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Terrible Times: Apocalypse Now for Believers



What's the major life force of society today? Without a doubt, it's attaining "the good life." If given the choice and the means, most people would likely not knowingly choose to pursue anything else. And why not? The "good life" seems so within grasp in our society today. Yet, our entire commercial culture is tilting at a feverished pace to create imagined "cares of this life" and to pitch their solution to every potential consumer, whether they can afford it or not. And, if not, all the better — it's good for the financial services business, which today, by the way, is the largest profit earner of any major industry.

We are witnessing a hyped, last-days stage of what was already a glimmer in New Testament times: "To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry' (Matthew 11:6-17). So the whole world increasingly accepts a materialistic perspective of life. To our culture, at least, you only

have lived if you "had your chance at greatness" (at least as the world would see it), consumed luxury items, are living in ease, popular and have excess wealth. Anything less means that one has not met the standard of "success" ... and worst of all, may even be a failure as a "blessed" Christian. Of course, this represents blindness to eternal realities at its most complete.

Yet, today it stands as a major success of the humanist view of the world ... one which the majority of Christians today en-

dorse. The Humanist Manifesto actually even states that, "the quest for the good life is still the central task for mankind. [...] And that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams."

It's all a sign of an over-commercialized culture, which is a major facet of the endtime money trap that is being set for the world. But there is an additional endtime strategy evident in this rush towards popular indulgence and "blessed wealth." It has to do with the attempt to



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weaken and annihilate the true Church of the last days.

A False Message

Many movements identifying themselves as Christian are peddling the same visions and techniques as the marketing wizards of Madison Avenue. They are “like children sitting in the marketplace calling out to each other” with the latest marketing sciences that have been adopted to deliver attendance and revenue results. While we don’t intend to review the sophistication of these latest techniques, our only intent is to point out the common message that underpins many of today’s church “marketing” programs — ease, comfort, the “good life” and how “you, too, can have all your trials solved.”

All of the trends evident in the secular world of commerce and pop psychology are evident in the “church business.” Just as a Wal-Mart and other large “big-box” retailers squeeze out the smaller stores with their massive buying power and become ever bigger, so the large mega-churches are draining attendance at the “drab and boring” churches wherever they are. After all, it requires “bigness” and “success” to afford jumbo Videotrons and to attract Hollywood entertainment stars to perform during services. Church-growth consulting services are

even operated as “profit centers” in at least one ministry. The net result of it all is that “big-box” church-goers are being taught that to be Christian is to be materially blessed, to be culturally relevant, to have all of one’s problems solved and perhaps even to get invited to an interview on CNN’s “Larry King Live.”

There is only one problem. While it is possible that some Christians may have fewer trials than others, nowhere is the “good life” presented in the New Testament as the identifying mark of the Christian. Actually, if anything, the exact inverse is true. “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also,” said the Savior (John 15:20). In hindsight, these are both statements of fact. There are far, far more warnings about persecutions in the New Testament than there are possible indications of attaining the worldly “good life.” Rather, persecution and trials are held up as being good and commendable. “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:12). “For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God” (1 Peter 2:19).

But even more so, the Bible says that in the last days there

will be terrible times for Christians, so awful in fact, that the “love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12).

Therefore, the unfortunate timing of the tragedy that we see is unfolding in Western Christendom today. At the most inopportune and dangerous of times, a coddled Christianity is looking for the reward of the “good life” in the here and now. As such, these people are made captives of the “deceitfulness of wealth” and “worries of life” and “desires for other things” and are no match for the type of brutal environment that the Bible prophesies will (and does) typify the last days before Christ’s return. As we will briefly examine together, there are many indications that those terrible times are already here and are presently intensifying. Sadly, many Christians in North America and other rich countries are falling away for other gospels. Their shepherds have led them astray.

What Kind of Good Life?

Just what should those who have the real “Good” in their life expect? As Christ said, “There is only One who is good” (Matthew 19:16). Just what should life be like for the people who have the Good One living within them during the “last days”?

Remarking on this time, the Apostle Paul provided a key

warning to the Church about the conditions that it would face in the last days, saying, “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days” (2 Timothy 3:1). A scriptural case can be made that Paul is speaking to the Church — believers, in other words — and not just the world overall.

Just why will the “love of many grow cold” at that time? (Matthew 24:12). Then, the Bible says, “Because of the increase of wickedness” (Matthew 24:12). The original Greek word used for “love” in the above text is *agape*, which refers to the type of perfect love that is “godly and selfless.” We see here that the faith of many Christians will wither and die.

Apparently, the prophesied boom in wickedness will test Christians like never before. Of course, persecution of some form or time has characterized the life of the faithful from the beginning. But as the parable of the sower anticipates, not only physical persecution can make one’s faith grow cold: “When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful” (Mark 4: 17-19).

Everyone who takes a literal interpretation of Bible prophecy will agree that horrible events will certainly occur in the endtimes. The types of things depicted for the Great Tribulation are apocalyptic, to say the least. A third of

the earth’s population will die, and various other difficulties have been described throughout Scripture in graphic terms and by numerous prophets. These are all events taking place in that general period that can be called the “last days” that certainly will be terrible. But technically, that seven-year time period is also called the “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7), a time during which people for the most part have not yet recognized the Messiah.

The “terrible times in the last days” mentioned by the Apostle Paul specifically speaks to those who have already recognized and “bowed their knees” to the Messiah — the Church. In at least one sense, this period being addressed can be seen to be even more terrible than the Great Tribulation. Just how terrible?

Terminally Terrible

Let’s take a moment to confirm what the Apostle Paul exactly meant by the word “terrible.” Actually, this word is not an ideal interpretation of what has been originally expressed in the Greek. Of all the main Bible translations, the King James probably uses the best-fitting word — “perilous.” The original Greek word is *chalepos*, which means, “troublesome, dangerous, harsh, fierce and savage.” Not once is this word found in the book of Revelation. The only other time that *chalepos* is used in the New Testament is in Matthew 8:28, where we find Jesus encountering two demon-possessed men, living in caves who were “exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that

way” (KJV). Here we can postulate demonic connection to these “perilous times.”

We do know that the period just before the Great Tribulation will be a complacent time when “people will be eating and drinking as in the times of Noah” (Matthew 24:37-40). It is a perilous time, spiritually treacherous. Much of the Church will have been neutralized and deceived. We can already see all of the characteristics of that time with great intensity today.

It will be different during the Great Tribulation. Yes, the world will see the height of Christian purging — genocide — during that period. They will be slaughtered left, right and center. But will that time actually be dangerous for Christians living then? No, not likely. After all, Scripture says, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Matthew 10:28). In the spiritual sense the answer is “no.” In the end, their souls will be safe ... for an eternity, no less. They may be slaughtered, but there will be little jeopardy with respect to them winning the race, and rejecting the grace that was theirs through Jesus Christ. We see them as “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb robed in white” (Revelation 7:9).

These Christians will be forced to make a clear-cut decision when it comes to the point of accepting the “sign of the beast.” Any person who is or who becomes a believer during



that time and refuses to take the sign of the beast is certain to die physically (Revelation 14:11). True believers will know that their decision will lead to at least one type of death — certain spiritual death should they take the “sign of the beast” (with physical death still possible over the remaining Tribulation Period), or alternately, certain physical death. With such facts and evidence, what sane, non-deceived person who recognizes Christ as eternal Savior would take the sign?

The “perilous times” that the Apostle Paul mentioned already begin to occur well before the Great Tribulation. Paul is saying that conditions for Christians who are living in the last days — before the Great Tribulation and before Christ’s return — will become fiercely and harshly dangerous wherever they may live. As mentioned, these will be perilous times during which the faith of many will turn cold. They may still be saved, but certainly they will be out of circulation spiritually — ineffective, ignoring truth, not running the race, totally dormant or worse. On the other hand, it takes much, much more courage to remain the “salt of the earth” during a time where wickedness is increasing.

Given that these are the very last of the last days, then

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shouldn’t Christians already be experiencing (or at least observing) fierce, harsh conditions? Would we be overstating the case to say that we should be observing a firestorm of activity, a veritable flood of terrible and demonic things today?

The Bible contains some signs to answer these questions.

Signs of the Terrible Times

Scripture tells us exactly what to anticipate and what its results will be during the “perilous” times. Above all, it is a time of great deception. We are even given the specific signs of its occurrence. Eighteen of them alone are mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:2-5.

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

These 18 behavioral characteristics take place under the license of institutionalized religion. As such, this number could represent the final or highest form of mankind’s rebelliousness that the world will see against God — a figure that is three times six, the numbers of completeness and of

man, respectively. Is that day here today?

We have no trouble finding statistics and evidence documenting the emergence of each of these characteristics as accepted norms in today’s societies — many of which are still called “Christian” countries — and that are “white washed” by theologians and religious organizations. For example, starting at the beginning of the list, here are some brief observations:

1. “People will be lovers of themselves.” Myriad surveys document the increase of narcissism, selfishness, etc. The best indirect evidence of this trend is the high incidence of depression. The World Health Organization has produced studies on this trend in recent years, calling it an epidemic. While this phenomenon will have different causes, it is also promoted by the empty values that society incessantly promotes. Self-love is deceitful. It tricks people into believing that they can imagine something better for themselves, treatment other than what God has in mind for them.

2. “Lovers of money.” The love of money is today worshipped as a central pillar of economic growth, the chief measure of national and personal achievement. In recent decades, policymakers of many countries have advanced the deceitfulness of wealth by even tantalizing its cit-



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izens with effigies of effortless (but false) wealth.

3. “Boastful.” Once upon a time, people were encouraged to be discreet and understated. The Bible counsels us to give God all of the glory, and whatever we do, to do it unto Him. One telling statistic, aptly documenting today’s acceptance of “boastfulness” is the incidence of lies and overstatements on résumés submitted for job positions. For example, a recent survey found that more than 95 percent of US college students were willing to make at least one false statement on a résumé to get a job. And of course, today, we have “bragging rights.”

We could provide statistics that document the widespread emergence of the other 15 characteristics found in 2 Timothy 3:2-5, however, space doesn’t allow. All of them occur under the guise and structure of godliness and apparent piety, but deny the power of godliness. We are instructed to, “Have nothing to do with them.”

True believers, those who will be faithful to the end and whose love hasn’t turned cold, will not have succumbed to these conditions and can expect to face persecution of many types. When outlining the signs of the last days in Matthew 24, Christ told the disciples:

“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:12-14).

These are among the last conditions Christ mentions before He returns (only one other condition follows: the preaching of the Gospel in all the earth). But just where is the persecution today? We hear of Christians who live in Muslim countries, China, and other Third World countries, who are being slain for their faith, but not so in North America or Europe. Christ mentions two hardships — persecution and being put to death. Persecution can take many forms. In North America, it can be argued that Christians are being persecuted in a much more dangerous and cunning fashion.

As “wickedness increases” and more and more of society and the Church takes on the characteristics that we already examined (under the structural appearance of godliness, no less!) it takes much courage to go against the flow.

Consider these examples:

If you have a retail business, it is now virtually impossible to close one day a week and stay profitable. What to do? Sell the business, go bankrupt or stay open on the Sabbath?

Society today is given over to massive speculation and indebtedness. Why not “plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation” (1 Peter 4.4)? Doing so, it’s even possible to rub shoulders with other successful Christian business people who seem perfectly suited to the corrupt business morality of the day. After all, it is not uncommon to see among the wildest business people honored at the gatherings of Christian business associations.

You forthrightly uphold God’s Word, literally interpreting the Bible. But now people think you are a nut, and avoid you as a pariah. Even your Christian friends exclude you from their circle.

You work in a large multi-national corporation that enforces a highly incentivized performance structure and discover that honesty and attempts at maintaining a balanced family life renders you unfit. Do you quit and give up the “good life”?

Your children may be subject to deep insecurity and depression. They don’t possess the latest de-



signer jeans and can't see themselves matching up to the ideal image that our culture today demands. Counteracting the thousands of media messages that your children face every day is a thankless, never-ending task.

A "man-on-the-street" TV interviewer asks you whether you think homosexuality is a sin. You evade the question because your comment could be considered a "hate crime." Besides, your employer or business may face repercussions.

An apparent Christian inexplicably takes you to court. He was a trusted business partner at one time ... maybe a member of your "Christian" investment club. Undeservedly, you lose your house as a result. Your life is in ruins.

You find yourself out of a job. Sending out résumés with inflated qualifications would be doing what is simply the norm. Why not? The cares of this life are pressing. You need to get your daughter into the right school to ensure her chances for an elite job. And everybody in your circle of friends is buying second houses.

Legions of other examples of pressures and persecutions could be cited, not even to mention

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specific demonic activity that can be directed against "front-line" Christians. As we can see from the conditions observed, the time of persecution is already here. The bottom line is that being a Christian today has a price and it involves a sacrifice. But how could that be? Haven't we been taught for years that being a good Christian brings rich blessings?

Therefore, many will choose to let their love run cold due to the disappointments brought about by persecution and wickedness. Instead of seeing it as a privilege to share in the sufferings of Christ, they have been conditioned by apostate teachers to expect the "good life" in the here and now. They therefore repudiate their faith as a result of hardship and forced sacrifice. Better to go through the motions of godliness while yet endorsing the tactics and mindsets that will not forfeit the chance for having the "good life." After all, country club Christianity for its own sake is a rarified religion that has the ultimate appeal.

Up, Up and Away?

A major point of difference between prophecy students in the premillennial camp is the topic of the Rapture. Some interpret Scripture to reveal that there will be a "snatching away" of the

faithful at some point before Christ's feet again physically alight on the Mount of Olives. Others are equally adamant that there is only one event. This writer doesn't feel a duty to enter this debate, other than to make this broad observation: Whatever of the two views comes to be, if Christians were to face the Great Tribulation, it can be seen as the less "perilous" outcome.

Understandably, some consider the "Rapture crowd" as escapist who wish to avoid the tough times during the Great Tribulation period. Like the lyrics of the well-known Fifth Dimension song, they count on the "Up, up and away in my beautiful, my beautiful balloon." While this is of course not an argument disproving the Rapture, it nevertheless represents a correct and embarrassing view of the state of most Christians. Some are so idolatrous about the "good life" that they are or yet want to enjoy, they are relieved to believe that their comforts will not be taken away from them before they go to heaven. A comment we once heard from a high-profile Christian expressed relief at the thought that his investment portfolio would be secure until the time of the devastations that are likely to occur during the Great Tribulation. He was comforted that he



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wouldn't suffer any major losses before the Rapture.

As we have reviewed, the really “terrible times” for Christians are today. Today is the dangerous period where the “love of many” becomes cold. In contrast, that likely will not happen during the Great Tribulation. Those who have eyes to see and ears to hear during that time will clearly recognize the times. How could they not? In that sense, experiencing the Great Tribulation would be the easy way out. As a Christian during that time, the chances are better that one's faith will be proven true, tested and secure.

Thoughts to Ponder

Today is the dangerous time of deception, apostasy and complacency. If that is the case, then dedicated Christians who truly strive to serve God and walk with Jesus Christ should be facing perilous times right now, or at least expect it. All the resources of the world and the “prince of the air” will be engaged in the “rise of wickedness” with the express objective of annihilating the Church and true believers.

what price will you be willing to pay in order to follow Christ? Many can't bear to pay the price of forsaking the “good life” and retreat, shutting down their witness.

Of course, the most effective way of competing to attain the “good life” as the world and some churches would define it is to have the 18 characteristics foreseen by the Apostle Paul. Given the present “hyper-competitive” and deceitful economic environment, it is these characteristics that are most likely to be rewarded now. It is no coincidence that the Apostle Peter presents nearly the same list as the description of the false prophets in 2 Peter 2.

Given the “feel good” pop psychology being preached by many teachers and “smiling” preachers these days, Christ's statements that we should expect to share in His sufferings will surely seem incongruous and surprising to most Christians on the wayside and main path. It shouldn't be. The Apostle Peter warned exactly the opposite: “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that

you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Christians may now have this opportunity of these last days to prove that their faith is genuine: Grief is being suffered in “all kinds of trials [...] so that your faith [...] may be proved genuine” (1 Peter 1:6). With Christ it is possible to stand firm to the end (Matthew 24:13). Paul provides hope, writing: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

For Christians, the terrible times are worsening now . . . before any prospect of the “up, up and away.” (MC)

ENDNOTES

- 1 Humanist Manifesto I, 1973. The American Humanist Association. HYPERLINK “<http://www.americanhumanist.org/about/manifesto1.html>” Organization . Accessed July 22” <http://www.americanhumanist.org/about/manifesto1.html> Organization. Accessed July 22, 2005
- 2 *The Vancouver Province*, August 13, 1996, p. A25. Reid Psychological Systems found that more than 95 percent of U.S. college students surveyed said they would make at least one false statement to get a job. Forty-one percent said they had already done so.