



BURNING ALIGHT: 12 ENDTIME FUSES – PART IV



EAGER GRIEFS: IDOLATROUS ECONOMICS

By Wilfred Hahn

We continue with the 5th “burning fuse” of the end times. What is it? Prophecy confirms this development we are about to explain. The Bible tells us that a time will come when commerce—the act of buying and selling—can be controlled worldwide.

This facility will actually be invoked at one point during the Great Tribulation period, “He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name” (Revelation 13:16-17).

This is an oft-referenced verse, frequently misquoted and misinterpreted. It is the source of much speculation about the identity of the “mark” and the “number.” However, the most critical error concerns the identity of who it is that actually brings in these controls. It is not the first beast with 7 heads that

comes out of the sea, which is of the lineage that gives rise to the physical Antichrist. Rather, it is the second beast (which emerges from earth and has two horns like a lamb) that brings in these commercial controls. This latter beast is commonly linked with the False Prophet, who is mentioned in Revelation 16:13.

Assuming that this connection is correct, it is telling that it will be a religious figure that ends up being the world’s last “economic guru.” This is not accidental. Why? Because free market macroeconomics (and its global spread, this being globalization) is the world’s largest and fastest growing religion (belief system). The beliefs imbedded in this bosom ide-



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ology are the hope of humanity today, though an increasing number of observers may be having their doubts.

The spectacular Global Financial Crisis (GFC) that has played out in recent years, provides a foreshadow of the final economic and financial collapses yet to come. As such, this development definitely qualifies as one of the burning fuses of the end times. To recall, it is the change in human “beliefs” that is the common thread that defines our selection of the 12 endtime fuses of this series.

Idolatry of Modern Economics

What is idolatry? To answer this question, we first need to examine its object ... the idol itself. Just what is an idol? Consulting a dictionary, we read descriptions such as this: “[...] a representation or symbol of an object of worship [...] a false conception [...]” and so on. The Bible, however, provides an easy, useful definition: An idol is any object of human reliance that is vulnerable to toppling. For example: “A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood

that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple” (Isaiah 40:20). This is a most humorous depiction. After all, why worship something that we ourselves must prevent from toppling with our own hands?

Again, Isaiah tells us: “The craftsman encourages the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer spurs on him who strikes the anvil. He says of the welding, ‘It is good.’ He nails down the idol so it will not topple” (Isaiah 41:7). Jeremiah, too, made the same observation: “[...] they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter” (Jeremiah 10:3-4).

God must surely laugh at mankind’s attempts to build and set up his own gods. He chuckles that mankind does not see the futility of his idols if they indeed must be nailed down and defended. Said Gideon’s father, Joash, when coming to his senses after Gideon smashed his idols: “If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar” (Judges 6:31). Anything that mankind allows to become an idol will be sure to disappoint and come up empty.

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This is one of the key lessons of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), that continues at this present time. Idols topple and totter. Things held to be venerable emblems of mankind's achievements and hopes, are vulnerable to toppling. Comically, they must then be propped up by man. Therefore, we see politicians and policymakers around the world desperately trying to prop up their belief systems ... trying to cover up the futility and falsehoods of these beliefs. Countries such as Greece and Cypress needed to be bailed out. More and much bigger bailouts lie ahead. As the great idol of global commercialism crumbles, policymakers are becoming increasingly desperate, resorting to theft and deception.

Idolatry Gone Rampant

Anyone who has eyes to see knows that the world today is governed by materialism. More than ever, people, nations and virtually the entire world are almost totally preoccupied with the human pursuit of happiness, peace and material prosperity. God does indeed want us all to be joyful, prosperous and at peace. But not without Him, the true Source. Not without reverence and glorification. Instead, what we have today is the accepted perversion that peace and happiness are directly linked to prosperity. There's no need for God. Give people prosperity, and there will be peace and happiness.

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For example, among many, the World Economic Forum—hardly an altruistic entity, as its membership is comprised of approximately 1,000 multinational corporations—takes this view.¹ Typically, their thinking is that a free-market and capitalistic revolution will solve all the problems of political and religious unrest. Closing the large gap between the financial and economic wealth of the West will fix the problem. In their eyes, this disparity must be the main source of the problems.

Governments and various global agencies are all united in this view, supremely confident that the model of free markets, consumerism and inflated financial wealth will bring contentment and peace.

Manmade Prosperity as the Solution

How did this modern perspective of materialism and "greed is good" come into such wide acceptance? It is a relatively recent phenomenon in world history. We will attempt a brief summary.



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Down through the centuries, Christians sought to find themselves on the right side of the divide between God and Mammon. Generally, the pursuit of material gain had been frowned upon since it was seen to be incompatible with a virtuous life. In fact, for a long time the Church—at the time, the Roman Catholic Church—saw it as its duty to regulate economics and commerce. These fields were not necessarily under the rule of kings and sovereigns. Whether Christian or not, the Church sought to enforce moral conduct upon society overall. Greed, usury and materialism were definitely the emblems of Mammon. These were to be stamped out.

Responses ranged from Monasticism—hiding away in monasteries and taking vows of poverty—to the rigid enforcement of feudal life, in the belief that as not all men are made equal or the same, they should remain in their station, whether peasant, priest or lords of estates. The concept that all wealth or anything material is bad—in other words, the natural world that God created is to be detested—were among the extreme interpretations.

However, perspectives began to change noticeably as of the 1700s. Christianity was at the very center of this shift. A transition was influenced by new philosophies, technologies and discoveries, and most importantly religious beliefs. The greatest of these was the Reformation, which indirectly encouraged a strong work ethic and capitalism. All



of these forces working together—sometimes in opposition and parallel—gave rise to a cauldron of change.

At first, devotion to serving God and Christian stewardship brought rewards. These were not the object of faith, just the attendant blessings that God gave in grace. As these rewards accumulated—mostly in forms of wealth, technology and comforts—the pursuit of godliness for the sake of wealth itself became the focus. Idolatry began to take root. Next, the focus shifted to the process of creating wealth and comforts—any kind, for that matter. Then, the “pursuit” of wealth and possessions became the idol. Lastly, wealth itself became the false god.

So societies gave way to the “spirit of capitalism,” and more recently, to the full-fledged, society-wide endorsed “love of money.” Today, the “love of money” is invoked as both the solution to the world’s troubles as well as the hope for future progress. What at first was a gradual development, eventually

gave way to a flood of materialism and the worship of material wealth that we presently witness.

Today, modern commerce has become the most powerful force on earth ... a figurative tyrant. Mostly, this tyrant is held in high regard by much of modern Christianity. In fact, so-called Christian organizations exist to validate the ideas of “free markets” and the “spirit of capitalism” as scripturally-endorsed forces for good. Yes, Scripture endorses good works. But these come from inspired individual hearts, not systems or machines. True capitalism, like democracy, is only good if the majority of people have the One that is Good living in their hearts.

Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism*² and R. H. Tawney’s *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*³ provide excellent documentaries of how this progression to mass idolatry came about. Both of them were spurred to write about these issues already at the turn of the 20th century. Were they to have lived to see our day, they would probably have been shocked. What is still called capitalism by name today is only a faint parody of its early roots, a far cry from honest labor and godly stewardship. Today, we live in the “Age of Money,” “The Age of Global Capital.” It involves a religion ... a faith in the ways (financial and economic theories of wealth) of mankind.

Today, our societies endorse greed as good... at least some measure of it. Too much, of course, is not completely condoned. But the definition of what is too

much or not enough is a relative concept and in constant flux. All the same, the very pillar of modern day economy and its theories is indeed the “spirit of greed.” Says one writer, “The essence of this philosophy of avarice is the idea or of the duty of the individual to work towards the increase of his wealth, which is assumed to be an end in itself.”⁴ Most of us live right at “ground zero” of this phenomenon. According to one influential business writer about the US, “The American way of business has been hijacked by the values of a financial community that is so preoccupied with trading and deal-making that it has lost sight of the purpose of its own existence.”⁵

Points to Ponder

The conditions of materialism and economic oppression witnessed today—even in such advanced nations as the U.S., Canada and others—is at least as rampant as during the times that the prophets sounded the warnings and indictments against Judah and Israel. To date, global leaders and finance ministers from the major nations have no answer to the Global Financial Crisis other than to reshuffle debt and to shift liabilities upon governments and aging populations. The result is even greater financial slavery for the average citizen; even greater relative wealth of the “haves.”

We see that what began from good motives has long ago given way to the “doctrines of demons.” It is a system that has become little more than the

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worship of self-interest and greed as the common givers of good and prosperity for mankind. It is this “doctrine of greed” that today plays the role of a new secular religion, one that is unifying much of the world—and also pulling the entire world into a common net.

According to this perspective, freely-trading financial markets are all-wise and all-knowing. False and deceiving forms of wealth are considered just as acceptable as real wealth. Economic growth, for its own sake, is good. Consumption must be maximized as an inalienable proof of progress.

It used to be the other way around. The most beneficial activity for society overall was the act of frugality and denial. Now that this system of frugality and honest work has produced great wealth, the system itself is being worshiped apart from the workings of God’s grace. And, therefore, it is ripe for total collapse.

The fact that today’s popular theories are false as relates to the peace and godliness of mankind is widely evident, yet purposely ignored. Even though many nations have become richer (in the world’s definition), survey after survey shows that people in America, Europe and Japan are less pleased with their circumstances than 50 years ago. Why? According to the Bible, and evidenced by surveys, the problem is envy, greed and idolatry. More will never be enough, “man cannot live by bread alone” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

So, we see that a large part of the world has traveled the slippery slope from piety to rampant greed. Applying the language of our day, what once was honest vocation led to capitalism, then to the “spirit of capitalism,” and in recent decades, the outright idolatry of materialism and “greed is good.” In this process, we see the five-stage progression of sin. First, man sins. Then man finds ways to justify it. Next, he boasts about the sin. Finally, good and truth are torn down. But, that is not the end. Lastly comes judgment.

At that time there will be such a crisis, that people will likely respond as they did to Joseph in the third year of the famine: “[...] Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we with our land will be in bondage to Pharaoh” (Genesis 47:19). This “burning fuse” is getting very short in this writer’s opinion. As this article lays out, the world is ripe to have its financial and economic control systems put at the disposal of the False Prophet and the evil purposes of the Antichrist. (MC)

ENDNOTES

- 1 See The Arab World Competitiveness Report, published by the World Economic Forum in 2002.
- 2 *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism*, Max Weber, 1905.
- 3 *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, R. H. Tawney, 1926.
- 4 Ferdinand Kürnberger, *The Man Tired of America*.
- 5 John Plender, columnist of the *Financial Times* of London, quoted from his recent book, *Going Off the Rails*.