

THE CURRENT GREATEST DANGER IN OUR APOCALYPTIC INTERPRETATION

Dr. Alberto R. Treiyer

February 2015

www.adventistdistinctivemessages.com

A recent *trend* in Adventist eschatology has been the gradual adoption of the *ideological* method of prophetic interpretation. This method is derived from other theologies that are widely accepted in the Christian world today. Instead of discovering specific, concrete historical fulfillments in the apocalyptic prophecies, the ideological approach searches for philosophical or theological fulfillments, spiritualizing and thus weakening the significance of the historical fulfillments. Little by little, all of the symbolic Biblical references become spiritualized, recasting (even voiding) the context of the apocalyptic messages and disconnecting the symbols themselves from their concrete historical applications. Each time you attempt to identify a particular power (political, religious, etc.) clearly represented in one of the visions that together comprise the book of Revelation, you are reminded by this new approach in our milieu that each of these visions are concerned with wider concepts. In essence, they are not necessarily associated with a specific historical event.

This has nothing to do with a symbolical application of some OT prophecies by the NT. Admittedly, several kingdoms of the Old Testament like Israel and Babylon become symbols of the Church and Rome. In the NT, they are projected to specific entities and kingdoms. In other words, we don't deny symbols in the visions of Revelation. [See A. R. Treiyer, *The Seals and the Trumpets. Biblical and Historical Studies* (2005), the chapter which deals with methodology in connection especially with the trumpets of Revelation]. The problem is that the new idealistic trend is more and more interested in ideological concepts rather than in a specific fulfillment in definite historical events. It has to do with a *spiritualization of the apocalyptic fulfillment*. In this way, the eschatological identification of the seals, the trumpets, the beasts, become more and more ambiguous, vague, indefinite, imprecise.

Let me enumerate some examples:

a) The name represented by the number 666 is spiritualized into a presumable human imperfection, and its more definite identification of the papacy by "*Vicarivs Filii Dei*" is discarded.

b) The harlot woman of Revelation 17 (Babylon) is universalized into a spiritual entity that comprehends every kingdom opposed to God. She is no longer the apostate church (ecclesiastical representation), but a spirit of rebellion which pervades all the kingdoms of the world.

- I answer, no! Babylon is projected in a specific time in history which was fulfilled directly by the Roman Catholic Church, which has daughters (the Protestant apostate churches in the end...).

c) The seals and the trumpets are spiritualized, (as in the Middle Ages in reference to a non-identified antichrist, or the Hellenist allegorical application of Alexandria in the first half of the first Christian millennium). Concerning the trumpets, they are partial or completely spiritualized into philosophical fulfillments, and the clear military projection of the judgments of God there represented is dismissed. Let us give you an example of this elusive trend in the Apocalyptic interpretation, by quoting from the book of Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Andrews University), 304-5, the following statement: "it is uncertain whether John intended every detail of this description to be interpreted."

d) The prophetic dates are also spiritualized (some disregard the dates of the trumpets; others neglect the period of time prophesied for the supremacy of the Roman antichrist). Rome is no longer the direct and specific target of all the judgments of the trumpets. Instead of developing a biblical healthy historicist theology to guide the search of the definite historical apocalyptic fulfillments, some are becoming more and more attracted by terminological and exegetical analysis deprived of their historical connection. The purpose of the apocalyptic vision is lost.

- What Protestants could see clearly in former centuries (because they could plainly understand the purpose of the trumpets and the book of Revelation at large), several Adventist theologians today cannot see anymore. They proudly considered themselves as being “exegetes”. But, what is the real background of this new trend to depart from our prophetic legacy? The adoption of modern theological evangelical patterns as well as their *idealistic* methodology, which are more concerned with concepts and messages disincarnated from their historical fulfillment. They don’t take into consideration that our church was born with the Protestant historicist legacy which, in addition, was confirmed by God Himself through the Spirit of Prophecy. But this heavenly confirmation is partially, if not completely, neglected.

e) A spiritualization of the heavenly sanctuary. Some see sanctuaries everywhere, and universalize the divine sanctuary. For instance, some see the Garden of Eden as a temple and Eve who lived there as also a priest, making her equal to Adam. This egalitarian approach is then used to permit women to be ordained to pastoral ministry. Others try to compare Mount Sinai with the tabernacle of the wilderness while others project the imagery of the temple to the entire heavenly city, forgetting that God is the temple of that city, not the city, etc. What does it have to do with the pattern given by God to Moses? Why play with imageries and terminologies which distract from the true messages comprehended in the gospel of the heavenly sanctuary?

A more dangerous trend is seen in a denial of a concrete, material heavenly sanctuary in agreement with the earthly temple. Some, like Kenneth Strand and Gerhard Pfandl more recently, suppose that the heavenly sanctuary is a one room building, not two as the earthly temple, and reorganize the apocalyptic portrayal of the heavenly sanctuary at their own pleasure. The denial of a literal sanctuary in heaven started, more definitely, with Edward Heppenstal, and was spread throughout our church on a worldwide level.

Conclusion: In all these new spiritualizing approaches, the clear testimony of the Spirit of Prophecy is neglected. Sometimes we may see an appeal to some of her statements, deprived of their true context, and without taking care to gather all that she wrote on a particular apocalyptic vision. Our prophetic legacy is being thrown away by introducing ideas and criteria which put the emphasis on concepts rather on concrete historical fulfillments. In spiritualizing the historical fulfillment, everything turns vague and imprecise.

“Spiritual darkness has covered the earth and gross darkness the people... There are in many churches skepticism and infidelity in the interpretation of the Scriptures... Human reasoning and the imaginings of the human heart are undermining the inspiration of the Word of God, and that which should be received as granted, is surrounded with a cloud of mysticism. Nothing stands out in clear and distinct lines, upon rock bottom. This is one of the marked signs of the last days” (1 SM 15).

We, however, stand firm on the platform of what our forefathers believed, and this makes us more confident in the divine prophetic guidance of our church.