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'Unless the Lord builds the House...'. Does Jesus rule here – or some other 'Jesus'?

Discerning the spirit of Antichrist

Where is the Antichrist? Is the truth 'out there' – or much nearer to home? **Jon Garvey** offers a free eye-test...

I remember sitting in an editorial meeting of *Prophecy Today* the week before the 9.11 attacks in 2001, and discussing how the ministry of the magazine was entering a new phase. It became clear five days later that world history was to enter a new phase first.

Our position was that though evil in themselves, the attacks were the fulfilment of predictions of judgement on western society that we had been anticipating for many years. In my own article in the following issue, I warned against glibly tying the attacks into an end-times scenario, but affirmed a close spiritual link to the destruction of Babylon in Revelation 18:

If we were to look, in our time, for a symbol of human pride and wealth, where else would it be but in the trading centre of the world's richest nation –

Manhattan? Even the architect of the twin towers is said to have described them as symbolic of man's ability to achieve whatever he sets out to do, almost quoting Genesis 11.4-6. And at any other time but these days of shock and bereavement, would not Christians have warned of the risk of judgement on the greed of the cap-

italist markets, though they finance our homes and pay our pensions?

I pointed out that Americans and Britons needed to put their own spiritual house in order if they were to become in any way fit to pursue *Operation Infinite Justice*, as it was called before it was toned down to the more conciliatory *Operation Enduring Freedom*.

Since then, quite rightly, the role of militant Islam in world disorder has been examined both internationally and within PTi's pages. But we should not forget the original emphasis on God's judgement of the apostate West. Whether or not the Lord's return is imminent, it is certainly closer than before, and the spiritual principles of the Last Days, seen throughout the New Testament, are at work under God's providence.

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The Spirit of Antichrist

One of these principles is that of the spirit of Antichrist – mentioned as such in 1 & 2 John, symbolically described as 'the beast' in Revelation and further explained by Paul in 2 Thessalonians. If we are wise in studying these passages, we will realise that it is not the best approach to ask *if* there is now such a spirit abroad in the world, but *where*, since John tells us it was already in the world as he wrote (1 John 4.3). So the Reformers were quite right to equate the mediaeval Papacy with Antichrist, just as were the early Church to attribute this spirit to the Emperors of Rome, even though the end did not come.

Some day the definitive Antichrist will appear, but we do better to recognise his activity now than to try and identify one final individual, because his aim throughout history, as Jesus first prophesied (Mark 13.22), is to deceive the elect – and that is a present danger for all God's people.

So what are some of the attributes of the Antichrist? Revelation 13 tells us that he is both a political and religious figure, delegated with the power of Satan on earth as Jesus has been given the authority of God. He is given authority over all nations, and persecuting power over the saints. Chapter 17 describes 'the great prostitute' riding the beast, implying a world empire dependant on Antichrist's power – but eventually destroyed by him. The beast (chapter 19) will gather the nations to the final war against Christ and His people.

Less apocalyptically, 2 Thessalonians describes the same thing: emphasising his lawlessness, his blasphemous claims to worship, and his ability to deceive all who have not believed the truth.

In this context, 1 John is surprising, because it describes a much more local and everyday antichrist. Antichrists, according to 1 John 2.18-23, are those who go out from the Church and deny that Jesus is the Christ. Similar false prophecy is the mark of the spirit of the antichrist in chapter four. 2 John adds that departure from the teaching of Christ is a mark. The witness of John is important because it shows us that antichrist arises not separately from the Church, but within it. He appears at first to be our ally and brother, but is in fact our seducer and enemy.

An example from history

Let's take the pre-reformation Papacy as an example from history. There is no doubt that during the troubled times of the first millennium, the bishops of Rome were often champions of the Gospel. Their assumption of an overseeing role for Christendom was, in retrospect, a Scriptural error – but initially a benign one. Britain is Christian today because Pope Gregory had sufficient evangelistic zeal to send Augustine to Canterbury to preach. But something horrible happened over the centuries. By the time of the Reformation, Rome was still the centre of the Christian world, but it was corrupt to the core. It had all the marks of the beast: self-deification, temporal power, departure

from apostolic doctrine and persecution of the saints. **But notice it did all this without overtly denying Christ – their denial came more by their actions and doctrines than their profession.**

So it seems to be a pattern that, at least until the gloves are off, Antichrist proclaims himself to be a disciple of Christ. That's where the danger of deceit lies.



PHOTO: EMPICS

*To be killed on sight -
in the Name of Jesus?*

Where is Antichrist today?

So in the moral, political and turmoil around us, where should we suspect the spirit of antichrist today? Do we look at Islam? Its origins are indeed from Christianity, as any reading of the Qur'an confirms. But in practice Muhammad rejected the Gospel when Christians refused to accept him, and today token acceptance of Christ as a prophet is gainsaid by Muslims' rejection of all His actual teaching, on the grounds that the gospel has been corrupted by Christians and abrogated by the later Qur'anic revelation. Though it persecutes Christians, and has temporal power, its ability to deceive the elect now, unlike during the 7th century, must be considered limited.

More worrying, and surprising, is the possibility that that other world power, the USA, that most Christian of nations, could be doing the work of the beast! Could it be that loyalty to 'truth, justice and the American way' is becoming instead slavery to lies, persecution and the spirit of antichrist? American believers will balk at this, since it is the very accusation that the satanic Islamic fundamentalist throws at them. Furthermore, they have in George W Bush a President who is not only a believer, but a 'born again Christian', whose administration has been marked by attempts to

stay the tide of abortion, to mitigate the effects of anti-creationist education and to give at least modest support to Israel.

Personal faith

Bush's reaction to 9.11 suggests personal faith, too. A fortnight afterwards, it was noted as 'remarkable that a man faced with the biggest crisis to hit America since the Second World War should appear so unperturbed.' The President's aides said that, in a time of turmoil, he believed it was important to take care of his mind, body and spirit. But personal faith is difficult to gauge in a politician, especially in one whose election depended, for better or worse, on a very powerful Conservative Evangelical lobby, especially in the southern states.

The American religious right may be evangelical in doctrine, but it is also politically blinkered and somewhat parochial – it should not be forgotten how blind it was to its own ungodly racism before irreligious liberals forced a change in the sixties. So Bush's piety may be honest, but he might also be a seducer, or even seduced by a less wholesome spirit than that of Jesus.

For example, is it true, as reported, that he told a Middle Eastern politician that God himself had called him to invade Iraq? If the report is true, it would certainly not square with this magazine's stance on the war.

More worrying still are the human rights abuses that have occurred in the name of the War on Terror. Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State, has denied that the CIA has flown prisoners to Arab countries to be tortured. But 'Rendition Flights' certainly occurred, and nobody has quite refuted the suggestion that the Administration has redefined 'torture' in the same way that President Clinton redefined 'sexual intercourse.' Porter Gos, director of the CIA, admitted in November that the US interrogated prisoners in a 'variety of unique and innovative ways'. In any case, the running sore of Guantanamo Bay, where prisoners are still being kept without charge, without trial, without proper access and without due process of law four years on from the Afghan War, is getting ever harder to justify in Christian terms.

When the Lord returns, will he be more concerned with the teaching of evolution in schools, or with the rule of law and the humane treatment of enemies by those who claim His name? Of course, this could all be propaganda by the liberal left. But some of us were concerned back in October 2001 when the President gave the CIA *carte blanche* to murder Osama bin Laden, reversing the former ban on political assassination. At that time it was also reported that there had been calls from within the FBI for agents to be allowed to torture suspects. The press were incredulous then, but the scandal over Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq changed that.

Trust was also eroded by the false intelligence on weapons of mass destruction that took both us and the Americans into a costly and unjust war in

Iraq. The opprobrium that has fallen on the Bush administration over these matters has also, unfortunately, fallen on Evangelical Christians. For Evangelicalism to be equated with Arab Fundamentalism is nonsense just so long as it is nonsense – but what if it has a basis in truth? Will Christians ever again have a voice in democratic politics? It is widely believed that Evangelicals would kill Muslims willingly given the opportunity. Guantanamo Bay is an illustration of the opportunity.

Shrewd as snakes, innocent as doves

What, then should we do? In a sentence, we must avoid being deceived. In our discipleship we are to be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves (Matthew 10.16). The fact that a leader is a Christian does not baptize their opinions or actions. At best we may all be deceived. At worst, Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. In the past, those with the name of Evangelical Christians have oppressed races, burnt old ladies as witches, kept slaves and excused the evil deeds of other Christians. In doing so, they denied Evangelical doctrine, which is the truth of Christ – that is where our true loyalty lies.

Whether Antichrist is yet in the world I do not know. But his spirit certainly is abroad, and his purpose is always to deceive the world and if it were possible, the elect, to deny Christ. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

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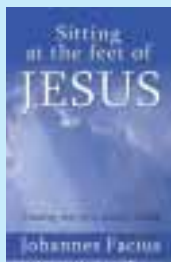
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Does it matter if an evangelical leader is out of step with Jesus – even a teensy weensy bit? It matters.



The fact that a leader is a Christian does not baptize their opinions or actions

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**Sitting
at the
feet of
JESUS**

Out Now – from New Wine Press

As we come closer to the return of the Lord Jesus, God’s people will face increasing pressure from the powers of darkness. Satan, knowing his time is short, will throw everything he has against God’s people in a desperate final attempt to abort the final destruction coming upon him and his kingdom.

Many members of the worldwide Body of Christ are suffering from burnout and depression as a result of this oppression. What do we need in order to cope with these growing pressures?

We need the ‘one thing’ that Jesus referred to when He spoke to Martha, the sister of Mary, when visiting their home in Bethany. We need, like Mary, to come and sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to His word.

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