptation, appealed to the "pride of life." In the case of Eve, Satan appealed to her pride by offering her the possibility of becoming "wiser." In the case of Christ, Satan appealed to His sense of pride by offering Him the possibility of becoming the ruler of this world, simply by falling down and worshipping him (Matt 4:8-9).

This temptation threaten the very purpose of Christ's coming into the world, namely to restore the Kingdom of God, by leading men and women to accept God's sovereignty in their own hearts. Satan offered to Christ the possibility of achieving this goal by accepting and worshipping him. To do so, however, it would mean to become the ruler of a sinful and lost world. But Jesus had come not to rule a sinful world, but to redeem men and women in order for them to become citizens of God's eternal Kingdom. Satan's way, still followed by many, required no suffering and death. It is the way of living self-centered lives, in open rebellion against God. But Jesus chose God's way, which required His atoning suffering and death to expiate the sins of penitent sinners. This is the way that leads to God's centered living, in harmony to His will.

The Relationship Between Temptation and Testing

A distinction ought to be made between God's testing and Satan's temptation. Testing is the ordering of circumstances by God to reveal one's allegiance to Him and to fortify believers against sin. Satan can turn a testing experience into a temptation. The prohibition to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a test designed by God for testing the obedience of Adam and Eve. Satan made use of this test to lure them into disbelief and disobedience.

"Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt 4:1). The leading of Christ into the wilderness to test his fidelity was ordered by God. The enticement for Christ to use His supernatural powers simply to satisfy his intense anger came from Satan. The inducement to worship Satan in order to become the rule of this world was permitted by God, but it was carried out by the Tempter. God may utilize trying circumstances to test our fidelity and to deepen our commitment to Him.

We are told to pray "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (Matt 6:13). To me this means that we should pray that God will not order circumstances which Satan can use to his advantage to tempt us to disobey. It also means that we must ask daily the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to meet the daily temptations. God permits Satan to tempt us, but He has promised that "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way to escape, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Cor 10:13). God allows the way INTO temptation, but He makes the way OUT of temptation.

How to Deal with Temptation

Temptations are a reality that no one can escape. "Temptations to sin are sure to come" Luke 17:1). To deal with temptations successfully, it is important first of all to follow Christ's advice in correcting the source of temptations within ourselves. "If your

hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away from you. . . . An if your eye cause you to sin, pluck it out and throw it from you" (Matt 18:8,9). These hyperboles show the need to deal with the temptation problem at the root, by eliminating its causes.

This process involves gaining a clearer understanding of our inner motives, desires, and habits, asking the Holy Spirit to cleanse us from whatever causes us to stumble. It involves also gaining self-control through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

When tempted we must follow Christ's example, by appealing to Scripture. The more we allow Scripture to shape our values and to develop our moral convictions, the greater will be our capacity to resist temptations. Most important is the reassurance that as believers we can count on the understanding of Christ, our sympathetic High Priest, "who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb 4:15).

ENDTIME SIGNS OF OPPOSITION TO GOD - Part 2

In the 17th installment of ENDTIME ISSUES we considered two of the Endtime signs of human rebellion against God, given by Christ and clarified by New Testament writers: (1) Messianic Pretenders, and (2) the Antichrist. After a temporary interruption during which we addressed two timely topics of the Sabbath School lesson, namely, the state of the dead and the deception of spiritualism, we wish to return to the study of the endtime signs of opposition to God. In this installment we focus on two specific signs: (1) Apostasy, and (2) the Evildoer

THE APOSTASY

Closely related to the appearance of the antichrist, there are two other joint endtime signs given by Paul in the so-called "little apocalypse" of 2 Thessalonians 2. These are the coming of the great apostasy and the appearance of the "man of lawlessness." We shall consider these two signs in the sequence given since they are casually and temporally interrelated.

To appreciate the significance of these two precursory Advent signs, it is important to understand the context in which they were given. Paul had heard that the Thessalonians were being unsettled in their minds and habits by some persons who taught that "the day of the Lord has come" (2 Thess 2:2). This teaching caused excitement and unrest, leading some to stop working altogether, since they believed that the Lord had already come (2 Thess 3:6-15).

To correct this deceptive teaching and the disorders it had caused, Paul reminds the church of what he taught them orally, namely that Christ "will not come, unless the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed" (2 Thess 2:3). The two events mentioned by Paul deserve our consideration because they are specifically linked to the Parousia.

Apostasy in New Testament Times

The first pre-Advent sign given by Paul is "the rebellion"-a translation of the Greek "apostasia" from which our English word "apostasy" is derived. This word is used in the New Testament both as a noun (Acts 21:21) and as a verb (1 Tim 4:1; Heb 3:12), to denote departure from the faith, falling away from the true God.

In His Olivet Discourse Christ also predicted a future apostasy in the following words: "And then many will fall away, and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold" (Matt 24:10-12; cf. 24:24). Apostasy is here closely related to the appearance of false prophets (the antichrist discussed above), since the latter are often the cause of the former.

The End-time apostasy predicted by Christ was recognized as being fulfilled in New Testament times. The author of Hebrews speaks of those who were committing "apostasy" (Heb 6:6) by spurning the Son of God (Heb 10:29). John sadly speaks of those members who "went out from us, but they were not of us" (1 John 2:19). He views their apostasy as the fulfillment of the expected antichrist (1 John 2:18).

Paul warns Timothy about the apostasy of "the last days" of "the last times": "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith . . ." (1 Tim 4:1). "But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, . . . holding the form of religion but denying the power of it" (2 Tim 3:1,5).

The expression "the last days," as noted in chapter 2, designates in the New Testament the entire period between the First and Second Advents. Paul already says the apostasy of the last days taking place in his own time, for he urges Timothy to avoid those who "oppose the truth, men of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith" (2 Tim 3:8).

The Endtime Apostasy

While Paul recognized that the End-time apostasy was "already at work" (2 Thess 2:7), he makes it abundantly clear that "the apostasy," that is, the well-known pre-Advent rebellion, had not taken place yet. The latter is indicated by the use in Greek of the definite article, "the apostasy," and by the statement that this event must occur before ("first"-2 Thess 2:3) the Second Advent.

The rebellion "already at work" in Paul's time was not the final, End-time, well-known apostasy about which he had instructed the church orally (2 Thess 2:5), but only the prelude to it. The Apostle recognized that apostasy was already occurring, but he believed and taught that there was yet to come a final, climactic manifestation of it just before the Return of Christ. This final apostasy is linked with the appearance of the "man of lawlessness" whom we shall soon consider.

Apostasy Today. Is the final, apocalyptic apostasy predicted by Paul taking place in Christendom today? The earlier study of the signs of the worldwide evangelization and of the antichrist have indicated that twentieth-century Christianity has experienced not only massive gains across the Third World but also massive apostasies in the Western and Communist worlds. In Europe and North America, according to the WORLD CHRISTIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA, "net defections from Christianity-converts to other religions or to irreligion-are now running to 1,820,500 former Christians a year."

The total number of apostasies, however, is much higher if the meaning of "apostasy" is broadened to include not only formal defectors from the Christian faith but also nominal Christians who are indifferent toward God. The latter include the large number of Christians, especially in Western Europe, who view their Christian religion primarily as a cultural heritage. They do not feel committed to basic Christian beliefs or practices. In fact, some of the surveys cited earlier indicate that in some Western countries there are between 60 and 70 percent of "Christians" who do not even believe in the existence of God.

The Extent of Apostasy. The extent of this practical (de facto) apostasy is hard to measure statistically. One reason is that churches generally do not remove from their registers the names of those indifferent members who question basic Biblical beliefs and who rarely attend church. This is particularly true of the State churches where people become members at birth by baptism and their names remain in the church register until their funeral service, unless a cancellation of membership is specifically requested, which seldom happens.

I asked Father Masi, a parish priest of a Roman church (a classmate at the Pontifical Gregorian University), "How many members do you have in your parish?" He sadly replied: "Well, in our parish register there are over 16,000 names, but those who

attend Mass services on Sunday are only between 150 and 200." The situation of Father Masi's parish is not unusual, but is rather reflective of much of Western Christianity. It represents a clear case of practical apostasy.

Some Causes of Apostasy

Liberalism. Various factors contribute to this massive apostasy. One of them is undoubtedly the spirit of the antichrist, manifested, as noted earlier, in liberal religious teachers who deny basic Biblical beliefs. Paul warned believers about this development when he wrote that prior to Christ's "appearing . . . the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Tim 4:1, 3-4 NIV).

Secular Quasi-Religions. Another important factor is the meteoric rise in our century of secular quasi-religions such as secularism, materialism, communism, and humanism. The World Christian Encyclopedia sadly acknowledges that "no-one in 1900 expected the massive defections from Christianity that subsequently took place in Western Europe due to secularism, in Russia and later in Eastern Europe due to Communism, and in the Americas due to materialism."

These various systems have grown enormously during this century. The same encyclopedia reports: "From a minuscule presence in 1900, a mere 0.2% of the globe, these systems have mushroomed to 20.8% of the globe by 1980. They are today increasing at the extraordinary rate of 8.5 million new converts each year and are likely to reach one billion adherents by the year 1984." These statistics reflect the rate of apostasies in the eighties when the WORLD CHRISTIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA was published (1982). Since then, the rate of apostasies have increased to the point that social analysts speak of Western Europe as living in the post-Christian era.

The said reality is that "a large percentage of their members are the children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren of persons who in their lifetimes were practicing Christians." The encyclopedia concludes by noting: "No Christian strategist in 1900 had envisaged such a massive rate of defection from Christianity within its 19th-century heartlands."

Conclusion. The unprecedented apostasy of our time, which is occurring in the very heartlands of historic Christianity, could well be the final or at least the prelude to the final pre-Advent apostasy predicted by Christ and Paul. As materialism, secularism, and humanism lead many Christians to become "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it" (2 Tim 3:4-5), we need to pray for grace and wisdom to continue to stand fast in the faith, while "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

THE EVILDOER

The great pre-Advent apostasy is linked by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2 to the appearance of "the man of lawlessness": "that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed" (2 Thess 2:3). By linking the two together, Paul suggests that the man of lawlessness will arise out of apostasy. Presumably his appearance will cause apostasy to intensify, since the Apostle says, "The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thess 2:9-10).

Characteristics of the Evildoer

Before attempting an identification of this eschatological personage whom Paul calls "the man of lawlessness," it is important to understand his main characteristics as given in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10.

1. He will come out of the great pre-Advent apostasy since, we noticed, his appearance is tied to the coming of "the rebellion" (v. 3).
2. He is a figure in whom rebellion and sin crystallize as indicated by his designation as "the man of lawlessness (2 Thess 2:3). This evildoer will be the incarnation of evil as Jesus was the incarnation of good.
3. He is "the son of perdition" (2 Thess 2:3), a Semitic phrase (John 17::12; Is 57:4) used to denote his ultimate fate: destined to "eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess 19).
4. He is the adversary of God who will attempt to abolish "every so-called god or object of worship" in favor of himself (2 Thess 2:4). In his reckless audacity, he will go as far as to take "his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess 2:4). Presumably this means that he will attempt to usurp the honor and worship which are properly rendered only to God.
5. He will be "revealed" after a certain restrainer is "out of the way" (2 Thess 2:6-7). The verb "will be revealed," which is used three times (vv. 3, 6, 8) in deliberate contrast to the revelation of Jesus Christ (2 Thess 1:7), points to a definite time when the veil will be removed so that the true nature and work of the Evildoer will be disclosed. Both the verb "will be revealed" and the phrase "what is restraining him" imply a prior, secret existence of the Evildoer before his manifestation.
6. The "coming" (parousia) of the Evildoer is presented by Paul as a parody of the Second Coming of Christ. Like Christ, the Evildoer has a "coming" (2 Thess 2:9), a "revelation" (v. 3), a gospel which, however, "is false" (v. 11), and a claim to exclusive worship (v. 4). In imitation of Christ he will support his claim with "all power and with pretended signs and wonders" (v. 9). As Christ was empowered by God, so this Evildoer will be empowered by Satan (v. 9).
7. The career of the Evildoer will be terminated at the Coming of Christ, who "will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming" (2 Thess 2:8).

Old Testament Background of the Evildoer

The above characteristics of the Evildoer pose an important question: From where did Paul learn about this eschatological personage? Christ predicted the arising of "false Christs and false prophets" (Matt 24:24) before His Return, but He made no specific mention of a Great Deceiver to appear as a prelude to His Parousia.

It is altogether possible that Paul received this information through special revelation. However, certain linguistic and conceptual similarities between Paul's expression and expressions used in Daniel (7:25; 8:10-13; 11:36-37), Ezekiel (28:1-19), and Isaiah (11:4; 14:3-23) suggest that the Apostle drew, at least in part, his description of the Evildoer from these three Old Testament sources.

Linguistic Similarities. Several linguistic similarities help to clarify this point. Paul's phrase, "who . . . exalts himself against every so-called God . . ." (2 Thess 2:4), appears to be derived from Daniel's description of the anti-God King of the North who "shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god" (Dan 11:36).

Similarly, Paul's expression "he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess 2:4) is possibly drawn from the self-exaltation of the King of Tyre, who said: "I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods" (Ezek 28:2). Paul's description of the lawless one whom "the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of his mouth" (2 Thess 2:8) is strikingly similar to Old Testament prophetic descriptions of the destruction of the wicked by the Messiah: "with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked" (Is 11:4).

Conceptual Similarities. The similarities are not only linguistic but also conceptual. For example, the self-deification and doom of the kings of Babylon (Is 14:3-23) and Tyre (Ezek 28:1-19) find their correspondence in the self-deification and doom of the Evildoer (2 Thess 2:4, 8). A similar correspondence can be seen in the self-exaltation of Daniel's little horn, who "shall speak words against the Most High" but who is "consumed and destroyed" at the end, when the Kingdom "shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High" (Dan 7:225-27).

How could Paul legitimately apply the doom-prophecies of Tyre and Babylon to the appearance and destruction of the End-time Evildoer? His justification is to be found primarily in the typological nature of these prophecies, that is to say, in the fact that they point beyond their immediate historical situation. For example, the divine punishment upon the king of Babylon is described as follows: "The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers, . . . The whole earth is at rest and quiet; they break forth into singing" (Is 14:5, 7).

This description of global judgment, rest, peace, and rejoicing transcends the immediate historical outcome of the downfall of the King of Babylon, and thus it typifies the final retribution and restoration of the Day of the Lord. As William Neil explains: "All of these prophecies found their place in association with the Day of the Lord. This was to mark the complete downfall of all evil and oppression of the Jews and usher in the Golden Age."³²

Historical Outline. The specific historical outline of 2 Thessalonians 2 (namely: power of lawlessness restrained, removal of restrainer, appearance of the lawless one, destruction of the latter by the Coming of Christ) could well have been suggested to Paul by the historical sequence of the prophecy found in Daniel 7. In Daniel, the anti-God "little horn" who "shall speak words against the Most High," arises only after the downfall of the Roman Empire and its fragmentation into ten kingdoms (Dan 7:7-8, 24-25). His career is terminated by the coming of "the Ancient of Days" (Dan 7:22) who destroys him and establishes "an everlasting kingdom" (Dan 7:26, 27).

If Paul was guided in his prediction of pre-Advent events by Daniel's prophetic sequence, then the mysterious "restrainer" (2 Thess 2:6-7) could well be the system of law and order embodied in the Roman government. On repeated occasions Paul had been delivered from angry crowds by the restraining authority of Roman officials (Acts 18:12-16 19:31; 23:23-30). Thus he could speak of the Roman State as being "God's servant for your good" (Rom 13:4).

The restraining function of law and order did not disappear when Rome fell, but is still present today. Paul apparently foresaw a future time when the basic structure of justice would break down-presumably as a result of withdrawal of divine restraining influence-and this would set the stage for the revelation of the man of lawlessness.

Old Testament Typological Prophecies. This attempted reconstruction of the Old Testament background of 2 Thessalonians 2 suggests that Paul presumably derived his prophetic outline of pre-Advent events from some Old Testament prophecies or at least found support in them. Under divine inspiration the Apostle possibly saw in the typology of the kings of Tyre and Babylon, and in the historical sequence of Daniel 7, allusions to a future and final rebellion (led by a Rebel) which would be suppressed by the Coming of Christ.

Paul's prediction of pre-Advent events may then be rooted in Old Testament prophecies and prophetic typologies. This correlation of Old Testament typology and prophecy with New Testament eschatology is not an arbitrary Pauline innovation but is recognized by many scholars as common among apostolic writers. Hans K. LaRondelle rightly calls it "the apostolic principle [which] binds the OT and NT eschatologies together in an organic theological unity and thematic continuity."³³

Mistaken Identifications of the Evildoer

The identification of Paul's eschatological Evildoer has been the happy hunting-ground both of serious scholars and of eccentric theorizers. A brief consideration of some mistaken identifications will help in removing some misconceptions before attempting our identification.

Satan. The Evildoer cannot be identified directly with Satan since his "coming" is "by the activity of Satan" (v. 9). If the Evildoer is empowered by Satan to do mighty acts, then it is difficult to think that Paul intends to identify him directly with Satan himself.

An Emperor. The Evildoer cannot be identified with Nero nor with a line of emperors nor with dictators such as Stalin and Hitler. Though all of these have been manifestations of antichristian thought and action, and thus can be regarded as the forerunners of the End-time Evildoer, none of them have fulfilled the role of the eschatological Rebel by claiming the exclusive worship of themselves, or by counterfeiting the Coming of Christ with "pretended signs and wonders" (2 Thess 2:9), or by being slain by the breath of Christ's mouth at His Return (2 Thess 2:8).

Beast of Revelation. The Evildoer cannot be identified directly with the beast out of the sea of Revelation 13 and 17 because, in spite of some similarities, there are significant differences. A first difference can be seen in their nature. The beast of Revelation 13 is primarily an antichristian politico-religious power (Rev 13:4, 12-15), as indicated by its seven heads and ten horns (Rev 13:1), which are explained to be past and future kings (Rev 17:10, 12). The Evildoer of 2 Thessalonians 2, on the other hand, is essentially a religious personage with no royal characteristics.

A second difference is the duration of their work. The beast is allowed to make war against the saints and to conquer them during a prophetic period of forty-two months (Rev 13:5-7). The Evildoer appears at the End-time, deceives only the unbelievers (2 Thess 2:10), and is soon destroyed by the Coming of Christ (v. 9).

A third difference is the method of their operation. While the beast uses coercion to bludgeon people into its service (Rev 13:7, 15), the Evildoer uses "wicked deception" (2 Thess 2:10). Summing up, we can say that while the beast is portrayed primarily as a politico-religious, antichristian power that will be active during Christian history, the Evildoer is pictured essentially as a religious deceiver who will appear just before Christ's Return.

Identification of the Evildoer

Embodiment of Rebellion. In attempting an identification of "the Man of Lawlessness", dogmatism is not in order. The passage is problematic because of its fragmentary information, due to Paul's assumption of a knowledge of what he had already taught orally. What appears reasonably clear is that Paul predicted the coming of a final, climactic apostasy out of which would arise a personage who will be the supreme embodiment of rebellion against God. He will claim to be God and expect to be worshipped as the only true God.

Empowered by Satan, this Evildoer will perform deceptive miracles and wonders, presumably designed to counterfeit the Coming of Christ. His "wicked deception" will carry away many unbelievers. The career of this eschatological Rebel will not last long because it will be terminated by the Coming of Christ, who "will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing" (2 Thess 2:8).

Person or Principle? Obviously no past historical person matches the characteristics of this unique personage. There is little doubt that his appearance is still future since his career is terminated by the Coming of Christ. The question then is: Who is this Evildoer who is still to come? Is he a human person or a superhuman being or an intensification of the power of evil?

The last option at first appears the most plausible because Paul speaks of "the secret power of lawlessness [which] is already at work" (2 Thess 2:7, NIV). This has led some to conclude that "the coming of the lawless one" (v. 9) is an intensification of the present forces of evil which will grow into a great apostasy and rebellion against God.

Personal Characteristics. The weakness of this interpretation is that it ignores the personal characteristics of this eschatological figure. Not only is he called "the man of lawlessness," "the son of perdition," but also he is described as the one "who opposes" and "exalts himself against every so-called god"; "he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God"; something is "restraining him" now but he will be "revealed in his time" and the "Lord Jesus will slay him" (2 Thess 2:3-6).

All of these personal characterizations cannot be dismissed as abstract personifications because they point unmistakably to a human person. At the same time, there is much in this description which cannot be reduced to a mere human person. For example, someone who exalts himself above every known deity, who usurps the worship, authority and name of God, is more than a mere human being.

This conclusion is further corroborated by the fact that the Evildoer first exists secretly and then is revealed openly when the restrainer is removed (2 Thess 2:6-8). The verb "will be revealed," which is used three times (2 Thess 2:3, 6, 8), as Edmond Hiebert points out, "implies his prior existence on earth, for he will doubtless have been living many years before his manifestation as the man of sin."

Conclusion

Incarnation of Satan. The above observations lead us to conclude that this eschatological Evildoer is a unique, unparalleled personage who presumably combines both human and superhuman characteristics. Before his personal appearance he exists as the power of evil ("the mystery [secret power] of lawlessness"-2 Thess 2:7), but prior to Christ's Coming, this power of evil will incarnate itself in a real person as Christ was the true human incarnation of goodness.

This climactic incarnation of Satan is designed to deceive mankind into accepting him as the expected Savior. Empowered by Satan, this Evildoer will perform mighty acts and wonders which will succeed in deceiving many to accept him as the expected Lord.

Ellen White describes with prophetic insight how "the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come." She explains that he "will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation (Rev 1:13-15). The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: 'Christ has come! Christ has come!' The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him, while he lifts his hands and pronounces a blessing upon them, as Christ blessed His disciples when He was upon the earth" (GC 624).

Paul indicates that such an overmastering deception will carry away many unbelievers, but it will be met by the judgment of Christ, who will destroy this Great Deceiver by the splendor of His appearance and by "the breath of his mouth" (2 Thess 2:8).

The fulfillment of this sign still lies in the future. No one can tell how long it will be before this great deceptive Evildoer, predicted by Paul, will appear. We have found that an important pre-condition of his appearance-namely, the final apostasy-is already showing signs of fulfillment. This leads us to believe that his appearance is not far in the future.

Our present need is to recognize and withstand by divine grace "the secret power of lawlessness [which] is already at work" (2 Thess 2:7), so that when the Great Deceiver will appear, we shall not be led astray (Matt 24:24).

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Contact Information

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.
Professor of Theology and Church History
Andrews University
4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

Phone (616) 471-2915 Fax (616) 471-4013
E-mail: sbacchiocchi@qtm.net or sbacchiocchi@csi.com
Web site: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>