

A Profile of the Antichrist and his Reign

Introduction

From the very beginnings of the Christian Church, the end-time manifestation of the ‘Antichrist’ became a fixed element of Christian tradition. The term itself has its origin in the New Testament (1Jn 2,18-19.22), where there are a number of passages dealing with this expectation.¹ These scattered references were later brought together and developed by the Church Fathers, so that, by the third century, it was widely taught that the Antichrist would be a human figure, a person, who would rule the world on behalf of Satan for a brief period of time at the end of history, and that he would persecute the people of God.² His reign would be brought to an end by the intervention of the Lord himself, at his second coming.

In the course of time, however, the Antichrist tradition became so embellished with bizarre and fantastic speculations that its real and historical significance was obscured. In modern times, films and novels have continued to mine the theme in sensational ways.³ It is not surprising, then, that scholars have come to consider the Antichrist tradition as a ‘myth’, or a ‘legend’, with little or no relation to historical events, past, present or future.⁴ Doubt has also cast its shadow over the doctrine of the Catholic Church, where it is rare to find a priest, biblical scholar or theologian who will affirm the Early Church’s teaching on Antichrist as a person. Instead, the ‘Antichrist’ is explained in a collective way, as the totality of those people through whom Satan has acted, and continues to act, in history.

The Teaching of the Church

The most recent and authoritative statement of the Church’s teaching on the subject is a passing reference in a single paragraph of the Catholic Catechism, which reads as follows: “Before Christ’s second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the “mystery of iniquity” in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh”.⁵

Here, the Church authorities have defined the Antichrist as the author of a supreme form of religious deception, or ‘pseudo-messianism’, in which “man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah”. We should note that instead of referring to the subject as a person, ‘a man’, the Catechism omits the article, leaving the collective noun, ‘man’. With this simple omission, the personal end-historical ruler known to tradition as ‘the Antichrist’ is replaced by a term representing the apostate

¹ Especially 2Thess 2,1-12; Mk 13,6.14.22; Mt 24,5.15.24; Lk 21,8; Rev 11,7; 13,1-8; 17,8-14.

² For a brief account of this tradition in the early Church, see Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1996; 57-70. Also David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson 1998; Excursus 13B, 751-55. Apart from the biblical sources, special note should be made of the *Didache* (end of first century) which describes the end-historical appearance of “the Deceiver of the World...pretending to be a Son of God and doing signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will work such wickedness as there has never been since the beginning” (*Didache* 16). The Antichrist teaching was important for several Fathers of the second century, especially Sts. Irenaeus and Hippolytus, and many other celebrated churchmen of the following centuries, including St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. Jerome.

³ One of the most imaginative, yet realistic, of the novels was penned by Vladimir Solovyov, the Russian Philosopher, in 1899, the last year of his life (“A Short Story of the Antichrist”).

⁴ This is evident, for example, in the titles of some of the most important academic studies on the subject, over the last century: *The Antichrist Legend: A Chapter in Jewish Folklore*, by Wilhelm Bousset (Eng Trans. 1896), *The Origins and Early Development of the Antichrist Myth*, Gregory C. Jenks (1991); *The Combat Myth*, Adela Yarbro Collins (1976).

⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994; para 675, p. 155.

or unredeemed mass of mankind. Nevertheless, some traces of the original teaching on the personal Antichrist can be discerned:

1. The term ‘Antichrist’ simply means ‘instead of’ and ‘opposed to’ Christ. In its intrinsic relation to the person of Christ, the term ‘Antichrist’ also implies personhood—an individual who puts himself in the place of God and his Christ, not a collective as stated in the Catechism. Similarly, the use of the definite article and capital letter in ‘the Antichrist’ suggests that it is referring to a specific figure of some importance, familiar to the Christian tradition.

2. In Latin, the original language of the Catechism, there is no indefinite article, so its inclusion or omission in this context is a matter of interpretation. It is quite reasonable to translate the Latin ‘in quo homo se ipsum glorificat’ as ‘by which a man glorifies himself’, referring to a particular man and not to humankind in general. By using Latin as the original language, the Catechism does not therefore exclude the interpretation of a personal Antichrist.

3. The ‘supreme religious deception’ of the Antichrist is somewhat understated when described collectively as the body of men and women who glorify themselves after turning away from God and Christ. This ‘apostasy’ may lead to a very selfish, proud and vain society of human beings, who have turned away from God for various reasons, but it does not amount to a ‘supreme religious deception’, or ‘pseudo-messianism’. ‘Supreme religious deception’, or ‘pseudo-messianism’ describes a situation even further down the road to perdition: it implies a situation in which people, having once turned away from God and Christ, are then deceived by a false messianic leader, or movement, claiming to offer “men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth.” Stated more simply, the society in which “man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah” is at an earlier stage of religious deception than the society which is governed by “a man who glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah”. Only this later stage can be considered ‘supreme religious deception’, or ‘pseudo-messianism’.

Two successive stages in the historical evolution of the ‘mystery of iniquity’ can therefore be identified: firstly, the historical operation of this mystery resulting in the apostasy of large numbers of people and their willing service to the Antichrist. Secondly, the final unveiling of the mystery, leading to the ‘supreme’ form of religious deception headed by the Antichrist himself. If the historical operation of the ‘mystery of iniquity’, via willing human agents, represents the collective Antichrist, then the final unveiling of this mystery can be understood as the manifestation of its author, the Antichrist in person. Since the Catechism is talking about the final and ‘supreme’ phase of the Antichrist’s activity, it would therefore seem to be speaking about the personal Antichrist. Viewed in this way, there is no fundamental opposition between the collective and personal interpretations of the Antichrist tradition: they are simply two successive stages in the progressive historical disclosure of evil.

As presented in the Catechism, however, the Antichrist teaching conflates these two successive stages: the authors describe the future and final revelation of a personal Antichrist in terms which are better suited to its current, collective mode of operation. They seem to want to speak about the end-historical revelation of the personal Antichrist, but they retreat at the last moment and describe the collective Antichrist. This not only introduces confusion, but more importantly it betrays a strong reluctance to speak about the future coming of Antichrist as a person.

The reluctance is best explained by the irresponsible use of this doctrine at various times in the Church’s history. Of particular note was the trading of Antichrist accusations by both sides in the 13th century quarrel between the Papacy and the Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen (1194-1250). Again, during the Reformation, Luther’s conviction that the Pope was the Antichrist succeeded in drawing many faithful away from the Church. In modern times, the title of Antichrist has been

attributed to numerous national leaders and statesmen, bringing the personal Antichrist doctrine into even greater disrepute. So, it is not difficult to understand why the Church's leaders should have wished to dampen Antichrist enthusiasm as much as possible. By reducing the Church's Antichrist doctrine to a minimum, and by concealing the teaching of a personal Antichrist under a collective interpretation of this figure, they have succeeded to a great extent.

The Personal Antichrist

As a result of minimizing and collectivizing the Antichrist teaching, the expectation of Antichrist as a person has all but disappeared from the Catholic Church. Those who continue to hold this teaching are guided, not so much by Scripture, nor by the teaching of the Early Church, but by popular visionaries.

Although most visionaries have foreseen the infiltration of the Church's leadership, at the end-time, by Satan and his angels, it was the renowned Abbott Joachim of Fiore, writing in the 12th century, who started a tradition that the Antichrist himself would become the leader of the Catholic Church. He wrote: "*Toward the end of the world, Antichrist will overthrow the Pope and usurp his See.*" The Protestants seized on this tradition and, by applying it to the contemporary Pope, made it one of the slogans justifying their separation from the Church of Rome. Ever since, many are the Protestants who have identified every Pope as Antichrist. The adoption of Joachim's 'Papal Antichrist prophecy' by the Protestants, however, has not deterred many Catholics from also believing and maintaining this tradition. In fact, it has received a huge boost, in modern times, from visionaries issuing prophecies about the end of history in the name of Mary, mother of Jesus. Perhaps the best known of this kind was recorded at La Salette, in France, in the 19th century, by Melanie Calvat: "*Rome will lose the faith and become the seat of Antichrist. The Church will be in eclipse, the world will be in dismay.*" Since then, and especially towards the end of the 20th century, there has been a steady stream of Marian prophecies, issued by various visionaries, repeating the same formula: Maria Valtorta, Don Stefano Gobbi (for his "Movimento Sacerdotale Mariano"), Ms. Vassula Ryden, and others.

More recently, Pope Francis has reawoken fears of an antichristian takeover of the See of St. Peter, by issuing a steady stream of 'progressive' statements challenging traditional Church doctrine, morality and liturgy. The view that the Vatican will become the seat of the Antichrist, and not just its preferred instrument, seems to be associated with a triumphalist form of millennialism, the start of a Catholic "Era of Peace",⁶ which can also be traced back to the Blessed Joachim of Fiore and his "Third Age – the Age of the Spirit".

⁶ In a section entitled '**The Three Ages of the World**', Dr Kelly Bowring writes: "At the monastery in Casamari, south of Rome, the twelfth century Italian monk, Bl. Joachim of Fiore, contributed greatly to Christian prophetic thinking. He has been called the most important prophetic thinker of the whole medieval period and maybe, after the Apostle John, the most important in the history of Christianity. Joachim saw human history as aligned in three ages with the Holy Trinity. The first age of the Father had been the age of Ancient Israel. The second age of the Son has been the age of the Church. The third age of the Spirit, brought about by a great purification, will usher in a time of peace, and the whole world will look like and live like a monastery and people will believe like in ancient times....."

As the third stage begins, the **Latins (Catholics) and Greeks (Orthodox) will be united** in the new spiritual kingdom, freed alike from the fetters of the letter; **the Jews will be converted**, and the "*Eternal Gospel*" will abide until the end of the world. In this third age, that of the Kingdom and the Holy Spirit, there will be a new dispensation of universal love, which will proceed from the Gospel of Christ, but transcend the letter of it, and in which there will be no need from disciplinary institutions.

Prophesizing about the upheaval that would occur before the era of peace, Joachim of Fiore held that the third epoch would begin after some great cataclysm. And he prophesied about this, saying: "*Towards the end of the world, Antichrist will overthrow the pope and usurp his see.*" *The Secrets, Chastisement, and Triumph Of the Two Hearts of Jesus and Mary And What Heaven is Calling Us To Do*, by Kelly Bowring, Cumming, GA: Two Hearts Press, LLC, 2009; 215-217.

However, respected provenance and wide circulation do not validate or prove the belief that the Antichrist will be a future Pope. Can we really accept that one day, sooner or later, the Pope, who has ceaselessly preached eternal salvation for two thousand years, will be replaced in his office by the Antichrist, who takes his followers with him to eternal condemnation? Such a tragic ‘flip’ in the leadership of the world’s oldest institution seems far-fetched to say the least, and can be refuted effectively by the Scripture: shortly after the commissioning of Peter as head of the Church, Jesus goes on to assure his disciples that “the gates of Hades will not prevail against her” (Mt 16,18). The gates of Hades and the netherworld will never be able to resist the Church’s saving mission. This assurance would be empty if there ever be a time, in her history, during which the Church’s saving mission is led by the Antichrist, for, as the embodiment of Satan, the Antichrist is the arch-enemy of the Church’s saving mission. The ‘Papal Antichrist Prophecy’ not only sows doubt in these words of Christ’s promise, but also destroys trust in the Church leadership, inevitably contributing to a dramatic fall in Church attendance and participation.

Return to the Sources

Having considered the nature and extent of the problem caused by the ‘Papal Antichrist prophecy’, there is no alternative but to refute and utterly reject it. Instead of relying on the mediaeval speculations of Joachim of Fiore and a long list of popular visionaries, there must be a “return to the sources” in the New Testament, and to the teaching of the Early Church. This would help to resolve the ‘cognitive dissonance’ generated by the ‘Papal Antichrist prophecy’, and return the scriptures to their central place in the life of the faithful.

To those who believed that the Day of the Lord had already come, St. Paul wrote: “...*that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes himself and exalts himself against every so-called god or object, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming*” (2Thess 2,3-8).

In this passage, St. Paul unambiguously describes the Antichrist figure, whom he calls the ‘man of lawlessness’ and ‘son of perdition’, as a person who will reveal himself by taking his seat in the Temple of God. In St. Paul’s mind, this was the Temple in Jerusalem, whose renovation was rapidly nearing completion and was generating a great deal of messianic fervour among the Jewish people. For St. Paul, therefore, the Antichrist was going to be welcomed by those Jews who had rejected Jesus Christ because they wanted their messiah to be a successful military leader who would restore their political and religious sovereignty. This was being prevented by the Roman occupation of their Temple, city and country, but clearly St. Paul foresees that this would eventually be withdrawn, or defeated, thus allowing the ‘man of lawlessness’ to be revealed as a false messiah, or Antichrist. The context of his appearance, according to this prophecy of St Paul, is the false messianic expectation of the Jews.

The Antichrist prophecy in the ‘Little Apocalypse’ of the Gospels of Matthew (Mt 24,1-25,46) and Mark (Mk 13,1-37) alludes cryptically to the coming of the Antichrist with an expression that recalls ‘the little horn’ of Daniel’s prophecy (Dan 7-12): ‘*the abomination of desolation standing in a holy place*’. Again, as in St. Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, the ‘holy place’ refers to the

Temple in Jerusalem, where at a certain time, the Antichrist will establish his idolatrous form of worship.

Before moving on to the most detailed prophecy of the Antichrist in the New Testament, it is now possible to see how the Early Church's doctrine of Antichrist was fundamentally changed by the Blessed Joachim of Fiore in the 12th century. Instead of the Antichrist revealing himself in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, Joachim simply changed the location and declared that the Antichrist will reveal himself from the Papal See, in Rome. It is not difficult to understand why this change took place. It happened at a time when the Temple Mount in Jerusalem was in the hands of the Catholic Crusaders, and when the Jewish population of Europe and the Middle East were vigorously persecuted and repressed. It was inconceivable that they would ever recover so as to be able to rebuild their Temple and enthrone there a person claiming to be the messiah, in place of Jesus Christ. A reinterpretation of the prophecies was called for, and these were provided by the Blessed Joachim of Fiore. But let us understand his interpretations as a product of his time, and not as the eternal Word of God. Soon after he was writing, the Catholic Church began her gradual retreat from the Holy Land, and in the present day the Jews have regained their control over the Temple Mount. It would be wise to turn to the main source in the New Testament and understand the Antichrist prophecy in its original context and clarity.

The Antichrist in the Book of Revelation

For prophecy on the Antichrist, the most complete source in the New Testament is the Book of Revelation, where the ultimate antagonist of Jesus Christ is referred to as the "Beast from the sea".⁷ This highly complex figure is described in various parts of the text, particularly in chapters 11,13 and 17, although he is also mentioned in the accounts of the final battle of Harmageddon in chapters 16 and 19.

Putting together the various passages of text and interpreting the imagery is no easy task, especially if we do not first establish the temporal orientation of the author's visions. In this, we are helped by their dominant temple and liturgical imagery, which indicates they follow a certain temporal order, as liturgies inevitably do. Furthermore, by identifying the liturgical elements and comparing them with other accounts of the liturgy in the ancient Jerusalem Temple, the order of events can be precisely defined.

Reading the text in this way confirms that its greater part, from chapter 8 until the end, refers to events at the conclusion and culmination of the liturgy represented in the Book of Revelation. Since the conclusion of the liturgy involves nothing less than the second coming of Christ and the final Judgment, then we can infer that the events depicted in this part of the text, from chapter 8 onwards, concern the eschatological period of history. The visions in this section contain a prophecy for the end-times, in which the 'Beast from the sea' is one of the main figures. In the order of the text, the Beast's full and final manifestation is given the first place (11,7 and 13,1-18), which is then followed by an explanation of its previous, more candid existence (17,3.7-18), and finally by an account of his final defeat and destiny (16,12-16; 19,19-21; 20,10).⁸

Our aim here is to present the main affirmations about the 'Beast from the sea', often adding some context, in a way that allows them to be more easily grasped and interpreted. As in any biography, this requires a chronological presentation of the details, and a reordering of the references according to the temporal order implicit in the text. The presentation can therefore be split into the following

⁷ Identifying the Beast from the sea as the antichrist.

⁸ Reference to the plan

sections: 1) the period preceding the Beast's brief end-historical reign; 2) the full manifestation of the Beast and the start of his reign; 3) the main features and events of the Beast's reign, and 4) the defeat of the Beast at the final battle and the termination of his reign. Each group of textual references is followed by the inferences that can safely be made from the various statements, without unreasonably departing from the content of the text or from its historical context.

1. *The period preceding the Beast's brief end-historical reign*

a) The Beast with seven heads carries and supports a woman (17,3.9) who represents the great city with 'a kingdom over the kings of the earth' (17,18). Her name is a mystery: 'Babylon the great, the mother of the prostitutes and the abominations of all the earth' (17,5). The woman that is sitting on the Beast is also sitting on many waters (17,1.3), which represent 'races and crowds and nations and tongues' (17,15).

Inferences: Since the woman is sitting on the 'many waters' and, at the same time, on the Beast, it is evident that the Beast is here depicted as being submerged under the 'many waters', which represent 'races and crowds and nations and tongues' (17,15) – an expression the author uses to refer to the unredeemed peoples of the world (cf. 5,9; 7,9; 13,7). The fact that the Beast later emerges from the 'Abyss' (11,7), and 'sea' (13,1), tells us firstly that the 'many waters', the 'Abyss' and the 'sea' are all synonymous terms for the unredeemed peoples of the world, and secondly that this vision concerns the Beast's covert state before emerging and revealing himself fully at a given moment at the end of history (11,7; 13,1). In this covert state, he is simply supporting the woman, Babylon, in a secret and clandestine way, thus contributing to her worldly success and power.

b) The Beast's clandestine relationship with Babylon constitutes a mystery (17,7), at the center of which is the Beast that 'was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and then go to his destruction' (17,8.11). This reappearance of the Beast in all its fullness will cause the inhabitants of the earth to wonder – all those whose name is not recorded in the Scroll of Life (17,8).

Inferences: the mystery described here is the evil counterpart to the Mystery of God that was announced to his servants the prophets (10,7) and can therefore fittingly be called the 'Mystery of Iniquity' (cf. 2Thess 2,7). The mystery consists in the fact that the Beast that 'was' the ruling power at the time of the Roman Empire (cf. 2,13), 'is not', because it is presently hidden under the waters of the Abyss or sea, and has revealed only a succession of heads (17,9-10). However, it is about to come up out of the Abyss and reveal itself fully (11,7; 13,1), before going off to its destruction.

c) The interpreting angel further reveals that the seven heads of the Beast are the seven hills, on which Babylon sits, and are also seven rulers. The angel is explaining this immediately before the short rule of the 7th head: "five of these have fallen, one is now, and the other has not yet come, and whenever he comes he will remain for a short time only" (17,9-10). Then the Beast will be revealed in all its fullness as an 'eighth head', which is also one of the seven heads (17,11). One of his seven heads recovers after being fatally wounded (13,3a).

Inferences: The city called Babylon is established in Rome, the city of seven hills, and is also supported by seven successive rulers represented by the heads of the Beast. From the narrative point of view, which could be the time of writing the prophecy or the time of its announcement by the two witnesses, the next ruler will be the seventh and last before the full revelation of the Beast, as an 'eighth'. But since the full manifestation of the Beast, under the

rule of the eighth head, is also 'one of the seven' (17,11), and since the seventh head is the last of the Beast's line, then the eighth head can be identified with the seventh head after it has recovered from its fatal wound (cf. 13,3a; 13,14).

2. The full manifestation of the Beast and the start of this reign

a) The Beast rises from the Abyss (11,7), or sea (13,1a), to 'make war' against the two witnesses, when they have finished their prophetic mission, at the end of the period of 1,260 days. He kills them and has their corpses exposed for 3½ days in the 'great city', spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where 'indeed their Lord was crucified' (11,7-8). After rising from the sea (13,1), or Abyss (11,7), the Beast was allowed to reign over the entire world for 42 months (13,5.7). His reign will be brought to an end by his defeat in the final battle (17,14; 19,11-21).

Inferences: The emergence of the Beast from the Abyss, or sea, represents his full self-revelation or manifestation. This event takes place when the two witnesses have completed their mission, at the end of the period of 1,260 days, and corresponds to the start of the Beast's reign of 42 months (13,5). The two time periods are therefore consecutive, opening with the period of 1,260 days, closing with the 42 months, and together comprising a final seven-year period ('a week of years' or 'septennium'). The Beast reveals himself to slay the two witnesses in Jerusalem ('the city where indeed their Lord was crucified'), which then receives the title that previously applied to Babylon: 'the great city' (11,8; 16,19). Since it was the Beast's support for Babylon that earned her the title of 'great city', the transfer of this title to Jerusalem implies that this city will now receive the Beast's patronage and support. The implication is that, at the start of his reign of 42 months, the Beast transfers his support from Babylon to Jerusalem, where he establishes his throne (16,10) and reveals himself fully and openly. This coincides with the trampling of the Holy City (Jerusalem) for 42 months (11,2), and her spiritual renaming as "Sodom and Egypt" (instead of 'Zion').

b) The Beast is scarlet in colour (17,3), has 10 horns crowned with diadems and seven heads displaying blasphemous titles (13,1b). He had received his power, throne and authority from the dragon (13,2b), and on account of the Beast's power the dragon is worshipped (13,4a). The dragon is fiery-red in colour, and has 10 horns and 7 heads crowned with diadems (12,3). The dragon is the ancient serpent called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world and the accuser of the faithful, who is thrown down to the earth with great fury, knowing that his time is short (12,9-10.12). He is subsequently chained and locked in the Abyss for a thousand years, where he is called Abaddon, or Apollyon, which means the 'Destroyer' (20,1-3; 9,11).

Inference: as shown above (1a), the Abyss represents the mass of unredeemed humanity, in which the Beast remains submerged until he reveals himself fully to begin his global, 42-month reign. The fact that Beast receives his power, kingdom and great authority from the dragon, and that both the Beast and the dragon are confined in the Abyss, suggests that the dragon and the Beast are one, and that the Beast is the 'place' in the Abyss where the dragon is imprisoned, or in other words, that the Beast is the embodiment of the dragon, Satan. In colour and form, the Beast is strikingly similar to the dragon, suggesting a family likeness, like that of son and father. Worship of the Beast amounts to worship of the dragon, called the devil and Satan.

c). The Beast is like a leopard with bear's feet and a lion's mouth (13,2a). He is identified as a man, the number of whose name is 666 (13,18).

Inference: The Beast is here depicted as a combination of all the four beasts described in Dan 7,2-8. All the beastly and monstrous forces depicted in the text are finally embodied in one man, whose name or title will add up to 666, according to the ancient number system, in which each letter has a numerical value (gematria).

3. *The main features and events of the Beast's reign*

a) The Beast is admired and worshipped by all the inhabitants of the earth, because of his military strength (13,4b). They worship him with words that resemble the ancient worship of God – “who is like the beast?” (13,4; cf. Ps 113,5; 89,7.9; 86.8; 35,10; Ex 15,11). Furthermore, the Beast is described by an epithet (“the Beast that...was and is not and is about to come up out of the abyss and goes to destruction”, Rev 17,18) that parodies God’s name (“The One who was and is and is to come” Rev 1,8). He is worshipped by those whose names are not written in the ‘Scroll of Life from the foundation of the world’ of the Lamb that was slain (13,8).

Inference: the Beast is worshipped through his exercise of the powers given to him by the dragon, and this worship recalls the worship and status that was once given to God. This explains why the beast’s worshippers are removed from the Scroll of Life of the Lamb (3,5; 13,8; 17,8).

b) He is allowed to rule for 42 months (13,5a), when he speaks ‘great things’ and blasphemies: he blasphemes against God, against His name and dwelling, which means those dwelling in heaven (13,6). His authority extends over every tribe and race and tongue and nation, including the saints whom he overcomes (13,7).

Inference: His 42-month reign corresponds to the ‘trampling’ of the Holy City by the gentile nations for 42 months (11,2), and also to the ‘time, two times and half a time’ during which the 144,000 are protected and nourished at a mountain in the desert (12,14; 14,1-5; cf. Dn 7,23-25; 12,7).⁹ The Beast is a blasphemer of God and of his people, and during his brief reign he will persecute and conquer the rest of God’s people (those not protected at the desert refuge).

c) He has an associate, described as a second Beast that comes up out of ‘the land’ and has two horns ‘like a lamb’, but speaks like a dragon (Rev 13,11). He is later referred to as the false prophet (19,20; 20,10).

Inference: this figure has a sacrificial appearance, like a lamb, but speaks on behalf of the dragon, who is the devil and Satan. He is therefore a type of sacrifice to Satan, a role that recalls the scapegoat to Azazel in the ancient rite on the Day of Atonement (Lv 16). He removes sin not by expiation, like the blood of the Lamb (Rev 1,5), but by bringing the sinner and his sin to eternal condemnation. The identification of this figure as a ‘false prophet’ concurs with the identification of his master, the ‘Beast from the sea’, as a ‘false messiah’. The dragon, the Beast from the sea, and the Beast from the land (the false prophet) constitute a hierarchy of three evil figures which the author contrasts with Almighty God, his Messiah and their prophet, John.

⁹ “Time, two times and half a time” (Rev 12,14) is a temporal expression signifying three and a half years. It is first encountered in Dn 7,23-25, where it refers to the period of persecution of God’s people, at the hands of the tyrant represented by the ‘little horn’ of the fourth beast seen by Daniel. It therefore corresponds to the 42-month reign of the Beast in the Book of Revelation.

d) The Beast delegates his authority to the false prophet, who coerces the inhabitants of the earth to worship him, after his fatal wound had been healed (13,12). The false prophet achieves this by means of:

- i. Deceptive signs: making fire come down from heaven in the sight of all (13,13), and by creating an animated, speaking image of the first Beast 13,14-15). Those who do not worship the image of the Beast are put to death (13,15b).
- ii. Compulsion to receive a mark (the name or number of the beast) on the right hand or forehead. Those who refuse the mark cannot buy or sell (13,17).

The people who worship him or his image, or receive his mark, will suffer eternal condemnation and torment (14,9-11). They will also suffer sorely from the bowl plagues (Rev 16): they will be afflicted with a foul and malignant ulcer after the pouring of the 2nd bowl (16,2), and they will be scorched by the heat of the sun after the 4th (16,8). As a result of these plagues, they blaspheme God and refuse to repent (16,11).

Inference: Those who do not voluntarily worship the Beast will be forced to do so by the deceptive and coercive measures introduced by the false prophet. The result is the great tribulation (7,17), through which the martyrs will attain heaven and ‘overcome’ the beast, his image and the number of his name (15,2-4). Since the Beast and the devil are one, the worship of the Beast is at the same time worship of the devil and its consequence is eternal damnation. The false prophet incites this damnable worship by a sign that has a particular significance in the context of the Beast’s self-revelation in Jerusalem: “*he performs great signs such that he even makes fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men*” (13,13). In the history of the ancient Israelite cult, the sign of fire falling from heaven appeared at the consecration of a new altar and indicated divine approval (Lev 9,24; 1Chr 21,26; 2Chr 7,1; 2Macc 1,18-36). So, the false prophet’s imitation of this sign, in this impressive but inauthentic way, implies his participation in the dedication of a new altar connected to the ancient Israelite cult.¹⁰ This act would entail the reconstruction of the Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Despite occupying the most sacred site of the ancient temple in Jerusalem (cf. 2Thess 2,4; Mt 24,15; Mk 13,14), the cult established and enforced by the false prophet is nevertheless directed towards the worship of a false messiah (the Beast from the sea) and the source of his authority, the devil (Rev 13,2-3.8.15).¹¹

4. *The defeat of the Beast at the final battle and the termination of his reign*

a) The Beast will rule for a short time with 10 kings, who are represented by its 10 horns. These will give their authority (17,12-13) and kingdom to the Beast (17,17), and together they will destroy the once great city, Babylon, thus fulfilling the words of God (14,8; 16,19; 17,1;17,16-17). Finally, they

¹⁰ The imitation of this sign by the false prophet also suggests that he wishes to identify himself with Elijah, since it recalls the divine powers given to this prophet (cf. 2Kgs 1,9-14; 1Kgs 18,30-40).

¹¹ Modern interpretations of the religious activity described in this passage identify it with the imperial cult – a form of pagan idolatry practiced in the first century CE, which made the image of the Emperor an object of worship. Very few commentators seem to notice the messianic overtones in this passage, or the allusion to ancient Israelite prophetic and ceremonial traditions. Those scholars who have noticed these allusions do not seem to be aware of their incompatibility with first-century pagan practices. There is only one religion into which the religious activity described in this passage fits, and that is Judaism, especially those branches of orthodox Judaism that await the rebuilding of their Temple in its former place. In the Halachah defined by Maimonides, in fact, the rebuilding of the Temple in its place is the act that definitively identifies Judaism’s messiah and the inauguration of its messianic age (*The Code [Mishneh Torah]*, Book 14: Judges; Treatise 5: Kings and Wars, chs. 11-12). In this it differs fundamentally from the Christian view, as represented in the Book of Revelation, which sees this act as diabolical, and its instigator as the Antichrist.

will fight with the Beast in the forthcoming battle against the Lamb and his armies (17,14) at Harmagedon (16,16; 19,19).

Inference: Babylon is destroyed during the 42-month reign of the beast, and in doing this the Beast and the 10 kings are the agents of God's wrath and judgment against this city (16,19). Together with 10 kings, the Beast and the false prophet constitute an alliance of 12 rulers, hinting at an attempt to reconstitute the tribal federation of the ancient Israelites. The beast's conflict with the Lamb confirms that he is the ultimate antagonist of Christ, otherwise known as the Antichrist (17,14) in the Christian tradition.

b) At the end of his divinely permitted rule, the beast's throne is struck by the 5th bowl plague, and his kingdom is then darkened (16,10).

Inference: this represents the imminent end of the beast's 42-month rule. The end follows promptly at a final battle.

c) After the 6th bowl the River Euphrates dries up to allow the rulers of the East to pass over. Unclean and deceitful spirits issue from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the dragon and of the false prophet, summoning the rulers of the world to assemble for the battle of the great day of Almighty God (16,13-14), at the place called Harmageddon (16,16), where they will fight against the Lamb and his armies (17,14; 19,11-19). The armies are defeated, and the Beast and the false prophet are thrown into the Lake of Fire (19,19-21), where they will be joined by the devil (20,10), Death and Hades (20,14), and all those not written in the "Scroll of Life" (20,15).

Inference: the final battle is convoked by deceitful demons, in a place known by its Hebrew name 'Harmageddon', Mount Megiddon in English, which can be identified with the Carmel mountain range overlooking the Plain of Megiddon (Zech 12,11), or Jezreel Valley, in Northern Israel. It has been the site of many battles over the last 3,000 years. No sooner has the fighting begun, than the Beast and his false prophet are captured and condemned. The rest of the assembled armies were destroyed and became food for the birds.

In summary, the Antichrist is described as the personal representative of all diabolical power and authority (Rev 13,1-4) – the embodiment of Satan. His personal appearance is heralded by the murder of two Christian witnesses in Jerusalem, at the end of their prophetic mission (11,7-13). He then goes on to rule briefly over the whole world and subject the faithful to a severe persecution (13,1-9). His reign is consolidated by the establishment of a personality cult, which is forcefully promoted by an assistant called the false prophet at a restored cultic site in Jerusalem. Those who refuse to participate in this cult are outlawed, or killed as martyrs who will attain heaven (13,11-17; 15,2). On the other hand, those who do participate in the cult will suffer eternal condemnation (14,9-11). The Antichrist's reign is terminated in a war won by Christ at his second coming, and the final judgment follows quickly (19,11-21).

The Personality of the Antichrist

In the various prophecies in the New Testament, it is clear that the ultimate antagonist of Christ, the Antichrist, is a man (2Thess 2,1-12; Mk 13,14; Mt 24,15; Rev 11,7; 13,1-8; 17,8-14) and not a group, committee, community or multitude. The Book of Revelation is more specific, "*Let the one with intelligence calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is six hundred and sixty-six*", according to an ancient convention called Gematria, in which letters of the alphabet represent certain numbers (Rev 13,18). When he appears we may then be able to

recognize him from his name, but will we also be able to recognize him in other ways? Do the Scriptures tell us what kind of person he will be like?

In truth, from the Scriptures, we can also build up a picture of his personality. St. Paul calls him the “man of lawlessness (or iniquity)” and tells us that he “opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god and object of worship, so as to seat himself in the Temple of God, claiming that he is a god” (2Thess 2,4; cf. Mk 13,14; Mt 24,15). He would certainly have to be a special kind of person to claim to be God, and to convince others of his divine perfection, without showing any signs of mental illness or being certified as totally insane. Not only has this figure such an exalted opinion of himself, but he also expects others to admire and worship him as God, for we are told he is seated in the Temple of God, which he will have to rebuild on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for this purpose. Again, only a person who thinks himself unique and very special would “have the nerve” to enthrone himself in a place like this.

Furthermore, his claim to be God is not entirely empty, for it will be accompanied by the exercise of his dominion over the entire world, for a brief period of time, aided by an insuperable military force under his control (Rev 13,4.5.7). In this way, he is clearly able to satisfy an ambition for unlimited power and control over the world.

His name, “man of lawlessness” is taken from a description in the Book of Daniel, of a similar figure from the past, with a mouth that speaks arrogantly (Dn 7,8.11; Rev 13,5), who “shall speak against the Most High, and oppress the holy ones of the Most High, thinking to change the feast days and the law” (Dn 7,25; Rev 13,6-7). Clearly this person feels entitled to change the ancient laws, because he has a blasphemous disregard for the Almighty Himself and His people. Arrogance, blasphemous criticism and disregard for traditional laws (“lawlessness”) are therefore conspicuous aspects of his character.

Among the laws that this man will impose on his subjects is one that will bring persecution and death to all those who do not give him the worship and admiration he craves (Rev 13,7-17). To this end he shows that he is equipped with an unshakeable sense of entitlement to the obedience and admiration of his subjects. He is also exploitative, for he uses the services of an accomplice, a false prophet, a co-dependent religious figure, to enforce the ruthless and divisive laws of his personality cult (13,11-17; cf. 19,20; 20,10). He will expect total compliance with these laws and will have no pity on those who do not comply. Ostracism and death will be their lot. Millions of saintly people will die or be put to death in this way (Rev 7, 9-17). It is therefore probable that hypersensitivity to criticism, envy, total lack of empathy and sadism are also prominent features of this man’s character. He may also be giving vent to a spirit of vengeance, in response for the mortal wounding he suffered in the days before the start of his global reign (Rev 13,3.14).

This, then, is the profile of the Antichrist that we can extract from the prophecies. It seems almost inconceivable that all these human characteristics could come together in the personality of one man, and to such an extreme degree of grandiosity, self-importance, sense of uniqueness, perfection and superiority, desire for unlimited power and control over the world, sense of entitlement to the obedience, admiration and worship of all, being exploitative, vindictive, lacking in empathy, entangled in envy, hypersensitive to criticism, sadistic, haughty and arrogant.

In fact, the combination of these particular character traits in one person is not a novel or miraculous coincidence. They all happen to be aspects of a severe form of narcissism, called ‘malignant narcissism’, which is well-known to the mental health profession and has been seen many times before on the world stage, in different shapes and forms, in the character configuration of tyrants and

dictators. As ‘malignant narcissism’ is not yet defined as a psychiatric diagnosis in its own right, the closest diagnostic category we can refer to, in order to confirm and demonstrate this finding, is that of the “Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)”.¹² It will be seen that many of the character traits listed above appear in the criteria for this disorder, defined as follows by the American Psychiatric Association in their Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition (1994): “A pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

1. Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements).
2. Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.
3. Believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions)
4. Requires excessive admiration.
5. Has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations.
6. Is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends.
7. Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.
8. Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her.
9. Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.”

The greater the number of traits found in a person, the greater the degree of his Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). According to the prophetic description of the Antichrist outlined above, all nine of the defining characteristics of this personality disorder are present, with other traits in addition. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the whole style of his brief, but globally extensive, rule is molded by his disordered personality and the cult that is centred on it.¹³ It is disturbing, but not unforeseeable, that the history of this world should end under the rule of a grandiose person who is worshipped through a cult of his own disordered personality. In former times, the very same disorder was aptly called “megalomania”.

Most people with this personality disorder have fewer of the defining characteristics and their narcissism is of a lesser degree. They are nevertheless difficult to live or work with, and often cause mental, emotional or physical suffering to those they come into contact with. The disorder is thought to be an intra-psychic compensation resulting from dysfunctional mothering in the first few years of life (a mother who was indifferent, negligent, unempathic, unloving or outright abusive for one

¹² The fourth edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV) defines personality disorders as “enduring subjective experiences and behavior that deviate from cultural standards, are rigidly pervasive, have an onset in adolescence or early adulthood, are stable through time, and lead to unhappiness or impairment”.....

“People with personality disorders are far more likely to refuse psychiatric help and to deny their problems than are people with anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Personality disorder symptoms are alloplastic (can adapt to, and alter, the external environment) and ego-syntonic (acceptable to the ego); people with personality disorders do not feel anxiety about their maladaptive behavior. Because they do not routinely acknowledge pain from what others perceive as their symptoms, they often seem disinterested in treatment and impervious to recovery.” (quoted from *Synopsis of Psychiatry*, Kaplan and Sadock, 8th ed., Philadelphia: Williams and Wilkins, 1997, p. 775).

¹³ Current estimates give a prevalence rate for this disorder of about 1% of the general population, and about 2-16% of the population attending psychiatric clinics (*Synopsis of Psychiatry*, Kaplan and Sadock, 8th Edition, Lippincott, Williams and Wilkins, 1997, 788; more recent estimates show an increase, putting the lifetime prevalence rates of NPD in the community at 6.2%, with rates greater for men (7.7%) than for women (4.8%). NPD was significantly more prevalent among black men and women and Hispanic women, younger adults, and separated/divorced/widowed and never married adults: cf. <http://www.mentalhealth.com/home/dx/narcissisticpersonality.html> accessed 13.10.14).

reason or another). These characters cannot therefore be held responsible for the development of their personality, although they can and should be held responsible for the choices that they take on reaching maturity. If those choices affirm and develop the traits that constitute this personality disorder, rather than trying to overcome them and hold them in check, then the person with this disorder can indeed be held responsible. What is more significant is that uncontrolled and willful indulgence of these traits leads to practices and habits that can readily be considered evil.¹⁴ There has therefore been some discussion, in the mental health profession, about the nature of the association of this personality disorder with human evil.

The social psychologist, Erich Fromm, was the first to draw attention to this connection: he identifies narcissism in individuals and in social groups as one of the three most important psychological orientations “which can be said to be the essence of true evil”, the other two being “necrophilia”¹⁵ and “symbiotic fixation to mother”.¹⁶ In their gravest and most malignant forms, these orientations can converge to form what he calls a “syndrome of decay”, which represents the “quintessence of evil” and lies at the root of the most vicious destructiveness and inhumanity.¹⁷

In his description of narcissism, Fromm invented the term “malignant narcissism” to describe the worst form of this disorder and distinguish it from a relatively benign form: “the malignant nature of this type of narcissism lies in the fact that it lacks the corrective element which we find in the benign form. If I am great because of some quality I have, and not because of something I achieve, I do not need to be related to anybody or anything; I need not make any effort. In maintaining the picture of my greatness I remove myself more and more from reality and I have to increase the narcissistic charge in order to be better protected from the danger that my narcissistically inflated ego might be revealed as the product of my empty imagination. Malignant narcissism, thus, is not self-limiting, and in consequence it is crudely solipsistic as well as xenophobic.... One who has achieved nothing will find it difficult to appreciate the achievements of others, and thus will be forced to isolate himself increasingly in narcissistic splendor.”¹⁸ For the extreme case of this disorder, the outside world has ceased to be real because, by becoming his own god and world, the narcissist has made himself, his own false self, a substitute for reality. For Fromm, such an individual becomes evil by taking a series of wrong choices, until a point is reached when it is impossible for him to see they were wrong and make the necessary adjustments.¹⁹

¹⁴ A useful definition of evil is one proposed by Maria Hsia Chang in her article *A Study in Evil: Voldemort, the Malignant Narcissist* at www.mugglenet.com/editorials/editorials/edit-changm01.shtml (accessed 07.2013): “It is here proposed that human or moral evil may be understood as deliberate harm or cruelty toward an undeserving other. The damage may be psychological or physical, and can range from control and humiliation to physical pain, bloodshed, and most egregiously, death. Human evil, in other words, is malice or perniciousness – the desire or actual causing of harm, injury, or death to an innocent other in the service of the perpetrators self-interest above and beyond that of biological survival. Hurting another for personal gain, therefore, is intrinsic to the definition of evil.”

¹⁵ “The person with the necrophilous orientation is one who is attracted to and fascinated by all that is not alive, all that is dead; corpses, decay, feces, dirt. Necrophiles are those people who love to talk about sickness, about burials, about death. They come to life precisely when they can talk about death...” Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p 39.

¹⁶ “The incestuous tie to mother very frequently implies not only a longing for mother’s love and protection, but also a fear of her. This fear is first of all the result of a person’s regressive fantasies, but are caused by the fact that the mother is in reality a cannibalistic, vampirelike, or necrophilic person. If a son or daughter of such a mother grows up without breaking the ties to her, then he or she cannot escape from suffering intense fears of being eaten up or destroyed by mother. The only course which in such cases can cure the fears that may drive a person to the border of insanity is the capacity to cut the tie with mother. But the fear which is engendered in such a relationship is at the same time the reason why it is so difficult for a person to cut the umbilical cord. Inasmuch as a person remains caught in this dependency, his own independence, freedom, and responsibility are weakened.” Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p 100.

¹⁷ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p 37.

¹⁸ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p 77.

¹⁹ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, pp. 173-78.

It was the American Psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck, who further explored the connection between “malignant narcissism” and evil in a book entitled “*People of the Lie*.”²⁰ In the chapter called ‘Toward a Psychology of Evil’, he distinguishes between people who perform evil deeds and are aware of doing wrong (the situation of most people), and those who have personality characteristics that are evil, but think they are always right: “A predominant characteristic, however, of the behavior of those I call evil is scapegoating. Because in their hearts they consider themselves above reproach, they must lash out at anyone who does reproach them. They sacrifice others to preserve their self-image of perfection.” He goes on to explain how ‘scapegoating’ works through a mechanism called ‘projection’. Those who are evil never think of themselves as evil because they ‘project’ their evil onto others and on to the world. They consequently see a lot of evil in others, attacking them instead of facing their own failures. He then asks why these people have a failure of self-criticism: it is not because of a lack of conscience, because they usually have a keen sense of their own perfection and exert immense energy to maintain it. They intensely desire to appear good, but their “goodness” is a pretense, a lie in effect, which is why Scott Peck calls them “the people of the lie”. He concludes that “The problem is not a defect of conscience but the effort to deny the conscience its due. We become evil by trying to hide from ourselves. The wickedness of evil is not committed directly, but indirectly as part of a cover-up process. Evil originates not in the absence of guilt but in the effort to escape it.”

He then asks where “the central defect of evil” resides, if not in the conscience. After clarifying that, out of all the different forms of narcissism,²¹ he is considering the most extreme type called malignant narcissism, he observes that this form of narcissism is characterized by an unsubmitted will, a will that is not submitted to something higher than itself, such as God or the demands of conscience. “In the conflict between their guilt and their will, it is the guilt that must go and the will that must win,” observes the author.

“The reader will be struck by the extraordinary willfulness of evil people. They are men and women of obviously strong will, determined to have their own way. There is a remarkable power in the manner in which they attempt to control others.”

After identifying malignant narcissism with the ecclesiastical sin of pride – “a kind of overweening pride and arrogance that prompts people to reject and even attack the judgment implied by day-to-day evidence of their own inadequacy” – he admits that we do not yet know what causes “this overweening pride, this arrogant self-image of perfection, this particularly malignant type of narcissism.”²²

The author can only speculate on the causative factors. Noting that this kind of evil tends to run in families, he considers the influence of genetic and developmental factors on bad moral choices later in life, but concludes that this explanation does not go far enough. He then suggests that the worst forms of malignant narcissism arise from the selfish satisfaction of exercising one’s own free will against any notions of morality or conscience. In other words, the evil dimension of this disorder appears to be rooted in the exaltation and performance of the individual will “for its own sake”, independent of, and indeed even contrary to, the will of others, or the Will of God: it is a total

²⁰ M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, New York: Touchstone, 1983, pp. 70-84.

²¹ Chang expresses these forms well when she writes: “Given the various meanings of narcissism – as instinctive self-interest and as psychological and character pathology – the word more profitably should be understood as referring to a continuum of self-love and self-image, ranging from a healthy love-of-self founded on a realistic self-conception, to an increasingly obsessive self-love rooted in a self-image that is more fantasy than real. At the extreme of the spectrum is a self-love that is grandiose in its self-regard and malevolent toward others.” *A Study in Evil: Voldemort, the Malignant Narcissist* at www.mugglenet.com/editorials/editorials/edit-changm01.shtml (accessed 07.2013)

²² The description offered by the author strongly recalls Jesus’s accusations against the Pharisees in St. Matthew’s gospel, in particular in Mt. 23, but also in other parts of the NT.

rebellion of the will. That, unfortunately, is as far as it goes. Few mental health professionals have ventured to further develop, or even challenge, Scott Peck's thesis.

However, the influential American psychoanalyst Otto Kernberg was working on the same subject at the same time, analyzing people with borderline personality structure, which includes Narcissistic Personality Disorder. He defined 'malignant narcissism' by placing it in the centre of a spectrum of disorders with similar traits but of increasing severity, which he termed "pathological narcissism": it ranges from Narcissistic Personality Disorder at the lower end, through malignant narcissism in the centre to Antisocial Personality (Psychopathy) at the higher end. He regarded malignant narcissism as a syndrome characterized by Narcissistic Personality Disorder, but with added antisocial and sadistic features, paranoid traits and egosyntonic (primitive) aggression. Other symptoms may include reduced conscience, a psychological need for power and a sense of importance (grandiosity).²³

Regarding the particularly close association of this condition with human evil, Kernberg said the following, in an interview in the year 2000: "...by the same token, one cannot say that the evil in the world is constituted by narcissism. But it *is* significantly constituted by *pathological* narcissism. And I would add even further, it is constituted not just by any pathological narcissism but by the most severe forms of it – in which there is a particular malignant development that consists of a return to primitive aggression and an idealization of the self as an aggressive self with power over others. This pathological idealization of the self as an aggressive self clinically is called 'malignant narcissism.' And this is very much connected with evil and with a number of clinical forms that evil takes, such as the pleasure and enjoyment in controlling others, in making them suffer, in destroying them, or in the casual pleasure in using others' trust and confidence and love to exploit them and to destroy them. That's the real evil – that synthesis between pathological narcissism and primitive aggression. And we find that at the level of individuals and in groups as well. Sometimes we find it in organizations. We find it in certain fundamentalist ideologies; we find it in certain aspects of mass psychology. That's the real evil."²⁴

Campbell's Psychiatric Dictionary defines malignant narcissism as "a psychological syndrome comprising an extreme mix of narcissism, antisocial personality disorder, aggression and sadism."²⁵ So although malignant narcissism is not yet formally recognized as a diagnostic category *per se*, there now appears to be a consensus on the basic features of this condition: it is a kind of 'NPD plus' (i.e., Narcissistic Personality Disorder plus traits from other personality disorders, especially the Antisocial and/or Paranoid Personality disorders).

Thus, in his analysis of narcissism in ministers of the Church, Dr. Len Sperry refers to three different types, with "Reactive Narcissism" as the most pathological and corresponding to 'malignant narcissism': "Ministers exhibiting reactive narcissism clearly meet diagnostic criteria for the narcissistic personality disorder but also exhibit features of other personality disorders such as the sadistic, paranoid, and anti-social or psychopathic personality. While they appear to be charming and engaging, they can just as easily be cold, calculating, and ruthless."²⁶

²³ Wikipedia article on "Malignant Narcissism", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malignant_narcissism (accessed 09.2014), based on Kernberg, O. F. (1994), *The Psychotherapeutic Management of Psychopathic, Narcissistic, and Paranoid Transferences*.

²⁴ From "Otto Kernberg: The Seeds of the Self" – an interview with Otto Kernberg by Susan Bridle, published originally in the journal *What is Enlightenment?*, no 17, (Spring-Summer, 2000), but now available at www.python-regius.dreamwidth.org/21736.html (accessed 09.2014).

²⁵ R.J.Campbell in *Campbell's Psychiatric Dictionary*, 2009, p. 574, quoted in Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malignant_narcissism (accessed 09.2014).

²⁶ From Len Sperry, "Sex, Priestly Ministry and the Church", San Francisco: Liturgical Press, 2003, p. 91-92.

More recent work has identified a “dark triad” of personality types involving Narcissism (characterized by grandiosity, pride, egotism and lack of empathy), Machiavellianism (characterized by manipulation and exploitation of others, a cynical disregard for morality, with a focus on self-interest and deception) and Psychopathy (characterized by enduring anti-social behaviour, impulsivity, selfishness, callousness and remorselessness). Some have proposed a “dark tetrad”, adding subclinical Sadism (sadistic personality trait) to the above three.²⁷ Although not mentioned, malignant narcissism falls squarely in the range of personality traits characterizing these groups.

Having arrived at some kind of understanding of the malignant “nature of the beast”, and its propensity for evil, the question must be asked how a person with this disorder, which, by definition, should constitute a disadvantage in normal day to day functioning,²⁸ can reach the heights of worldly success. In other words, how can the ruler of the entire world, during the final period of history, be an extreme case of a classified personality disorder of this kind? Three kinds of explanation come to mind.

Firstly, this is by no means the first time that a person with this kind of personality has assumed a prominent leadership position of global importance. Generally speaking, people with narcissistic characteristics or traits, are found quite commonly in leadership positions, especially in political roles. The traits do not, however, exceed the number needed to constitute the Narcissistic personality “disorder” (more than five in the list above). Politicians with a few of these traits may indeed have very successful careers. Erich Fromm, for example, notes that “Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill ... were very narcissistic persons, yet they did not lack in important political achievements. But these achievements were not such as to justify their feeling of self-assurance and unquestionable rightness often manifested in arrogance; at the same time, their narcissism was limited in comparison with that of a man like Hitler.”²⁹

At this point it is worth quoting what the same author says about the more extreme cases: “A particular instance of narcissism which lies on the borderline between sanity and insanity can be found in some men who have reached an extraordinary degree of power. The Egyptian pharaohs, the Roman Caesars, the Borgias, Hitler, Stalin, Trujillo – they all show certain similar features. They have attained absolute power; their word is the ultimate judgment of everything, including life and death, there seems to be no limit to their capacity to do what they want. They are gods, limited only by illness, age and death. They try to find a solution to the problem of human existence by the desperate attempt to transcend the limitation of human existence by pretending that one is not human. It is a madness that tends to grow in the lifetime of the afflicted person. The more he tries to be god, the more he isolates himself from the human race; this isolation makes him more frightened, everybody becomes his enemy, and in order to stand the resulting fright he has to increase his power, his ruthlessness, and his narcissism.”³⁰

It would appear that the milder, more benign, narcissistic traits are useful qualities for those in leadership positions. They impress and charm those who are electing the leader of the organization or nation. However, history shows that more extreme narcissistic personalities, those whom we have already identified as ‘malignant narcissists’, also manage to insert themselves into positions of power

²⁷ Cf. Wikipedia “Dark Triad” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_triad (accessed 19.09.14) , with references to recent research.

²⁸ Cf. note 2 above, “definition of a personality disorder”.

²⁹ Cf. Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973, 203, note 19.

³⁰ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p. 66

from time to time and, under certain conditions, indulge their personality traits and get carried away in spiraling extremes of tyrannical frenzy and cruelty (as described well by Fromm above). They become truly evil. Although, the entire history of western democracy has been aimed at preventing, or at least limiting, the evils of tyranny and dictatorship, occasionally democratic principles have lapsed and allowed the most appalling tyrants to come to power, most recently in the case of Adolf Hitler. One must therefore consider the nature of the social and political conditions that have favoured this aberration.

Due to the abundance of historical data from Germany in the 1920's and 1930's, this enquiry can begin with the conditions that led to the failure of democratic rule under the Social Democrat government of the Weimar Republic and the concomitant rise of Hitler and the totalitarian rule of his Nazi Party before World War II. It is fair to say that this period of transition from democracy to dictatorship in Germany was a time of great crisis for the country: morally, politically, socially and financially. It is summarized by an election poster in November 1932, which reads "Hitler – our last hope". Morally, the Germans were humiliated and embittered by their defeat in World War I, and angry with their leaders for signing the treaty of Versailles, whose conditions included huge loss of territory and vast financial penalties. They insisted they had fought well and were clearly not totally defeated and exhausted. Politically, the democratic leadership was weak and hampered by an ineffective constitution. Parliament was filled with representatives from many rival political parties, all fighting each other. The rivalry between the Nationalist and Communist parties often spilled over into the streets, in bloody confrontations and assassinations. Socially, the country was deeply divided by social class. Financially it was challenged first by the reparations they were obliged to pay under the terms of the Versailles treaty – debts they often refused to pay – and second by the economic depression of 1929, resulting from the Wall Street Crash and the withdrawal of American loans. Unemployment and hyperinflation led to severe hardship, even starvation, in the streets. There must have been a sense of existential threat and insecurity among a significant part of the population. In their desperation, the people looked for extreme solutions, so they turned to Hitler and his nationalist Nazi Party, since they appeared to have something to offer. The number of their seats in parliament rose from 12 in 1928 to 230 in 1932, to become the largest party, although still not a majority. The final turning point came, however, in March 1933 with Hitler's acceptance by the ruling elite and his appointment as Chancellor by Von Hindenberg, the country's President. Within a short time Hitler had received extraordinary powers, so that when the President died in 1934, he was able to combine the roles of President and Chancellor and become the absolute leader.

There were also personal factors involved. Hitler himself was a brilliant and persuasive speaker, full of self-conviction. He had a vision of Germany's greatness and how to restore it. Through their wounded patriotism, Hitler moved vast numbers of people from all the social classes to support him, including the many wealthy industrialists who provided him with funds. Erich Fromm adds psychological colouring to this picture of Hitler's success: "I have tried to show in Hitler's writings the two trends that we have already described as fundamental for the authoritarian character: the craving for power over men and the longing for submission to an overwhelmingly strong outside power. Hitler's ideas are more or less identical with the ideology of the Nazi party. The ideas expressed in his book [*Mein Kampf*] are those which he expressed in the countless speeches by which he won mass following for his party. This ideology results from his personality which, with its inferiority feeling, hatred against life, asceticism, and envy of those who enjoy life, is the soil of sado-masochistic strivings; it was addressed to people who, on account of their similar character structure, felt attracted and excited by these teachings and became ardent followers of the man who expressed what they felt. But it was not only the Nazi ideology that satisfied the lower middle class; the political practice realized what the ideology promised. A hierarchy was created in which everyone has somebody above him to submit to and somebody beneath him to feel power over; the

man at the top, the leader, has Fate, History, Nature above him as the power in which to submerge himself. Thus the Nazi ideology and practice satisfies the desires springing from the character structure of one part of the population and gives direction and orientation to those who, though not enjoying domination and submission, were resigned and had given up faith in life, in their own decisions, in everything.”³¹

In short, there was a deep crisis in German society at the time, which Hitler accurately identified, described and believed he could resolve. He moved a large proportion of the German people to believe in him and came to be regarded as a national redeemer figure – a role he managed to play deceptively well for many years, until it was apparent that he had failed and his solutions were wrong. At that point he committed suicide.

The main message from this is clearly to beware of leaders who appear at times of crisis and desperation, claiming to have the solution to current problems. They come to be regarded as redeemer figures, and hopes and expectations rise accordingly. Having been forewarned in the Gospels, Christians should have no problem in rejecting these ‘false Christs’ (cf: Mk 13,21-22), but for those who do not believe in God’s redemption through Christ, there is a great temptation to seek redemption from political leaders, especially those who are charismatic and convincing. The situation is highly reminiscent of the famous quote attributed to G.K. Chesterton: “When men choose not to believe in God, they do not therefore believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything.”³² In other words, men become easily deceived, not only about the ability of political leaders to bring about change that is seen as a kind of redemption, but also about the rightness and efficacy of the proposed solutions.

The election of Barak Obama as president of the USA in 2008 is a case in point: at the time, there was a crisis in the US – especially a crisis of confidence in the leadership of the 43rd President, George W. Bush. He had made America immensely unpopular in the world, especially among Muslims, and had run up huge debts from warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq – with all its echoes of Vietnam. There was a mini financial crisis at home leading to insolvency of major banks and mega companies like General Motors. American society was deeply divided along political lines. There were grievances over health care, gun laws, illegal immigration, security measures, foreign debt, all of which turned the elections in November 2008 into a matter of national redemption, and the main democratic candidate, Barak Obama, into a potential national redeemer. Obama was hailed as an enlightened savior figure³³ and his reported religious convictions and statements simply stoked the flames of messianic speculation.³⁴ The award of the Nobel Peace prize the next year, before he had made any achievements in that field, must also have been fuelled by a certain degree of messianic expectation. In an interview with Piers Morgan in late 2013, the political journalist Barbara Walters admits that “We thought he was going to be.... the next messiah.” Interestingly, she does not entirely give up hope in this belief: “But you know? He still has several years to go. What does he have, three years more, Piers? And, you know, there will be a lot of changes, one thinks in that time.”³⁵

³¹ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1994, pp. 235-36

³² Attributed to G.K.Chesterton, but for further clarification on the source see: www.chesterton.org/ceases-to-worship/

³³ Cf: <http://obamamessiah.blogspot.co.il/> . As an example of the gushing praises for Obama, see: Mark Mortford, “Is Obama an enlightened being?”, San Francisco Chronicle, June 6, 2008, available at <http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/mortford/article/Is-Obama-an-enlightened-being-Spiritual-wise-2544395.php> (29.09.2014).

³⁴ see: http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/10/obamas_religious_ruse_the_cult_1.html

³⁵ The interview can be found at the following link:

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2013/12/17/barbara_walters_on_obama_we_thought_he_was_going_to_be_the_next_messiah.html

This final comment shows, perhaps, that the hope for a political messiah in the USA remains high to this day. But although, in the eyes of some, Obama may still be a suitable candidate, or redeemer figure,³⁶ the right conditions for messianic style, authoritarian leadership with personality cult, were not present. According to the lessons learnt from Germany's Hitler, the redeemer figure needs a real existential crisis in order to suspend the laws of democracy, seize absolute power and enact extreme solutions. The conditions for this kind of leadership are being created as we speak, by those who wish to shape the future of the planet.

Conclusions

From the earliest days of Christian Church, the person of the Antichrist has been a fixed element of the prophecy of the end of days, and the last things. Down the centuries, the interpretation of this figure has undergone ludicrous embellishment, geographical displacement and collective obfuscation. Nevertheless, the New Testament sources remain unanimous and clear, with the Book of Revelation giving us the most detailed information on his ultimate, but thankfully brief, global reign. As the leader of a false messianic regime, worshipped by many on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the Antichrist will be recognized both by the number of his name and by his megalomaniac personality, well known to mental health specialists and to students of history. Natural and manufactured crises of various kinds will precede his reign, leading to the enactment of emergency decrees and the suspension of normal democratic processes. We have outlined above what appear to be the main factors favouring the transformation of democratic societies into dictatorship and authoritarianism: a sense of defeat, humiliation and dissatisfaction among the electorate, weak leadership hampered by constitutional restrictions, strong political rivalries, deep social divisions and financial crises leading to economic insecurity and ruin, all contributing to a strong sense of existential insecurity and fear. A glance at the news on any day should convince us that the whole world is presently undergoing this change. We should prepare spiritually and physically for the full revelation and global reign of the Antichrist, in the near future.

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³⁶ It is an open question as to whether his personality is sufficiently narcissistic and sadistic for this role.