

## Babylonian Theology

Before going on to discuss Babylon's 'theology', we must first remind ourselves of what Babylon represents, according to St. John's description of her in the Apocalypse.

Babylon is described as an international authority based in a city (Ap 17,18) with seven hills (Ap 17,9), an ancient and widely-known allusion to the city of Rome. But Babylon can not be equated with ancient Rome, since her destruction is eternal (18,21; 19,3), and we know that the ancient city of Rome was rebuilt and repopulated after the Barbarian invasions 1600 years ago. Furthermore, Babylon's destruction is described as one of the eschatological judgements of God (Ap 16,19: the 'bowl plagues'), and by no stretch of the imagination can it be claimed that these divine 'acts of judgement' have already taken place. Therefore, there is no alternative but to admit that Babylon represents an international authority which currently exists and is based in Rome.

The Babylon in St. John's vision can be more precisely identified by the fact that she is also described as a woman who is drunk (Ap 17,6) and behaving as a prostitute (Ap 17,1-5). The ancient prophets often used the metaphor of prostitution to depict the idolatrous practices of the people of Israel (e.g.: 1Chr 5,25; Ps 73,27; Jer 3,6; Ezek 16,17; 23,19; Hos 9,1), since it vividly expressed the infidelity to God, underlying these practices. In reference to Babylon, then, the use of this metaphor indicates that she is a religious community that has abandoned her privileged relationship with God, in this case because of her idolatrous love of riches and wealth (Ap ch. 18).

The religious character of this community is indicated by the statement that she is drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus (Ap 17,6). In addition to the fact that saints, unlike martyrs, are not killed in the witnessing of their faith, there is nothing in the text of the Apocalypse which suggests that Babylon is guilty of shedding the blood of these people. Instead, the expression reveals that the life-blood of these holy followers of Jesus has affected Babylon's mentality in such a way as to cause her to behave in an uncharacteristic, exalted and disinhibited way, like a woman who is drunk. Now this intoxication tells us much about the identity of Babylon. Firstly it implies a certain identification with, and assimilation of, the lives of the saints and martyrs of Jesus, confirming the suspicion that the international religious power represented by Babylon is Christian. Secondly, when interpreted in the context of Babylon's prostitution, it tells us the exact nature of her transgression. Being drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus (feeling 'high' and being exalted with their merits) predisposes and prompts Babylon to behave as a prostitute (to indulge her idolatrous desire for riches, luxury and wealth). In short, Babylon exploits the merits of the saints and martyrs of Jesus in order to satisfy her idolatrous love of wealth and luxury.

Babylon, then, represents the historical centre of the Catholic Church at Rome. In the prophet's vision she is accused of exploiting the cult of the saints and martyrs, by using the money collected in their name, in order to finance her opulent and luxurious lifestyle. However, in spite of being identified with a specific location, nowadays called the City of the Vatican, it is evident from the text of the Apocalypse that Babylon's corrupting influence has spread far beyond Rome and now extends throughout the whole world (Ap 19,2). In varying degrees, we are all held 'captive' by this Babylon, and by her historical legacy of corruption. Who has not drunk from "the wine of the passion of her fornication" (Ap 17,2; 18,3), so as to have taken delight in the acquisition of wealth and luxury, mindless of God's disapproval?

However, Babylon has not only corrupted human desires with her idolatrous behaviour. We must seriously consider whether her drunken and disordered mentality has not also affected the understanding of God's Word, producing a very subtle distortion of Christian theology and belief, which for simplicity can be called 'Babylonian theology'. Before discussing its implications, this deviant pattern of thinking can be reconstructed from the following passage of St. John's description of Babylon:

*"For in her heart she says: Queen I sit and sorrow I certainly do not see"*  
(Ap 18,7).

By these words Babylon is expressing her claim to be the Lamb's holy bride, the wife and queen of the King of kings, described as the city in which there *"will be no more death, nor mourning, nor crying, nor pain"* (Ap 21,4) – the ultimate fulfilment of the divine promises for mankind. Babylon is clearly thinking she represents that fulfilment. But since the fulfilment is not going to be realized until after the final Judgement, this self-centred and triumphalist way of thinking leads Babylon to behave as if the final Judgement will never take place. Babylonian theology, then, is essentially a 'de-eschatologized' variant of Christian theology, that is to say a theology whose cardinal feature is the denial of the final Judgement – the time when the source of evil will eventually be confronted and eradicated from creation. Pretending that evil has already been judged, 'Babylonian theology' is tolerant of compromise with evil forces in the present world, and thus participates, in the 'mystery of iniquity'. As it is written, Babylon fornicates with the rulers of the world (Ap 17,2; 18,3.9).

The result of this 'de-eschatologized' and worldly ideology is that 'Babylonians' are very attached to the present world, and cannot bear to contemplate the 'end of this world'. As an institution, in fact, Babylon seems to be dedicated to preserving 'this world', supporting the 'status quo', and ignoring or misinterpreting the eschatological dimension of the Lord's teaching.

This is particularly true when it comes to the interpretation of the Apocalypse. It explains why the run-up to the final Judgement prophesied in the Apocalypse – the blowing of the seven trumpets, the mission of the two witnesses, the 'exodus' of the 144,000, the reign of the beast and his defeat at the final battle (Ap chs. 8 to 19) – is totally misinterpreted as a description of the history of the Church in the Roman Period.

One can find very eloquent and persuasive tracts, composed by theologians of the 'Babylonian School', let us call it, in which the 'Parousia' is re-defined as the 'Real Presence' at the celebration of the Eucharist, the individual judgement at death is confused with the final Judgement, and the internal spiritual battle of every believer is identified with the final battle at the end of history. In the 'Babylonian view', prophecy no longer refers to future events, and history is understood as a gradual conversion process, by which everyone living on the earth will eventually become Catholics and go to Mass. Little by little Heaven is coming down to Earth, thus fulfilling God's plan of salvation in a gradual way. Babylonians claim that the martyrs in heaven, instead of mourning for the sins of mankind and longing for the eschatological judgements of God (Ap 6,9-10), are already celebrating the marriage feast of Christ. In 'Babylonian theology', the Holy City will never be realized more concretely than it is now (i.e., by the Holy See in the Eternal City of Rome), and there will never be a cataclysmic transformation of the present heaven and earth into a new heaven and a new earth.

'Babylonian theology' is strongly supportive of the present world order, in which evil

prospers behind the mask of religious piety. Underlying this worldly distortion of Christian theology is the manipulation of basic Christian eschatology: the incorruptible goal which will be attained by the eschatological transformation of the present world, as described in Scripture, has been substituted by a triumphalist and self-glorifying image of the Church in the present world. The inspiring visions of the Apocalypse are 'accommodated' to a re-defined eschatology that views the institutional Church as the consummation of all things. The canonical book that speaks most clearly about the 'end of the kingdom of this world' (Ap 11,15) has been 'de-eschatologized', and 'neutralized', by interpreting it to refer to the Roman Period.

In apocalyptic terms, 'Babylonian theology' confuses the 'binding' of Satan during the 'Millennium'(Ap 20,1-6) with the eternal condemnation of Satan, the Beast, the false prophet and their followers at the final Judgement (Ap 20,10.15). The term 'realized eschatology' for the Babylonians has come to denote the complete fulfilment of God's promises, rather than the temporary and partial realization otherwise known as the 'Millennium'.

In this way, through her subtle theological modifications, Babylon is actually obstructing the final act of global redemption. By pretending to embody the final realization of God's promises, she is obscuring the eschatological vision and confounding the desire for radical change, which will bring, in its wake, the true fulfilment of God's Words and promises to mankind. So it is necessary to follow the example of the saints and martyrs in heaven, as they pray for the time (Ap 6,9-10) when this false imitation and usurper of God's Holy City will be destroyed (Ap 18,20; 19,2-3). In the meantime, like the Jews of the 6th century BC, we must accept that we are being held 'captive' by Babylon – captive not only to her desire for riches and luxury, but also to her triumphalist, de-eschatologized and worldly mentality.

In defence of Babylon and her theologians, it may be argued that nowhere is it officially stated that the historical centre of the Catholic Church, as an institution, represents the complete fulfilment of God's promises. No part of the Church is exempt from professing the Creed, and in the Creed it is proclaimed that, at the end of time, Christ "will come in glory to judge the living and the dead", so we "look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come". The daily recitation of the Creed confirms that the complete fulfilment of the divine promises has not yet taken place. However, 'Babylonian theology' is not an official or even semi-official teaching of the Church, and neither is it openly expressed for the faithful to challenge or refute. As indicated by the opening clause in the relevant passage , 'Babylonian theology' has its origin in nothing more than an unspoken attitude or conviction:

*"For in her heart she says: Queen I sit and am not a widow, and sorrow I certainly do not see" (Ap 18,7).*

“For in her heart she says” is the literal translation of a Semitic expression, which means to think or believe inwardly. Implicit in the use of this expression, then, is a difference between what Babylon thinks privately to herself, and what she publicly pronounces and proclaims (cf. Mt 23,2-4). So, in theory, one would not really expect Babylon's sin (her love of riches and wealth) to affect her knowledge of our Lord's teaching, or her ability to formulate or explain it for the faithful. In practice, however, Babylon's posturing as the fulfilment of God's divine plan for mankind does indeed influence the Church's eschatological teaching, as noted previously. Unfortunately, this influence is not limited to unofficial theological works or commentaries, but has found its way into official Church teaching, albeit mainly in the field of eschatology. Several statements in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, especially those concerning the ‘last things’, do not square well with the Word of God in the

Apocalypse, and may have been influenced by what we call 'Babylonian theology' (for the details please see the article entitled 'Comments on the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 1020-1060').

After identifying Babylon's worldly misrepresentation of the Christian eschatological hope, the faithful are faced with the task of rectifying it. The first step is to affirm the Christian Creed and insist that there will be a second coming and a final Judgement, and that the complete fulfilment of the divine promises will only be realized through these events. We should be grateful for the Old Testament because it helps us to understand Christ and the prophecy he gave to John in the Apocalypse. We should recognize the value of the prophecy of the Apocalypse because it informs and prepares us for the distressing events leading up to the final Judgement. Those who would make us think otherwise have forsaken their Christian identity, and have become 'Babylonians'.

The ultimate step in defeating the Babylonian mind-set, though, is the exposure of its source – the centre of this worldly, ecclesiastical triumphalism – through the identification of 'Babylon', the Great Prostitute described in the Apocalypse. As we have argued elsewhere (in the book "The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple"), this will unmask the 'mystery of iniquity' and pave the way for the divinely-willed destruction of Babylon (Ap 17,16-17), the reign of the antichrist, and the events leading up to the second coming and final Judgement. With faith in the Word of God in the Apocalypse, the time of our 'captivity' will soon come to an end.