

Title: Babylon - The Mother of Harlots

Text: Revelation 17:1-6

Dr. Milton Gould was the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Downey when I was a young person. ~~It~~ I remember him saying once: "One of the most dangerous movements in Christendom today is the ~~bad~~ trend toward ecumenicity." It didn't mean much to me twenty years ago. But, after studying Bible prophecy I understand now what he meant. The Bible clearly foretells that during the tribulation period there will be one vast religious system - all religions will be amalgamated into one vast system. Naturally, such a thing as religious untiy cannot take place overnight. It, therefore, must begin prior to the tribulation period. I submit that the modern ecumenical movement is doing ~~exactly~~ that. And, further, this uniting of apostates, heretics, cults, and eventually the pagan religions of the world is a SIGN that we are rapidly approaching the end of the age.

### ① BABYLON THE HARLOT

When you follow the rules of Bible interpretation it is not very difficult to figure out who "Mystery, Babylon, the Mother of Harlots" is. The prophets were consistent in their use of prophetic symbols. A woman used symbolically in Scriptue signifies religion. If it is a good woman it means a good religion, such as "the bride," which is the church. If it is a bad woman, such as "the harlot," it means an evil religious system that will deceive the souls of mankind.

"Babylon, the Mother of Harlots" is equally easy to understand, for Babylon was the source of all ancient idolatry. What is obviously meant, then, is that in the tribulation period there will be a one-world idolatrous religion so powerful that it can exert pressure on the "beast" or political leader of the day. Certainly we have a precedent for this in the days when Roman Catholic popes were able to force Roman emperors to do their will. So it will be during the first half of the tribulation period. Revelation 17 goes on to describe the ultimate destruction of this evil Babylonish religious system in the middle of the tribulation period, but that is not important to our study tonight.

This passage is of vital interest to us in that it prophesies a one-world religious system coming on the scene, amalgamating all the major religions of the world into one idolatrous system. It is my conviction that just such a system has been very active in the world for many years and is even now working toward the goal of "ecumenicity" or religious amalgamation.

Dr. Gould preached another sermon of which I recall. He made a prediction that "one of these days we will see apostate Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church make overtures ~~toward~~ toward ~~getting together~~ getting together." At that time the theological divisions between them was so vast that it seemed impossible. But today the possibility is not so far-fetched.

During the past 15 years we have seen a gradual and consistent change in both religious groups, producing a climate of cooperation between them that suggests total union in the near future. Consider some of the events which would have been considered impossible 15 years ago.

After Vatican I and Vatican II, tremendous changes occurred in Catholicism. For example, there has been a significant soft-pedaling of "Mariolatry," the doctrine which Protestants found most offensive. Pope John 23 changed the Catholic attitude toward Protestants from that of "heretics" to "separated brethren," Pope Paul 6th has liberalized the mass, and the Bible is now read in English. Would you have believed this 15 years ago.

But while all this was going on in the Church of Rome, the "separated brethren" were on a unity jag. Discarding doctrinal principle for organizational unity, large church groups began to merge under guidance of leaders of the National Council of Churches of Christ in America. And more are being planned. The watchword seems to be, "We are all the children of God." Little attempt is made to explain that according to the Bible we are "children of God through faith in Jesus Christ."

This spirit of togetherness has not been limited to Protestants. In the last few years I have seen things I never dreamed possible. An Arizona newspaper showed a Baptist minister and a Catholic priest jointly participating in a marriage ceremony. Equally as amazing was a report that a Catholic priest had attended the ordination of a Baptist minister. In addition, a common Bible for Catholics, Jews, and Protestants has been published and is doubtless going to contribute toward that common religious climate that will nurture the seeds of ecumenicity. You can be sure that this plant is growing into the biggest and strangest religious hybrid of all time.

Naturally, the World Council of Churches is getting into the global act. At first it merely sent observers to Vatican I. Today it holds regular "Dialogue" sessions. Now that the former head of the NCCCA has become leader of the World Council, he has a lofty platform for promoting his apostate doctrines and will doubtless work very hard for Catholic-Protestant unity.

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Pagan Ecumenicity Next?

When the work of amalgamating Roman Catholicism and apostate Protestantism is complete, it won't be enough, for together they will number only one-quarter of the world's population. The rest of the world's religious systems must be brought into the system. The differences between paganism and the ornate religious practices of some branches of christianity are not so distinct as one might think. In Vietnam, for example, I visited several Buddhist temples and Catholic churches. Frankly, I saw many similarities. The incense burning, sense of mystery, idolatrous images, superstition, and spirit of self-sacrifice to "please the gods" existed in both places. One missionary in Vietnam said it was not uncommon for a Vietnamese to become Catholic and go right on worshipping in the Buddhist religion.

Not only did it seem apparent to me that a simple procedure would merge Buddhism and Catholicism, but I understand that Hinduism has many similar customs. And Hinduism and Buddhism are very, very similar. It doesn't tax my ~~credulity~~ imagination to believe that the day will come when Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism, apostate Protestantism, and who knows what else will combine. That would involve over 3/4th of the population of the world.

Please keep in mind that this amalgamation need not take place before the rapture of the church. It could very easily be accomplished right after the Antichrist signs a covenant with Israel to begin the Tribulation. The amalgamated church with the government of the Antichrist to back it, could very quickly bring all the religions of the world into one gigantic tent, for they all have one thing in common - a religion of externals.

Idolatry, which has always been the religious crutch of Satan to deceive the multitudes, undergirds them all. Someone once said, "The more religion a person has on the inside, the less he craves on the outside. But the less he has on the inside, the more he craves on the outside." People who do not know the truth of ~~Christ~~ <sup>Jesus Christ</sup> Jesus and lack the power of a "spirit-filled" life crave elaborate external aids to worship. These idolatrous practices, therefore, will provide them a common denominator.

Humanly speaking, all that inhibits the ecumenical movement today are Bible-believing Christians. They take many forms and are found in all denominations, but thank God they exist. They are the group called "the church" that Christ is coming for at the rapture. I use the term "Church" in the sense of believers in the fundamentals of the faith, that is, those who believe in the inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Jesus Christ, the resurrection, and the second coming - to name a few of the cardinal doctrines. Naturally, this is an oversimplification, but for our purposes it does convey the point that so-called Christianity is divided basically into two main groups, the apostates and the true church.

Were it not for Bible-believing Christians today, the leaders of the ecumenical movement would have proceeded much further than they have toward amalgamation of the denominations. It doesn't take too much imagination to see what will happen as soon as the true church is taken out of this world by Christ. The inhibiting influence upon the ecumenical movement will be removed, and their cry, "We do better together," will unite the religious ~~wo~~ world.

Try the Spirits

The church has never lacked enemies. From the very beginning, the apostles had a variety of heretics following them. Each book and letter in the N.T. contains warnings against such characters who would seek to "creep in unawares" and lead people astray. For this reason the teachings of the Apostle John are very appropriate today and will continue to grow in significance as we get closer to the coming of Christ.

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already. Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world, and the world listens to them. We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (I John 4:1-6)

There is no reason for a Christian to be deceived by the tidal wave of anti-christian teaching coming from religious leaders today if he knows his Bible, for he can "try the spirits." Because we are blessed with some excellent modern translations which make the Scriptures easy to understand and apply to life, you owe it to yourself to study and "become a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2Tim. 2:15).

As we approach the end of this age and as the voices of apostasy and heresy become more prominent, make sure that you are not deceived. If you walk in the Spirit, feed daily on the Word of God, and obey what the Holy Spirit directs you to do, you will have no problems. If you neglect the Word, you leave yourself open to the deceiver who would, if possible, as Jesus warned, "deceive the very elect."