

## Editorial

Este primer número de *DavarLogos* alberga en sus páginas trabajos que indagan con patente lucidez en la escatología bíblica, la apocalíptica joánica y el pensamiento nietzscheano.

Hugo A. Cotro explora con informada sensibilidad, y arguye con sabida maestría, atendiendo el devenir histórico, la proyección fundamental, proléptica, escatológica, del *milieu* del profeta bíblico. En efecto, la escatología bíblica, sostiene Cotro, era a la vez presente y futura para los profetas y los apóstoles, para Daniel y para Juan; es pasado, presente y futuro para nosotros, y ha de serlo hasta el mismo fin a medida que el mañana se vuelve hoy, y el hoy, ayer.

Ekkehardt Mueller, escatólogo adventista y especialista en la literatura joánica, oferta una serie de orientaciones hermenéuticas a propósito del Libro de Apocalipsis y de la homilética bíblica cristiana. A su vez, subraya el valor perenne del mensaje de la apocalíptica bíblica en su conjunto.

Julio Junior Sandoval Alberca, por su parte, y dando cierre a esta primera entrega, revisa críticamente varios postulados fundamentales del pensamiento nietzscheano a la vez que advierte su profundo impacto en el contexto del quehacer teológico cristiano.

Leandro J. Velardo  
Editor de *DavarLogos*

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# 1. Then, now and tomorrow: Ethical relevance of biblical eschatology

Entonces, ahora y mañana: relevancia ética de la escatología bíblica

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## Abstract

Biblical eschatology is a coin where two inextricable sides concur and interact: the circumstances contemporaneous to the prophet and those envisioned for the future while proleptically mirrored in the former. Ethical relevance and an implicit stewardship of power shine in both as a seamless flux linking past, present and future, and stressing the inescapable option either for good or for evil within the all-encompassing historical scenario of the controversy between God and Satan

## Keywords

Eschatology – Ethics – Revelation – Prophecy

## Resumen

La escatología bíblica es una moneda en que dos caras inextricables concurren e interactúan: las circunstancias contemporáneas del profeta y las previstas para el futuro reflejadas anticipadamente en las primeras. La relevancia ética y una mayordomía implícita del poder brillan en ambas como flujo perfecto que enlaza el pasado, el presente y el futuro, y subraya la opción ineludible, ya sea por el bien o el mal, dentro del escenario histórico universal del conflicto entre Dios y Satanás.

## Palabras claves

Escatología – Ética – Revelación – Profecía

The Apocalypse, a book for the present day. The publication of this Commentary has been delayed in manifold ways by the War. But these delays have only served to adjourn its publication to the fittest year in which it could see the light, that is, the year that has witnessed the overthrow of



the greatest conspiracy of might against right that has occurred in the history of the world... But even though the powers of darkness have been vanquished in the open field, there remains a still more grievous strife to wage, a warfare from which there can be no discharge either for individuals or States. This... is emphatically the teaching of our author. John the Seer insists not only that the individual follower of Christ should fashion his principles and conduct by the teaching of Christ, but that all governments should model their policies by the same Christian norm. He proclaims that there can be no divergence between the moral laws binding on the individual and those incumbent on the State. None can be exempt from these obligations, and such as exempt themselves, however well being their professions, cannot fail to go over with all their gifts, whether great or mean, to the kingdom of outer darkness. In any case, no matter how many individuals, societies, kingdoms or races may rebel against such obligations, the warfare against sin and darkness must go on, and go on inexorably, till the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of God and of His Christ.<sup>1</sup>

When Charles wrote that preface to his book (1920), he did not imagine that his words would become even more relevant just two decades later, during another world war in which “the conspiracy of might against right”, and its aftermath, would once again surpass any historical precedent, even that of the First World War.

### Eschatology and its ethical relevance

The permanent reserve of ethical relevance of biblical eschatology,<sup>2</sup> a tutorial role so clearly perceived by Charles, was lost of sight or ignored

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<sup>1</sup> R. H. Charles, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), I: xv, xvi.

<sup>2</sup> On this, see Victor Massuh, *Sentido y fin de la historia en el pensamiento religioso actual* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1963), especially chapter 7, where he comments on the thought of the German philosopher of history Josef Pieper: “La profecía es un modo de conocimiento no sólo ligado al futuro. Está entretrejida en todo presente histórico. Pueden percibirse los rasgos de la profecía en los hechos históricos actuales [...] captar hondamente el sentido de las situaciones y figuras históricas del presente [...] el Apocalipsis refleja la imagen de nuestro tiempo. Su espejo nos devuelve nuestra realidad” (90-91).

in general by the classical European hermeneutics, which built its theological reflection, its discourse about the last things, from a historical, cultural, social and economic perspective not only proper and particular, but also deeply conditioning.

While developing its discourse inevitably from its cultural scope, neither from unfeasible asepis, nor from a horizon other than its own, Europe shaped an interpretative tradition characterized, among other things, by deactivation of the acutely ethical stance of biblical eschatology, by a conciliatory re-reading of its prompts and imperatives, and by circumscribing the biblical message to an exclusive point in time and scenario, one that was to a great extent irrelevant to the present, to the spot in history it was on.

To say it in the words of two South-American theologians:

El lugar desde donde se hace teología proporciona perspectivas y hace hablar a las fuentes. ¿Desde qué lugar utiliza, interpreta y lee las fuentes la teología europea? ¿En qué lugar se sitúa el teólogo...? En estas preguntas va implícito un grave problema hermenéutico: la relación de la Palabra pronunciada en el pasado y su actualización en cada presente [...]. La tarea teológica y sus exigencias [son, pues]: actualizar el mensaje revelado desde las situaciones históricas concretas de la comunidad cristiana, para dar respuesta adecuada a las inquietudes y necesidades de la comunidad. La teología europea ha descuidado el lugar teológico desde el cual el pensador hace teología [...]. Apenas ha habido conciencia de la repercusión de esta situación en la reflexión teológica. El teólogo europeo ha creído hacer teología con pretensión de universalidad. La universalidad genera una cierta neutralidad. La neutralidad conduce al rechazo intencionado de cualquier lugar teológico concreto como perspectiva hermenéutica para hacer teología. Todo texto leído es un texto releído e interpretado desde la situación hermenéutica del lector. Sucede así consciente o inconscientemente. Por eso la teología europea tiene un cierto sabor a exégesis—interpretación de la Palabra en su contexto original. Le falta la proyección concreta, actualizadora y vivencial de la Palabra.<sup>3</sup>

This explains the fact that at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, when Europe and the United States charted the world far and near by blood and sword to make true their neocolonial expansionist

<sup>3</sup> Felicísimo Martínez Díez y Benjamín García F. *La teología latinoamericana* (Caracas: Ediciones Paulinas, 1989), 60-61; see also Caleb Rosado, *What is God like?* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1990), 7-13.

dreams, the vanguard of theology was involved, for instance, in an academic speculation on the purportedly several compositional strata of the Pentateuch and the assumed mythic near eastern roots of Revelation.

From a static temporal perspective, heyday hermeneutics anchored the divine interaction with history in a so distant past or future that any proposal of social renovation or reform was regarded as puerile at best or even foreign to religion.

And while it is true that biblical eschatology sees God's kingdom as realized or consummated in the future by the supernatural intervention of a supra human, transcendent Being, the theological insistence in the far away (or never)—leaving out the here and now—, plus the stress on the divine to the detriment of any human involvement, paralyzed the socio-historic commitment of Christianity as the salt of the earth, replaced the transhistorical relevance of eschatology for a historical indifference, and turned it into a pretext for evasion, leaving the hope without a practical articulation.<sup>4</sup>

From such a perspective...

... la teología europea se ha vuelto acrítica frente a opciones y compromisos históricos concretos: acrítica frente al pragmatismo consumista... Diluye así la fuerza transformadora y liberadora del mensaje y la praxis cristianos. El hecho de que ninguna mejora social sea absoluta y definitiva no significa que no deban emprenderse reformas sociales, o que todas valgan lo mismo. Hay mejoras y proyectos [...] que van en la dirección del reino. Hay proyectos que no van en la dirección del reino de Dios.<sup>5</sup>

Speaking about this neutralizing lack of updating affecting the person and message of Christ, the Prophet par excellence, another theologian alludes to the softening and the chronological anchoring of the biblical Christ and of his radically ethical message, prophetic *per se*, in these terms:

Hemos sustituido la incómoda ética del maestro de Galilea por una encantadora metafísica. Hemos desarrollado una religión alrededor de Jesús [...] que ha llegado a ser tan radicalmente diferente de su religión, que el Jesús histórico tendría

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.



hoy que dejar bien sentado que él mismo no es cristiano [...]. Cuando un agitador espiritual, una figura recia y profética no ha podido ser aniquilado por la oposición directa, el mundo siempre ha encontrado otros medios de hacerlo a un lado. Se le convierte en ídolo, se le cubre de ropaje metafísico o teológico; se le nega en un credo; se escapa de su mirada penetrante y acusadora detrás de una nube de incienso; se le encastilla detrás de un elevado altar, y así se acaba con el molesto profeta [...]. Jesús ha compartido el destino de todos los profetas. A estos se los toma primero en serio y luego se los condena. Después de pasado largo tiempo se los reverencia, se los diviniza y ya no se los toma más en serio”<sup>6</sup>

The origin of that uncompromised, deactivating, and non-critic approach to biblical prophetism in general and to eschatology in particular should be looked for in what has been called the Constantinian settlement of the Christian Church during the decline of the Western Roman Empire, when Christianity, an originally transforming faith, was absorbed into the imperialist ideology and the social structure of the IV century Roman Empire, a culture and a society originally antithetic regarding Christianity. Thus, the church now allied to power served to sanctify and perpetuate the classical culture’s hierarchical society and worldview.<sup>7</sup>

That was the starting point of the agreement, so to say, between the church and the institutionalized evil in the person of the then-declining Roman Empire, an agreement as a result of which the church paid too high a price: the loss of its prophetic identity and consciousness, of its social role as an acutely ethical point of reference, and of its credibility in front of a then future world that would request relentlessly from it a consistency between its profession or theoretical discourse and its praxis.

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<sup>6</sup> Jorge Howard, *Rivales del cristianismo* (Buenos Aires: La Aurora), 109-111; Rosado, *ibid.*, 15-22; see also John H. Yoder, *The politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994). Perhaps an instance of this uncommitted spiritualization of Jesus’ message is the preference many have shown for the Matthean version—although not deeply rooted in exegesis—of the Blessings over the Lukan. “Blessed are the poor in spirit...” (Matt 5,3) is less disturbing and conflictive than “blessed be you, poor: for yours is the kingdom of God [...]. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are you that weep now: for you shall laugh [...]. But woe unto you that are rich! For you have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! For you shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! For you shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets!” (Luke 6,20-26).

<sup>7</sup> On this, see, for instance, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The radical kingdom: The Western experience of messianic hope*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 2-3.

The church chose the power or, which is the same, the preservation of its recently acquired institutional status and privileges. It made itself the source of moral legitimacy for the secular power, but lost its identity, its singular nature and its deeply transforming message in the process.

### God, time, and reality

The biblical revelation points out that the conflict between good and evil is not *a*-historic, *para*-historic or *supra*-historic, but *intra*-historic, namely temporal and spatial. This conflict cannot be solved in a dimension outside of the human realm, but *into* the world (Rev 12).

In line with this, the God of the Bible is committed to reality and history to the point of becoming a human *be-ing*, one who subjects himself and makes himself vulnerable to space and time, who reveals himself and enters the time-made human frame of history.

“But when the appropriate *time* had come, God sent out his Son, *born* of a woman, born under the law”, says Paul (Gal 4,4, emphasis supplied).<sup>8</sup> “I am with you always, to the end of the age”, assured the Kurios, the divine Lord and glorified Jristos, the divine-human Messiah, to his disciples who were worried about the when of his return (Matt 28,20, emphasis supplied). “He will appear a second time, not to bear sin but to bring salvation” (Heb 9,28, emphasis supplied).

The God of the Bible does not fear time. He is neither supra-temporal nor time-bound, but omni-temporal. He does not avoid the ongoing flow of time and life but becomes a historical subject by his incarnation. He is not Aristotle’s motionless motor, but the history mover par excellence, the yeast of upward change by antonomasia.<sup>9</sup>

He is not the immaterial *logos* which abhors the degraded physical sphere, but the *Logos* who makes himself flesh and dwells amid his creatures as one of them (Exod 25,8; 29,45; John 1,14.18; Phil 2,5-7; Heb 2,14).

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all the Bible quotations are from the New English Translation.

<sup>9</sup> On the inherent critical and transforming potential of the Christian message for history and the social structures, see, for instance, Roy Branson, “Social reform as a sacrament of the Second Coming”, *Spectrum* 21, 3 (May 1991), 49-59.

In short, the God of the Bible accompanies history from within it, sharing ontologically and experientially in human existence. He is the One who was in the past (Gal 4,4), who is in the present (Exod 3,14; Rev 1,4.8; 16,5), and who will be in the far and near future (Matt 28,20), a God who takes part in every episode of the struggle between good and evil from within the very conflict (Dan 3), who inter-venes (from the Lat-in *inter venire*: lit. “to come into”) into everything to make good finally prevail over evil: “And we know that God *interven*es in all things for the good of those who love him” (Rom 8,28, Biblia de Jerusalén; my translation, emphasis supplied).

### Eschatology and engagement in reality

Besides the church’s acritical stand after its new status close to power, another element—as foreign to the Bible as the imperial doctrine of might—pushed its way into the Christian movement from as early as the mid-second century:<sup>10</sup> dichotomy, which split reality between matter and a mutually exclusive parallel realm conceived as ideal and supra-human.<sup>11</sup>

The fruit of such a drastic and neat split starting with philosophy soon spread to every area of Christian thought: anthropology<sup>12</sup> (soul versus body; monasticism; inherent sinfulness of sexuality; celibacy); ecclesiology (clergy versus laity); Christology (Docetism: Jesus as only divine, as human only in appearance); soteriology (faith as opposite to works); sacred history versus secular history; theory versus praxis; past and present versus eschatological future; etc.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Daniel 2,20.21; John 19,10.11; Acts 5,29; etc.

<sup>11</sup> See Enrique Dussel, *Ética comunitaria* (Buenos Aires, AR: Ediciones Paulinas, 1986), especially 72, 73.

<sup>12</sup> On this, see, for instance, Enrique Dussel, *El humanismo semita* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1969); *El dualismo en la antropología de la cristiandad* (Buenos Aires, AR: Editorial Guadalupe, 1974); Hans Walter Wolf, *Antropología do Antigo Testamento* (São Paulo, BR: Edições Loyola, 1983), 2d. ed.; etc.

<sup>13</sup> See Víctor Codina, *Ser cristiano en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Latinoamérica Libros S.R.L., 1986), 44-46.

In this way, a whole epistemology strange to the biblical heritage—both Hebrew and early Christian—broke through into it and reshaped the way Christians henceforth articulated reality:

A la hora de estudiar la relación entre teoría y praxis en teología, debe tenerse en cuenta la existencia de dos concepciones de la verdad: la helénica y la bíblica. La verdad griega está cercana a la contemplación teórica de las cosas, implica una visión estática, ahistórica e impersonal de la realidad. La verdad bíblica está más cercana a una transformación praxica de las cosas, implica una visión más dinámica de las cosas, más histórica, más personal. La verdad helénica está en el mundo ideal del conocimiento. La verdad bíblica se mueve en el proceso histórico de salvación. Aquélla se contempla; ésta se traduce en fidelidad personal [...]. Teoría y praxis son inseparables [...]. A los que pedían signos del cielo, Jesús les contestaba con signos de la tierra [...]. La esperanza es virtud cristiana activa.<sup>14</sup>

Once dichotomy was in the very marrow of the Christian worldview, part of the intelligentsia of the church took cover from any social-historical conflict or tension behind a *fuga mundi* attitude.<sup>15</sup> “What the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world”, said the mid-second century apologist who penned the Letter to Diognetus,<sup>16</sup> perhaps in part to guarantee the state the innocuousness of the church to the material interests of the empire.

It was precisely to such a deactivation of the permanent ethical relevance of eschatology—first by splitting reality<sup>17</sup> and later through compromise with power—, that Dietrich Bonhoeffer pointed to, here in the words of the theologian Julio de Santa Ana:

Lo que Dios ha hecho por el hombre no ha sido cosa fácil para él. Por eso mismo el hombre no puede tomar con ligereza su vida cristiana. Así como para Dios lo hecho en Jesucristo en favor del hombre ha sido de un costo inapreciable, de la misma manera la vida cristiana que desarrollen los hombres debe ser fiel

<sup>14</sup> F. Martínez Díez y B. García F., *ibid.*, 73-74, 76.

<sup>15</sup> See Dussel, *ibid.*, 21-24.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Diognetus 6,1. Text from Michael W. Holmes ed., *The apostolic fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 541.

<sup>17</sup> Nazism, as other previous and subsequent totalitarian ideologies, managed to perceive and take advantage of this Christian split or dichotomization when it labeled as “State affairs” its genocidal policies, its pan-Germanist expansionism, etcetera. See in this respect, for instance, Tim Stafford, “Hitler and the failure of the church”, *Signs of the Times*, August 1991, 7-11.

reflejo de dicha 'gracia costosa'. Así como en Cristo dicha gracia lleva a la encarnación, del mismo modo no cabe una vida cristiana separada del mundo, sino en medio de él. El gran significado de la obra de Lutero fue romper definitivamente con el convento, dejar todo ámbito propicio para la existencia de la fe, porque en realidad la vivencia de ésta no puede existir sino en medio del mundo, que le es hostil. Cuando la fe cristiana insiste en querer preservarse libre de toda mancha, y para ello se abstiene de participar en las luchas y problemas humanos, deja de ser una fiel respuesta a su Señor. La "gracia costosa" implica seguir a Jesús: abandono de privilegios, de respetabilidades, de posiciones adquiridas, y disposición a ser presencia de Jesucristo en medio de los problemas y vicisitudes humanas. Esto tiene que dar como resultado una acción cristiana plena de significado en medio de lo que está ocurriendo. Sin embargo, la presencia cristiana en el mundo actual está demasiado lejos de llegar a ello. Es el resultado del "abaratamiento de la gracia", de no haber tomado en serio lo hecho por Dios en Jesucristo. Se vive un cristianismo inauténtico cuando todas las miras del supuesto cristiano están puestas en actividades y reflexiones que tienden a separar netamente la esfera de lo cristiano de la esfera de lo temporal. De este modo, se pierde el verdadero significado de la encarnación; el mundo y la historia dejan de ser el escenario donde se despliega la acción de Dios, al mismo tiempo que los llamados cristianos se abrogan el derecho de limitar dicha acción de Dios únicamente a la esfera de la institución eclesial. Para que ello no ocurra, la fe debe vivir recurriendo a una disciplina constante por medio de la cual el creyente, abandonando toda posible seguridad y superioridad espiritual, se lanza a servir a los hombres tal como Cristo lo hizo. Cuando ello ocurre, la "gracia costosa" ya no es sólo aquella que se mostró en la existencia de Jesús, sino la misma vida de la comunidad cristiana y de quienes la integran. Cuando la comunidad cristiana vive en el reconocimiento de la "gracia costosa", deja de ser un grupo de hombres que viven únicamente en actitud de concentración. Y se transforma en presencia de amor servicial "en-el-mundo". Dicho de otro modo, la iglesia reunida se transforma en iglesia dispersa, el Evangelio no va dirigido principalmente a los que ya creen en él, sino al mundo.<sup>18</sup>

### The purposes of eschatology

While the general purpose of biblical eschatology is to show in advance the development of the great controversy between good and evil and its outcome: God's final triumph, it has also some other related aims.

1. To highlight God's sovereignty over history despite the appearances and his leading in the crucial events based on the distinctive

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<sup>18</sup> Julio de Santa Ana, *Protestantismo, cultura y sociedad* (Buenos Aires: La Aurora, 1970), 98-100.

traits of his character (love, justice, respect for human free will, etc.) and in cooperation with those committed to good and justice for the divine restoration of all things (see Isa 44,24-46; 55,10.11; etc.).

2. To unmask (one of the nuances of ἀποκάλυψις) the human and supernatural entities making evil operative along history, mostly close to the *eschaton* and in the sphere of power (Dan 10,20.21; 11,1; John 2,23-25; 1 Cor 12,10; Eph 2,2; 6,12; 1 John 4,1; Rev 13,2.4; 16,13.14.16; etc.), which makes every institution, policy and pronouncement a concrete manifestation of God's kingdom or of the kingdom of evil.
3. To affirm the faith of those who believe after fulfilment (see John 13,19; 14,29).
4. To reveal and highlight Christ's nature (divine and human), character (loving and just), and mission (redemptive and judicial) within the controversy between good and evil (e.g., Dan 7,9-14; Luke 24,27; John 5,39; Rev 19,10). Thus, biblical prophecy in general, and eschatology in particular, is Christ-centric par excellence.
5. The struggle between good and evil is as concrete, spatial and temporal as God's ordinary *modus operandi* *in* and *through* history (time), *in* and *through* the world (matter). It is simultaneously transcendent and immanent, divine and mediated by humankind. Thus, one of the aims of biblical eschatology is to stress the unescapable human option—by act or omission—either for good and justice or for evil and injustice, the impossibility of being neutral in the context of the cosmic controversy between God and Satan. Therefore, Bible prophecies on the last things confront each person with his/her eternal destiny and urge him/her to choose life and justice (e.g., Dan 2,34.35.44.45; cf. Matt 21,43.44) since, as Charles pointed to in his book's preface, there is no such a thing as mere passive expectation nor neutrality in the battlefield of ethics. As Jesus said: "He who is not with me is against me", Matt 12,30; cf. John 3,16-21.

Therefore, it is not just a question of finding out what side of the conflict lies behind every idea and institution. The commitment includes the daily exercise of being “light” (illumination) and “salt” (preservation) “*in the world*” (see Matt 5,13-16; John 17,15.20-23) as a conscious and consistent instrument of good against evil, as a retaining wall and a dependable point of ethical reference for those who are in pursue of truth and justice: “Those who have guided the people in the true path shall be like the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12,3).

### Eschatology and power

Biblical eschatology is not just an ethical discourse in general, but one on power. There is a theology of power, a stewardship of power, and an ethics of power implied in it.

It could not be otherwise, because everything in the conflict between good and evil—both in heaven and on earth, along it and at its peak—has to do with power (Gen 3; Isa 14; Ezek 28; Dan 3; 10; Luke 4,5-7; Rev 12,7-12; 13; 16; 20).<sup>19</sup>

As certainly as time is the raw matter of history, and this is the raw matter of prophecy, power is the raw matter of the conflict between good and evil.

After all, what is the conflict if not a power struggle? A legitimate and benevolent power challenged and usurped by a vicious another; and a struggle between the former to recover what was lost and the usurper to retain, consolidate and extend it.

The most meaningful about this discourse is that it has a transient, supra-human, and divine origin (Rev 22,10.16.20). It is God who decides

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<sup>19</sup> The Scriptures present themselves as a seamless chronicle of the struggle between good and evil, both incarnate in duets of opposed elements which confront each other in every historical epoch, environment and situation: God and Lucifer; Eve's seed and the serpent's offspring; Abel and Cain; etc., and by the paradigmatic manifestations of the institutionalized, corporative evil opposed to God's people: Babel, Sodom, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Rome, etc. Interestingly, these historical incarnations of evil are typologically evoked in Revelation, the epitome of biblical eschatology, as symbolic prefigurations of the powers in which evil would be embodied in the final stage of the conflict (see Rev 11: Sodom and Egypt; Rev 16, 17 and 18: Babylon; Rev 2,18-22; 16: Ahab and Jezebel; etc.).

that his eschatological revelation has to do preponderantly with power. He is the one who points humanity's attention to such a focus and epicenter besides worship as a naturally derivative topic (Isa 14; Mark 4,8,9 and parallels; Rev 13).

And that's the reason why biblical eschatology is the joyful anticipation of the final and definitive victory of good over evil, of God over all his enemies, and this has to do with power (Ps 110.1; Mark 12.36 and par.; Acts 2.35; Heb 1.13; 10.13; Rev 5.13).

The book of Revelation—the most outstanding exponent of biblical eschatology— is no other thing than God's open and frontal declaration of war against the institutionalized and corporative evil masked behind the structures of power serving the kingdom of darkness.

### The radical stance of eschatology

The ethical radicality of biblical eschatology (especially that of Revelation), becomes even more evident when projected against the background of the Roman imperial cult of the first centuries of the Christian era.

In such a context, nothing could be as defiant as the eschatological prophetism of the book of Revelation.

Let's imagine the reaction of a political system as that of Rome—which held absolute power and required from its subjects a total submission based on religious assumptions—, together with those instigating the empire against the early church, to affirmations like these:

1. "Jesus Christ [...] the ruler over the kings of the earth" (Rev 1,5).
2. "To him be the glory and the power forever and ever!" (Rev 1,6).
3. "He is returning with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him..." (Rev 1,7).
4. "I am the first and the last" (Rev 1,17).
5. "I hold the keys of death and of Hades!" (Rev 1,18).



6. “The devil<sup>20</sup> is about to have some of you thrown into prison” (Rev 2,10).
7. “To the one who conquers and who continues in my deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations—he will rule them with an iron rod and like clay jars he will break them to pieces, just as I have received the right to rule from my Father” (Rev 2,26.27).
8. “This is the solemn pronouncement of the Holy One [Christ], the True One, who holds the key of David, who opens doors no one can shut, and shuts doors no one can open” (Rev 3,7).
9. “[Referring to Christ] the originator of God’s creation” (Rev 3,14; cf. Phil 2,5.6; Col 1,15.16; John 1,1-3; Heb 1,1-3).
10. “I will grant the one who conquers permission to sit with me on my throne, just as I too conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev 3,21).
11. “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the All-Powerful, Who was and who is, and who is still to come!” (Rev 4,8).
12. “And whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the one who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders throw themselves to the ground before the one who sits on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever, and they offer their crowns before his throne, saying: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, since you created all things, and because of your will they existed and were created!”” (Rev 4,9-11).

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<sup>20</sup> Here it is an unmistakable and obvious identification between the devil and its political vehicles: Roman backed up local authorities and later on Rome itself—often instigated by some fringes of Judaism—in the first centuries. How would “the Devil” be able to do that (to imprison the faithful Christians), but making use of individual and corporative agents, by incarnating himself—so to say—in historically concrete instruments? That radically ethic identification has implications and derivations very disturbing to many: the stewardship of human power—be this political, military, economic, religious, or of any other nature—inevitably falls according to this scheme in one of two categories: either divine or devilish.

13. “Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered...’” (Rev 5,5).
14. “Then I saw standing in the middle of the throne [...] a Lamb that appeared to have been killed. He had seven horns [i.e. all the power, namely omnipotence] and seven eyes [i.e. all the knowledge, namely omniscience]” (Rev 5,6).
15. “And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders threw themselves to the ground before the Lamb [...] They were singing a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were killed, and at the cost of your own blood you have purchased for God persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation. You have appointed them [the proscribed and persecuted Christians] as a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth’” (Rev 5,8-10).
16. “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels [...] all of whom were singing in a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the lamb who was killed to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and praise!’. Then I heard every creature—in heaven, on earth, under the earth, in the sea, and all that is in them— singing: ‘To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be praise, honor, glory, and ruling power forever and ever!’ [...] and the elders threw themselves to the ground and worshiped” (Rev 5,11-14).
17. “Then the kings of the earth, the very important people, the generals, the rich, the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb’” (Rev 6,15.16).
18. “‘Salvation belongs to our God, to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Rev 7,10).

19. “[The Christians martyred for their loyalty to Christ] are before the throne of God and and they serve him day and night in his temple” (Rev 7,15).
20. “A male child [Christ], who is going to rule all the nations with an iron rod” (Rev 12,5).
21. “The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the ruling authority of his Christ, have now come” (Rev 12,10).
22. “They will make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb will conquer them, because he is Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev 17,14).
23. “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the All-Powerful, reigns!” (Rev 19,6).
24. “Then I saw heaven opened and here came a white horse! The one riding it was called ‘Faithful’ and ‘True’, and with justice he judges and goes to war [...] The armies that are in heaven [...] were following him [...]. From his mouth extends a sharp sword, so that with it he can strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod [...], and he stomps the winepress of the furious wrath of God, the All-Powerful. He has a name written on his clothing and on his thigh: ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’” (Rev 19,11-16).

What could be more explicitly combative, sharply ethical, and challenging in the context of a self-divinized political power and its religious and institutional allies than statements like those? What greater challenge than that to the all-embracing claims of the Roman imperial doctrine? Since the main subject of those pronouncements is Jesus Christ, accused of sedition by the Jewish religious establishment and executed under their instigation by the Roman occupation army, one can only imagine their effect on the authorities of the metropolis. An executed leader challenging his executioners from the memory and the militancy of his followers!

## Eschatology as a request for justice

Despite what most of Christianity has made of the biblical message in general and eschatology in particular, both are characterized by an ethical radicality that has nothing to do with passive acquiescence in the face of evil and injustice.

Scriptures are plenty of instances of such an imperative request of a commitment to what is right:

1. God committed himself to avenging Abel's blood shed by Cain (Gen 4,10): "But the LORD said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!'" For the vindicatory sense of that "crying out", cf: Rev 6,10.
2. Zechariah, murdered by order of king Joash, delegates to God the typically Semitic mission of the blood avenger or nearest kin to apply the retributive justice (2 Chron 24,22): "May the LORD take notice and seek vengeance!"
3. God committed himself to avenge the blood of the Christian martyrs by punishing their persecutors and executioners: "They cried out with a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Master, holy and true, before you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?'. Each of them was given a long white robe and they were told to rest for a little longer, until the full number was reached of both their fellow servants and their brothers who were going to be killed just as they had been" (Rev 6,10.11). See God's implicit response in Rev 16,3-7; 18,20.24; 19,2; 20,4.
4. God promises to do justice to the workmen exploited by their oppressive masters: "Look, the pay you have held back from the workers who mowed your fields cries out against you, and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived indulgently and luxuriously on the earth. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person, although he does not resist you" (James 5,4-6). Cf: Rev 18,13.

5. God promises to avenge the death of his prophets and his Son: “What then will the owner [God] of the vineyard [his people] do to them [those who murdered his prophets and his Son]? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others (Luke 20,15.16; *cf.* 13,34; Rev 14,17-20).

### Ethics and the main views on eschatology

There are three main hermeneutical approaches to biblical eschatology (basically Daniel and Revelation)—with their variations: continuous historicism (a.k.a. historicism), contemporary historicism (a.k.a. preterism), and futurism.

The first of them is easily traceable back to the beginnings of Christianity and even earlier, since the Bible itself attests that the inspired or canonic writers approached the prophetic texts of their predecessors from such a perspective (*cf.*, for instance, Dan 9,26.27 to Matt 24,15; Luke 21,20).

Historicism holds that as time is the raw material history is made of, foreseen history is the raw matter of prophecy. Since eschatology is preponderantly predictive, its content is no other thing than the future seen before it happens in virtue of divine prescience, although respectful of free will (*e.g.* Isa 41,21-23; 44,7; 46,9.10; Amos 3,7). The interpretative clues to the symbols of this literary genre are basically within Scripture itself. The future events foreseen and announced in this kind of prophecy turn out to be recognizable when they happen by the unequivocal depiction that the prophecy previously made of them (*e.g.*, Matt 24:15; John 14,29; Rev 17,15).<sup>21</sup>

According to this hermeneutical perspective, many Christian scholars—even from much earlier than the 16th century—, saw in the

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<sup>21</sup> According to the American historicist theologian Frank Holbrook, in “Understanding Revelation”, *These Times* (July 1 1980): 32, the system commonly known as...

historical school of prophetic interpretation is based on the idea that prophecy pertains to the realm of time and, since prophecy is set up and expressed in a given historical situation, it will also find its fulfillment in the historical ongoing, which basically means a continuous and progressive fulfillment of the visions from the days of the prophet until the end of the present historical order.

condition of the moral bankruptcy of the church a fulfillment of prophecies like those of Daniel 7 (the little horn), Daniel 8 (the religious phase of the little horn corresponding to the fourth beast of Dan 7), 2 Thessalonians 2 (the apostasy and the antichrist), Revelation 13 (the sea monster with seven heads, ten horns, and a slain but later healed head), Revelation 17 (the bloodthirsty whore or adulteress), 18 (the symbolic Babylon), etcetera.

This interpretation became normative within Protestantism since the 16th century, something that explains the rise—in the same century and within the Jesuit Counter-Reformation—, of the other two and now prevalent interpretative schools: preterism and futurism.

The first was the creation of the Jesuit Luis de Alcázar (1554-1613), and its basic assumption—as its name suggests (“preterism”, from “*pre-terit*”, namely “*past*”)—is that the prophetic pictures of Revelation about coalitions of powers hostile to God’s people alluded to the persecutions suffered by the church during the first centuries at the hands of the roman empire. In consonance with this, the antichrist who would try to exterminate Christ’s faithful followers was any of the emperors outstanding for their cruelty, Nero among them.

There is no place in this view for any predictive element. John, therefore, was addressing the present and the immediate future of the Christian church of the late first century.

In the same historical context—the 16th century Counter-Reformation—, the Jesuit Francisco Rivera (1537-1591) developed the interpretive school known as futurism, whose basic axiom, as its name indicates, was that the content of Revelation related to “the time of the end” pointed to events that would happen in a remote future—three years and a half before the end of human history—, when a Jewish antichrist [in harmony with the typically medieval ecclesiastical antisemitism] would fiercely persecute the Christians.

Both seemingly unreconcilable interpretations had nevertheless something in common: They deviated from the Roman church the accusing finger of the protestant—as well as the early Christian—historicism.

Curiously, those two systems of interpretation were adopted by European mainstream Protestantism in the 19th century. While its scholarly, critical, and liberal wing opted for the preterist model, the conservative sector adopted, with some variations, the futurist.

Both views had a deeply eroding influence on the perception of the ethical dimension of biblical eschatology.

In different measures, in different ways, and for different reasons, the three approaches—preterism, historicism, and futurism—lost sight of the multi-dimensional and omni-temporal character of the biblical eschatological prophecy and limited it to a unique historic moment or period, thus silencing its voice, which endeavored to speak to every future generation, even though it aimed particularly at some specific events and historical periods.<sup>22</sup>

The first preterists, with an apologetic agenda in mind and in the conditioned and conditioning context of the medieval ecclesiastic polemics, diverted from the *raison d'être* of the biblical eschatology in anchoring it to a remote past which had nothing to do with “the end time”—the leitmotiv of biblical eschatology and the very essence of the prophetic portions of Daniel and Revelation. In consequence, if the powers unmasked, denounced, and condemned in the prophecy were part of the remote past, the present became *ipso facto* exonerated from any divine or transcendent reproach. The prophecy was no longer relevant for the here and now, and much less for the tomorrow. It becomes just an old-fashioned curiosity, a museum piece, a nice salt statue.

The futurists, in the same arena that the former ones, and for the same motivations and conditionings, contented themselves with taking away from the church a dishonor not only self-evident but even denounced from within its ranks.<sup>23</sup> From the futurist interpretative perspective, if the powers denounced and condemned by the prophecy were

<sup>22</sup> See Charles Teel, “Growing up with John’s beasts: A rite of passage”, *Spectrum*, May 1991, 25-34.

<sup>23</sup> In this respect, even some high-ranking ecclesiastical authorities—and much before the protestant reformation—saw in the medieval stage of the Roman church the fulfillment of the prophecies about the antichrist announced by Daniel, Paul, and John.

not present yet and were confined to a nebulous and remote future, the silence of the divine oracles toward the past and the medieval present of the church exonerated it *per se* from any guilt and charge. Silence grants consent.

However, paradoxically, the protestant historicist interpretation which insisted during centuries on pointing out to the Roman church as the “little horn” of Daniel, and the Babylonian beastly and human characters of Revelation, made itself, to a lesser degree, also vulnerable to the same mistake of its two counterparts.

Even though it was aware of the manifold historical, concrete, spatial, and temporal manifestations of good and evil in the context of the great controversy between them and perceived the precise historical pertinence of the biblical eschatological denounces, it lost sight of the general, vast, panoramic and continuous dimension of that conflict and, in consequence, of the need of being always alert to detect new disguises, both historically prefigurative and derivative, nuances and shades adopted by the manifold evil besides the main targets of prophecy.

No one will distract the historicist from the right tree—its characteristics, dimensions, location, origin, history, development, etcetera—the Bible points its accurate ax to. But it is simultaneously possible to lose sight of the surrounding forest, the other morphologically related species, the other manifestations and embodiments—ideologies, institutions, movements, characters, etcetera—in which good and evil made themselves visible and fought each other in every epoch and place.

Perhaps this explains in part the acritic attitude and even the legitimation on the part of Christian-rooted Europe and America toward ideologies, practices and policies such as slavery, colonialism, imperialism, bellicism, nationalism, racism, totalitarianism, antisemitism, etcetera.

Could also have been there—in the 16th century chronologic unilaterality of preterism and futurism—part of the roots of the acquiescence of the European theology regarding the perennial pertinence and relevance of biblical eschatology?



The multi-temporality or trans historicity we have been talking about—which makes pertinent and re-applicable with different levels of emphasis the warnings, denounces and rebukes of the eschatological prophecy to the multiform historical manifestations of evil wherever and whenever they show up—demands an accordingly hermeneutical effort to reach an interpretative synthesis which integrates their proper insights on the past and the future as part of the transhistorical relevance of Bible eschatology.

No doubt Revelation had something to say about the most effective *political* instrument of evil ever known in antiquity, namely the Roman Empire. Did not Daniel devote most of chapters 2, 7, 8, and 11 to portray that versatile power in advance? What could be “the iron” and the “terrifying, frightening and very powerful” fourth beast other than imperial Rome?

Holbrook precisely pointed to that historical immediate and primary pertinence or relevance when he said: “The historical system would not deny that certain aspects of the apocalyptic prophecies of Revelation had an immediate and local significance for the early church when it was originally penned”.<sup>24</sup>

The same is recognized by George E. Ladd:

The prophets spoke not only of contemporary events; they constantly related contemporary historical events to the last great event at the end of history: the day of the Lord when God will visit his people to redeem them and to establish his Kingdom.

This brings us to a characteristic of Old Testament prophecy which is also characteristic of the Revelation, and which solves this problem of distance (futurism) and relevance (the pertinence of prophecy for the addressees contemporary to the prophet). As we have just pointed out, the prophets have two focuses in their prophetic perspective: the events of the present and the immediate future, and the ultimate eschatological event. These two are held in a dynamic tension, often without chronological distinction, for the main purpose of prophecy is not to give a program or chart of the future, but to let the light of the eschatological consummation fall on the present (2 Pet. 1:19). Thus in Amos’ prophecy

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

the impending historical judgment of Israel at the hands of Assyria was called the Day of the Lord (Amos 5:18, 27), and the eschatological salvation of Israel will also occur in that day (9:11). Isaiah pictured the overthrow of Babylon in apocalyptic colors as though it were the end of the world (Isa. 13:1-22). Zephaniah described some (to us) unknown historical visitation as the Day of the Lord which would consume the entire earth and its inhabitants (1:2-18) as though with fire (1:18; 3:8). Joel moved imperceptibly from historical plagues of locust and drought into the eschatological judgments of the Day of the Lord.

In other words, the imminent historical judgment is seen as a type of, or a prelude to the eschatological judgment. The two are often blended together in apparent disregard for chronology, for the same God who acts in the imminent historical judgment will also act in the final eschatological judgment to further his one redemptive purpose [...]. In the same way, our Lord's Olivet Discourse was concerned with both the historical judgment of Jerusalem at the hands of the Roman armies (Luke 21:20ff.) and the eschatological appearance of Antichrist (Matt. 24:15ff.). Rome was a historical forerunner of Antichrist.

Thus, while the Revelation was primarily concerned to assure the churches of Asia of the final eschatological salvation at the end of the age, together with the judgment of the evil world powers, this had immediate relevance to the first century. For the demonic powers which will be manifested at the end [...] were also to be seen in the historical hatred of Rome for God's people and the persecution they were to suffer at Rome's hands.

Therefore, we conclude that the correct method of interpreting the Revelation is a blending [...]. The beast is both Rome and the eschatological Antichrist—and, we might add any demonic power which the church must face in her entire history. The great tribulation is primarily an eschatological event, but it includes all tribulation which the church may experience at the hands of the world, whether by first-century Rome or by later evil powers.

This interpretation is borne out by several objective facts. First: it is the nature of apocalyptic writings to be concerned primarily with the consummation of God's redemptive purpose and the eschatological end of the age. This is the theme of the Revelation: "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him" (1:7). Second: it is the nature of apocalyptic symbolism, whether canonical or noncanonical, to refer to events in history leading up to, and associated with, this eschatological consummation. Third: as already noted, the book claims to be

a prophecy. We have already seen that the nature of prophecy is to let light shine from the future upon the present.<sup>25</sup>

But, what about the present? Has the biblical eschatology a message, a reserve of relevant, pertinent ethical meaning for today, for the here and now? Can the historical flux of the conflict between good and evil be split in: past (sixth century B.C.—or second according to preterism—in the case of Daniel; first century A.D. in the case of Revelation) and future consummation (the *esjaton*), dispensing with our present, which was the future for Daniel and the past from the perspective of the climax of the *esjaton*?

Had the prophecy so much to say to Egypt, Babylon, and Rome, but nothing against the Ottoman genocide which between 1915 and 1923 barbarously and systematically slaughtered one and a half million Christian Armenians basically on religious grounds? Was the biblical eschatological prophetism voiceless while Nazism and its allies murdered ten million human beings? Or during the massacres perpetrated by the communist regimes? Or during the “ethnic cleansing” in some Slavic countries in the late 20th century? Or during the genocidal South African apartheid? Or when the European colonial powers erased some aboriginal societies from the American continent? Or during the massacres of the civil populations in the proxy wars and the expansionist operations under the guise of antiterrorism? Were those powers not destroying part of the Lamb’s bride? Were not their victims God’s children as well as the Christians persecuted during the first centuries or the faithful Jewish suffering under the heathen nations in Old Testament times? Was there not among them some “remnant”, some “God’s people” (see Rom 2,14-16)?

Such an artificial splitting of the seamless spatial and temporal flux of the conflict between good and evil into mutually exclusive, isolated and unreconcilable categories—past, present, and future—, such confinement of biblical eschatological relevance to a far distant past or future, and the subsequent ethical emptying of the biblical prophetism for the

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<sup>25</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Apocalypse of John: A commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 12-14.

here and now surely explains the lack of protagonism of the institutionalized Christianity during most of its history.

De ordinario, nuestros catecismos o proyectos catequéticos presentan el plan de Dios en esta forma: Primer momento (léase *pasado*), Dios crea el mundo y al hombre libre; Segundo momento (léase *presente*), el hombre libre ejecuta el bien o el mal; Tercer momento (léase *futuro*), Dios juzga al hombre libre. Si obró bien = el cielo; Si obró mal = infierno. Este esquema en el fondo no es cristiano. El verdadero enfoque cristiano afirma que la creación no ha terminado, ya que continúa en el segundo momento del esquema. La creación es histórica.

Además, en el segundo momento, el hombre no es el único agente. También Dios actúa haciendo historia. Y no es imparcial, mero espectador. El juicio de Dios tampoco es un tercer momento. *La escatología ya ha dado comienzo. Ya se está juzgando al hombre en la fase histórica.* En la escuela tradicional, la creación y el juicio serían ahistóricos, solamente sería histórico el segundo momento. En cambio [...]. las tres etapas son históricas. Por eso, todo se centra y reduce a la segunda fase, a la historia.<sup>26</sup>

### Crises, eschatological ethics and the faithful

If, as George E. Ladd states, “the eschatological facts are prefigured in historical facts”<sup>27</sup> each historical crisis meaningful for the history of salvation—which all of them are in the context of the conflict between good and evil—acts as a catalyst making visible God’s transhistorical remnants against the backdrop of the hostility of institutionalized evil against them.

Thus, the formidable persecutory crisis of the first three centuries of the Christian era made unmistakably evident who were in fact “the saints of the Most High”: Not certainly “the synagogue of Satan”, those who claimed to be “Jews but were not”, neither those who had embraced the gospel during the relative calmness of the first times. Much less those compromising with pagan culture. On the contrary, there were those who “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” no matter the path goes through the shadowy valley of death (Isa 53; Ps 23); the “few that have not stained

<sup>26</sup> Carlos Bazarra, *¿Qué es la teología...?* (Buenos Aires, AR: Ediciones Paulinas, 1985), 27.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

their garments” (Rev 3.4); those who “did not knee” before Baal (1 Kgs 19,18); the three Hebrew lads of Daniel 3 among the silent majority of their compromising fellow countrymen; those who have “no lie in their lips”, not even to preserve their lives or their acquired privileges.

These, like Christ, distinguish themselves by opposing a pacific ethical—although unequivocal—resistance to the claims and demands of the self-divinized powers opposed to God (see Acts 5,29).

The ethical submission of all the religious organizations in Nazi Germany is something widely known and documented since long ago.<sup>28</sup> This relatively recent historical experience serves as a superb illustration of what can be expected just before the final irruption of God in history according to Revelation 13 through 18, when a small and marginalized handful of believers abandoned by their respective institutionalized religious groups, will be again the target of the wrath of a global, self-divinized power whose mystic will seduce most of humankind.

### Eschatology and God’s option

In the biblical eschatology, God reveals himself as the God of the weak, the persecuted, the oppressed, and the despised, contrary to the self-divinized, dictatorial and persecuting worldly powers (see Dan 2, 7, 8; Rev 13; 17,2.13.14.17; 18,3.9.11.15.23; 19,19; etc.).

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<sup>28</sup> See on this Klaus Scholder, *The churches and the Third Reich* (London, UK: SCM, 1988); Guenter Levi, *La iglesia católica y la Alemania nazi* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1965); Rolf Hochhuth, *El vicario* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1964), especially the historical-documentary appendix; Stafford, “Hitler and the failure of the Church”; etc. It is interesting the stereotyped answer of the religious organizations in general to the all-embracing and self-legitimated powers, an answer more predictable the greater the degree of institutionalization of those organizations, which makes them—by way of fear or of a self-preserving interest—proportionally more vulnerable to the propaganda and the pressure of those in power. That ecclesiastic compromise was the norm in Czarist Russia, in the subsequent communist stage, in Germany under the Nazism, in the socialist satellites of the Eastern Europe during the Cold War and during the right and left-wing dictatorships of Latin America, etcetera. Among the copious available literature on the issue, see, for instance, Sidney Reiners, “Catarama’s Romanian Ordeal: Where was the church?”, *Spectrum*, 18, 1 (October 1987), 26-31; Mark A. Kellner, “Europe: German, Austrian churches apologize for Holocaust actions”, *Adventist News Network*, August 15, 2005, accessed June 17 2024, <https://adventist.news/news/europe-german-austrian-churches-apologize-for-holocaust-actions>.

Therefore, the eschatology of the Bible is a demystification of the devilish-rooted human power. It is the counter-discourse, the delegitimizing par excellence of the kingdom of darkness, the subverted version of the established order whenever the evil disguises behind it.

The deeply destabilizing discourse inaugurated by Christ against the powers of darkness<sup>29</sup> implies and represents an eschatological theology and stewardship of power: the slain Lamb defeats the dragon (Rev 5,6-14); those who are poor for God's sake are the truly rich (Rev 2,8,9); the trodden "stars" shine again "forever" (Dan 12,3); the defenseless woman chased by the dragon becomes the wife of the victorious Lamb (Rev 12; 19; 21); the bloodthirsty adulteress/whore turned powerful, wealthy and renowned through her fornication with her mighty lovers ends humiliated and destroyed together with them (Rev 18; 19,1-3); the cry of those slain for their loyalty to the Lamb finally set in motion God's just wrath in the shape of the last devastating plagues (Rev 16); the one who ends on the throne is the unarmed Lamb (Rev 5; 21) while the worldly powers and powerful ones who served as agents to evil end in the lake of fire (Rev 20).

In the style of the anti-Babylonian imprecatory psalms, God puts in his lips the vindictive cry of the Christian martyrs, who no longer can cry for vindication because they were silenced by evil in the shape of the self-divinized political and religious power in its manifold historical manifestations all along the conflict between good and evil.

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<sup>29</sup> "Your gift may be in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you" (Matt 6,4); "Do not accumulate for yourselves treasures on earth" (Matt 6,19); "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul [*psyjé*: life]" (Matt 10,28); "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions use their authority over them [...]. It must not be this way among you!" (Matt 20,25,26); "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve" (Matt 20,28); "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20,35); "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi', for you have one Teacher and you are all brothers" (Matt 23,8); "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matt 23,11); "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt 23,12); "All who take hold of the sword will die by the sword" (Matt 26,52); "My kingdom is not from this world" (John 18,36); etc.

See also Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in politics* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), especially the chapter entitled "The political Christ", 142-150; John H. Yoder, *Jesus and his politics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972).

The biblical eschatological genre is, therefore, a preferential exponent of God's unmistakable option for the few and weak in contrast to the preferences and option of evil: the few powerful and the masses cooperating—actively or passively, out of conviction, for fear or personal convenience—to the prevalence, persistence and consolidation of evil (Rev 13; 16).

### Unpacking eschatology

An illustrative example of the perception of the reserve of ethical relevance of biblical eschatology happened in the second half of the 19th century in the United States in the context of the debate about slavery.

The economy of the whole country, and particularly of the South, rested largely upon the affluence of the cheap workforce seized with no cost or risk from the African continent.

The main churches heir of the Reformation—particularly the Methodists—soon became divided on the issue.<sup>30</sup>

The seeming Pauline tolerance of slavery (see his letter to Philemon) and a supposed divine curse reaching the presumed black offspring of Cam (see Gen 9,18-28) was for the southern advocates of slavery enough evidence of God's approval of it. To that it was added a very particular exegesis of Matthew 22,21, according to which “the secular world with its laws and politics pertained to the Caesar and had nothing to do with the spiritual life, which was limited to the practice of religion and the issues of the soul”.<sup>31</sup>

As the different positions consolidated and radicalized, the central government became more hesitant to make a choice that would result either in a fragmentation of the territorial and political unit or in a bloody civil war of uncertain results. The North, and Lincoln, were determined to save the unity without abolishing slavery, but that seemed less and less viable.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Duncan A. Reily, *Momentos decisivos del metodismo* (San Bernardo do Campo, BR: Imprenta Metodista, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

In such a context, a religious movement derived from the millerite phenomenon and finding its *raison d'être* in Bible eschatology was born: The Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Its pioneers were among the most active antislavery adherents and censured in the most severe terms the slavery itself as well as the vacillating politics of President Lincoln on the issue.

The American historian Jonathan Butler, says:

Like evangelicalism at large, Seventh-day Adventism knew an earlier era of social activism when abolitionist Adventists spoke out for the civil rights of black Americans [...]. We need not be torn between our Adventism and basic humanitarian concern. As we discover from our Adventist heritage, they have been one and the same.<sup>32</sup>

In the 1860s, when the antislavery movement was a crusade wielded by the North putting all the guilt for the slavery on the South, the Adventists of New England and the Middle West censured “the peculiar institution”, broke federal law in helping the slaves to escape, and denounced President Lincoln for his slowness to free the slaves.

The Millerite proto-Adventism was born as one of the most sharply ethical and socially progressive reform movements.<sup>33</sup>

Joshua Himes, who made William Miller publicly notorious, had built the Chardon Street Chapel, in Boston, where he paid homage to the abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison as well as other famous social reformers of that time.

Charles Fitch, who would become the herald of the message of the second angel of Revelation 14 within Adventism, wrote in 1837 the booklet *Slaveholding weighed in the balance of truth and its comparative guilt*, about the time when he knew Millerism.

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<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Butler, “Race relations in the church: The early radicalism” (part 1), *Insight* (January 30, 1979): 7-8.

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, Jonathan Butler, “Speaking up”, *Insight*, June 12, 1979, 17-18; Charles Teel, Jr. “The radical roots of the Peruvian Adventism”, *Spectrum*, December 1990, 5-15; *Idem*, “Revolutionary missionaries in Perú: Fernando and Ana Stahl”, *Spectrum*, February 1988, 50-52.



In 1840, George Storrs, the rediscoverer of the biblical doctrine of the future and conditional immortality of the human being, met frequently with Orange Scott, one of the founders of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, created to protest the tolerance of the methodists toward slavery.

Joseph Bates, one of the three founders of Seventh-day Adventism, organized an antislavery society in 1830. Like Henry Thoreau and many others in the North, he saw the war launched by North America against Mexico (1846-1848) as an expansionist strategy to extend the pro-slavery territory.

In 1847, he said in his writing entitled *Second advent way marks and high heaps*: “The third woe has come upon this nation, this boasted land of liberty, this heaven-daring, soul-destroying, slave-holding, neighbor-murdering country!”<sup>34</sup>

It was in the 1850s when Seventh-day Adventists developed their interpretation according to which the two-horned beast resembling a lamb but acting as the dragon (see Rev 13), represented the United States.

John N. Andrews, a young and prominent leader during the early stage of Adventism, said that North America had professed that all human beings are born free, equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights such as life, freedom and the opportunity to be happy. Nevertheless, the American dragon was keeping three million human beings enslaved. Its professed equality was a lie.<sup>35</sup>

In the decade before the Civil War, each event was for the Seventh-day Adventists a confirmation of the dragon-like character of North America. The law against the escaped slaves flared up even the most moderated northerners, and the Adventists, like others, appealed to what they called “a higher Law [than the federal]” and sought shelter for themselves on it to refuse to give the fugitive slaves back to the authorities. In some cases, the Adventists operated the underground rails with which they helped the slaves to flee to Canada.

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<sup>34</sup> Butler, “Race relations in the church” (part 1), 6.

<sup>35</sup> Butler, *ibid.*, 9.

John Preston Kellogg, the father of the physician John Harvey Kellogg and W. K. Kellogg (inventor of the famous cereal flakes), built one of those underground rails on his farm, in the south of Michigan.

John Byington, who would become the first president of the General Conference, helped several runaway slaves who reached his door, in the state of New York, and was one of the founders of the anti-slavery Wesleyan Methodist Church. He remained nine years as a member of that church because he sympathized with its unequivocal abolitionism and named two of his sons after two famous abolitionists.

In those days, the *Review and Herald*, the official magazine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, expressed its regret for the legislation that favored the expansion of the pro-slavery territory.

The Adventists at that time rebuked the Congress for its muzzling politics which limited the debate about slavery and accused the southern congressmen of violating the freedom of speech.

In the *Review and Herald*, the Adventist evangelist M. E. Cornell referred to the Independence Day of the United States as the celebration of “American slavery, alias independence and liberty”.<sup>36</sup>

The act of the abolitionist John Brown<sup>37</sup> acquired an epic significance for many northerners and, according to J. N. Loughborough, Ellen White regarded it as a sincere and meditated attempt to free the slaves; not as a quixotic and irresponsible action, but as a breath of freedom.<sup>38</sup>

At that time, Mrs. White was very frank and frontal about the issue and even told a pro-slavery Adventist that he should be separated from the church if he insisted on his opinions favorable to slavery.

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<sup>36</sup> Butler, *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> John Brown (1800-1859) was an American deeply religious abolitionist who defended the emancipation of the slaves. He planned an uprising of the slaves in Virginia and the constitution of a free state south of the Appalachians. To that purpose, he assaulted with some companions a federal arsenal in 1859, but no slave dared to join them, and he had to surrender. He was judged for treason and executed.

<sup>38</sup> Butler, *ibid.*, 10.

In 1858, she published the first volume of the *Spiritual Gifts* series, which later would be increased to become *The great controversy between Christ and Satan*.

As a part of that material, she identified slavery in America—and the complicity of the American churches with it—as one of the main indications of the world’s moral decline and of its imminent and terrible end. There we read ethical pronouncements tinted with eschatological relevance like the following ones:

All heaven beholds with indignation, human beings, the workmanship of God, reduced to the lowest depths of degradation, and placed on a level with the brute creation by their fellow men. And professed followers of that dear Saviour whose compassion was ever moved as he witnessed human woe, heartily engage in this enormous and grievous sin, and *deal in slaves and souls of men*.<sup>39</sup> Angels have recorded it all. It is written in the book. The tears of the pious bond-men and bond-women, of fathers, mothers and children, brothers and sisters, are all bottled up in heaven. Agony, human agony, is carried from place to place, and bought and sold. God will restrain his anger but a little longer. His anger burns against this nation, and especially against the religious bodies who have sanctioned, and have themselves engaged in this terrible merchandise. Such injustice, such oppression, such sufferings, many professed followers of the meek and lowly Jesus can witness with heartless indifference. And many of them can inflict with hateful satisfaction, all this indescribable agony themselves, and yet dare to worship God. It is solemn mockery, and Satan exults over it, and reproaches Jesus and his angels with such inconsistency, saying, with hellish triumph, Such are Christ’s followers!

These professed Christians read of the sufferings of the martyrs, and tears course down their cheeks. They wonder that men could ever possess hearts so hardened as to practice such inhuman cruelties towards their fellow-men, while at the same time they hold their fellow-men in slavery. And this is not all. They sever the ties of nature, and cruelly oppress from day to day their fellow-men. They can inflict most inhuman tortures with relentless cruelty, which would well compare with the cruelty papists and heathens exercised towards Christ’s followers. Said the angel, It will be more tolerable for the heathen and for papists in the day of the execution of God’s judgment than for such men. *The cries and sufferings of the oppressed have reached unto heaven*,<sup>40</sup> and angels stand amazed at the

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<sup>39</sup> An allusion to Revelation 18,13.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Genesis 4,10; James 5,4; Revelation 6,9.10.

hard-hearted, untold, agonizing, suffering, man in the image of his Maker, causes his fellow-man. Said the angel, “The names of such are written in blood, crossed with stripes, and flooded with agonizing, burning tears of suffering. God’s anger will not cease until he has caused the land of light *to drink the dregs of the cup of his fury, and until he has rewarded unto Babylon double. Reward her even as she rewarded you, double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double*.”<sup>41</sup>

I saw that the slave-master would have to answer for the soul of his slave whom he has kept in ignorance; and all the sins of the slave will be visited upon the master. God cannot take the slave to heaven, who has been kept in ignorance and degradation, knowing nothing of God, or the Bible, fearing nothing but his master’s lash, and not holding so elevated a position as his master’s brute beasts. But he does the best thing for him that a compassionate God can do. He lets him be as though he had not been; while the master has to suffer *the seven last plagues, and then come up in the second resurrection, and suffer the second, most awful death*.<sup>42</sup> Then the wrath of God will be appeased.<sup>43</sup>

During the war, and before the declaration of the emancipation of the slaves, the northern forces suffered repeated defeats. Ellen White regarded them as divine judgments against slavery.

In 1862 she said:

God is punishing this nation for the high crime of slavery. He has the destiny of the nation in His hands. He will punish the South for the sin of slavery, and the North for so long suffering its overreaching and overbearing influence.<sup>44</sup>

Uriah Smith, another Adventist pioneer and editor of the *Review and Herald*, referred with disdain to Lincoln’s politics before emancipation as “conservative, not to say suicide”.

In an editorial of the official publication of the church, he said that President Lincoln’s reluctance to abolish slavery would mean...

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<sup>41</sup> In allusion to Revelation 14,8,9; 18,6 (italics supplied).

<sup>42</sup> A clear allusion to Revelation 15, 16 and 20.

<sup>43</sup> Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1944), 1:191-193 (emphasis supplied).

<sup>44</sup> Ellen White, *Testimonies for the church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:264.

... to stand up against the “enthusiasm for freedom” which reigns in nearly twenty millions of hearts in the free North, and against the prayers of four millions of oppressed and suffering slaves. If he continues to resist all these, in refusing to take these steps which a sound policy, the principles of humanity, and the salvation of the country, demand, it must be from an infatuation akin to that which of old brought Pharaoh to an untimely end.<sup>45</sup>

In that initial stage of the Adventist church, its members and authorities openly gave their opinions about the great social and political problems of the day. From a radical and republican position, they requested “Emancipation now!” for all the slaves in front of a president reluctant to that and a nation in crisis. The socio-historic and political concerns were for them a moral and eschatological question.

Talking about the defenders of slavery, the Adventist pioneer John N. Andrews wrote the following:

This sin [slavery] is snugly stowed away in a certain package which is labeled “Politics”. [Those in favor of slavery] deny their fellow men to condemn any of the favorite sins which they have placed in this bundle; and they evidently expect that any parcel bearing this label, will pass the final custom-house, i.e., the judgment of the last day—without being examined. Should the All-seeing Judge, however, inquire into their connection with this great iniquity, they suppose the following answer will be entirely satisfactory to Him: “I am not at all censurable for anything said or done by me in behalf of slavery; for O Lord, Thou Knowest, it was a part of my politics!”<sup>46</sup>

The updating and ethical application the Adventist pioneers did of the biblical eschatology in the light of their historical reality can be summed up by the following words of Jonathan Butler: “Mrs. White’s antislavery statements had been grounded in eschatology. American slavery was [for her] a ‘sign of the end’”<sup>47</sup>

In this respect, she included, as we saw, American slavery in the message of the second angel of Revelation 14. Mainstream Christianity of

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<sup>45</sup> Butler, *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Butler, *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Butler, “Race relations in the church: A segregated Adventism” (part 2), *Insight*, February 6, 1979, 7.

her day had fallen, in God's sight, because of its complicity with human exploitation upheld by the State.

Here and there within the Adventist literature, it is still possible to find examples of this same updating, inclusive and always opened to the present eschatological hermeneutics:

Can the theme of the "fallen Babylon" (Rev. 18) be applied to the whole spectrum of world institutions which are in moral bankruptcy—governments that lie and treat with cruelty their citizens, industries defrauding, stealing and contaminating the environment behind a respectable facade, universities that deify the ideology over the true honesty, religious organizations avid of power and wealth instead of ministering with simplicity, compassion and veracity, as was done by the Founder of the church—or can only be applied narrowly to the roman papal institution?<sup>48</sup>

Some [adventists] have seen in "Babylon" a symbol of all the religious groups, including the Christian denominations, except the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We should be careful not to isolate ourselves nor to adopt the sectarian attitude of "we against them". This erroneous perspective consists in seeing God's true church exclusively as a differentiable group rather than as an invisible organism integrated by faithful believers and located wherever. This is the prevailing view in the New Testament.<sup>49</sup>

### Eschatology, ethics and secularism

It is precisely the losing sight of the perennial relevance and of the ethical demands of biblical eschatology that discredited institutionalized Christianity the most in the eyes of secularism and served as a justification for its rejection of God and religion.

Along most of the twice millennial history of the church, in every crisis where its ethical credibility was at stake, the church systematically

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<sup>48</sup> Alf Birch, Bailey Gillespie, Pat Habada, James Park, Monte Sahlin, and Jim Zackrison, *So I send you: Biblical models of soul winning*, Sabbath School Lessons, teacher's edition, January-March 1994, 159.

<sup>49</sup> Don Eckenroth, Ron Flowers, Bailey Gillespie, Brian Jones and Jim Zackrison, *Three angels' messages: Last call for heaven*, Sabbath School Lessons, teacher's edition, October-December 1994, 85 (*The Great Controversy*, 440, 441 is quoted).

opted for institutional self-preservation, surrendered to evil, and forsook those haunted by it (see Prov 31,8.9).

During the Nazi tragedy, and after its postwar sequels, in what was probably its great opportunity to recover its deeply questioned credibility, the Christian religion received noticeable requests from the skeptical—although committed to good—European intellectuality.

In 1948, in an anthological statement, the existentialist Albert Camus exhorted the Dominican Order of Paris in terms verily evangelic and pastoral:

Comparto con vosotros el horror del mal [...] nunca he de cesar de luchar contra este mundo, en el que sufren y mueren niños [...]. El mundo aguarda de los cristianos que se despojen de la abstracción y se enfrenten con el semblante inundado de sangre que ha asumido la historia en nuestros días [...]. Quizá no podamos impedir que esta creación sea un mundo en el que los niños son martirizados. Pero podemos disminuir el número de los niños martirizados. Y si vosotros no nos ayudáis a ello, ¿quién, pues, nos ha de ayudar? [...] Sé, y lo sé a veces con el corazón transido, que a los cristianos les bastaría con decidirse para que millones de voces en el mundo entero vinieran a unirse al clamor de un puñado de solitarios que sin fe ni ley<sup>50</sup>, abogan en favor de los hombres y de los niños en todas partes e infatigablemente.<sup>51</sup>

A decade before, the “voices in the wilderness” of a few Christians opposed to the passivity of the institutionalized European religion during the advances of the Nazi doctrine requested at least an unequivocal pronouncement of rejection from the most influential religious leadership, something that never happened.

The result of that silence [on the part of the German religious hierarchy] disconcerts the Christians and disappoints with the most extreme bitterness the non-Christian, who, other way could be now converts instead of being today losing all confidence in the church as a consequence of its failure in condemning the flagrant injustice.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Romans 2,14-16.

<sup>51</sup> Albert Camus, *L'incroyant et les chrétiens* (Paris, FR: Pléiade, 1948); quoted in J. Feiner y L. Vischer, *Nuevo libro de la fe cristiana* (Barcelona, ES: Herder, 1977), 102, 103.

<sup>52</sup> Waldemar Gurian, *Hitler and the Christians* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1936), 162.

Half a century later, pastor Martin Luther King Jr. censured the permissive passivity of a white, Anglo-Saxon, Christian America in one of his famous speeches:

It may well be that we would have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words of the bad people and the violent actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say wait on time. Somewhere we must come to see that social progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation. So, we must help time, and we must realize that the time is always right to do right.<sup>53</sup>

How, then, not seeing in that ethical emptying of eschatology a reason for the rejection of so many “prodigal sons” (see Luke 15) against the theology and eschatology of their “older Christian brothers”?

Therefore, it is neither legitimate nor honest to quote Lenin’s “religion is the opium of the people” without setting his rejection—certainly and unnecessarily programmatic—of the Christian religion in itself and as a whole against the backdrop of the connivance of the state church with the government.<sup>54</sup> It is not legitimate to condemn the atheism of the French revolutionaries without remembering the suffocating and demoralizing tutoring that the monarchic clergy exerted over bodies, goods, and minds during endless centuries.<sup>55</sup> Nor it is legitimate to anathematize Nietzsche’s disregard for God without seeing in it a reaction to a

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<sup>53</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “Remaining awake through a great revolution”, accessed on June 20, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/thekingcenter/videos/it-may-well-be-that-we-will-have-to-repent-in-this-generation-not-merely-for-the/648455449232170/>.

<sup>54</sup> See Godfrey T. Anderson, *The past is always present* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1977), 12-13.

<sup>55</sup> The absolutist dogma of the monarchy by God’s design had been sacralized by the European ecclesiastic hierarchy as a faithful reflect of the famous thought expressed by Louis XIV, “the sun king”, in his *Memories*: “Todo lo que se encuentra en la extensión de nuestros Estados, de cualquier naturaleza que sea, nos pertenece [a los reyes]. La voluntad de Dios es que cualquiera que haya nacido súbdito obedezca ciegamente [...]. Por muy nefasto que pueda ser un príncipe, la rebelión de sus súbditos es siempre criminal” (quoted in Alfonso Lazo, *Revoluciones del mundo moderno* [Barcelona: Salvat, 1984], 7). In other words, no one was in power unless by God’s will. Therefore, the ruler was accountable for his actions to God alone.



decadent European religiosity that not only did not condemn antisemitism, imperialist bellicism, discrimination, and the deification of human power, but also had consubstantiated with them and became their main apologist, often through its consenting silence.<sup>56</sup>

In this light, Christianity as such seems not to have been the very aim of their criticism, but what the Christian religion became over time.

Those antireligious reactions should then not be interpreted as an attack directed against religion itself, but against what it turned to be:

Un conjunto de prácticas doctrinarias que enmascaran contenidos extrarreligiosos [...] una “ideología” que legitima los intereses temporales de un grupo privilegiado, una clase, o una institución que quiere prolongar el *statu quo* social [...]. En tales casos, el rechazo de la religión es un acto purificador que conviene [...] sobre todo a la religión misma. [Tal rechazo] puede estar obedeciendo a un imperativo religioso mucho más que ateo, puede ser la respuesta a un acto de fe honda mucho más que una negación de lo sagrado [...]. La religión va cobrando a lo largo de su ejercicio una serie de contenidos espurios e inauténticos. En tales casos, los rasgos exteriores se convierten en contenidos esenciales, la pureza inicial cede al hedonismo y la blandura, la austeridad primitiva se diluye en un decorativismo desmesurado y teatral, la emoción sobrecogedora se pierde en la mecánica de comportamientos rituales, en un ceremonial hueco que ha gastado su fuerza simbólica; y la rebeldía social que supone toda actitud de entrega a lo sagrado truécase en la sumisión a los poderes del mundo. Cuando la religión se ha transformado en esta serie de formas [...] la crítica [...] niega legítimamente todo aquello que debe ser negado, destruye y anula esto que traba el desarrollo de una auténtica religiosidad. [Esa crítica] rinde un excelente servicio a la religión, porque por más cruenta que sea, nunca tendrá la fuerza suficiente como para destruir sus contenidos auténticos: al día siguiente de un rechazo, ya sea en la forma de una objeción teórica o de una persecución, la religión renace con mayor vitalidad.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, Clifford Goldstein, “Anti-Semites and the City of God”, *Liberty*, (January-February 1985), 24-25; M. A. Zaburov, *Historia de las cruzadas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Futuro, 1960), especially 11-31; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Así habló Zaratustra* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1992); Hans Küng, ¿Existe Dios?, 2nd. ed. (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1979), 554-559; Juan Carlos García-Borrón, prologue to *Así habló Zaratustra* (Barcelona: Hyspamérica, 1974), 23-25; Horacio Lona, *Fe cristiana y realidad social: estudios sobre el cristianismo antiguo* (Buenos Aires: Centro Salesiano de Estudios, 1992), 12; etc.

<sup>57</sup> Víctor Massuh, *La libertad y la violencia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1968), 119, 120, 122.

En ciertos momentos de la historia de una religión, las formas de la relación que el hombre establece con [Dios] se convierten en obstáculos para la relación misma. Estas formas son doctrinas, ritos, prácticas, símbolos, que con el tiempo se vuelven productos muertos pero sacralizados que sustituyen a Dios mismo”,<sup>58</sup> says Massuh evoking Buber, and finishes stating:

Lo sagrado trasciende todas sus manifestaciones; ellas mismas pueden alcanzar tal grado de distorsión y degradación que acaso se vuelvan contra lo divino y constituyan formas vacías que encubran la “ausencia” de Dios, una voluntad de poderío, un interés mezquino o una preocupación “humana, demasiado humana”. Marx y Lenin confundieron la esencia de la religión con sus objetivaciones alienadas y sus deformaciones históricas. Confundieron las formas que Kant llamó “estatutarias” de la religión, con sus contenidos eternos. Sólo tuvieron ojos para sus rasgos caricaturescos, para aquellos aspectos —que sin duda existieron y existen— en que las iglesias aparecen pactando con los poderosos y en que los teólogos aparecen legitimando el *statu quo* social.<sup>59</sup>

Sadly, those achievements and victories that had to be the natural and spontaneous patrimony of Christianity in virtue of its acutely ethic, critical and transforming message were achieved despite Christian organized religion or at best without it.

Esa afirmación de lo finito y concreto, del hombre bajo la forma de la valoración del cuerpo, de la historia y del tiempo [...] esas conquistas se hicieron bajo las banderas del ateísmo porque la religión había, por lo general, permanecido hostil o indiferente a aquellas potencias, y porque se distrajo en una divinidad ajena a la vida, a la historia y a la finitud terrena. El ataque antirreligioso fue tan legítimo que obligó a la religión a revisar su propia imagen, a incorporar a su seno las conquistas realizadas fuera de su propio campo. Ella aprendió la lección: bajo la compulsión correctora del humanismo ateo dirigió sus pasos hacia el mundo... acentuó su necesidad de insertarse creativamente en la historia y ocuparse de los problemas sociales.<sup>60</sup>

It is in this Christianity uncommitted and foreign to reality, hostile or indifferent to it, and in the ethical emptying of the biblical prophetism, where should be sought the main trigger of modern and contemporary disregard for God.

<sup>58</sup> Víctor Massuh, *Nihilismo y experiencia extrema* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1975), 87.

<sup>59</sup> Massuh, *La libertad y la violencia*, 121, 122.

<sup>60</sup> Massuh, *ibid.*, 88.

It is valid here the distinction Karl Barth made between Christian faith and religion. In this respect, and commentating on the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Julio de Santa Ana concludes:

La religión implica una huida del mundo, la anulación de la historia, a la vez que una actitud netamente individualista que procura únicamente el bienestar eterno para el individuo que dice creer en algo o alguien. En cambio, la fe cristiana es una actitud *responsable* (es una respuesta servicial a los llamados que Dios presenta al hombre a través de las necesidades de sus prójimos) no escapando a este mundo ni a esta historia, sino asumiéndolos en todas sus dimensiones, porque es el mundo de Dios, y la historia es el proceso a través del cual los hombres son llevados al Reino de los Cielos. Si el Evangelio fuera “religión”, entonces cabría afirmar que el cristianismo es un ingrediente del “opio de los pueblos”. Nadie duda de que en determinadas circunstancias históricas la fe cristiana ha caído en la esfera de lo religioso. Pero el caso no es tal: Jesús no viene a salvar “el alma”, sino a procurar el bien del hombre en todos los aspectos (sana enfermos, da de comer a los hambrientos, brinda su compañía a los parias de la sociedad, no cae en actitudes demagógicas buscando la adhesión de las multitudes, no coacciona al prójimo, sino que respeta su libertad de decisión, etc.). Un cristianismo no religioso no intenta la distinción entre la esfera de lo sagrado y la de lo secular. Esto significa limitar la acción de Dios a la primera, caer en un dualismo (carne versus espíritu) que no tiene ningún fundamento en las fuentes de la revelación cristiana. Ya no pueden tener lugar actitudes escapistas y monacales para vivir la existencia cristiana; ése es el gran significado de Lutero y de la Reforma: señalar que la vida cristiana no es cosa exclusiva de un grupo especializado y de ambientes convencionales, sino que es “vida-en-el-mundo”.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

Has the biblical eschatology any consequences for the here and now or it is an anachronistic, outdated discourse exhausted in a preterit instance? Has it to do with an expectation anchored in a remote and elusive future?

From the biblical perspective, it rather seems that the eschatological prophetism in general (Daniel, the synoptic apocalypse, 2 Thessalonians, etcetera) and the apocalyptic in particular (Revelation) is neither only past (preterism) nor only future (futurism), but a balance between both

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<sup>61</sup> de Santa Ana, *Protestantismo, cultura y sociedad*, 106, 107.

historical moments seeking to illuminate and accompany the human being along the most meaningful and crucial stage of history, that of the consummation of all things. It is a lighthouse set in the destination harbor while projecting its light along the human historical ongoing from even before the first century A.D. until the end of the way. As it happens with a distant light, it becomes clearer as one walks toward its source, as we go along the road, as we are increasingly closer to its distant origin. Biblical eschatology was both present and future for the prophets and the apostles, for Daniel and John, while it is past, present and future for us, and it will remain so until the very end as tomorrow becomes today and today becomes yesterday.

Then, the question the believer has to ask himself or herself regarding biblical eschatology in the context of its ethical permanent, transhistorical relevance is not so much what it said to the remote past (it certainly said something to it) or what it will say to the near or far future (it certainly will speak to it), but what is its message for the here and now, for the present, for us individually and collectively, for the moment and the scenario of the great conflict between good and evil we are actors—not spectators—in.

Whether biblical eschatology is as pertinent for us as it was for Daniel and John to some degree depends on the answer we give to that question.



## 2. Preaching Revelation

Predicación de Apocalipsis

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### Abstract

There is much scholarly and non-scholarly interest in the Book of Revelation. This article argues that the book must be preached, but this must be done after serious study to avoid superficiality and speculative interpretation. Even as a sermon on Revelation will apply the text to the current audiences' situations, it must be true to the message of the Apocalypse. In this article we will (a) address some basics on preaching, (b) suggest why it is important to preach Revelation, (c) and mention prerequisites for and pitfalls of preaching Revelation. Furthermore, the article contains a proposal of what to preach, providing lists of passages and topics that may be of interest to the preacher. It also offers some examples of outlines for preaching. The article will not be dealing with rhetoric and the delivery of a sermon, but its focus is on content.

### Keywords

Hermeneutics – Exegesis – New Testament – Revelation – Preaching

### Resumen

Hay mucho interés académico y no académico en el libro de Apocalipsis. Este artículo expone que se debe predicar de este libro, pero se lo debe hacer luego de estudio serio para evitar la superficialidad y la interpretación especulativa. Incluso cuando un sermón sobre Apocalipsis aplique el texto a las situaciones actuales de las audiencias, debe ser fiel al mensaje del Apocalipsis. En este artículo (1) abordaremos algunas cuestiones básicas de la predicación, (2) sugeriremos por qué es importante predicar de Apocalipsis, (3) y mencionaremos prerequisites y riesgos de predicar Apocalipsis. Además el artículo contiene una propuesta de qué predicar, proveyendo listas de pasajes y temas que pueden ser de interés para el predicador. También ofrece ejemplos de bosquejos para la predicación. El artículo no tratará la retórica ni la oratoria de un sermón, sino que su enfoque será en el contenido.



**Palabras claves**

Hermenéutica – Exégesis – Nuevo Testamento – Apocalipsis – Predicación

After centuries of little interest in the Book of Revelation, John's Apocalypse has been studied extensively for the last decades. People from various faith traditions have shown interest in Revelation. Also Catholic scholars have studied the book exegetically, and in the 1980ies three ladies were quite influential Adela Yabro Collins, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Massynberde Ford. Since then, constantly new commentaries, monographs, and articles appear in print. It becomes difficult to keep up with all publications on Revelation. While there is a lot of interest in scholarly work on Revelation—exegetical and theological—it seems that not very much has been done in the area of preaching the Apocalypse of John. Publications on Revelation and homiletics are rare. Some are older and may be dated. Some focus largely or exclusively on the messages to the seven churches.

Typically, preaching has a major down-to-earth aspect. It must be practical and has to speak to the needs and challenges of the people but also to necessary changes with the audiences. True biblical preaching is based on Scripture but is applied to the present audience.

This is not necessarily what scholarship always does. Scholars may study biblical terms, grammar, syntax, phrases, etc., in order to understand a biblical saying, and theologians may explore biblical concepts in order to build a conclusive system of theology. In their publications they may not deal with what the text means for people today. Depending on their specialization, the nature of the project they are working on, and also their personal preferences biblical scholars may just deal with the question, What did the text or the biblical concept mean for the original audience? Maybe they even ask this question: How should the biblical text be interpreted by us?, but may not show what this means for everyday life. Theologians may, for instance, be satisfied by teaching that God is triune but never ask what difference this biblical concept of God versus the concept of God as proclaimed, for instance, by adherents to Arianism or Islam makes in practical terms for individual believers.

But this does not mean that apart from interest in apocalyptic studies and in Revelation as literature, there is no reflection on implications for the present time among scholars and theologians at all. While some scholars may remain in their ivory towers of intellectual theology, others address issues with which Revelation confronts and challenges us. Because Revelation is not only a book describing past, present, and future events, but is a book like other biblical books it speaks also to our personal Christian life and walk with God and not only to that of people groups and nations. We find, for instance, scholars who address the issue of justice and the reaction toward egregious injustice that Christians have to suffer. There are scholars who speak to the issue of violence—not just by an oppressive system—but also to a potential unwarranted violent reaction by the oppressed. Revelation has something to say about the dangers of political maneuvering and dual allegiance, and some authors address this issue. The same is true for materialism and extreme forms of capitalism in Revelation 18 and how Christians today should relate to money.

Yet even the exploration by biblical scholars and theologians of what the text or the Book of Revelation means is still somewhat different from preaching. Teachers better become preachers when they addresses church audiences or secular audiences that are interested in existential questions. And even then professional preachers may fare even better than the above mentioned academicians.

In this paper we will:

1. Address some basics for preaching.
2. Suggest why it is important to preach Revelation.
3. Mention prerequisites for and pitfalls of preaching Revelation.
4. Suggest what to preach.
5. Provide some examples.

We will not be dealing with rhetoric and delivery of a sermon but with its content.

## Some basics for preaching

### *The meaning of preaching*

Before going into detail, it may be useful to remember the ideal and the deeper meaning of preaching. We would suggest several theses:

1. Preaching is based on the conviction that even today the living God is at work in saving humans. Therefore, preaching is part of God's redemptive work.
2. Preaching is the proclamation of the gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. It wants to restore the broken communion between God and humankind (Rom 10,13-17).
3. Preaching is not a talk about God, but a talk of God to His people through the human intermediary. But the gospel that is preached is always greater than the speaker.
4. In preaching, the Bible speaks to us. Prerequisites are that the preacher uses Scripture and that he/she carefully studies the Word of God. Preaching seeks to remove the obstacles to a clear understanding of God's Word.
5. Preaching has two focal points:
  - a. The blessings and the will of God
  - b. The needs of His people
6. It is a dialogue between God and His people, in which the preacher belongs to the listening community.
7. Preaching oftentimes collides with the philosophies and cultural values and practices of our time. It proclaims a word that chastises but that also points to divine forgiveness.
8. Preaching wants to lead listeners to action. Individuals are called out of the world, are spiritually nourished, united, and as the church of God are sent back to a world in desperate need of hope and peace.

Preaching should never become a routine. Preachers must lose the respect for God's Word and the awe that they are privileged to speak for and represent the Most High. They have to cultivate an attitude of



humility. As the thirsty they proclaim to the thirsty where water can be found. They do not stand above the Word, but with the hearers they are under the Word. They do not appear with an attitude of having found something but as finding something together with the community of believers. Preaching is absolutely necessary for the life of the congregation (Rom 10,17). Jesus taught and preached.

### *Approaches to preaching*

A word about approaches to preaching. Here we are not discussing issues such as an inductive versus a deductive approach to preaching. Rather we suggest that the Bible is to be the starting point in each and every case of preaching. Christian life is based on God's revelation in His Word and especially in Jesus Christ. Today we know Jesus through Scripture. Therefore, no sermon should be preached that is not based on or at least connected to the Word of God.

However, there are different approaches to or types of sermons:

1. One can use a *biblical passage* which is studied, explained, and applied (e.g., the church in Laodicea).
2. One can deal with a *biblical topic* (e.g., God's throne in Revelation) which is studied, explained, and applied.
3. One may start with a contemporary issue for which there are neither biblical texts nor biblical topics at hand and where one needs to resort to *biblical principles* (e.g., the reaction to violence with non-violence).

All three categories are found in preaching and can be used as one preaches Revelation (see figure 1):

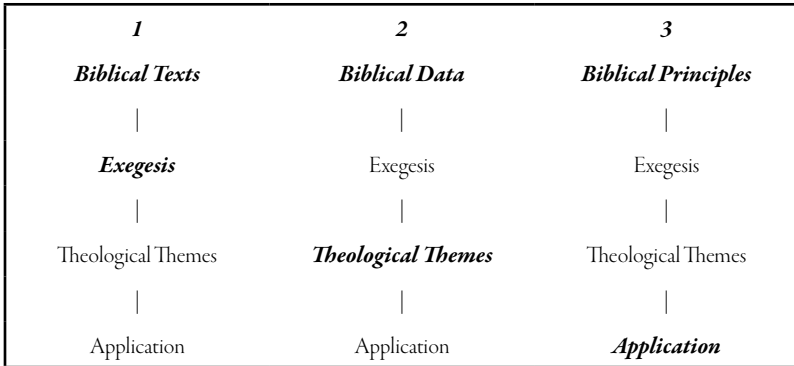


Figura 1. Types or categories of sermons

The first approach is probably the most common one among Adventists. One reads the Bible and needs to understand and explain a text or passage. The focus is on exegesis. Exegesis consists of a number of steps which may help the reader and student of Scripture to unlock the meaning of a text.<sup>1</sup> The most important exegetically steps in addition to praying and reading the passage again and again are the following:

<sup>1</sup> Here is a ten step suggestion of how to do exegesis. This is a summary only. There is much more to be said and done than what appears here:

- Step 1. Take time. Studying Scripture requires time.
- Step 2. Turn to God in prayer for help to understand His Word.
- Step 3. Read the text and also its context repeatedly.
- Step 4. Establish the best possible reading. This is a step for biblical scholars only.
- Step 5. Translate the text if you are a scholar. Otherwise check good translations.
- Step 6. Investigate the historical context and especially the literary context.
- Step 7. Analyze the text/passage under consideration.
- Step 8. Perform theological analysis, that is, look for themes.
- Step 9. Apply the text to us today.
- Step 10. Use resources mainly after having studied the text/passage.

For more information, see Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist theology*, ed. by Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 58-104, Ekkehardt Mueller, "Guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture," in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist approach*, Biblical Research Institute Studies, vol. 1, ed. by G. W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 111-134; Mueller, "Principles of biblical interpretation," unpublished paper, 2019.

1. The study of the context of a verse or passage<sup>2</sup>
2. The careful analysis of the biblical passage itself<sup>3</sup>
3. The application of the result of the study of Scripture to us here and now<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The historical context consists of the political, cultural, religious, and social situation when a biblical book was written and to which the text was addressed. The literary context consists of the passages preceding and following a text (immediate context), a biblical book, other biblical books (larger context) and the entire Bible (largest context). Biblical texts oftentimes relate to other texts (Old Testament and/or New Testament) and may reveal important themes of the Bible. The literary context determines to a large extent the meaning of words and the message of the passage.

The study of the context may consist of providing a structure of the context. It has also to do with the delimitation of biblical passages. This is especially important in apocalyptic prophecy where the beginning and the end of a passage may be crucial to its interpretation. The study of the context may also take in consideration different literary genres (e.g., legal texts, wisdom literature, classical prophecy, apocalyptic literature, letters). Although the general principles of interpretation apply more or less to all genres, there are differences that need to be taken into account.

<sup>3</sup> Analyzing a biblical text or passage includes the investigation of the structure of the text, its literary genre and form, and its larger units, sentences, phrases, and individual words. Consequently, grammar and syntax must be studied. Words and phrases need to be traced through the entire biblical book in which the text/passage is found and sometimes even through the rest of Scripture. However, one needs to keep in mind that words may have different meanings in different contexts, may change over time, and that root meanings are not always useful. Still the tracing of words and phrases may help to determine the main message of the passage and its interconnectedness to other parts of Scripture. Biblical terms must be understood literally unless verse or immediate context indicate a figurative meaning. Furthermore, words must be defined by the biblical context, not by modern usage.

Literary and rhetorical features should be observed such as rhetorical questions, irony, sarcasm, and comparisons. Questions have to be asked: What is the time frame of the passage? What is its geographical location? Who are the important figures and how do they act and speak? What is the main message? An allegorical approach must be avoided. However, biblical typology should be recognized.

<sup>4</sup> The application must be based on the preceding steps and should not go wild. Here the type of literature has to come into consideration. Some texts are of a permanent nature (e.g., those based on moral law and wisdom passages) while other are not (e.g., those dealing with theocratic laws). In the first case, the application can be direct. In the second case, it has to be based on a permanent principle derived from the passage under consideration.

In a sermon, it is normally better to focus on the most important aspect of the text/passage rather than confuse the audience with many different applications. One aspect of application has been called personalization. Because humans share so much with each other, the text can be personalized on an individual level and on a group level. What does God/Jesus want to tell me with this passage? How does it affect my commitment to Him, my insights into His character and His plan for us, my actions, and my obedience? How can I respond to His message? How does the respective biblical text affect us as a church? In which areas of our church life does Jesus

This first approach is the specialty of biblical scholars but needs to be emulated by all preachers, whether professional or not.

The second approach is a theological (thematic) study. In this case we would suggest to gather biblical data and concepts. They are enshrined in biblical passages. If, for instance, one would study biblical themes such as Christ's second coming or the resurrection of the dead in Revelation, one would have to search the Apocalypse for the respective terms and related vocabulary, e.g., the verbs "to come" (two different Greek terms in Revelation) and the terms "quickly" and "near".

But Revelation contains also symbolic descriptions of the Second Coming, such as the One like a Son of Man coming with the clouds or the Rider on the White horse in chapter 19. They have to be included if the study is intended to be comprehensive. We would also incorporate imagery related to this topic such as the "thief". Therefore, it would be best to read the entire Apocalypse initially and gather whatever is related to the Second Coming. The individual texts or passages are then exegeted before they are placed together for the formulating of a respective theology, in our case a theology of Christ's second coming in Revelation. This second approach is also done by biblical scholars as is the first one. But in this case, an overlap occurs because systematic theologians may also work in this field, especially as they attempt to formulate church doctrines. Because preachers oftentimes preach on biblical topics, they need to develop skills to handle a theological approach.

The third approach deals with issues not directly mentioned in Scripture, which, however, are relevant and that we may need to deal with. How should we, for example, relate to human cloning and artificial intelligence? Is it morally responsible to use public media with all the damage to truth and human wellbeing that they may cause? Do we need to do something about human abuse and human trafficking? What about global warming, ecology, and our responsibility to care for planet earth? In the case of an issue not covered directly by Scripture, the

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challenge us? How does the text educate and teach us? How does God use the biblical passage to comfort and encourage us? Our response to these questions can, for instance, be praise and thanksgiving, petitions and intercession, and/or changing our lives and our value system.

preacher should still go to the Bible. He or she has to look for biblical principles. These principles are found in groups of related biblical texts and passages. These passages should be investigated exegetically in order not to misuse them. Then one can extract from them their theological principles which may form the guidelines who can help to make biblical-theological decisions. This third approach is conducted by systematic theologians but must also be handled by pastors.<sup>5</sup> Typically, the search for biblical principles surpasses the limits of a biblical book.

No matter which approach is chosen, the preacher must determine and formulate the goal of his/her sermon and pursue that goal in a consistent manner. The sermon needs to be outlined so that clarity of thought prevails and the audience can grasp it and be blessed.

### The importance of preaching Revelation

Adventist treasure the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation. It is no secret that in a biblical commentary series these books sell best among Adventists. But it is relatively seldom that the community of believers hears a sermon on Revelation. And if they do, these are often sermons on the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 and seldom on other parts of the Apocalypse. There are Revelation seminars for the public, but oftentimes these seminars are not so much a study of the Book of Revelation but a course of Adventist doctrines somehow linked to Revelation. And then there are evangelistic campaigns, in which one or two public addresses use Revelation. Typically, they deal with the Antichrist and the mark of the beast. Should Revelation be used more frequently and why? Here are a number of reasons in favor of preaching Revelation:

1. The Apocalypse is the revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev 1,1). It is a revelation that comes from Jesus. Sayings and speeches attributed to Jesus directly and used in direct speech are found in the four gospels, in Acts 20:35—“It is more blessed to give than to

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<sup>5</sup> For an example, not of a sermon but of a church statement that is based on biblical principles, see Seventh-day Adventist Church, accessed 11/4/2019, <https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/statement-on-the-biblical-view-of-unborn-life-and-its-implications-for-abortion/>.

receive”—and in the letter frame of Revelation, that is, in Revelation 1-3 and 22. There Jesus speaks extensively. But Revelation is not only a revelation of sayings that come from Christ but is also a revelation of Jesus Christ. Revelation reveals Christ’s character and work, His status and majesty and does so more than many other New Testament documents.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, it reveals God the Father extensively and also the Holy Spirit, although the latter is not noticed so much at first glance.<sup>7</sup> Revelation underlines the divine nature of Christ. The prologue of Revelation summarizes the book in terms of who Jesus is, what He has done, and how He loves us (Rev 1,4-7). We preach Revelation because we preach the Godhead and especially Jesus. The Apocalypse makes an important contribution to the understanding of God and His reign.<sup>8</sup>

2. We preach Revelation because it is the climax of Scripture, the summary of the entire canon, Old Testament and New Testament. The historical and prophetic lines of the Old Testament and the New Testament merge in Revelation to show God’s grand finale of human history and the beginning of the eternal dwelling of God among His people. “In the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end”<sup>9</sup> Revelation tells us where we are in the prophetic outline of time which will end with the Second Coming, and it encourages us to fulfill our God-given mission.
3. The great controversy between good and evil, between God and the evil powers is described with great clarity in the Apocalypse.

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<sup>6</sup> See Ekkehardt Mueller, “Christological concepts in the Book of Revelation—Part 1: Jesus in the Apocalypse”, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 22, nos 1-2 (2010): 276-305; Mueller, “Christological concepts in the Book of Revelation—Part 2: Christ’s divinity”, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 21, no 1 (2011): 66-83; Mueller, “Christological concepts in the Book of Revelation—Part 3: The Lamb christology”, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 21, no 2 (2011): 42-66.

<sup>7</sup> See Ekkehardt Mueller, “O Espírito Santo no Apocalipse de João”, in *Pneumatologia pessoa e obra do Espírito Santo*, ed. by Reinaldo W. Siqueira and Alberto Timm (Engenheiro Coelho, SP: Unaspress, 2017), 321-352.

<sup>8</sup> This is “theology” in the narrow sense, the teaching of God.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *The acts of the apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 583.

We experience this controversy more and more in different societies around the globe today, but also in churches and in our own lives. However, Revelation does not leave its audience in permanent suspense about the outcome of the great spiritual war. It promises victory for God's cause.

4. Revelation provides information that is not found elsewhere. The history of Christianity and also of humanity from Christ's first to His second coming is nowhere described in such detail as in Revelation. While according to Daniel the beastly powers of the Book of Daniel rule from the sixth century B.C. to Christ's second coming, Revelation provides details about church history and end time events not found in such clarity elsewhere, not even in Daniel. This prophetic description shows that human history is not circular, rotating in unending loops, but is linear, reaching an intended goal, the establishment of God's kingdom of glory of which we may be part. This gives meaning to human life. "In the Revelation are portrayed the deep things of God".<sup>10</sup> "The last book of the New Testament scriptures is full of truth that we need to understand.
5. Revelation describes the status of the redeemed and the special group of the 144,000. It allows us to take a look at God's throne, addresses the issue of true versus false worship, the issue of doing God's will or rejecting His commandments, and shows the enormous attraction of evil, the problem of apostasy, and the operation of occultism and spiritualism at the end of human history in unexpected ways. But Revelation does not only teach and enlighten believers, it also calls them to return to God and fear Him (Rev 14,12). We preach Revelation because this unique information given to God's people needs to be shared. E. G. White notes: "The last book of the New Testament scriptures is full of truth that we need to understand".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 584.

<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christ's object lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 133.

The book of Revelation must be opened to the people. Many have been taught that it is a sealed book; but it is sealed only to those who reject light and truth. The truth it contains must be proclaimed, that people may have an opportunity to prepare for the events which are so soon to transpire. The third angel's message must be presented as the only hope for the salvation of a perishing world.<sup>12</sup>

6. Revelation contains teachings that are not found clearly elsewhere, for example, the teachings about Armageddon, the Millennium, the final judgment, and the New Jerusalem. These teachings are crucial for an understanding of anthropology and salvation and the character of God. They enrich our lives. For instance, the denial that there is an everlasting burning hell in which unbelievers suffer forever while believers simultaneously enjoy the restored Paradise supports the justice and love of God. Revelation deals with the difficult topic of theodicy and helps us to understand the justice, holiness, and goodness of God and to have a vibrant relationship with Him.
7. Revelation stresses in a specific way God's activity as Creator and as Savior and connects the two with each other. While ethical behavior plays an important role in the book (Rev 22,15) as well as the keeping of God's commandments, that is, doing His will, it is by grace that we are saved. The redeemed have symbolically washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7,14).
8. We preach Revelation because Jesus Himself has stated that those are blessed who hear and read the Apocalypse and keep what is written (Rev 1,3). And we do so because it assures us not only of hope and the good things to come but reveals the love of God here and now and in eternity (Rev 1,5; 3,9.19) to which we respond with our love (Rev 2,4.19).

It is indeed worthwhile to preach Revelation. This brings us to the question of what are prerequisites for preaching the Apocalypse and what are pitfalls.

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<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), 195-196.



## Prerequisites for and pitfalls of preaching Revelation

We have mentioned above that preaching is a sacred task that has to be taken seriously. We have hinted to the fact that preaching has to be preceded by serious prayer, study, and hard work including knowing one's audience. It means wrestling with the Word of God to see its various dimensions, to understand the intricate connections between passages which at first glance seem to be unconnected, to get a glimpse of the grand themes, and to delight in God's message sent to us.

A worthwhile sermon cannot be prepared in half an hour or an hour. As a rule of thumb it has been suggested that serious preaching of Scripture requires preparation time of thirty minutes to one hour per minute of speaking. In other words, a speech of twenty minutes may take up to twenty hours in preparation.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, some preaching is quite shallow and repetitive, not only because of poor delivery but also and even more so because of poor content. "Take the text as it is (or reads)" is not enough. While the audience needs to be reminded of what the church believes, it also needs to hear new aspects of truth—not fanciful theories—but aspects of truth that are not found on the surface of a text but require some digging. This can create an experience of joy and wonder in the hearers (an "aha experience") because they receive new insights or a deeper understanding of truth. Normally, poor and superficial preaching does not create a love for God's Word in the audience but more likely boredom.

Preachers who decide to explain Revelation must have a good grasp of the Apocalypse. They must know how to do exegesis and theological studies. They must be able to see both the great pictures and the details, the forest as well as the trees. They have to understand the major focus of Revelation which is Jesus Christ and the Godhead and our relation to Him.

We can get so caught up with the beasts and the time spans presented in the Apocalypse, with the Antichrist, Babylon and Satan, with evil

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<sup>13</sup> This has been verified not only with our own preaching but also with students in a course on homiletics who prepare devotionals and present them publicly.

developments, persecution, the death decree, with the disregard for the Ten Commandment, materialism, false miracles and the number 666 and other things that we miss Jesus. But the book is about Jesus, as Revelation 1,4-7 says:

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

There is an “eternal gospel” (Rev 14,6) to be proclaimed, gospel—good news. Even the judgment is good news.

Revelation has various features. It is different from other biblical books because it is mainly couched in metaphorical language. Sometimes it shifts to non-symbolic language. How can we find out when it is symbolic and when it is not? Furthermore, the grand themes need to be understood as well as the Old Testament and New Testament background, which help to unlock the symbols. The book contains a letter frame and a large apocalyptic section. It consists of a historical part and an eschatological part. In the historical part recapitulation happens extensively, and in the eschatological part progression comes at times also with some recapitulation. Sometimes it is difficult to decide where a section ends and a new one begins. But the delimitation of a passage may have great influence on its interpretation. Since the book suggests a historicist interpretation, fulfillment of predicted events in history has to be found. But this can only be done after careful exegesis. While in some cases we can be confident of our interpretation, in others we have to remain tentative. That means we have to be very careful, should not assume to have the last word, and must take on humility.

These comments about the intricacies of the Apocalypse are not meant to deter the preacher from tackling the book. Rather they are meant to instill respect for Revelation in the reader, researcher, and preacher. They

are meant to encourage those involved in preaching to familiarize themselves with the last book of Scripture before expounding it, and they challenge us to remain lifelong learners. By the way the book is not only for New Testament scholars but for all of us.

What about pitfalls?<sup>14</sup> Revelation is not to be used as a springboard for conspiracy theories and speculations. While it points out major players in history, it does not provide all details. We need to remain with the text and curb our curiosity and phantasy.

Another issue is time setting for the Second Coming. It is a very sad story that many Adventists—though not the Seventh-day Adventist Church—and also non-Adventists have engaged in time setting.<sup>15</sup> It is constantly around, and after one date has passed and Jesus did not return at the predicted time, already new dates are being proposed.

There is “newspaper exegesis” in which current political, social, and religious events determine the proposed fulfillment of Revelation, but not a thorough study of respective passages of Revelation. Current events change constantly as do the dates set for the Second Coming. While some of these fanciful theories are welcomed by some church members, in the end they destroy the credibility of the Word of God and the credibility of the church. In “newspaper exegesis” and similar approaches it is not Scripture that interprets Scripture. Exegesis of biblical texts does not happen, but a shortcut is taken.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Ekkehardt Mueller, “Challenges to the Adventist interpretation of Apocalyptic literature”, *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 13, no 1 (2010): 49-70.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Connie Ordelheide-Anderson, *Decoding the Bible prophecy of the 7 thunders* (no place and no date), 150. Others use soft time setting, claiming that we are the last generation and that Jesus will definitely return in our life time or that the present pope is the last pope. Victor McGowan, *The Revelation and the history of christendom: Prophecy fulfilled to the end of our time* (N. p.: Universe, 2011), sets dates for the historical periods of the seven churches. Based on these dates he concludes: “If a time line is drawn for the church eras, it forms a symmetry of years that may suggest the time of the return of Christ” (McGowan, *The Revelation and the history of christendom*, 19). In a subsequent chart, he lists the year 2019 with a question mark.

<sup>16</sup> When in 1986 the devastating nuclear accident happened in Chernobyl (then Soviet Union, today Ukraine) some people suggested that the name Chernobyl is related to wormwood and that this is a fulfillment of the third trumpet. See, e.g., One Year New Testament Blog, “Revelation 8: Does Chernobyl really mean wormwood? Well... yeah, kind of”, accessed 11/5/2019,

Another pitfall is to give to an apocalyptic prophecy multiple fulfillments or to suggest adding a futurist interpretation to the historicist interpretation which has no foundation at all in the biblical text but is completely arbitrary.<sup>17</sup>

Sometimes modern usage of language is employed to explain biblical terms. But the same term used hundreds of years ago and also today may no longer have the same meaning. Languages change in the course of history. They are dynamic.<sup>18</sup>

Another and very different problem is that message and person of the preacher must be congruent—at least to a large extent. Through their attitude and lifestyle preachers can prevent people to take seriously what they present, even if it is truth (see Matt 23,2-3).

There are more pitfalls, but no matter which one is discussed, in almost all of these cases the biblical text is not taken seriously or is interpreted not through Scripture but by current day events, philosophy, modern understanding of language or present cultural conventions.

So, preachers of Revelation are encouraged to study Revelation seriously and stay away from possible pitfalls.

### What to preach from Revelation?

What to preach is a relevant question. It should be supplemented by the question what not to preach? We would suggest to be sensitive to the audiences that we address. In addition, it matters how we address the respective topic. Generally speaking, everything can be preached, but here

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<https://oneyearbibleblogentry.blogspot.com/2012/01/revelation-8-does-chernobyl-really-mean.html>. McGowan, 40-51 suggests that the first of the seven plagues stands for syphilis, the second for Muslims controlling the Mediterranean Sea, the third for the Thirty Years War, the fourth the period from sun king Louis XIV to Napoleon, the fifth for papal darkness, the sixth for the three frogs of Nietzsche, Marx, and Darwin, and the seventh for World War II.

<sup>17</sup> See Erwin R. Gane, *Trumpet after trumpet: Will Revelation's seven trumpets sound again?* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2012). After the publication of this book, Pacific Press Publishing Association refused to publish his full commentary on Revelation due to the approach that he took.

<sup>18</sup> This is a problem with the King James Version. The term “meat” then designated food, and “gay” meant “happy” and “lively”.

are some considerations which may help us to choose diligently and under prayer what to preach:

1. First, do we have to take into consideration where people are in their faith development and what they know about Christ and Christianity? Does it matter if people have committed their lives to Jesus Christ, and can we be more explicit with them as with Animists or Hindus, to mention just two of many people groups? Should we preach to people, who hardly know Christ and Christianity, the sea beast or the mark of the beast or should we preach Jesus, His life, His teachings, and salvation offered to us through Him? If the latter is the case we have to choose respective texts and topics which address the uniqueness and beauty of Jesus in Revelation.
2. Second, when it comes to church members should be publicly preach each and every passage in Revelation or should we keep some, for instance, for a Sabbath afternoon seminar to which we invite those that have a marked interest even in the difficult passages of Revelation? The seven trumpets are quite challenging, and there are a number of different interpretations among Adventists. If they are based on a historicist approach, they do not need to be rejected right away. But the multiplicity of interpretations can confuse believers. The trumpets may be a topic for church members with a distinct interest. This group is not the majority. While most Adventists appreciate Revelation, some strongly dislike the book and avoid even a discussion in Sabbath School. They would not be interested in the disputed texts and passages. Revelation 17 is a similar case.
3. Third, while Adventists have a message for other Christians, should this message be presented in an offensive way? While we have an issue with some Christian churches and their teachings, we respect individual believers. After having become friends we can challenge them. But slander and public scorn is not appropriate. Therefore, we may have to be careful how to present publicly Revelation 14, 17, and 18.

So what should we preach? In our response, we will differentiate between texts and passages of Revelation, themes of the book, and issues

not explicitly spelled out in Revelation.<sup>19</sup> But again we have to keep in mind what the true focus of Revelation is Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, the plan of salvation, the final triumph of the kingdom of God, goodness, love, joy, and eternal *shalom*. Sinclair writes:

In contrast to the secular perspective of “progress” Revelation offered the perspective that in the end things in this world would not get better but catastrophically worse. Yet for Revelation this devolution did not necessitate either cynicism or despair. History has a transcendent goal, and no matter how terrible things may turn out in this age, God’s will is being realized and salvation will surely come. [...] Revelation suggests that progress in this age is not crucial. What is crucial is that God is unspeakably glorious, that he has an eternal plan, and that that plan will be realized regardless of human evil. What is important is for us to focus on that plan. [...] Could it be that the only way we will be able to improve this world fundamentally will be to realize more deeply Revelation’s vision that this life is only a prelude to final union with God in Christ?<sup>20</sup>

### *Preaching passages and texts of Revelation*

Here are passages and verses of Revelation that may lend themselves to preaching. They are not comprehensive but just a suggestion, taking in account the above mentioned limitations and the major focus of the Apocalypse:

1. The prologue of Revelation: Revelation 1,3-8 (Trinity), 1,4-7 (Jesus) or 1,4-8.<sup>21</sup>
2. Jesus in the introduction to the messages to the seven churches: Revelation 1,9-20.
3. Jesus’ messages to the seven churches: Revelation 2-3 (individually or in an overview).

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<sup>19</sup> See the three types or categories of sermons above.

<sup>20</sup> Scott Gambrell Sinclair, *Revelation: A book for the rest of us* (Berkeley, CA: Bibal Press, 1992), 155-156.

<sup>21</sup> If verse 8 is added, it should be noted that this verse speaks about God the Father (see verse 3), not about Jesus.

4. The introduction to the seven seals: Revelation 4-5 (chapters either individually or together).<sup>22</sup>
5. The sixth seal: Revelation 6,12-17 (Jesus' second coming and the preceding heavenly signs).
6. Jesus as Lamb and Shepherd of the great multitude: Revelation 7,9-17 (see Rev 21,3-4).<sup>23</sup>
7. Washing clothes in the blood of the Lamb: Revelation 7,14 (*cf.* Rev 22,14 ESV, not NKJV).<sup>24</sup>
8. The two witnesses: Revelation 11,3-13 (the Word of God in its Old Testament and New Testament form).<sup>25</sup>
9. The seventh trumpet: Revelation 11,15-18 (Kingdom of God and Christ: summary of the rest of Revelation).
10. The great controversy and Jesus: Revelation 12.
11. The satanic trinity and the Messiah: Revelation 12-14 (an overview of the central vision without going into details).
12. The 144,000 and Jesus: Revelation 4,15 (see Rev 6,17-7,8).
13. The message of the three angels: Revelation 14,6-12 (the eternal good news; *cf.* Rev 18,2-4).
14. The blessedness of those dying in the Lord: Revelation 14,13.
15. The redeemed and the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb: Revelation 15,1-4.
16. Jesus as Lord of lords and King of kings: Revelation 7,14 (see 19,16 and its context).

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<sup>22</sup> Revelation 4 is probably the most important throne vision of Revelation. Revelation 3,21 prepares for it. Revelation depicts the enthronement of Jesus as Priest-King after His ascension.

<sup>23</sup> Although the two scenes are similar, they are not identical. Revelation 7b may play in heaven probably during the Millennium, while Revelation 21,3-4 play on the new earth.

<sup>24</sup> See the similarity but the different tenses for the term "to wash".

<sup>25</sup> See Ekkehardt Mueller, "The two witnesses of Revelation 11". *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13, no 2 (2002): 30-45. Notice verse 8, the only text in Revelation that mentions directly Jesus' crucifixion.

17. The marriage and the wedding banquet of the Lamb: Revelation 19,7-9 (see Rev 3,20).<sup>26</sup>
18. Jesus as rider on the white horse and as the Word of God: Revelation 19,11-18.
19. The redeemed as priests of God and Christ during the Millennium: Revelation 20,4-6.
20. The Millennium: Revelation 20 (*cf.* Rev 7,9-17).
21. The new earth and the new Jerusalem with God and Jesus: Revelation 21-22,5.
22. Seeing God: Revelation 21,3-5.
23. The epilogue and Christ's multiple promises of His coming: Revelation 22,6-20.

### *Preaching topics of Revelation*

There are topics that can be studied which remind us of systematic theology. They have a direct impact on teachings of the church. There are also other topics which pop up in Revelation and which are very interesting und good to preach about either in series of sermons or in one sermon by way of an overview. For some but not all subjects we have provided some literature.

#### **Topics close to systematic theology**

1. Theology (teaching of God)
2. Christology<sup>27</sup>
3. Pneumatology<sup>28</sup>
4. Anthropology

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<sup>26</sup> Revelation 3,20 uses the cognate verb of "supper" in Revelation 19,9.

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 15.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 16.



5. Ecclesiology<sup>29</sup>
6. Second coming<sup>30</sup>
7. Sanctuary
8. Creation<sup>31</sup>
9. Salvation
10. Law and obedience
11. Mission<sup>32</sup>

### Topics more or less unique to Revelation

1. Seven beatitudes in Revelation
2. Promises to the overcomers
3. Hymns in Revelation<sup>33</sup>
4. Imagery in Revelation<sup>34</sup>
5. Worship in Revelation
6. Parody, imitation, and counterparody<sup>35</sup>

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Philip L Mayo, “Those who call themselves Jews: The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John”, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006); Olutola K. Peters, *The mandate of the church in the Apocalypse*, Studies in Biblical Literature 77 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005); Ekkehardt Mueller, “Introduction to the ecclesiology of Revelation”, in *Pensar la iglesia hoy: hacia una ecclesiología adventista*, ed. by G. A. Klingbeil, M. G. Klingbeil, M. Á. Núñez, 147-164 (Libertador San Martín, ER, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2002; Mueller, “The end time remnant in Revelation”, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11, nos 1-2 (2000): 188-204.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Ekkehardt Mueller, “Jesus and His Second Coming in the Apocalypse”, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11, nos 1-2 (2000): 205-215.

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Ekkehardt Mueller, “Creation in the Book of Revelation”, unpublished paper 2019.

<sup>32</sup> E.g., Ekkehardt Mueller, “Mission in the Book of Revelation,” in *Message, mission, and unity of the church*, Studies in Adventist Ecclesiology-2, ed. by Ángel Manuel Rodríguez (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2013), 129-153.

<sup>33</sup> One can address all the hymns in the book or the seven hymns in the seal vision or the five hymns in Revelation 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Labahn, Michael and Lehtipuu, Outi. *Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology (Leuven: Peters, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Sophie Laws, *In the light of the Lamb: Imagery, parody, and theology in the Apocalypse of John*, Good News Studies 31 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988); Joe E. Lunceford, Parody

7. Women in Revelation<sup>36</sup>
8. Evil in various forms
9. The Antichrist
10. The false prophet
11. Babylon<sup>37</sup>
12. Occultism, demonic animals, and magical motives<sup>38</sup>
13. Falsehood and deception
14. Wealth, capitalism, and materialism
15. Mouths in Revelation
16. Suffering and persecution<sup>39</sup>
17. Death
18. Divine justice and vengeance<sup>40</sup>
19. The goodness of God's judgment

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and counterimaging in the Apocalypse (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> For this topic and others, see James L. Resseguie, *Revelation unsealed: A narrative critical approach to John's Apocalypse* (Leiden, Paises Bajos: Brill, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> E.g., Ekkehardt Mueller, "Babylon's terminology in Revelation", in *The Word: Searching, living, teaching*, vol. 1, Biblical Research Institute, ed. by Artur A. Stele, 131-145 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015); Mueller, "Revelation's Babylon and its characteristics" in *The Word: Searching, living, teaching*, vol. 1, Biblical Research Institute, ed. by Artur A. Stele, 147-161 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015); Mueller, "Babylon identified" in *The Word: Searching, living, teaching*, vol. 1, Biblical Research Institute, ed. by Artur A. Stele, 163-176 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> E.g., Rodney Lawrence Thomas, *Magical motifs in the Book of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies 416 (London: T & T Clark, 2009); Ekkehardt Mueller, "Evil powers and occult practices in the Apocalypse", in *The church, culture, and spirits: Adventism in Africa*, ed. by Kwabena Donkor, 105-129 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> E.g., Ekkehardt Mueller, "Revelation's perspective on persecution", in *The great controversy and the end of evil: Biblical and theological studies in honor of Ángel Manuel Rodríguez in celebration of His seventieth birthday*, 251-262, ed. by Gerhard Pfandl (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Joel Vobel Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 17 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993); Ekkehardt Mueller, "Justice is coming: Answers to basic questions about the Millennium", *Adventist World*, August 2016, 22-23.

*Preaching about issues not directly addressed  
in Revelation*

We have already indicated that modern issues that are not directly addressed in Scripture have to be solved by finding and applying biblical principles. This is easier if we have the entire Bible available to draw from rather than limiting ourselves to one biblical book, in our case, Revelation. Still we believe it can be done in some cases. We have in mind the following issues:

1. Christian non-violence
2. Human trafficking

*Examples of preaching  
Revelation*

**Preaching on passages/texts  
of Revelation**

We have mentioned Daniel Russell, *Preaching Revelation*, above. For a number of his chapters, Russell provides a very short exegetical part before he moves to the sermon outline. His sermon outline for Revelation 18, which deals with the judgment of Babylon as a city, is presented below. He takes Babylon to be Rome and quite likely pagan Rome. While we do not share this position, still the outline of his sermon is interesting.

It comes with an introduction of the “powerful spell” of Rome.<sup>41</sup> The main body of his sermon consists of four points followed by a few explanations. It ends with two lessons. His main points on Revelation 18 are:

1. John was impressed by the Power of Rome...
2. John was impressed by the Wickedness of Rome...
3. John was impressed by the Influence of Rome...
4. John was impressed by the Certainty of Rome’s Destruction...

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<sup>41</sup> Russell, *Preaching the Apocalypse*, 208.

His two lessons stress “the profound responsibility of the church in a great city” and the individual in view of the passing away of the world.<sup>42</sup>

### *Preaching topics*

A study of worship mainly in Revelation 4-5 has led to the following results which need to be fleshed out in a sermon. These results are not just theological statements that must be explained in practical terms. To these points an introduction and conclusion needs to be added to have a full sermon.

1. True worship is theocentric.
2. True worship is trinitarian.
3. True worship maintains the tension between God’s immanence and his transcendence.
4. True worship extols the character and nature of God.
5. True worship praises God for his mighty works.
6. True worship is objective, not only subjective.
7. True worship is universal and all-encompassing.
8. The completion of the plan of salvation is set into a worship setting.
9. True worship provides a new perspective to life on earth.
10. True worship is continuous and unending.<sup>43</sup>

Here is a second example, an outline on the topic of lying in Revelation:

### **Lying in Revelation**

- I. Encountering the culture surrounding us
- II. The lie and the Book of Revelation
  1. Texts in Revelation about lying

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-212.

<sup>43</sup> Ekkehardt Mueller, “Reflections on worship in Revelation 4 and 5”, *Reflections: The BRI Newsletter* (July 2012), 1-6.

- a. False prophets, false apostles, and Jews who are liars
  - b. Consequences for liars
  - c. No lie among the 144,000
2. Facts about lying
- a. If there is the lie, there must be truth
  - b. It is extremely dangerous to lie
  - c. Lies and deception threaten the Christian community
  - d. Lying comes also as a system
  - e. We are responsible for lying (including an illustration of absolute truthfulness)
  - f. We are responsible for accepting a lie
  - g. There are those who have distanced themselves from the lie

### III. The lie and we

1. What is lie and falsehood?
2. The church, the believer, and the lie
  - a. Plagiarism
  - b. Conspiracy theories
  - c. The numbers game
  - d. Avoiding disadvantages
  - e. Double standards
  - f. Christian conduct
  - g. The disintegration of Christianity and divine truth

### Conclusion

1. Denouncing the lie in each and every form.
2. Commitment to the truth in all forms, especially the personified truth, Jesus our Lord.

### **Preaching on issues not directly addressed in Revelation**

Some preliminary thoughts on the two issues above. This needs to be further developed. Revelation seems to have enough material to allow for

a definite conclusion. However, one has to keep in mind that much of Revelation is expressed in symbolic language.

In the case of non-violence of believers, we would have to start with Jesus, who is presented as Lamb twenty-eight times in Revelation. This is his dominant designation and only found in the apocalyptic part of Revelation. The Lamb occurs for the first time in Revelation 5,6 but is preceded by the Lion in verse 5. Jesus is both Lion and Lamb. Interestingly, John hears about Jesus being victorious through the image of the Lion, but as soon as he looks he does not see a lion but the Lamb. The image of the Lion is superseded by the image of Jesus the Lamb who was “slaughtered” and still looks slaughtered although He is alive. The message of Revelation is very clear. Jesus has won the victorious through vicarious suffering not by violence. This is the divine miracle. When Jesus is portrayed with a sword coming out of His mouth, the sword is the Word of God. And when He wears a blood-stained garment it is not necessarily the blood of the enemies that has stained His garment. It could be His own blood shed on Calvary which brought about the victory.

From Jesus we have to move to His followers, from Christology to ecclesiology. In any case, his followers are also “slaughtered” as He was and is. They are killed from chapter 2 on. Many of them die as martyrs and follow Jesus’ example and His teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, His challenge to non-violent behavior. The war they are involved in is a spiritual war and not a physical war. Biblical principles: Jesus’ life, teachings, and death; the disciples follow the example of the master; in Revelation only evil powers kill and thereby transgress the Ten Commandments, which are kept by the believers.

Human trafficking is a modern plague and goes along with sexual abuse. Revelation may address the issue when in chapter 18 among Babylon’s merchandise humans, souls are found. End-time Babylon seems to trade humans. This is clearly condemned because Babylon undergoes judgment and God brings about justice. The value given to human life in Revelation is a further indication that human trafficking and exploitation are unacceptable in God’s sight. Those involved will be judged, and the oppressed will come free to live with God forever, if they have committed

their lives to Him. Revelation also teaches that the prayers of the saints for deliverance from persecution and suffering will be heard and answered in God's time (Rev 6,10; 8,3-5).

## Conclusion

Kelly observes:

Revelation is an overarching survey of the final victory of purity and beauty of the Triune God over the impurity and ugliness of sin, death and hell. This remaking of a twisted creation into the beautiful rightness of a renewed one, was, is now being, and finally shall be, fully accomplished through the blood of the Lamb 'slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev. 13:8).<sup>44</sup>

“Revelation is primarily about Jesus Christ; He is the hero of all ages. Satan, though real enough, is finally a minor note in this divinely orchestrated symphony”.<sup>45</sup> If this is true, and we believe it is, then let us preach this message of Revelation with full conviction and zeal.

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<sup>44</sup> Kelly, *Revelation*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 12.







### 3. Una aproximación a Nietzsche: los albores del posmodernismo y los desafíos para la teología

An approach to Nietzsche: the dawn of Posmodernism and the challenges for theology

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#### Resumen

Occidente, tal como acontece, es un cúmulo de conflictos ideológicos, el cual es, en parte, el resultado del trabajo intelectual de pensadores posmodernos. En este sentido, una aproximación al pensamiento filosófico de Nietzsche, consagrado como precursor del posmodernismo, resulta necesaria a fin de proyectar su influencia a esta era posilustrada, así como exponer sus vigorosos ataques contra las grandes categorías fundamentales del pensamiento natural, más específicamente contra las categorías de verdad, razón, valor, principio, esencia, etc. Este conjunto de ideas subversivas incide también en la teología cristiana que, aunque largamente construida sobre la metafísica clásica, es afectada en sus fundamentos.

#### Palabras claves

Posmodernismo – Dios – Verdad – Interpretación – Moral

#### Abstract

West, as it happens, is an accumulation of ideological conflicts, which is, in part, the result of the intellectual work of postmodern thinkers. In this sense, an approach to the philosophical thought of Nietzsche, consecrated as a precursor of postmodernism, is necessary in order to project his influence to this post-Enlightenment era, as well as to expose his vigorous attacks against the great fundamental categories of natural thought, more specifically against the categories of truth, reason, value, principle, essence, etc. This set of subversive ideas also has an impact on Christian theology, which, although long built on classical metaphysics, is affected in its foundations.



## Keywords

Postmodernism – God – Truth – Interpretation – Morality

## Introducción

La construcción del pensamiento ha sido paralelamente análoga al desarrollo de la historia humana. En este sentido, la influencia del pensamiento es —en tanto que fundante— una matriz que moldea la cosmovisión individual y colectiva.<sup>1</sup>

Entre los filósofos más prominentes, Nietzsche es uno cuyo impacto no puede ser subestimado en la historia del pensamiento,<sup>2</sup> razón por la cual se vuelve imperativo estudiarlo, especialmente desde una perspectiva teológica. Esto último se justifica debido a que la repercusión de su filosofía se traduce en el amanecer del pensamiento posmoderno,<sup>3</sup> el cual representa un desafío sustancial para la iglesia cristiana militante.<sup>4</sup>

A causa de los límites de este trabajo —y a fin de realizar un abordaje crítico—, el autor realizará un breve esbozo histórico que servirá de introducción al pensamiento de Nietzsche, para luego examinar tres de

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<sup>1</sup> Berlin explica que “las ideas [...] adquieren a veces un carácter incontrolado y un poder irresistible sobre multitudes... [ya que] los conceptos filosóficos criados en la quietud del cuarto de estudio de un profesor pod[r]ían destruir una civilización”. Isaiah Berlin, “Dos conceptos de libertad” (conferencia presentada como “Inaugural Lecture”, Universidad de Oxford, 31 de octubre de 1958).

<sup>2</sup> De acuerdo con Leiter, “Nietzsche has long been one of the dominant figures in twentieth-century intellectual life”. Brian Leiter, “Nietzsche and the morality critics”, *Ethics* 107, n.º 2 (1997), 250. Para Heidegger, “Nietzsche, [ha sido quien] en cuya luz y [en cuyas] sombras todo contemporáneo con su “con él” o ‘contra él’ piensa y crea”. Ernst Jünger y Martin Heidegger, *Acerca del nihilismo*, trad. por José Luis Molinuevo (España: Paidós, 1994), 126.

<sup>3</sup> “I teorici o i simpatizzanti del postmoderno fanno in genere cominciare la modernità [...] con Bacon e Descartes e fanno terminare il moderno con Nietzsche, Weber, Heidegger”. Paolo Rossi, *Paragone degli ingegni moderni e postmoderni* (Bologna, Italia: Il Mulino, 2009), 68. Respecto al concepto de posmodernismo, Lyotard señala: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives”. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Introducción a The Postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

<sup>4</sup> Claramente, “Vi sono cose in filosofia di cui dopo Nietzsche, con la ‘morte di Dio’ e la fine delle certezze, è difficile parlare. Sono cose ultime —Dio, la Verità, il Bene e il Male— i grandi problemi della religione, del pensiero e della morale su cui la filosofia è prosperata, ma di cui oggi non può più discorrere senza compromettere la sua reputazione”. Rossi, *Paragone degli ingegni*, 228-9.

los aspectos nodales de su obra que impactaron el paradigma occidental: la muerte de Dios, la crítica a la moral universal y el concepto nietzscheano de ser humano.

Finalmente, el autor expondrá las conclusiones del estudio.

## Contexto histórico y aproximación al pensamiento nietzscheano

### *Contexto histórico, filosófico y religioso*

Pocas épocas, en la historia del pensamiento, han reunido en sí mismas notables corrientes antagónicas, como las comprendidas entre los siglos XVIII y XIX. El progreso científico que condujo a un virtual desprestigio de la religión, junto con el liberalismo ideológico, confluyen en el mismo marco temporal con el segundo gran despertar y la lucha marxista del proletariado.

En las postrimerías de la Edad Moderna, el positivismo científico y el evolucionismo biológico fueron dos expresiones del progreso romántica que estaba en pleno auge. Además, para ese entonces, las bases del relativismo, esto es, la “doctrina de la incognoscibilidad de lo absoluto”<sup>5</sup> estaban ya establecidas,<sup>6</sup> lo que le permitió gozar de amplia aceptación entre los círculos científicos y filosóficos, lo que condujo a un fuerte rechazo de la metafísica. Con todo, todavía existía desacuerdo sobre la pregunta por la existencia de una realidad última.<sup>7</sup> Por un lado, “las explicaciones

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<sup>5</sup> Nicolás Abbagnano, *Historia de la filosofía* (Barcelona, ES: Hora, 1994), 3:279.

<sup>6</sup> Para Comte, fue el paradigma kantiano el que permitió el abandono del “absolutismo filosófico”. *Ibid.*, 249. Si bien el relativismo ve sus inicios en la Grecia antigua, explicitada en la conocida frase del sofista Protágoras “El hombre es la medida de todas las cosas, de las que son en cuanto que son y de las que no son en cuanto que no son”, es particularmente con Kant que alcanza preponderancia epistemológica.

<sup>7</sup> En el contexto del auge científico, autores como Spencer declaraban que, inclusive la ciencia misma se vale del misterio de una realidad última, pese a que este misterio pertenezca al campo de estudio teológico. Ver Herbert Spencer, *First principles* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 98-123. Además de ello, es preciso señalar que todavía existía una visión *dualista* de la realidad reflejada en la relación de lo “burgués y lo humano, de lo espiritual y lo material, de lo temporal y lo eterno, de lo cristiano y lo mundano, del Estado y la Iglesia”. Johannes

trascendentes u ocultas ya no satisfacían”<sup>8</sup> el intelecto del hombre moderno. La visión mecanicista del mundo había preparado el terreno para una sociedad *moderna* en la que “ni Dios ni sus representantes oficiales son ya necesarios para dirigir el curso de la historia humana”<sup>9</sup>.

Por otro lado, paradójicamente, el progreso científico no parece haber frenado el fervor religioso del cristianismo moderno. Dos siglos después de la Reforma protestante (s. XVI), hubo un creciente interés (por toda Europa, Oceanía y América) en el descubrimiento de las profecías bíblicas que resultaron en tiempos de gran reavivamiento espiritual y que se reflejaron en la “creación de nuevas denominaciones”.<sup>10</sup>

Así pues, aunque esta es la época de los “ismos” que han trascendido y construido el panorama de la sociedad actual, es también la época del redescubrimiento religioso, la búsqueda por comprender la relación entre Dios y la religión.<sup>11</sup> Es precisamente en circunstancias tales que un filósofo como Nietzsche desarrolló su pensamiento que alcanzaría ecos sustanciales en las diferentes áreas del quehacer reflexivo. El autor de la muerte de Dios emprenderá uno de los más significativos programas anticristianos que comprometería a la teología a dar una respuesta.

### “Dios ha muerto”

¡Dios ha muerto! ¡Dios permanece muerto! ¡Y nosotros lo hemos matado!  
 ¿Cómo nos consolamos los asesinos de todos los asesinos? Lo más sagrado y lo más poderoso que hasta ahora poseía el mundo sangra bajo nuestros cuchillos.  
 ¿Quién nos lavará esta sangre? ¿Con qué agua podremos limpiarnos? ¿Qué fiestas

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Hirschberger, *Historia de la filosofía*, trad. por Luis Martínez Gómez (Barcelona, ES: Herder, 2011), 2:392.

<sup>8</sup> Alberto Tenenti, *La Edad Moderna: siglos XVI-XVIII* (Barcelona, ES: Crítica, 2000), 316.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Justo L. González, *Historia del cristianismo* (Miami, FL: Unilit, 1994), 2:340. Schwarz y Greenleaf señalan que “la última parte del siglo XVIII y la primera del XIX vieron una abundante diversidad religiosa. Proliferaron nuevas sectas”. Richard W. Schwarz y Floyd Greenleaf, *Portadores de luz: historia de la Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día* (Buenos Aires: Asociación Casa Editora Sudamericana, 2012), 14. Esta, además, fue la época del segundo gran despertar. Para un estudio sobre el contexto religioso de la época, ver *ibid.*, 13-34.

<sup>11</sup> Entre otros, Immanuel Kant y Søren Kierkegaard son ejemplos notables de la búsqueda por *redefinir* la relación entre la teología y su objeto.

expiatorias, qué juegos sagrados tendremos que inventar? ¿No es la grandeza de este hecho demasiado grande para nosotros?<sup>12</sup>

La atrevida irreverencia nietzscheana es, sencillamente, cautivadora. Nietzsche se consagra como el gran deicida de todos los tiempos, el responsable de la más paradigmática de todas las teotanatologías. La muerte de Dios es una tesis central que articula el pensamiento del filósofo alemán y que ha sido objeto de interpretaciones divergentes por parte de sus diversos lectores y comentaristas.<sup>13</sup> En este trabajo, se considerarán dos interpretaciones sobre la muerte de Dios: la “interpretación epistemológica” y la “interpretación metafísica”.<sup>14</sup>

### Interpretación cristiana-epistemológica

La historia de Occidente —particularmente durante la Edad Media— ha sido el desarrollo del pensamiento con base en un “determinado tipo de Dios”.<sup>15</sup> En este punto, no debe pensarse que el desarrollo teológico-metafísico que Occidente ha hecho sobre lo que llamamos “Dios” refleje, necesariamente, la autorrevelación del Ser divino en la Biblia. Ahora bien, en tiempos del hombre moderno, la idea de lo divino estaba asociada a las épocas oscuras de la reflexión humana. Dios era concebido, entre otras cosas, como una entificación trascendente de fuente de consuelo,<sup>16</sup> o bien

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *La gaya ciencia*, trad. por José Jara (Barcelona, ES: Planeta, 2019), 117.

<sup>13</sup> Para un estudio introductorio de este filosofema, ver Darío Sztajnszrajber, “Dios ha muerto (Nietzsche)”, en *Filosofía en 11 frases* (Buenos Aires, AR: Paidós, 2018), 225-50; Remedios Ávila Crespo, “De la muerte de Dios al superhombre: el sufrimiento y la risa en el ‘Zaratus-tra’ de Nietzsche” *Estudios Nietzsche* 1, n.º 1 (2001): 13-31, acceso el 6 de octubre de 2021, <https://revistas.uma.es/index.php/estnie/article/view/8789>.

<sup>14</sup> Se ha hecho esta diferencia metodológica a fin de destacar importantes distinciones entre *ambas* interpretaciones. Sin embargo, por tratarse del mismo “hecho”, tienen corolarios equivalentes.

<sup>15</sup> Sztajnszrajber, *Filosofía en 11 frases*, 234.

<sup>16</sup> En épocas de Nietzsche, Feuerbach impulsó fuertemente la idea de que las cualidades que le atribuimos a Dios son siempre una expresión máxima de aquello de lo cual carecemos; en ese sentido, “el secreto de la teología es la antropología”. Ludwig Feuerbach, *La esencia del cristianismo*, trad. por José L. Iglesias (Madrid, ES: Trotta, 2009), 12. La mención de Feuerbach en este contexto es precisa porque “the influence of Feuerbach on Nietzsche’s thought was more significant even than that of Schopenhauer”. Paul Bishop, “Nietzsche’s ‘new’ morality: Gay science, materialist ethics”, *History of European Ideas* 32, n.º 2 (2006): 225.

como un pseudorrecurso contra los “agujeros misteriosos” del conocimiento. En consecuencia, el Dios cristiano había ocupado protagonismo epistemológico entre el ente y la reflexión, la realidad y el *cogitatio*.

Llegados a la modernidad tardía, entonces, para el pensador de Röcken, el Dios cristiano —como invento metafórico— ha sido desmascarado. El metarrelato<sup>17</sup> de un Creador resulta ser una vil y desfasada creación humana. “La muerte de Dios es el himno triunfante de la batalla moderna”.<sup>18</sup> Ahora, bajo las cenizas de la Divinidad, solo queda su sombra, tras la que hay que vivir. “Esa sombra es la ciencia”.<sup>19</sup> Desde hacía tiempo, el alcance de los descubrimientos científicos ha revelado a la fe<sup>20</sup> como contraria al progreso humano y, por lo tanto, la necesaria muerte de Dios.<sup>21</sup> La era moderna es —en el sentido cognitivo— la emancipación de la esclavizante ignorancia cristiana. Con todo, aunque el anuncio del asesinato del Santo ha hecho “borrar todo el horizonte”,<sup>22</sup> trae un mejor

<sup>17</sup> Por metarrelato se entiende toda propuesta ontológica, esto es, toda aspiración por encontrar una inspiración; una interpretación discursiva de la realidad. Para una comprensión filosófica del término metarrelato en el contexto del posmodernismo, ver Antonio Diéguez, “La ciencia desde una perspectiva postmoderna: entre la legitimidad política y la validez epistemológica”, en *II Jornadas de Filosofía: Filosofía y Política*, ed. por Javier Muguerza et al. (Málaga, ES: Procure, DL, 2006), 177-205. Allí el autor define metarrelato como “una gran narración con pretensiones justificatorias y explicativas de ciertas instituciones o creencias compartidas”, 179. Orlando Cárcamo Berrío, “El concepto de metarrelato en el postmodernismo”, *Aulas y Maestros* 1, n.º 1 (2007), bajo “Postmodernidad”, acceso el 12 de octubre de 2021, [http://www.orlandocarcamo.com/concepto\\_de\\_metarrelato.html](http://www.orlandocarcamo.com/concepto_de_metarrelato.html). Con todo, se podría objetar que la filosofía nietzscheana, como macroparadigma, es un metarrelato.

<sup>18</sup> Fernando J. Vergara Henríquez, “Nietzsche y la muerte de Dios como himno triunfante de la batalla moderna entre el progreso como certeza teleológica y Dios como verdad teológica”, *Opición* 33, n.º 82 (2017): 12, acceso el 12 de octubre de 2021, <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=31053180002>.

<sup>19</sup> “La ciencia, en sentido positivista, llegó a ocupar gradualmente el espacio que la ‘muerte de Dios’ dejó”. Osman Daniel Choque Aliaga, “‘Dios ha muerto’ y la cuestión de la ciencia en Nietzsche”, *Estudios de Filosofía* n.º 59 (2019): 150.

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche entiende la fe como el acto de “cerrar los ojos de una vez por todas ante sí mismo, para no sufrir el aspecto de la falsía incurable”. Friedrich Nietzsche, *El anticristo* (Madrid, ES: Alianza, 1993), 33.

<sup>21</sup> En palabras de Nietzsche, “Dios es un pensamiento que vuelve torcido todo lo derecho y que hace voltearse a todo lo que está de pie”. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Así habló Zaratustra*, trad. por Andrés Sánchez Pascual (Madrid, ES: Alianza, 2003), 136.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, *La gaya ciencia*, 116.

*evangelio*. Una vez que el difunto Dios yace bajo polvo,<sup>23</sup> ¿no acaeen las puertas del conocimiento como si se abrieran por primera vez? ¿No acaece ante nosotros la extensión infinita de un mar insondable por descubrir?

### Interpretación metafísica-articuladora<sup>24</sup>

Los intérpretes de Nietzsche, sin embargo, observan que la muerte de Dios trae consigo consecuencias más trascendentales que trastornan los fundamentos mismos de la realidad.<sup>25</sup> El Dios a quien Nietzsche mata, ¿podría abarcar mucho más que, meramente, el objeto de la fe cristiana? “The last metaphysician of the West”,<sup>26</sup> ¿no trastornaría la metafísica misma?

Durante siglos, la teoría de los dos mundos de Platón —el más allá y el más acá— había condicionado el quehacer por la pregunta ontológica.<sup>27</sup> La

<sup>23</sup> Esta metáfora no implica un ciclo natural en la vida divina en la que Dios ha expirado su último hálito. Por el contrario, *afortunadamente* nos hemos dado cuenta de que Aquel a quien atribuíamos la fuente de nuestra *participación* vital ha sido desenmascarado, ha resultado ser una vil ilusión. En este sentido, Nietzsche “is postulating the death of a set of ideas about God that once held currency and hold currency no longer”. Louis A. Ruprecht, Jr., “Nietzsche, the death of God, and truth, or why I still like reading Nietzsche”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, n.º 3 (1997): 577.

<sup>24</sup> Con el propósito de explicar los efectos de la muerte de Dios, en esta sección se distinguirán los términos “metafísica” y “articuladora”. El primero apunta más a un sentido intercambiable con el plano ontológico. Ver Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002) 1:22. El segundo apunta al plano sistematizador.

<sup>25</sup> En efecto, para Vattimo, Nietzsche y Heidegger “son considerados como los pensadores que echaron las bases para construir una imagen de la existencia en estas nuevas condiciones de no historicidad o, mejor aún, de poshistoricidad”. Gianni Vattimo, *El fin de la modernidad: nihilismo y hermenéutica en la cultura posmoderna*, Mediaciones (Barcelona, ES: Gedisa, 1987), 13.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, ed. por David Farrell Krell (Nueva York, NY: Harper Collins, 1991), 3:8. Para Heidegger, es el concepto de “voluntad de poder” el que convierte a su compatriota en el consumidor del mundo platónico-aristotélico, el cual rige la historia de la metafísica occidental. Heidegger le da este título pues considera que “Nietzsche [es el último que] niega la existencia de trascendencia alguna [...]. Es decir, Nietzsche concibe la vida en términos exclusiva y absolutamente immanentes”. Diego Pérez Lasserre, “La técnica y el acabamiento de la metafísica occidental”, *Logos* 27, n.º 2 (2017): 286-7.

<sup>27</sup> De allí que “el cristianismo histórico [...] encontró en la tradición de la metafísica del ser [ontoteología] [...] una estructura de referencia y consolidación para su mensaje”. Armando Matteo, *Credos posmodernos: de Vattimo a Galimberti; los filósofos contemporáneos frente al cristianismo* (Buenos Aires, AR: Marea, 2007), 84.

lectura cristiana de la filosofía platónica funcionaba no solo como principio epistemológico estructurante,<sup>28</sup> sino que, además, “conlleva[ba] toda la carga metafísica”<sup>29</sup> que comprendía un orden cósmico determinado, absoluto, no contingente e ideal.<sup>30</sup> La muerte de Dios, en consecuencia, no ilustra la aspiración a una ambición más noble, sino, precisamente, la muerte al hecho mismo de aspirar. No es, meramente, la muerte de un sujeto, sino el despojo pleno de la función que este cumplía. La muerte de Dios representa que el criterio universal, los principios ontológicos regentes y las causas últimas como bases metafísicas son inválidas y que ¡le hemos quitado a esta Tierra, su Sol!<sup>31</sup> ¡Se ha removido la más elevada invención metafísica de Occidente!

### *Influencia en el posmodernismo y en la teología*

Si bien la sentencia nietzscheana no es un enunciado esencialmente teológico, sin duda alguna arremete sustancialmente contra la teología. La ausencia de un principio estructurante de la realidad, desde luego, se-pulta a la teología: no hay unidad, no hay finalidad, no hay adecuación

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<sup>28</sup> “Dios murió, pero no podemos pensar la realidad sino desde un centro, y Dios es eso: la idea de que hay un centro ordenador a partir del cual se estructura la realidad toda”. Darío Sztajnszrajber, *Filosofía a martillazos* (Buenos Aires, AR: Paidós, 2019), 1:144. “For God here is not merely the metaphysical underpinning of the Christian cosmology. He is the very notion of a basis, an external authority, on which opinions are founded —the very notion of a horizon against which everything can be seen and judged”. Ken Gemes, “Nietzsche’s critique of truth”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, n.º 1 (1992): 50.

<sup>29</sup> Sztajnszrajber, *Filosofía en 11 frases*, 238.

<sup>30</sup> “For Nietzsche ‘God is dead’ means nothing else than the fact that there is no ultimate foundation”. Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, Italian Academy Lectures (Nueva York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>31</sup> Tan radicales son sus efectos que las preguntas metafísicas todavía generan intriga. Nietzsche, en *La gaya ciencia*, 117, expresó:

¿Hacia dónde nos movemos nosotros? ¿Lejos de todos los soles? ¿No caemos continuamente? ¿Y hacia atrás, hacia los lados, hacia delante, hacia todos los lados? ¿Hay aún un arriba y un abajo? ¿No erramos como a través de una nada infinita? ¿No nos sofoca el espacio vacío? ¿No se ha vuelto todo más frío? ¿No llega continuamente la noche y más noche? ¿No habrán de ser encendidas lámparas a mediodía? ¿No escuchamos aún nada del ruido de los sepulcros que entierran a Dios? ¿No olemos aún nada de la descomposición divina?



y, por ende, no hay una verdad.<sup>32</sup> Seguidamente, se expondrán algunas consecuencias que la muerte de Dios conlleva para la teología.

### La ausencia de la estructura

Sin sistema no hay teología. Si no existe una realidad última, la teología se ve desprovista no solo del *Theos*, sino también del *logos*. La teología es posible porque existen tres realidades —“Dios, el hombre, y el mundo”—<sup>33</sup> que articulan cognitivamente un sistema teológico y forma un todo coherente. Pero, con la ausencia de una realidad ontológica, hay un quiebre tanto en la estructura tríada (Dios-hombre-mundo) como también en la estructura epistemológica que hacía posible nuestro acercamiento por medio del acto reflexivo: la revelación.<sup>34</sup> Como resultado, no hay forma de relacionarse cognitivamente (ausencia del *Theos*) ni de relacionar enunciados cognitivos (ausencia de la *logia*) respecto a lo que llamamos teología. De ahí se sigue que la autoridad de la fuente *par excellence* del quehacer teológico —las Sagradas Escrituras— es desafiada respecto a su naturaleza y propósito. Respecto a su naturaleza, porque la revelación es imposible, y respecto a su propósito porque, al no considerarse revelación,

<sup>32</sup> La muerte de la metafísica (Dios) conlleva a la disolución de la comprensión aristotélica de la verdad como adecuación. Ver Gianni Vattimo, *Adiós a la verdad*, trad. por María Teresa d’Meza (Barcelona, ES: Gedisa, 2010), 16, donde Vattimo cataloga como “error metafísico” el “haber imaginado la verdad como correspondencia”.

<sup>33</sup> Para el cristianismo, estas “tres realidades absolutamente relacionales [...] aunque tengan una autonomía particular, no pueden ser absolutizadas por separado, ni manifestar solas su esencia más íntima”. Juan Manuel Medrano Ezquerro, “Tres acercamientos cristianos al pensamiento de Nietzsche: Welte, Vattimo y Gonzáles del Cardenal”, *Brocar* 36 (2012): 325. Por otro lado, es preciso señalar que, aparte de la muerte de Dios —lo que indica ya una ruptura en la relación *Dios-hombre-mundo*—, la comprensión que Nietzsche tiene del “hombre” y del “mundo” es diferente al de la teología bíblica.

<sup>34</sup> Como se ha mostrado anteriormente, la muerte de Dios representa tanto una crisis metafísica como epistemológica. Acerca de cómo estas dos categorías se entretienen, ver Roy E. Graf, *The principle of articulation in Adventist theology: An evaluation of current interpretations and a proposal*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2019), 62. Aplicándolo al planteamiento nietzscheano, como presuposición, *Dios* es un “*cognitive whole*”, mientras que, como realidad, “can be named an *ontological system*”.

no es normativa (*norma normans*). Así, la muerte de Dios es también la muerte de la teología propiamente dicha.<sup>35</sup>

### La muerte de la verdad

La verdad, tradicionalmente entendida, se fundamenta en el terreno de lo metafísico.<sup>36</sup> Como disciplina, la teología presupone lo absoluto (Gn 1,1; Hb 11,6) y orienta su desarrollo hacia la búsqueda de la verdad: hay teleología en la teología (Jn 8,32; 14,6). No obstante, con el anuncio de la muerte de Dios, Nietzsche rompe con la tradición occidental de los binarios (e. g. verdad-mentira) para señalar que el destino humano está bajo una eterna *condenación* hermenéutica.<sup>37</sup> En palabras del filósofo:

Facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations [...] is it necessary to posit an interpreter behind the interpretation? [...] In so far as the word “knowledge” has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is interpretable otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings. —“Perspectivism”.<sup>38</sup>

There exists neither “spirit”, nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions that are of no use.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Aquí no se hace referencia a la teología como corriente de pensamiento (por ej., teología de la liberación, teología de la muerte de Dios, etc.), las cuales vendrán —en parte, como consecuencia— un tiempo después, sino más bien a la teología como empresa intelectual, el quehacer teológico propiamente dicho.

<sup>36</sup> Ver Paul Tillich, *Systematic theology: Three volumes in one* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 102. “The truth of something is that level of its being the knowledge of which prevents wrong expectations and consequent disappointments. Truth, therefore, is the essence of things as well as the cognitive act in which their essence is grasped”.

<sup>37</sup> La hermenéutica, en este sentido, es más un arte que un proceso objetivo.

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The will to power*, ed. por Walter Kaufmann (Nueva York, NY: Vintage, 1968), 267.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 266. Nietzsche, además, declara que, “todo ha devenido; no hay datos eternos, lo mismo que no hay verdades absolutas”. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Humano, demasiado humano* (Madrid, ES: Akal, 2007), 44. “Los juicios de valor sobre la vida, en favor o en contra, no pueden, en definitiva, ser verdaderos nunca: únicamente tienen valor como síntomas [...] en sí tales juicios son estupideces”. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Crepúsculo de los ídolos o cómo se filosofa a martillazos*, trad. por Andrés Sánchez Pascual (Madrid, ES: Alianza, 2002), 44. Por otro lado, el filósofo posmoderno Darío Sztajnszrajber, en el contexto de la muerte de la verdad, cita a Nietzsche y señala que “la verdad es la mentira más eficiente, aquella que ha logrado su objetivo, es tan profundamente mentirosa que le creemos”. Juan Rapacioli, “Darío Sztajnszrajber: ‘Sabemos que la verdad no existe pero no hacemos otra cosa que buscarla’”, Telam, acceso el 15 de diciembre de

La consecuencia de esto es que la doctrina de la verdad, como representación de la realidad, desaparece. Todo es interpretable. El desafío, entonces, se encuentra en que un enunciado teológico no solo nunca podría ser afirmado como verdadero,<sup>40</sup> sino que también se cuestionaría si ese enunciado “carga” un *contenido*. Por tal motivo, Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre declara:

... los textos son más bien acontecimientos de lenguaje que conjuntos de signos que se refieren directamente a realidades y significados estables [...] Por eso, el lenguaje es un lugar en el que se lucha por el significado, los valores y el poder.<sup>41</sup>

La muerte de la verdad es así un corolario previsible de la ausencia de un principio estructurante. Así, se da lugar a la hegemonía del subjetivismo, el relativismo epistemológico y el posestructuralismo posmoderno.

Dentro del pensamiento teológico, los efectos de *la muerte de la verdad* pueden ser vistos en la aplicación de los postulados posestructuralistas y deconstructivistas<sup>42</sup> que presentan la imposibilidad de la “verdad última

2021, <https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/201508/117824-dario-sztajnszrajber-sabemos-que-la-verdad-no-existe-pero-no-hacemos-otra-cosa-buscarla.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Según Nooshin Forghani, Narges Keshtiaray y Alireza Yousefy, “A critical examination of post-modernism based on religious and moral values education”, *International Education Studies* 8, n.º 9 (2015): 100, esta actitud es, evidentemente, posmoderna, pues se cree que...

... “meaning” is not dependent on words; rather, it is dependent on the kind of relation we make among words and the kind of context we create. Therefore, a word, based on the frame within which it is placed, takes different and even opposite meanings.

<sup>41</sup> Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, “Textos y lectores, retórica y ética”, en *La exégesis feminista del siglo XX*, ed. por Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Navarra, ES: Verbo divino, 2014), 240.

<sup>42</sup> Pese a que la deconstrucción como doctrina posestructuralista fue propuesta por el filósofo ateo Jacques Derrida, ha tenido un fuerte impacto en la teología. Ver John D. Caputo, *The prayers and tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without religion*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 113, donde señala que la “deconstruction can be of service to theology in breaking the grip of this excessively Eleatic idea of God which has overrun the biblical traditions”.

Ver, además, G. Douglas Atkins, *Reading deconstruction/deconstructive reading* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 2, quien considera que “some of the most important, perhaps even revolutionary, implications of deconstruction are for theology and religion”. Atkins, adicionalmente, examina “relation of deconstruction and Christianity”. *Ibid.*, 3.

Por otro lado, pese a su simpatía al promover la deconstrucción dentro del aparato teológico, Juan Manuel Arias Perea, en “Una aproximación a la deconstrucción de la fe: apuntes personales”, Lupa Protestante, acceso el 7 de diciembre, 2021, <https://www.lupaprotestante.com/>

del lenguaje” y se rehúsan “a considerar el conocimiento como algo ‘basado en la realidad’”.<sup>43</sup> Por lo tanto, no existe una interpretación correcta, sino que todos los discursos teológicos son *verdaderos*.<sup>44</sup> Un ejemplo de esto puede encontrarse en la postura de Caputo, quien reconoce no solo la multiplicidad y la contingencia de los “caminos” espirituales, sino que, además, el hecho de que “no one really *knows* the way”.<sup>45</sup> Caputo declara que ser un cristiano posmoderno es agradable debido a que es vivir bajo una “condition of irreducible pluralism”.<sup>46</sup>

### El concepto de moral universal

*No* apaciguamiento, sino más poder; *no* paz ante todo, sino guerra, *no* virtud [...] Los débiles y malogrados deben perecer: artículo primero de *nuestro* amor a los hombres. Y además se debe ayudarlos a perecer. ¿Qué es más dañoso que

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una-aproximacion-a-la-deconstruccion-de-la-fe-apuntes-personales-juan-manuel-arias-perea/, reconoce que...

... los movimientos deconstructivos que traen como consecuencia el abandono total de la fe, están creciendo cada vez más en varias partes del mundo. Es una cuestión que ya no se puede ignorar en nuestros días y que está latente como uno de los desafíos con los que tendrá que lidiar la Iglesia moderna.

<sup>43</sup> J. K. Gibson-Graham, “Intervenciones posestructurales”, *Revista Colombiana de Antropología* 38 (2002): 264. “Desde una perspectiva posestructuralista, el lenguaje no existe como un sistema de diferencias dentro de un conjunto único de signos. En cambio, las relaciones significante-significado se crean y revisan continuamente, ya que las palabras se recontextualizan en una producción eterna de textos”. *Ibid.* Además, como señala Miller, Nietzsche postuló “the existence of innumerable interpretations of a given text to the fact that reading is never the objective identifying of a sense but the importation of meaning into a text which has no meaning ‘in itself’”. J. Hillis Miller, recensión de *Tradition and difference*, por M. H. Abrams, *Diacritics* 2, n.º 4 (1972): 12.

<sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, en *Humano, demasiado humano*, 57, parece ir en esa dirección:

Desde que se ha extinguido la creencia en que un dios rige los destinos del mundo a gran escala y, pese a todas las curvas que aparecen en la senda de la humanidad, los conduce con autoridad a feliz término, los hombres deben proponerse a sí mismos fines ecuménicos que abarquen toda la tierra.

<sup>45</sup> No en su sentido epistemológico, sino en el sentido de su verdad o falsedad. Ver John D. Caputo, *What would Jesus deconstruct?: The good news of postmodernism for the church, the church and postmodern culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 41. Sobre una lectura posmoderna de la teología propiamente dicha —por ej. la doctrina de Dios—, ver Jean-Luc Marion, *Dios sin el ser*, trad. por Daniel Barreto González, Javier Bassas Vila y Carlos Enrique Restrepo (Pontevedra, ES: Ellago, 2010), específicamente las páginas 265-307.

<sup>46</sup> Caputo, *What would Jesus deconstruct?*, 42.

cualquier vicio? —La compasión activa con todos los malogrados y débiles— el cristianismo...<sup>47</sup>

Se ha mencionado anteriormente que la muerte de Dios trae consigo la erradicación de *una* verdad última, universal y necesaria y que, en su lugar, impera la naturaleza contingente de la hermenéutica: el perspectivismo. Ahora bien, si esto es así, ¿qué hay en cuanto a la moral? La moral también *muere*. O tal vez sea más preciso decir que deviene en una inversión axiológica. En adelante, se examinará el proyecto nietzscheano de la transmutación de los valores.<sup>48</sup>

En principio, como reconoce Hernández, “la voluntad de poder es la palabra clave para comprender la visión moral de Nietzsche”.<sup>49</sup> Sin embargo, es necesario observar el concepto de moral que tiene el filósofo alemán. Para Nietzsche, la moral ha sido “the ‘greatest lie’ of all times”.<sup>50</sup> Este gran invento occidental ha sido posible por la aceptación del “prejuicio dualista metafísico”<sup>51</sup> desarrollado por

<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche, *El anticristo*, 28.

<sup>48</sup> Será precisamente esta gran revolución la que identificará a Nietzsche como un detractor referente contra la moral cristiana.

<sup>49</sup> Danilo Kadesh Hernández Esquerre, “Visión histórico valorativa de la compasión de la antigüedad a la modernidad” (tesis de licenciatura, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2014), 262.

<sup>50</sup> Bertram M. Laing, “The metaphysics of Nietzsche’s immoralism”, *The Philosophical Review* 24, n.º 4 (1915): 400. Sin embargo, Nietzsche reconoce la utilidad de esta mentira. *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Diego Sánchez Meca, “¿Qué son y cómo se forman los valores?”, *Estudios Nietzsche* 13 (2013): 81. Sánchez afirma que “lo que la moral occidental ha hecho ha sido contraponerlas [cultura y naturaleza] drásticamente, y esto ha tenido consecuencias graves y posiblemente irreparables, [pues] ha concebido al ser humano como sólo espíritu, sólo alma y sólo razón” al punto casi de deshumanizarlo. *Ibid.*

Sobre este dualismo, Nietzsche declara que “la creencia básica de los metafísicos es la *creencia en las antítesis de los valores*”. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Más allá del bien y del mal*, trad. por Andrés Sánchez Pascual (Madrid, ES: Alianza, 2005), 23 (en adelante *MBM*).

Nietzsche, además, en *Humano, demasiado humano*, “focuses its attack on the assumption that the postulation of a metaphysical world —Plato’s Forms, Kant’s thing-in-itself— is necessary to explain certain value-related aspects of the human world”. Maudemarie Clark y David Dudrick, “Nietzsche and moral objectivity: The development of Nietzsche’s metaethics”, en *Nietzsche and morality*, ed. por Brian Leiter y Neil Sinhababu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 196. Por esta razón, Nietzsche entiende al mundo metafísico como el mundo del error, pues se conceptualiza sobre entes *metafísicos* no existentes. Ver Nietzsche, *Humano, demasiado humano*, 54.

Sócrates,<sup>52</sup> continuado por Platón y naturalizado por los partidarios de este: la religión cristiana, “pues el cristianismo es platonismo para el ‘pueblo’”.<sup>53</sup>

La moral, asimismo, ha servido para reprimir en el hombre sus deseos vitales, esto porque hacía de la conciencia la reguladora del valor de las acciones. Por eso, Nietzsche considera que la conciencia no es un dispositivo innato en el ser humano, sino más bien una *construcción* humana. Es el recurso del poder para lograr determinados fines.<sup>54</sup> La conciencia no está allí señalándonos *el* camino; por ende, “la conciencia nunca puede usarse como un estándar para la vida”.<sup>55</sup> En consecuencia, los valores no deben ser fundamentados en el ámbito metafísico, sino que deben encontrarse en el yo, en la *voluntad de poder*<sup>56</sup> satisfacer los impulsos naturales que durante siglos Occidente —el cristianismo— ha desprestigiado tanto.

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<sup>52</sup> Para el filósofo alemán, “Sócrates fue el [primer] payaso que se hizo tomar en serio”. Esto, por haber introducido en el “gusto griego”, los “modales dialécticos”. Nietzsche, *Crepúsculo de los idolos*, 54. Sobre la relación Sócrates-Platón, Nietzsche declara que “son síntomas de decaimiento, instrumentos de la disolución griega, pseudogriegos, antigriegos”, ya que disolvieron la expresión dionisiaca por la apolínea.

<sup>53</sup> Nietzsche, *Humano, demasiado humano*, 21.

<sup>54</sup> Para el filósofo, “dicha moral pone de manifiesto las *relaciones de poder* [énfasis añadido] sustentada en unos valores que actúan de acuerdo a una *moral de esclavos*”. Luis Manuel Román Cárdenas, “La voluntad de poder en Nietzsche” (tesis doctoral, Universidad Iberoamericana, 1979), 5. La tesis nietzscheana que se menciona será una influencia capital en el desarrollo de la filosofía posmoderna de Michel Foucault, quien declaró que “Nietzsche fue el filósofo del poder, fue quien llegó a pensar el poder, pero sin encerrarse en el interior de una teoría política para hacerlo”. Michel Foucault, *Estrategias de poder*, vol. 2 de *Obras esenciales* (Barcelona, ES: Paidós, 1999), 312.

Sobre la influencia de Nietzsche en el filósofo francés, ver Hans Sluga, “I am simply a Nietzschean”, en *Foucault and philosophy*, ed. por Timothy O’Leary y Christopher Falzon (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 36-59; Aitor Alzola Molina, “Pensar con Nietzsche: la relación de Michel Foucault con la filosofía de Nietzsche”, *Eikasía* 73 (2017): 259, quien señala que el filósofo francés “se siente en deuda con aquellos textos nietzscheanos del periodo de 1880 que abordan cuestiones relacionadas con el problema de la verdad y el saber”; David Cortez, *Foucault, lector de Nietzsche* (Quito, EC: Flacso, 2015), 1-2, “la amplia presencia de Nietzsche en la obra de Foucault tiene que ver con su común pertenencia a tradiciones críticas de la Ilustración que apuestan por la construcción histórica de subjetividades libres”.

<sup>55</sup> Laing, “The metaphysics of Nietzsche’s immoralism”, 399.

<sup>56</sup> La voluntad de poder está ligada a la moral debido a que Nietzsche “describe la Voluntad de Poder como consecuencia del relativismo de los valores”. Stephan Günzel, “Voluntad de poder”, en *Diccionario Nietzsche: conceptos, obras, influencias y lugares*, ed. por Germán Cano (Madrid, ES: Biblioteca Nueva, 2012), 534.

Por eso, los valores han de ser *anticristianos*, porque el cristianismo ensalza lo que denigra la vida,<sup>57</sup> predica una moral esclavizante<sup>58</sup> —moral de los esclavos—. <sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, en cambio, promueve dar vida a aquellos instintos<sup>60</sup> que “fortalecen” al ser humano. Para ello, fomentará una moralidad libre de las cadenas de la moral opresora —la moral de los señores—, la cual ha de permanecer tras la muerte de Dios y ha de ser aquella que el superhombre ha de desear. Pero a fin de que esto sea posible, no solo se deben transmutar los valores cristiano-occidentales por un espíritu dionisiaco,<sup>61</sup> sino que se ha de dar muerte a todo lo débil, empezando por *erradicar* su fundamento: la compasión,<sup>62</sup> para luego erradicar a

<sup>57</sup> “Cristiano es el odio al *espíritu* [intelecto], al orgullo, al valor, a la libertad, al libertinaje del espíritu; cristiano es el odio a los *sentidos*, a las alegrías de los sentidos, a la alegría en cuanto tal...” Nietzsche, *El anticristo*, 46-7.

<sup>58</sup> “Nietzsche, unlike these writers, situates his critique of morality within a broader ‘cultural critique’, in which morality is attacked as only the most important of a variety of social and cultural forces posing obstacles to human flourishing”. Leiter, “Nietzsche and the morality critics”, 252.

<sup>59</sup> El filósofo, en *MBM*, 143, señala que esta moral ha sido efectiva porque se ha usado al miedo como mecanismo pedagógico:

El grado mayor o menor de peligro que para la comunidad, que para la igualdad hay en una opinión, en un estado de ánimo y un afecto, en una voluntad, en un don, eso es lo que ahora constituye la perspectiva moral. También aquí el miedo vuelve a ser el padre de la moral.

Por eso, la moral de occidente es “moral de animal de rebaño”. Todos están sometidos y reunidos por un espíritu gregario metafísico. *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>60</sup> Por citar un ejemplo, “we find in Nietzsche’s writings a positive evaluation of the orgy”. Bishop, “Nietzsche’s ‘new’ morality”, 232. El proyecto nietzscheano de una moral obediente a los instintos vitales no es una propuesta radical *per se*, sino un camino por el cual se ha de volver a la moral como era entendida por los griegos antes de la llegada del cristianismo.

<sup>61</sup> En Nietzsche, el espíritu dionisiaco se contrapone al apolíneo. Representa la vida, la fertilidad, el placer, la festividad, lo *humano, demasiado humano*, la naturaleza, el arte, la *inmanencia* del hombre. Jeison A. García Cruz, en “Nietzsche y el espíritu dionisiaco como antídoto a la decadencia de occidente” (trabajo de fin de grado, Universidad de La Laguna, 2018), 18, expresa:

... el espíritu dionisiaco manifestado en las bacanales o festividades que se hacían en la antigua Grecia en honor [a] él, no sólo eran una interacción comunitaria, sino a la vez era una reconciliación del hombre con dicha naturaleza. Dioniso representa la parte más animal y salvaje del hombre, así como la parte más originaria y fundamentada en el instinto.

<sup>62</sup> Es decir, erradicar la compasión cristiana, pues ser compasivos no es más que herir el orgullo ajeno. Pese a ello, es necesario tener en cuenta que el filósofo no está en contra de que ejerzamos compasión ante el sufrimiento de alguien cercano a nosotros, sino que, más bien, “cautions us to exercise compassion selectively”. Daniel I. Harris, “Compassion and affirmation in Nietzsche”,

sus practicantes. Es aquí donde Nietzsche encuentra la necesidad de una *transmutación de los valores*.

*Influencia en el posmodernismo  
y en la teología*

Despojado de fundamento y sugerido el perspectivismo, se sigue una concepción de la moral como subjetiva.<sup>63</sup> Como consecuencia, se ha planteado tratar algunas prácticas *morales* desde una perspectiva política,<sup>64</sup> desarraigándolas de naturaleza moral alguna.<sup>65</sup> A saber, debido a que “ciertos asuntos [morales] pueden parecer intratables y puede que nunca sean totalmente dirimidos”, debe existir una “cooperación política”<sup>66</sup> que sea “independiente de controvertidas doctrinas filosóficas y religiosas”.<sup>67</sup> En consecuencia, no puede pensarse a la teología —en tanto que teología— como rectora de la moral.

Ahora bien, aunque la crítica nietzscheana de la moral ha influenciado de manera significativa la visión posmoderna de la ética, ha tenido

*Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 48, n.º 1 (2017): 24. Para una lectura sobre este pensar “ambivalente” de la compasión en Nietzsche, ver *ibid.*

- <sup>63</sup> Esto queda claro en Nietzsche cuando dice que toda “virtud tiene que ser invención nuestra [...] cada uno se invente su virtud, su imperativo categórico”. Nietzsche, *El anticristo*, 35.
- <sup>64</sup> El trabajo de Rawls, en este sentido, ha sido importante por su propuesta de que “in public reason comprehensive doctrines of truth or right be replaced by an idea of the politically reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens”. John Rawls, *The law of peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 132.
- <sup>65</sup> En términos concretos, esto puede ser visto en la discusión sobre la legalidad del aborto. Así, por ejemplo, en Estados Unidos el porcentaje de adultos que piensa que el aborto no es un problema moral (21 %) sobrepasa al grupo que entiende que el aborto es moralmente incorrecto en todos los casos (13 %). Carrie Blazina, “Key facts about the abortion debate in America”, Pew Research Center, acceso el 31 de agosto de 2022, <https://pewrsr.ch/3z9xqE7>.
- <sup>66</sup> John Rawls, “Justicia como ‘fairness’: política, no metafísica”, *Revista de Ciencia Política* 12, n.º 1-2 (1990): 93. Para un análisis crítico sobre el citado artículo de Rawls, ver Fernando Aranda Fraga, “John Rawls: una ética jurídica sin fundamento metafísico”, *Apuntes universitarios* 5, n.º 2 (2015): 173-196, en el que el autor acusa al filósofo estadounidense de tener una “posición pseudo-neutral” (*ibid.*, 180). Asimismo, caracteriza la teoría política de Rawls como ingenua, puesto que “se hace difícil pensar que un mero consenso superpuesto de teorías, muchas de las cuales [son] conflictivas entre sí, pueda proporcionar algo más que un simple *modus vivendi*” que no llegue a ser identificado como hobbesiano (*ibid.*, 190).
- <sup>67</sup> Rawls, “Justicia como ‘fairness’”, 90 (énfasis añadido).



también un alcance importante en la lectura posmoderna de la moral cristiana, la cual, según la sugerencia de este trabajo, se traduce en dos corolarios aparentemente antagónicos: la cristofobia y el surgimiento de las distintas teologías posmodernas “emancipadoras”. El primero se des- hace del cristianismo, el segundo hace uso de él; pero ambos son teleológicamente seculares.

Por un lado, la cristofobia —que, dígame de paso, es una actitud muy nietzscheana—<sup>68</sup> es principalmente un discurso de odio hacia la tradición moral, esto es, a los valores cristianos, pues ellos son el alma de Occidente. La cristofobia promulga que el patrimonio cultural cristiano sea derrumbado por caracterizar un ascetismo execrable,<sup>69</sup> un *odium humani generis*, por eso ha de ser sustituido por “la tradición dionisiaca de impronta nietzscheana”;<sup>70</sup> esto es, el privilegio del deseo. Un ejemplo claro es la publicación de Schnadelbach, en la que, en un sentido “teológico”, señala siete defectos “malditos” (entre los que se incluye el ascetismo) que el cristianismo legó a Occidente,<sup>71</sup> para luego *vaticinar* el final de la cristiandad.

<sup>68</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, en *Ecce Homo* (Madrid: Alianza, 2005), 144-5, expresa:

... ¡El concepto ‘Dios’, inventado como concepto antitético de la vida —en ese concepto, concentrado en horrorosa unidad todo lo nocivo, envenenador, difamador, la entera hostilidad a muerte contra la vida! ¡El concepto “más allá”, “mundo verdadero”, inventado para desvalorizar el *único* mundo que existe— para no dejar a nuestra realidad terrenal ninguna meta, ninguna razón, ninguna tarea! [...] Finalmente —es lo más horrible en el concepto de hombre *bueno*, la defensa de todo lo débil, enfermo, mal constituido, sufriente a causa de sí mismo, de todo aquello que debe *perecer*—.

<sup>69</sup> Aquí encuentran lugar las palabras de Foucault, quien expresa que “el alma [es la], prisión del cuerpo”. Michel Foucault, *Vigilar y castigar: nacimiento de la prisión* (Buenos Aires, AR: Siglo veintiuno, 2002), 36.

<sup>70</sup> Eloy Bueno de la Fuente, “Crist(ian)ofobia: más que un fenómeno cultural”, *Fides Et Ratio* 3 (2018): 33. Para una discusión sobre el espíritu cristofóbico en Europa, ver Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, “Christianity: Alien presence or foundation of the West?”, en *Exiting a dead end road: A GPS for Christians in public discourse*, ed. por Martin Kugler y Gudrun Kugler (Viena: Kairos, 2010), 51-69.

<sup>71</sup> “Der christliche Platonismus bedeutete [...] im Menschen die normative Herabsetzung der Wirklichkeit, das heißt seiner Leiblichkeit. Das Ergebnis ist die systematische Leibfeindlichkeit der christlichen Tradition”. Von Herbert Schnädelbach, “Der Fluch des Christentums”, *Die Zeit* 20 (2000): 9. Se podría traducir así: “El platonismo cristiano significó el menosprecio normativo de la realidad, es decir, de su corporeidad [...]. El resultado es la hostilidad sistemática hacia el cuerpo”.

En sus palabras, “Vielleicht aber ist diese Selbstaufgabe der letzte segensreiche Dienst, den das Christentum unserer Kultur nach 2000 Jahren zu leisten vermöchte; wir könnten es dann in Frieden ziehen lassen”.<sup>72</sup> Otro trabajo en la rúbrica de cristofobia es el *Tratado de Ateología*. Respecto a la moral, Onfray reflexiona:

Nietzsche revela la transvaluación: el ateísmo no debe funcionar como un fin solamente. Suprimir a Dios, desde luego, pero ¿para qué? [Para el advenimiento de] Otra moral, nueva ética, valores inéditos, impensados porque son impensables, eso es lo que la liquidación y la superación del ateísmo permiten.<sup>73</sup>

Por otro lado, el alumbramiento de las vertientes teológicas que han acaecido como resultado del “filosofar a martillazos”<sup>74</sup> es evidente *de facto*. Predominantemente, en el terreno de la moral, la así llamada “teología de género” ha infectado de modo vertiginoso el orbe evangélico<sup>75</sup> como resultado de una reinterpretación *erudita* de la lectura tradicional (y natural) del texto bíblico, dándole primacía a la experiencia personal. La consecuencia de ello es una teología progresista que, en el campo epistemológico funciona como un presupuesto metodológico,<sup>76</sup> y en el campo político se evidencia en el activismo.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. Se podría traducir como “tal vez el abandono de sí mismo sea el último servicio bendito que el cristianismo es capaz de lograr en nuestra cultura después de 2000 años; entonces podríamos dejarlo ir [morir] en paz”.

<sup>73</sup> Michel Onfray, *Tratado de ateología: Física de la metafísica* (Buenos Aires, AR: Ediciones de la Flor, 2006), 60.

<sup>74</sup> Con esta frase pragmática, Nietzsche describe su actividad deconstruccionista de la metafísica y moral occidental.

<sup>75</sup> Aunque, evidentemente no se limita a ello. David P. Gushee, en “Reconciling evangelical Christianity with our sexual minorities: Reframing the biblical discussion”, *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 35, no. 2 (2015): 141, expresa:

In evangelical circles, however, until the past few years, everyone who raised a challenge to ‘traditionalist’ views immediately experienced some form of exclusion [...]. However, a number of new books have been written and organizations founded by avowed evangelicals attempting to open up conversational space, plead for better treatment, reframe the issues, or revise the traditionalist posture.

<sup>76</sup> Por ejemplo, “la hermenéutica del amor” como criterio interpretativo de los pasajes bíblicos que se utilizan para sancionar las desviaciones sexuales y las desviaciones de género. Cf. Emma Cadenas, *Jesús LGTBQ+: teología del género para una fe sexualmente activa* (Lima, PE: Garamond, 2022).

## El concepto de ser humano

“¿Qué importa el *resto*? —El resto es simplemente la humanidad—. Hay que ser superior a la humanidad por fuerza, por *altura* de alma, por desprecio...”<sup>77</sup>

El concepto de ser humano en Nietzsche es un tanto ambivalente porque, aunque Nietzsche no deja de tener *esperanza* en la humanidad, desarrolla una filosofía poshumanista que rechazará todo esencialismo. Consecuentemente, ya que el hombre no es un fin en sí mismo, ha de autoconstituirse en el adalid de su búsqueda por la libertad.

En principio, cualquier actitud de amor hacia el hombre deviene en no entenderlo como un anteproyecto inacabado; por lo tanto, no se puede amar lo humano, ya que hacerlo sería despreciarse a uno mismo.<sup>78</sup> En sus palabras, expresa:

El hombre es algo que debe ser superado [...] Todos los seres han creado hasta ahora algo por encima de sí mismos: ¿y queréis ser vosotros el reflujo de ese gran flujo y retroceder al animal más bien que superar al hombre? ¿Qué es el mono para el hombre? Una irrisión o una vergüenza dolorosa [...]. El hombre es una cuerda tendida entre el animal y el superhombre, una cuerda sobre un abismo [...]. La grandeza del hombre está en ser puente y no una meta: lo que en el hombre se puede amar es que es un *tránsito* y un *ocaso*.<sup>79</sup>

La muerte incruenta de Dios ha puesto en evidencia que no hay un *telos* ultraterrenal al que la humanidad como conjunto se dirija. Por lo tanto, toda *esperanza* humana ha de ser inmanente, ha de ser *humana*, *demasiado humana*. Para ello, en su peregrinaje, la humanidad ha de entender el desprecio por las categorías farmacológicas del sentido común (*la verdad*, *la razón*, etc.), esto es, la *deshumanización* de la humanidad. Cuando el hombre alcanza tal objetivo, “entonces su propia acción cobra a sus ojos el carácter de desperdicio. Pero sentirse en cuanto humanidad (y no sólo en cuanto individuo) tan *desperdiciado* [...] es un sentimiento

<sup>77</sup> Nietzsche, *El anticristo*, 26.

<sup>78</sup> “El hombre es para mí una cosa demasiado imperfecta. El amor al hombre me mataría”. Nietzsche, *Así habló Zaratustra*, 35.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-8.

por encima de todos los sentimientos”.<sup>80</sup> Al fin, habiendo despreciado lo humano, veremos nuestro amor por la humanidad en el advenimiento del superhombre.

Para explicar el cumplimiento de su oráculo, Nietzsche habla *De las tres transformaciones* por las que un individuo ha de transitar: “Tres transformaciones del espíritu os menciono: cómo el espíritu se convierte en camello, y el camello en león, y el león, por fin, en niño”.<sup>81</sup>

El espíritu, en tanto que individuo, se orienta mitológicamente y está sujetado a las construcciones normativas que lo terminan convirtiendo en un bestia de carga, en un camello. Después de esta primera transformación, este animal parece ser la condición por defecto del hombre, como si su estructura exigiera sobrellevar “cosas pesadas, e incluso las más pesadas de todas”.<sup>82</sup> El amor por el “tú debes”<sup>83</sup> explicitado en supersticiones ascéticas, la veneración por lo no natural, el repudio por la soberbia, el encanto por lo débil y el rechazo de lo consagrado como “vil” representan las jorobas milenarias de Occidente, ante las cuales la humanidad se ha arrodillado, ¡y ha encontrado gusto en hacerlo! Pero después de la muerte de Dios, el relato del significado ha sido removido. No obstante, no basta con renunciar a la carga y seguir metafísicamente fundado en ella. Entonces, aunque la muerte de Dios es una inevitable condición, su apropiación debe ser individual, razón por la cual el camello ha de escapar al desierto de la deconstrucción para esperar su libertadora transformación.

Aun así, para Nietzsche no es la libertad, sino el placer, el valor sumo. Por eso, la salida del camello al desierto representa el primer escalón en la transformación del espíritu de un individuo, que se produce cuando este genera una disidencia con lo que Nietzsche llama “el rebaño”, esto es, el imaginario colectivo que permanece atado a la moral del deber.

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<sup>80</sup> Nietzsche, *Humano, demasiado humano*, 21.

<sup>81</sup> Nietzsche, *Así habló Zaratustra*, 53.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> En el Zaratustra, el “Tú debes” es el otro nombre del gran dragón —el tentador— con el que combate el camello antes de su transformación a león.

Solo entonces ocurre la segunda transformación: el león. Se requiere de la ferocidad de esta bestia para vencer en la más sangrienta de todas las batallas: la lucha contra el objetivismo moral. Es aquí donde Nietzsche encuentra lugar para su proyecto de transmutación axiológica.

Pero “¿qué es capaz de hacer el niño que ni siquiera el león ha podido hacer?”<sup>84</sup> El niño es capaz de enterrar los recuerdos de la muerte de Dios y de redefinir la relación *significante/significado* en la constitución de nuevos signos.<sup>85</sup> De esta manera, la última transformación resulta en la actividad humana que experimenta espontáneamente la multiplicidad fáctica y simbólica. Entre tanto, tal vez ese niño sea aquel verdadero hombre que ama lo *demasiado humano*. En fin, el superhombre.<sup>86</sup>

Queda por tanto en el hombre, por su *voluntad de poder*, la magia del devenir: “El hombre deviene lo que él quiera devenir, [pues] su voluntad es anterior a su existencia.”<sup>87</sup> En este sentido, Nietzsche parece no solo acabar con Dios; sino también, con el hombre. Si la voluntad es anterior al sujeto, luego, ¿qué es el sujeto si no símbolo sin significado?

### *Influencia en el posmodernismo y en la teología*

Como tal, el pensamiento nietzscheano de que no existe esencia alguna en la humanidad impactó primeramente en la filosofía y, posteriormente, en la teología. Jean-Paul Sartre verá algunas de sus ideas dar a luz por la influencia del filósofo alemán.<sup>88</sup> Parafraseando a Nietzsche declara que “la existencia precede a la esencia”. Esto “significa que el hombre empieza

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<sup>84</sup> Nietzsche, *Así habló Zaratustra*, 55.

<sup>85</sup> Tal proyecto se enmarca en la crítica posestructuralista y puede usarse según sus múltiples fines. Ver Ernesto Laclau y Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemonía y estrategia socialista: hacia una radicalización de la democracia* (Madrid, ES: Siglo XXI, 1987), 3.

<sup>86</sup> Algunos han intentado vincular al superhombre con la enseñanza del eterno retorno. No es el objetivo aquí ampliar ambos conceptos, aunque se reconoce el posible vínculo.

<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche, *Humano, demasiado humano*, 68.

<sup>88</sup> Ver el análisis que hace Bello de la influencia de Nietzsche en el pensamiento existencialista de Sartre. Eduardo Bello, “La sombra de Nietzsche en Sartre”, *Daimon*, n.º 35 (2005): 41-62.

por existir, se encuentra, surge en el mundo, y que después se define”.<sup>89</sup> El pensamiento existencialista, en este sentido, es indistinguible de la búsqueda por la libertad subjetiva. “Así pues, no hay naturaleza humana, porque no hay Dios para concebirla [...] [por lo tanto] el hombre no es otra cosa que lo que él se hace”.<sup>90</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, pareja de Sartre, introducirá este concepto en el campo de los estudios feministas, desestimando la concepción de la sexualidad como una característica esencial e inmutable de la humanidad, y en su lugar, la presentará como una construcción cultural.<sup>91</sup> La doctrina según la cual la configuración presente del espíritu humano es un mero e intercambiable estadio ha nacido.

El antiesencialismo a nivel filosófico ha llevado a una reformulación de los conceptos bioéticos y deontológicos (en el debate sobre el aborto, por ejemplo). La ortodoxia que considera que la vida humana es digna por sí misma está enfrentando despiadados ataques intelectuales, y quienes embanderan tal lucha consideran que la premisa de “la santidad de [la] vida humana es hoy en día un profundo problema”.<sup>92</sup> Peter Singer observa un subversivo corolario que se desprende del antiesencialismo: señalar como absurdo el mandamiento que considera que “toda vida humana tiene el mismo valor”, para invitarnos a reconocer que “el valor de la vida humana varía” (con base en criterios de no conciencia y no sintiencia, por ejemplo).<sup>93</sup>

En el ámbito político, la conexión entre antiesencialismo y antiindividualismo es demasiado estrecha. Al aborrecer al individuo como un fin en sí mismo y como portador de proyectos de vida autónomos, se aspira a organizar la sociedad entera en favor del “bien común” o el “bienestar

<sup>89</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *El existencialismo es un humanismo* (Barcelona, ES: Edhasa, 2004), 31.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Aquí tiene lugar la muy conocida frase de Simone de Beauvoir, de influencia sartriana, expresada en *El segundo sexo*. Feminismos (Madrid, ES: Cátedra, 2015), 371: “No se nace mujer: se llega a serlo. Ningún destino biológico, psíquico, económico, define la imagen que reviste en el seno de la sociedad la hembra humana; el conjunto de la civilización elabora este producto intermedio entre el macho y el castrado que se suele calificar de femenino” (énfasis añadido).

<sup>92</sup> Peter Singer, *Repensar la vida y la muerte: el derrumbe de nuestra ética tradicional* (Buenos Aires, AR: Paidós, 1997), 186.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

general”, donde la voluntad del colectivo es anterior a la del individuo.<sup>94</sup> Históricamente, tales postulados han sido las semillas del totalitarismo,<sup>95</sup> como es el caso de la Alemania nazi de Hitler cuyas “doctrinas del nacionalsocialismo son la cima de una larga evolución ideológica”<sup>96</sup> y de una propaganda antiindividualista.

El antiesencialismo en teología constituye un enfoque de crítica severa hacia la doctrina que sostiene que el ser humano ha sido creado a semejanza de Dios. En consecuencia, resulta comprensible que en épocas recientes los teólogos estén llevando a cabo una reconsideración de la noción de la *imago Dei* bajo presupuestos de “evolutionary biology, contemporary ethology, psychology and other social sciences [that] have all bolstered a more complex vision of the creaturely family within which the human species is found”.<sup>97</sup> Así, se difumina la visión antropocéntrica que daba al

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<sup>94</sup> Se hace aquí eco a la famosa frase atribuida a Hitler: “El bien común antes que el bien individual”. Barbara Miller Lane y Leila J. Rupp, *Nazi ideology before 1933: A documentation* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1978), 43.

<sup>95</sup> Benito Mussolini, en *La doctrina del fascismo*, trad. por A. Dabini (Viale dei Mille, IT: Vallecchi, 2022), 4, Kindle, expresa:

Siendo antiindividualista, la concepción fascista se pronuncia por el Estado; y se pronuncia por el individuo en cuanto éste coincide con el Estado, que es conciencia y voluntad universal del hombre en su existencia histórica. Está en contra del liberalismo clásico, que surgió de la necesidad de reaccionar contra el absolutismo y que terminó su función histórica desde que el Estado se transformó en la conciencia y voluntad populares. El liberalismo negaba al Estado en interés del individuo particular; el fascismo reconfirma al Estado como verdadera realidad del individuo [...]. Se pronuncia por la única libertad que puede ser una cosa seria, a saber, la libertad del Estado y del individuo en el Estado. Ello, en razón de que, para el fascista, todo reside en el Estado, y nada que sea humano o espiritual existe, y tanto a menos tiene valor, fuera del Estado. En este sentido, el fascismo es totalitario, y el Estado fascista, síntesis y unidad de todos los valores, interpreta, desarrolla e incrementa toda la vida del pueblo.”

<sup>96</sup> Friedrich A. Hayek, *Camino de servidumbre* (Madrid, ES: Alianza, 2007), 208.

Mario Sznajder, en “Mussolini, Benito”, *Diccionario Nietzsche*, 360, expresa que aunque se sabe de cierta influencia intelectual de Nietzsche en las ideas totalitarias de Hitler y Mussolini, ya que ambos lo conocieron a través de la lectura de sus libros, “la ausencia de precisión y detalle de N. en el terreno de la teoría política permitieron las más diferentes interpretaciones políticas para todos aquellos que, como Mussolini, estaban convencidos de la validez de los análisis del filósofo alemán para la crisis de la Modernidad europea occidental”.

<sup>97</sup> Daniel P. Horan, “Creation”, en *T. & T. Clark handbook of theological anthropology*, ed. por Mary Ann Hinsdale y Stephen Okey (Londres: T. & T. Clark, 2021), 55. Horan dice: “These reconsiderations of the Genesis creation accounts more broadly have led theologians to reexamine

ser humano un lugar privilegiado en la creación, pues el hombre llega a ser parte de una “familia” comunitaria más extensa.

En este tenor, Muray “have sought to extend the *imago Dei* to non-humans”.<sup>98</sup> Fergusson rechaza que la *imago Dei* refiera a “some ontological property or moral attribute that sets human animals apart from others”.<sup>99</sup> Moritz critica “the notion that humans are unique” y, en su lugar, propone que la *imago Dei* es “best understood in light of the Hebrew theological framework of *historical election* [de la humanidad]”.<sup>100</sup>

Tales propuestas se presentan como esfuerzos encaminados hacia la “resolución” del prolongado conflicto *creación-evolución* que buscan conciliar la narrativa bíblica con el paradigma evolutivo vigente y que resultan en un escepticismo con respecto a la literalidad del relato del Génesis,<sup>101</sup> a la vez que se considera la evolución teísta como presupuesto teológico. Por supuesto, la teoría darwiniana es un corolario de la concepción de

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the Christian doctrine of the *imago Dei* as well, which is such a significant dimension of classical theological anthropology”. *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>98</sup> Leslie A. Muray, “Human uniqueness vs. human distinctiveness: The ‘imago Dei’ in the kinship of all creatures”, *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 28, n.º 3 (2007): 307, acceso el 7 de julio de 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27944415>.

<sup>99</sup> David Fergusson, “Humans created according to the *imago Dei*: An alternative proposal”, *Zygon* 48 (2013): 440.

<sup>100</sup> Joshua M. Moritz, “Evolution, the end of human uniqueness, and the election of the *Imago Dei*”, *Theology and Science* 9, n.º 3 (2011): 307-8, acceso el 9 de julio de 2023, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2011.587665>. En este sentido, Moritz establece paralelos estructurales y teológicos entre la elección abrahámica y la adánica y nos invita a “understand Adam and Eve as the covenantal prototypes of both Abraham and Sarah, and Israel”. *Ibid.*, 324. Ve a Adán y Eva, quienes “as the primal human pair, are chosen and called to be a species of priests to the non-Adamic humans (the other hominids) and to other non-human animals”, 324. En ese sentido, la *imago Dei* es más un *Homo sanctus* que un *Homo singularis*, entendiendo santidad como “set apart”, 329. Finalmente (p. 330), expresa:

Understanding the divine likeness as election is consonant with evolutionary biology’s conception of human-animal continuity and the genealogical nature of species, and also acknowledges non-human animals and hominids as the ontological equivalents of humans and as fellow creatures that are substantively the same.

<sup>101</sup> “Belief in a first couple created *ab initio* in a state of moral, physical, and intellectual perfection is untenable in light of the findings of the natural sciences, at least since the time of Darwin. Fergusson, “Humans created according to the *imago Dei*”, 441).



que los seres humanos —y las especies, en general— no poseen atributos esenciales autodefinitorios.

### Observaciones finales

Con todo, tal vez Nietzsche tuvo éxito en vaticinar una era poscristiana después de la muerte de Dios, pues resulta innegable llamar así a la actual situación. Después de Nietzsche y los autores de la muerte de Dios, pareciera que la religión —y el cristianismo, en particular— no tiene ya nada que ofrecer. Aun así, ¿tendremos que concluir, al igual que Harari, que la religión resulta *necesaria* para la sobrevivencia solo por ser un relato cohesionador?

¿Se puede vivir sin religión? Quizá no, por definición de humano, por definición de religión, porque un colectivo humano sin ficciones quedaría inerte frente a cualquier otro que se invente un dogma con el que sus creyentes puedan reconocerse y cohesionarse. Ya les pasó a los neandertales.<sup>102</sup>

Tal enfoque sociológico de la religión erosionaría su propósito primigenio al manifestarla como expresiones divergentes de voluntades de poder. Por consiguiente, la filosofía de Nietzsche, en tanto que semilla posmoderna, se muestra incompatible con el *ethos* inherente a la ortodoxia bíblica. La carencia de estructura, la disolución de la verdad, la transmutación de los valores y la negación de la esencia humana engendran una vigorosa vanguardia intelectual en el ámbito argumentativo contra los axiomas cristianos.

Aunque de Nietzsche se pueden extraer algunas ideas provechosas, como su actitud crítica hacia la metafísica tradicional —que históricamente ha dominado el aparato teológico—, aquellos que defienden las categorías de pensamiento bíblico-cristianas deberían descartar su discurso. En virtud de ello, se justifica otorgar a Nietzsche únicamente el lugar que se merece, el de la interpretación. Esto es, solo el de la alternativa.

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<sup>102</sup> Jorge Wagensberg, “¿Se puede vivir sin religión?”, *El País.com*, 24 de octubre de 2018, acceso el 9 de julio, 2023, [https://elpais.com/cultura/2016/10/19/babelia/1476869722\\_225744.html](https://elpais.com/cultura/2016/10/19/babelia/1476869722_225744.html).



***RECENSIONES BIBLIOGRÁFICAS***

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Boskamp Ulloa, Karl G., *La naturaleza de la visión de Elifaz: un estudio exegético de Job 4,12-21*. Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos: Editorial UAP. 2022. ISBN 978-987-765-074-7

La obra *La naturaleza de la visión de Elifaz: un estudio exegético de Job 4,12-21* concentra años de investigación dedicados a una tesis de maestría defendida por Karl G. Boskamp Ulloa en la Universidad Adventista del Plata. En la misma institución el autor se desempeña en actividades de docencia, investigación y gestión. Su especialidad es la exégesis y la teología del Antiguo Testamento. Bajo su autoría y el sello Editorial UAP, se encuentran los libros *Historias de un padre y su hijo* (2019) y, en coautoría, *Manual de hebreo bíblico* (2020) y *Teólogos influyentes del siglo XX*, dos volúmenes (2017 y 2022). También en coautoría, pero en portugués, Boskamp firma los libros *Um pouco menor que anjos* (Reflexão, 2021) e *Interpreto, logo prego* (Unaspress, 2022).

Además de los libros mencionados y de cuatro capítulos en obras colectivas, el autor tiene más de una decena de artículos publicados en revistas científicas con referato en diversos países. El autor, en junio de 2024, defendió, también, su disertación doctoral, que lleva por título: “Un estudio exegético-teológico del conflicto cósmico”, en la que expande el tema investigado en su tesis de maestría. Boskamp desarrolla el tema del conflicto cósmico que enmarca y confiere sentido al Libro de Job.

La visión, narrada en líneas poéticas, es una de las más enigmáticas de las Escrituras, especialmente en relación con su naturaleza. En tal sentido, el autor intenta responder a tres cuestiones: su origen, el tipo de experiencia y la veracidad del episodio (p. 6). En la revisión bibliográfica —uno de los aspectos destacados del libro—, Boskamp investiga 204 obras (152 libros y 52 artículos académicos). Desde una perspectiva cronológica, las fuentes se dividen entre los siglos XIX y XXI (12 son del siglo XIX, 94 del XX y 44 del XXI; dos son asignadas al siglo XVII [de Condurco, 1651] y a la transición entre los siglos XX y XXI [de Clines, 1993-2011]).

La revisión bibliográfica no sigue una línea cronológica sino temática. Se enfoca en las obras que comentan la visión y dedica menor atención a



las obras que no la comentan. Los autores que comentan la visión e intentan definir su naturaleza son divididos en cuatro posiciones: (a) un origen divino para la visión, (b) falsedad a la visión, (c) el origen en Job; (d) el origen en Satanás. Mientras la mayoría de los comentaristas se quedan con la primera opción, Boskamp defiende la última, con argumentos desarrollados en los capítulos subsecuentes.

Habiendo hecho su revisión bibliográfica en el primer capítulo, el autor pasa a proponer su análisis del texto en los capítulos 2-4. En el capítulo 2, se hace un estudio exegético de la perícopa (Job 4,12-21) bajo la metodología designada como “método histórico-lingüístico”, que “no es otro que el conocido método histórico-gramatical y, por lo tanto, incluye nuevos enfoques para el estudio de una lengua o pieza literaria” (p. 1). Tal metodología se aplica a todo el libro. El estudio, por lo tanto, considera la “forma final (canónica)” del texto, desconsiderando “su formación o prehistoria” (p. 1). Entretanto, el término “forma final” es discutible, pues sugiere algún tipo de prehistoria, encaja bien en los estudios literarios, pero no tanto en el método histórico-gramatical que Boskamp utiliza. Tal vez la expresión “forma canónica” sería suficiente.

Al aproximarse al texto, el autor primeramente procura ubicar su perícopa en la estructura general del libro. Ella se sitúa en el primer ciclo de diálogos entre Job y sus amigos (3,1-11,20), más específicamente en la primera respuesta de los amigos a Job. Después, Boskamp pasa a la ecdótica, investigando los manuscritos más antiguos con el objetivo de establecer un texto crítico, el texto más próximo al original. Fragmentos de Qumrán, fechados entre 225 y 150 a. C., no contienen la sección de la perícopa, mientras que por otro lado confirman el texto masorético (TM). La crítica textual del Códice de Aleppo y del TM, los únicos testigos hebreos restantes, revelan pocas e insignificantes diferencias. Por su parte, la Septuaginta (LXX) no ofrece una base segura para que se identifiquen correcciones, según el autor (p. 42). A la vez, las versiones griegas, en conjunto con las hebreas y las traducciones antiguas, testifican de la ubicación original de Job en la perícopa. Según el autor, esto es suficiente para desarmar la hipótesis que asigna a Job como el origen de la visión, pues para sostener esta idea sería necesario reubicar Job 4 en el capítulo 3,

conforme proponen Tur-Sinai y otros (p. 21-26). Como afirma Boskamp, “no hay evidencia objetiva, ya sea interna o externa, para la transposición del texto” (p. 27). La ubicación actual (en 4,12-21) también es confirmada por el targum 4QTgJob, que conserva la posición de Job 3 y 4. La traducción de los targumim, aunque revele diferencias, corrobora el TM, especialmente la ubicación de la perícopa (p. 48).

A continuación, el autor prosigue con un análisis morfosintáctico del texto, dividido en dos partes: “detalles del suceso (vv. 12-16)” y “el mensaje recibido (vv. 17-21)”. Boskamp estructura su análisis comentando palabras claves. El autor apunta que el uso de גנב (“robar”), y שעפים (“agitación”), “pensamientos alarmantes”, en el versículo 13, denuncian el carácter furtivo, sigiloso, efímero y generalmente negativo de una visión “sin paralelos entre el lenguaje de los profetas y sacerdotes de Israel” (p. 62).

Boskamp contraargumenta con respecto al uso de חזיון en el versículo 13 como evidencia de una visión divina, mencionando referencias bíblicas que vinculan este vocablo a la falsa profecía y a un contexto de condenación y juicio (p. 63). Lo mismo se aplica a תרדמה (“sueño profundo”), generalmente descrita como reminiscente de la visión de Abrahán, que puede o no estar relacionada con una visión profética. A este punto, concluye que el contexto debe determinar el sentido preciso del pasaje. El punto es que, desde el principio de la visión, “en ninguno de los casos Dios es el sujeto explícito del ‘sueño profundo’” (p. 65), lo que excluye el origen divino de la visión.

Boskamp demuestra que los versículos 14 y 15 “parecen describir el accionar del misterioso visitante: ‘Un espanto me llamó [...] y un espíritu pasó delante de mí. Que פחד (“espanto”, “terror”) ha sido personificado es la lectura que naturalmente surge de la gramática del pasaje” (p. 67). De esa forma, el autor propone que la ambigüedad del vocablo פחד puede ser definida por un uso en paralelo al רוּח del inicio del versículo 15. Además, su función como sujeto del verbo קרא (“llamar”), indicaría una personificación del “espanto”. En ese sentido, רוּח debería ser traducido como “espíritu” y no como un “viento” o un soplo, como la mayoría de las versiones bíblicas lo traducen. En seguida, Boskamp presenta algunos de

los argumentos más convincentes sobre la personalidad o personificación del רוּחַ (p. 72):

(a) las acciones que realiza, que son יחלף על-פניו “pasó por delante”, יעמד (“se detuvo”, “se paró”, o “se puso en pie”); y (b) por el hecho de poseer una “forma” (מראהו) y una “voz” (קול), ambas captadas por Elifaz (v. 16). De este modo, “espíritu” es una opción muy factible, en el sentido de “espectro”.

El mensaje recibido (vv. 17 al 21) gira alrededor de la tesis central: “¿qué es el hombre para que sea puro y para que sea justo el nacido de mujer?” (v. 17). De esa manera, el criterio divino es presentado como estando bajo una luz diferente de las declaraciones divinas encontradas en el prólogo. A final, si Job era considerado justo por Dios en el inicio del libro, ¿cómo ahora nadie podría ser justo a los ojos del Señor? Por lo tanto, de manera lógica, Boskamp concluye que “la temática central del mensaje es la desconfianza divina y la destrucción del ser humano” (p. 96), al identificar una contradicción incurable con respecto a la tesis del origen divino de la visión de Elifaz.

El tercer capítulo, “El ‘espíritu’ de Job 4,15: ampliando el rango semántico de רוּחַ”<sup>1</sup>, se lanza a evaluar si el “vocablo puede calificar un ser sobrenatural”. Para tanto, analiza cuatro pasajes claves. Se destaca el primero (1 Re 22,19-23). En este pasaje, uno de los presentes de “todo el ejército del cielo” (כל-צבא השמים) es descrito como un “espíritu de mentira o engaño” (רוּחַ שקר) (p. 107). En palabras de Boskamp, “claramente, no se trata de una mera personificación o creación poética, sino de un ente o individuo concreto. Este se mueve, habla y actúa por cuenta propia. Su carácter está nuevamente asociado a la falsa profecía” (pp. 107-108). Así que el autor desmantela el argumento de que רוּחַ no es utilizado en asociación a espíritus malos o a falsa profecía. Además, Boskamp llama la atención sobre las similitudes de 1 Reyes 22 y el Satán de Job 1-2, entre

<sup>1</sup> Esta es la grafía corregida de los caracteres hebreos del título del capítulo 3, que se encuentran invertidos en el libro, página 99. Lo mismo pasa con la inversión de los caracteres hebreos en los intertítulos de las páginas 99, 101, 102 y 111. Otros pequeños errores ortográficos son encontrados en las páginas 19, 21, 22, 78, 85, 89, 120. En comparación con el mercado editorial y las publicaciones académicas en general, se trata de un número de errores mínimo.



ellas, la mención de una asamblea celestial y el uso del artículo en “el espíritu” (הרוח) y “el Satán” (השטן) (p. 110).

Quedaría una observación sobre las connotaciones similares a רוּחַ con relación a πνεῦμα en el Nuevo Testamento. Parece carecer de una discusión más amplia la afirmación de que los siete espíritus del prólogo del Apocalipsis serían “siete ángeles”, aunque indubitadamente representen el Espíritu de Dios (ver pp. 117-118). Bajo otra perspectiva, los siete espíritus de Dios probablemente aluden a la pluralidad y a la plenitud de la acción global del Espíritu en favor de las siete iglesias y del mundo.<sup>2</sup> Aunque no parezca describir ángeles en este caso, el término πνεῦμα es utilizado para describir un ser personal. Como es presentado por Boskamp, y es ampliamente admitido, la evidencia general del Nuevo Testamento indica que πνεῦμα describe, en determinados contextos, seres sobrenaturales, principalmente demonios (p. 119).

El cuarto y último capítulo completa el análisis al evaluar “el contexto del libro como clave hermenéutica”. Empezando por la motivación de la asamblea del prólogo, el contexto funciona como un elemento determinante para la elucidación del tema de investigación. Más que la justicia de los hombres, se discute la justicia de Dios, “un cuestionamiento hacia Dios mismo” (p. 135). Dios considera justo a Job, una tesis completamente opuesta al mensaje que el espíritu susurró a Elifaz. El mensaje del espíritu a Elifaz ejerce influencia sobre lo que mencionan los otros amigos de Job y sus palabras “se acoplan demasiado bien al argumento del Satán del prólogo”. La reprobación divina a Elifaz y a los amigos de Job es una evidencia cabal de que su visión no vino de lo alto (pp. 147-148).

La obra como un todo ilumina con claridad meridiana el tema que el autor se propuso elucidar. Las posibles observaciones periféricas identificadas de modo alguno afectan la claridad y la efectividad de su investigación. El lenguaje preciso, el manejo profesional de las lenguas, el vocabulario rico y el estilo elegante, el rigor académico, la perspicacia y

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2.<sup>a</sup> ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 63-64.

sus sorprendentes *insights* no dejan duda de que se trata de una obra de referencia sobre el asunto.

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