

The Personality of the Antichrist

Many stories and legends have been told concerning the Antichrist who, according to New Testament prophecy, is due to appear and rule the world briefly at the end of history (2Thess 2,1-12; Mk 13,14; Mt 24,15; Rev 11,7; 13,1-8; 17,8-14).¹ In these prophecies, we are warned that the letters of his name will add up to 666, 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 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 the 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

¹ One of the most imaginative, yet realistic, of these was penned by Vladimir Solovyov, the Russian Philosopher, in 1899, the last year of his life (“A Short Story of the Antichrist”).

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)".² 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.³ It is disturbing, but not unforeseeable, that

² 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).

³ 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

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 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.⁴ 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”⁵ and “symbiotic fixation to mother”.⁶ 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.⁷

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

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).

⁴ A useful definition of evil is one proposed by Maria Hsia Chang in her article *A Study in Evil: Voldemort, the Malignant Narcissist* at <http://www.mugglenet.com/2007/03/a-study-in-evil-voldemort-the-malignant-narcissist/> (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.”

⁵ “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.

⁶ “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.

⁷ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p 37.

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.”⁸ 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.⁹

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*.”¹⁰ 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,¹¹ 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.

⁸ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p 77.

⁹ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, pp. 173-78.

¹⁰ M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*, New York: Touchstone, 1983, pp. 70-84.

¹¹ 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 <http://www.mugglenet.com/2007/03/a-study-in-evil-voldemort-the-malignant-narcissist/> (accessed 07.2013)

“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.”¹²

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 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).¹³

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

¹² 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.

¹³ 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*.

certain fundamentalist ideologies; we find it in certain aspects of mass psychology. That's the real evil."¹⁴

Campbell's *Psychiatric Dictionary* defines malignant narcissism as "a psychological syndrome comprising an extreme mix of narcissism, antisocial personality disorder, aggression and sadism."¹⁵ 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."¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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,¹⁸ 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

¹⁴ 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).

¹⁵ R.J.Campbell in *Campbell's Psychiatric Dictionary*, 2009, p. 574, quoted in Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malignant_narcissism (accessed 09.2014).

¹⁶ From Len Sperry, "*Sex, Priestly Ministry and the Church*", San Francisco: Liturgical Press, 2003, p. 91-92.

¹⁷ Cf. Wikipedia "Dark Triad" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dark_triad (accessed 19.09.14) , with references to recent research.

¹⁸ Cf. note 2 above, "definition of a personality disorder".

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.”¹⁹

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..”²⁰

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 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

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

²⁰ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p. 66

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."²¹

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."²² In other words, men become easily deceived, not only about the ability of

²¹ Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1994, pp. 235-36

²² Attributed to G.K.Chesterton, but for further clarification on the source see: www.chesterton.org/ceases-to-worship/

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 figure²³ and his reported religious convictions and statements simply stoked the flames of messianic speculation.²⁴ 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.”²⁵

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,²⁶ the right conditions for messianic style, authoritarian leadership with personality cult, are 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 just not there, at least not yet. It is worthwhile, nevertheless, to speculate on the kind of situation that might take us down that road again.

We have outlined above what appear to be the main factors favouring the transformation of democratic societies into dictatorships: 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.

Looking around the world today, it is no exaggeration to say that militant fundamentalist Islam is capable of bringing about a situation in which all these factors are present. It is indeed the declared aim of the followers of this violent Islamic creed, to bring down democratic governments and replace them with Islamic rule by Sharia law. Their tactics are a combination of persuasion (“stealth”) and violence (“terror”), and there is no doubt that, over the last 20 years, on a global level, they have been singularly successful in the pursuit of their aims. In particular, they have been able to “convert” at least 10-15% of the already-sizeable, immigrant Muslim populations in western democratic States, to their radical brand of Islam, and to recruit fighters to their cause from these dissatisfied and

²³ 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).

²⁴ see: http://www.americanthinker.com/2008/10/obamas_religious_ruse_the_cult_1.html

²⁵ 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

²⁶ It is an open question as to whether his personality is sufficiently narcissistic and sadistic for this role.

alienated young men and women. As a result, democracies have had to invest considerable resources in developing and maintaining security services acting on multiple levels to prevent terror attacks on their territory or property. So far they have been able to prevent the majority of planned attacks. But as the training and zeal of militant Muslims improves, and the coordination between their ranks grows, terror attacks will become more frequent, security measures will become insufficient, and life in western democratic States will become insecure and intolerable. There will be wars in certain regions.²⁷ Weak political leadership in this situation, especially if hampered by constitutional impediments, will cause social divisions to develop and financial insecurity and decline to set in. The peaceful citizens of these nations will then experience frustration with their leadership and demoralization.

This is precisely the kind of situation that could be exploited by a strong authoritarian leader claiming to have the solutions, in a form as radical and extreme as those who are causing the problem. It would have an instant appeal to those who have already despaired of ordinary measures. However, the effects of the cure would be far worse than the disease: the western “democratic” reaction would, in effect, be far worse than the oriental “Islamic” provocation. Democracy would be swallowed up by tyranny, and instead of a relatively small loss of life, many millions of lives will be lost.

This preview may seem unduly pessimistic, but unless fundamentalist Islam can be tamed and stopped through peaceful means, through “re-education” programs, it is entirely realistic to predict the capacity of militant Islamists to take down democratic governments. Experience with militant Islamic groups, up until now, has shown a trend towards increasing violence and fundamentalism over time: the Muslim Brotherhood already looks conservative when compared with Al Qaeda, and Al Qaeda already looks soft when compared with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Greater militancy and fundamentalism appears to breed greater success and popularity among the radicalized Islamic youth from around the world. Erich Fromm would have been quick to point out a concordance between the political program of Islamic fundamentalism and the character structure of these young “converts”, in whom an authoritarian, sado-masochist personality has long been waiting for an opportunity to express itself.²⁸

The militant Islamic challenge outlined above is not limited to one or two “chosen” nations, like Israel and the USA; it concerns all, for its aim is to submit the whole world to Sharia Law. It is therefore probable that individual nations, especially those in the “third world”, will become overwhelmed with further increases in militant Islamic violence. There will be a growing need for international cooperation in general and in counter-terrorist activities in particular.²⁹ A worldwide coalition against militant Islamic terror will

²⁷ In his “*Clash of Civilizations*”, Samuel Huntington considers whether this situation could give rise to full-blown global war: “A global war involving the core states of the world’s major civilizations is highly improbable but not impossible. Such a war, we have suggested, could come about from the escalation of a fault line war between groups from different civilizations, most likely involving Muslims on one side and non-Muslims on the other. Escalation is made more likely if aspiring Muslim core states compete to provide assistance to their embattled coreligionists. It is made less likely by the interests which secondary and tertiary kin countries may have in not becoming deeply involved in the war themselves.” (*The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, London: Simon and Shuster UK Ltd, 1997, p.312).

²⁸ Cf. Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, pp. 235-6.

²⁹ It is worth quoting from Samuel Huntington again: “On a worldwide basis Civilization seems in many respects to be yielding to barbarism, generating the image of an unprecedented phenomenon, a global Dark Ages, possibly descending on humanity.... In the greater clash, the global “*real* clash”, between Civilization and barbarism, the world’s greatest civilizations, with their rich accomplishments in religion, art, literature, philosophy, science, technology, morality, and compassion, will also hang together or hang separately. In the emerging era, clashes of civilizations are the greatest threat to world peace, and an international order based on civilizations is the surest safeguard against world war.” (*Clash of Civilizations*, 321). In many ways, the

be organized, in which the weaker States will be supported by the stronger. Security coordination will lead to global security enforcement, necessitating a single command centre and a single leadership with world dominion. So ultimately, the result of the Islamic militant activity against democratic governments will be to create a one world government, whose leader is a redeemer figure who promises “redemption” from this and other global threats. In other words, it is provoking the end-historical alliance known as the “dominion of the Antichrist”.³⁰ It is as if the devil has revived the violent face of Islam in order to generate anarchy and disorder on such a grand scale as to provoke a tyrannical counter-reaction, through which he, the devil, will then be able to exert his own control and dominion over all peoples; all this by means of a leader, traditionally called the Antichrist, who proposes and then enforces a phony redemption on the whole world.

Furthermore, there appears to be no escape. So long as militant Muslims are actively bent on conquering the world for their God, and submitting it to their own laws, then the rest of the world will have only two choices: to submit or to fight. To submit would lead to a condition that is incompatible with modern life, since it involves a reversal of more than a millennium of religious, scientific and cultural ‘progress’. In effect, it would be intolerable to the vast majority of the world’s population, including most Muslims. The only alternative is to join forces and fight against this sadistic ‘barbarism’ with all possible means, including the partial renunciation of privacy and individual liberties for the sake of better security. This might be acceptable if it stopped at that. However, according to the prophecies, the phony world redeemer figure will enhance his power and prestige by enthroning himself in a rebuilt Temple, on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and be worshipped through a “personality cult” of his own pathological personality (cf. 2Thess 2,4). This takes us to the third explanation for the success of this phony redeemer figure: not only does his personality adapt itself perfectly to this global leadership role, taking advantage of the prevailing situation of crisis and desperation, but it also manipulates and exploits the bimillennial messianic expectation of the Jewish religion for a redeemer of this world.

The Jewish religion has created a vacant position for the role of ‘world redeemer’ by its rejection of Jesus Christ as messiah. Whatever the orthodox Jews may think of Jesus of Nazareth, and some think very highly of him, they do not accept him as their messiah, and for this reason they await another person to fulfil this role. Their messianic expectations are based on the life and example of King David, the ancient King of Judah, who was an earthly ruler anointed by a prophet at the instruction of God. ‘Messiah’ simply means “divinely anointed”, in this case with the purpose of ruling God’s people. Over the years, and especially immediately after the time of Jesus, the messianic expectation of the Jews was more accurately defined, reaching its most clear definition in the legal writings of Maimonides, in the 12th century.

In his Halachic work entitled ‘*Yad Hachazakah*’ (‘*Mishneh Torah*’, or simply ‘*The Code*’), Maimonides has defined the prerequisite achievements of the expected messiah,

only sensible solution, the one suggested by Huntington, takes us perilously close to the notion of a one-world government.

³⁰ “The traditional doctrine of the Antichrist does not include any possibility of knowing the date of the end of time; nor does it state that there can be no world dominion save that of the Antichrist! The establishment of a World State, which is today well within the bounds of historical possibility, may quite possibly come to be looked upon as a legitimate goal of political endeavor. What this doctrine does state is that once this step has been taken, mankind will find itself in a condition in which the Dominion of the Antichrist has become more acutely possible than ever before: “a world organization might become the most deadly and impregnable of tyrannies, the final establishment of the reign of anti-Christ” *The End of Time: A Meditation on the Philosophy of History*” by Josef Pieper, Eng. Trans. Michael Bullock, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999, Part III, p.129.

so that he may be identified and followed as soon as he appears. Since there are no commentators who disagree with him, Maimonides' conclusions on this subject are accepted as binding Halachic rulings, i.e., as Jewish law.

Contrary to the popular expectation for a supernatural manifestation, Maimonides' Halachic ruling is that the coming of the messiah will be a natural process leading to the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. The messiah does not have to perform miracles. The natural process consists of two stages, appropriately termed 'presumably messiah' and 'definitely messiah': "If a Davidic king arises who studies Torah and observes the commandments prescribed by the written and oral law as his ancestor David did, and will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and reinforce the breaches in its observance, and (he will) fight the wars of Hashem, he is presumably messiah. If he does (all the above), conquers all the surrounding nations, rebuilds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed remnants of Israel, he is definitely messiah" (*The Code, or Mishneh Torah*, Book 14: Judges; Treatise 5: Kings and Wars, 11:4).³¹

This Halachic ruling of Maimonides should be examined very carefully because it describes the process of redemption as stipulated by Jewish law.

1. **'Presumably messiah'**: The following signs indicate the identity of messiah when he is in the first stages of revealing himself. The first sign is that 'a Davidic king arises', which simply means that the Jewish man who is to be the messiah will begin to lead and act. He will not be king in the formal sense until he is confirmed as messiah in the next stage. The second sign is that he 'studies Torah and observes the commandments... as his ancestor David did'. The third sign is that he uses his power of leadership 'to compel all Israel to walk in the way of Torah'. He mends the gaps in the observance of the Torah ('reinforces the breaches'), and stands up against the nations that distress the Jewish people ('fights the wars of Hashem'). The Jew who achieves a certain measure of success in these tasks is 'presumably messiah'.

2. **'Definitely messiah'**: One of the signs of being 'definitely messiah' is complete success in the tasks listed above, that is to say success in bringing the entire Jewish people to the way of the Torah, and in conquering all the gentile nations ('does all the above, conquers all the surrounding nations'). The building of the Temple in its place and the gathering of the dispersed remnants of Israel (including the ten lost tribes) finally establish the prospective messiah as 'definitely messiah'.

The completion of the building of the Temple is critical for the final confirmation and identification of the messiah. Although some authorities maintain that the Temple will descend from heaven, Maimonides rules that the messiah will build it. Only after the Temple has been rebuilt does redemption actually begin, according to Jewish law. Christian prophecy simply adds that this Jewish messiah, having rebuilt the Temple, will enthrone himself there and force people to worship him.

Clearly, according to Jewish law, many of the legal requirements of the messiah are interrelated. After the return of Israel to its land and the establishment of the State, almost any observant Jew who serves in the Israeli Defence Force, and encourages his co-religionists to observe Jewish law, can be placed in the category of 'presumably messiah'. However, in order to be regarded as 'definitely messiah' he has to accomplish three unique, almost impossible, but interrelated aims: the defeat of the 'surrounding nations', all Muslim, which will then allow him to remove the Muslim presence from the Temple Mount and rebuild the Jewish temple "in its place", which will, in turn, cause a huge

³¹ As quoted in "*The Days of Moschiach: The Redemption and the Coming of the Moschiach in Jewish Sources*", by Menachem M. Brod, Kfar Chabad, Israel: Chabad Youth organization, 1993. The subsequent explanation is also based on the presentation given in this book.

immigration of the Jews who remain in the Diaspora. The foremost factor here, the one which leads to all the rest, is clearly the defeat of the surrounding Islamic nations.

At this point we can return to the challenge of militant fundamentalist Islam in the Middle East Region. After re-establishing an Islamic Caliphate in order to unite Muslims under its rule (in the year 2014), the main aim of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is to submit the rest of the world to Islamic rule according to Sharia Law. This is a religious obligation according to fundamentalist Muslims, and it clearly has the whole world in its scope. Being a non-Islamic State adjacent to the Islamic heartland, Israel is the front line for militant attempts to bring about its “submission” and the extermination of “infidels” therein. In this situation of existential danger, the leader who goes ahead and defeats the source of this threat for Israel will certainly be received as a kind of redeemer. If his victory against the nations that surround and threaten Israel prompt him to rebuild the Temple, he will be hailed as ‘definitely messiah’.

It is as simple as that. The Islamic threat is already there and is constantly intensifying, even against the State of Israel. The Israelis are perfectly aware of their need to defend themselves now, as in the past, and they are well equipped with sophisticated weapons for this purpose. Although the results still lie in the future, the precise way in which the story plays out can be regarded as history, almost, precisely because it is determined by two different and inflexible religions. This used to be called ‘fate’. What makes the coming of the Jewish redeemer particularly inevitable is the interaction of these two religions, Islam and Judaism. Both are opponents of each other, with competing ideas about the way that brings “redemption” to the world. Islam is currently occupying the Temple Mount and obstructing the Jewish messianic expectation, which is an alternative view of redemption. A convincing victory over the ‘surrounding nations’ is all that is needed. Then the Jews will be able to “mark” their triumph over radical Islam by removing the mosques on the Temple Mount and building the Third Temple. As explained above, the one who is credited with this victory will be hailed as the messiah of the Jews.

The purpose of this article is to show that the “dominion of the Antichrist”, which Christian Prophecy faithfully awaits, is neither a story nor a legend. We are not awaiting anything extraordinary or unimaginable, because all the factors and elements are already in place, in these days, for its realization: from the potential “malignant narcissist” leader, who takes advantage of a situation of crisis caused mainly by militant Islam, in order to forcefully exert his own brand of totalitarian rule. All that is necessary for its realization is a further intensification of Islamic militant activity across the globe, resulting in a mood of demoralization and existential insecurity among the democratic countries. It is precisely in a situation like this that a charismatic leader with a ‘malignant narcissist’ personality comes forward, claiming to have the solution to all the world’s problems. If accepted and believed, he will be hailed as a “redeemer” and be given powers to govern in a totalitarian way, thus bringing an end to democracy as we know it. In an ironic twist, his victory over the enemies of “freedom and democracy” or “peace and security” will then allow him to rebuild the Temple of the Jews in Jerusalem and be proclaimed their messiah. Never have we been so close to the decisive events, prophesied so long ago, that will bring history and “this world” to an end.

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