

GIMME DAT END TIMES RELIGION – PART VII

In the last issue we introduced the notion that pagan influences entered the True Church through its marriage with the imperial power of Rome. In this chapter we'll trace just how some of those pagan practices found their way in and how they continue to influence the Church today.

A LITTLE LEAVEN

“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” (Galatians 5:9) “For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (2Corinthians 6:14)

In the year 317, the Emperor Constantine of Rome made a decision that changed the direction of, and subsequently the whole historical character of the Christian faith. Caught in a power struggle for the supreme control of the Empire, Constantine responded to a vision of a Cross in the sky and immediately decided to fight under that banner, - the banner of Christ and the Church. In the event he was victorious in battle. This set the stage for a transformation of both Roman society and the Church.

Though he championed the ‘Christian’ cause, his conversion remains somewhat in doubt, only accepting baptism on his deathbed. Throughout his life he was part of a pagan sun-god cult that worshipped Isis, a Madonna figure with a ‘divine’ son, - that was modeled on the real Queen Semiramis, Nimrod’s consort. He even built a triumphal arch honoring the sun god after his supposed conversion to Christianity.¹ In any case, Constantine was if nothing else, an astute politician. Genuine or not, he used the Christian faith to unite his empire. His aim was a revival of the religious / civil unified state that had been first dreamt of and established by Nimrod himself in Babylon. He was setting himself up as nearly a priest-king, placing giant statues of himself throughout the empire.

Pagan Friendly Christianity

So as he adopted Christianity he used the power of his office to adapt it to his, and the empires own ends. In 321 he put his approval on moving the Christian day of rest from the Saturday Sabbath to Sunday, the day the Lord rose from the dead. By 430 Church councils had ratified the change, outlawing any connection with the Jewish Sabbath. Other changes followed. Pagan religious traditions were over the course of time incorporated by the church including; the use of icons, festivals and holidays and rituals. Statues of the Queen mother goddess Isis nursing her child Horus were easily replaced by depictions of the Virgin Mary nursing Jesus at her breast.² The ‘Saints’ Peter and Paul replaced Romulus and Remus as the ‘patrons’ of Rome. Christ’s birthday celebration was conveniently celebrated on December 25th, - to coincide with the Sol Invictus festival, - a pagan celebration complete with decorations of green branches and lights and the giving of presents.³

The new church was becoming pagan friendly to accommodate all of the ‘converts’ that were thronging into it by the early 5th century. Many church leaders felt they had to be in order to welcome these former worshipers of the “creature rather than the Creator”, - who brought their superstitions and pagan customs. By order of Pope Gregory the Great, temples were cleansed before being transformed into churches and “devil-sacrifices” were to be replaced “by processions in honor of some saint”. Animal sacrifices were to be continued where necessary. Such were the cavalier orders and attitudes of the presiding church leadership.⁴

Thus the Church that had once been populated by ‘outsiders’ of the imperial system now became the state church. The Church became dependant on Caesar’s coffers for its support. Formerly, those claiming to be Christians had to be committed to the truth of the faith, as any believers faced persecution and even death for their faith. This had now absolutely reversed itself. Mass and even forced conversions (sometimes of whole army regiments) replaced the Holy Spirit

driven ‘change of heart’ that characterized earlier believers. The Church, driven now to please the masses, began to assimilate of Babylonian ritualism and mysticism. The rosary was adapted. Celibate priests and nuns, - hearkening back to the religious innovations of Semiramis, - made their way on to the scene. All were but imitations of polytheist practice that made their way into the Church.⁵

Most dangerous to the faith however was the “satanic counterfeit salvation” message that crept into Church teachings. The myth craftily constructed by Nimrod and Semiramis was that she was divine, and gave birth to a son who later died and came back to life. It was the worship of Semiramis that spread across the ancient world, - even as the Queen of Heaven; - a practice specifically forbidden by God in the Bible. In the Roman / Greek system, Semiramis became Diana, - with the giant Temple in Ephesus. [Now huge obelisks were built to honor and symbolize the fertility aspect of this pagan religion. It found its way into Baal worship, which was dealt with extensively by God in the Old Testament. These obelisks (think of a giant phallic symbol) were adopted by Masonry. Masons believe that Nimrod was the spiritual founder of their ancient and mystical brotherhood. And one of these obelisks eventually showed up in Rome, placed in front of St Peters, where it remains to this day. But all of this is another story.]⁶

Tim LaHaye, future co-author of the Left Behind series, compiled a list back in 1973 of some of the pagan practices that made their way into the Church during that era. Prayers for the dead, (never a teaching of Biblical Christianity), made their appearance in the year 300. The worship of saints and angels was approved in 375. The Mass first made its appearance in 394. Purgatory was officially declared in 593.⁷ Significantly, as noted before, it was in 378 that Bishop Damasus of Rome accepted the title given the head of the here-to-fore Pagan Roman State ‘Church’, - that of Pontifex Maximus. It is the term from which we get the modern day title held by the Pope; - The Pontif.⁸ That title had been held by the Emperor Constantine, who used that office, - according to one historian of the era, - to maintain “the right to regulate the Christian Church just as he would have regulated paganism”.⁹

In fact when Constantine held the office, he set himself up as sort of a ‘Super-Bishop’, influencing and molding the *princes of the church* to his will as he worked toward a “Romanized Christianity. It was he who gave special preference to the Bishop of Rome, enduing him with enhanced authority, - under the auspices and approval of the watchful eye of the Emperor. And in 325, it was Constantine who sponsored the first of the great ecumenical councils. The Emperor wanted unity, - in the Empire and the Church, - and the councils were the means to enforce that unity. The “independent voice” within the Church was silenced in favor of a “forced ecumenicalism”. Another Church council at Gangra, - again under Constantine, - outlawed “private assemblies outside of the Church”. The layman holding a private religious gathering was declared to be “anathema”, - or damned.

All now was under the control of Rome, - the religious and secular authority in all matters. Armed with the formerly pagan office of Pontiff, the Bishops of Rome accumulated power. As the Empire disintegrated the power of the Bishops and the now supreme Bishop of Rome grew. Over time the new office of Pope added both civil and military authority. It was a marriage of Church and State.¹⁰ But Jesus said, “**My kingdom is not of this world**”. (John 18:36) But civil and religious authorities became addicted to this compromised arrangement that enhanced power in both spheres.

The Ultimate Compromise

Most notable of all was what came out of the Church Council held in Ephesus in 431. It was this council that established the worship of Mary. And as Noah Hutchings puts it, it was after this decree that “sanctioned the worship of the godmother of religion, [that] the churches of Asia became filled with idols”.¹¹ The use of idols or statues in worship is in direct contradiction to God’s Word as laid out in the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20:4-5 God commands: “**You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them**”. Romans 1, if you remember, tells us to worship the Creator alone, - not the creature. Bowing down to a “**carved image**” only cheapens our perception of

the reality of just who God is. Recall the words of John 4:24: **“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”**.

It is this lifting up of the image that links all idol-worshipping religions of all ages; - Hindus, pagans ancient and modern, as well as those in the Church itself, - to the future supreme idol worship of the Last Days under the Antichrist as described in Revelation 13:14-15. **“And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”**

It was from this jumping off point of idol worship that the Church entered what has become known as the Dark Ages. Over the course of the following centuries, they wandered farther and farther from the doctrines of the Apostles and the practices and beliefs of the 1st century. Pagan encroachment continued. In 786 the worship of images and relics was instituted. In 850 it was holy water that was borrowed from the pagan playbook. Canonization of dead saints came in 995. Two centuries later Indulgences, (or get out of purgatory free cards) were put up for sale. That’s incredible, given that purgatory too, was a pagan borrowing. Later, after the onset of the Protestant Reformation attempted to return the Church to its original teachings, - the Church of Rome declared Tradition as interpreted by the Popes to have equal authority with the Bible and added the Apocryphal books. These were historical works that had never been accepted either by the early Church fathers or by the Rabbinical Jewish authorities. These latter just happened to sport some passages supporting Catholic teachings on Purgatory. Throughout all of this something that the Catholic Encyclopedia calls the “Cultus of Mary” gained in ascendance as Popes or Church councils found more and more “truths” about Jesus’ mother, Mary.¹²

Over the course of centuries, the organized Church had managed to transform its doctrine from that of the Apostles to a syncretism between Christianity and the paganisms from whence its people were called out. Almost a new faith had been built; - one constructed not so much on Jesus as on the good offices of what was called; The Mother of God. And so we prepare to look at just where that practice originated and to where it has led.

SOMETIMES IT’S WHAT YOU KNOW !

This story starts back about the middle of June, when Hamas bested Fatah in the Gaza region of the Palestinian territories. As the committed Hamas terrorists and their allies grabbed American supplied weapons intended for Fatah from military compounds there they also seized thousands of CIA and other Western documents containing "information about the collaboration between Fatah and the Israeli and American security organizations". In addition, the documents purportedly showed the intricate and intimate links between US intelligence and other Arab countries such as Egypt and Jordan. If publicized, this of course would not play well on the ‘Arab Street’. Or rather, it could play very well into the hands of radicalized terror groups like Hamas. And therein lies the rub. Hamas spokesman immediately threatened to publicize the information that details the cooperation between Arab nations and American, British and even Israeli intelligence services.¹³

¹⁴ Diplomats and politicians in the region got very, very nervous; - and some with very good reason.

One of the first to pay a price may have been Dr Ashraf Marwan, the billionaire Egyptian doctor whom, it was revealed, worked with Israel’s Mossad prior to the 1973 Yom Kippur War.¹⁵ Scotland Yard suspects that his recent death in London may have been a murder. He was the agent who, in the words of the Jerusalem Post, “tipped Israel off on the eve of the Yom Kippur War about the coming surprise attack”.¹⁶ Accusations of his involvement with Israel dated back about 3 years but his identity was just confirmed in early June, and as David Bay of Cutting Edge Ministries points out, he was murdered only after confirming documents were captured by Hamas and just days following Egypt’s policy reversal embracing Hamas.¹⁷ That story is interesting to say the least. On June 23, Egypt’s President Mubarak was publicly condemning the Hamas takeover of Gaza and preventing members of that terror group from crossing into Egypt. By the next day, something had changed his mind, with Egyptian security units escorting a motorcade of Hamas political and military leaders to Cairo, from where they flew to Damascus, Syria, - the region’s terror capital. An Egyptian cabinet minister later met with Hamas

head Haniyeh, who later that day, reaffirmed his commitment to the terror war against Israel.¹⁸ This could be seen as a signal that Egypt may be slipping into the Syrian / Hamas / Hezbollah camp that is openly preparing for war against Israel.

Interestingly, this comes on the heels of 2 other seeming policy reversals. Saudi King Abdullah openly snubbed Hamas' chief rival, Palestinian President Abbas while on a visit to Jordan. The Arab news service Al Jazeera called the action "deliberate".¹⁹ More significantly, Tony Blair, the former British PM who recently assumed new duties as the chief Middle East negotiator for the Quartet, (US, EU, UN & Russia), - called Russia's President Putin to assure him that he had no intention of sticking to the American-Israeli boycott of Hamas. This was a reversal of recent assurances he made to President Bush, who sponsored his appointment.²⁰ All of these policy reversal's may be a reaction to the danger of and a sop to prevent, - the captured intelligence information being released to the 'Arab Street'.

WAR DRUMS

- Jerusalem is currently actively preparing for war with one or more of five enemies that Israeli intelligence says could break out as early as later this month. Potential adversaries include; Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas & al Qaeda.²¹
- Taking advantage of the chaos caused by Lebanon's assault on terror strongholds; - in the last month, Syria has equipped and dropped over 1,600 Palestinian terrorists into the Beqaa Valley just across Israel's northern frontier.
- Iran has units from its elite Revolutionary Guards into southern Iraq by helicopter in preparation for suicide attacks against American and British forces there.²²
- The US has evidence that Iran and Hezbollah are cooperating in training, arming and supplying Shiite terrorist fighters for the war in Iraq. The terrorists undergo training at camps not far from Tehran before heading to Iraq.²³
- The Spanish contingent of UNIFIL, the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon, has made a deal with Hezbollah to collaborate in "intelligence and military" matters in return for freedom from attack by the terrorist group. The Mafia used to offer a similar deal. It was called: '*Protection*'. The Spaniards offered to facilitate a "friendly environment" for Hezbollah in southern Lebanon in return for this '*Protection*'.²⁴
- Sign of war: Oil rich Iran has imposed severe fuel rationing, sparking violent protests.²⁵ Besides stockpiling petroleum reserves, Tehran is paying for the quick delivery of already processed fuels.²⁶ With limited refining capacity, Iran is hedging against fuel shortages that a war would cause.

YADAS

- **Talk About Your One World Religion** - The Rev. Ann Holmes Redding, an Episcopal priest in Washington State, recently announced that she was now a Muslim...and still a Christian, - claiming to be a person of "dual faith". It's hard to figure how this can all jive. Muslims recognize Jesus as only a prophet, not the Lord, Savior or Son of God. Islam vehemently denies the possibility that God can even have a Son. **"Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son."** (1John 2:22) More curious than her attempt at this unusual heterodoxy is the fact that her diocese accepts this. The presiding bishop there ruled that she will remain a priest in good standing.²⁷
- **Churches Against God** - Ignoring God's word as set forth in numerous places in the Scriptures, the World Council of Churches has launched an initiative aimed at "putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands". The WCC, which represents about 560 million Christians from the more liberal denominations, is leading a campaign for the return of Judea and Samaria,²⁸ (the West Bank), to the Palestinians, despite the fact that in Genesis 17:8, God gives to Israel **"all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession"**. The land God gave is a lot bigger than what Israel is living in now; - **"from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates"**. (Genesis 15:18) God said, **"I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates"**. (Exodus 23:31) That's all of the contested land and more. But I guess you need not consult the Bible when you are the World Council of Churches.

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 - ⁵ Tim F LaHaye, Revelation: Illustrated and Made Plain, 1973, pg 57
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 - ⁹ Dr Ronald Fanter, Pontifex Maximus (Origin of The Papacy), Cutting Edge Ministries (of Illinois)
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 - ²⁷ Inclusion Run Amok: A Muslim/Episcopal Priest, Christian Newswire, June 20, 2007
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