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Commentary — From the Margins *Statutes by which They Could Not Live*

Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the wilderness. But I withheld my hand and acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations I had brought them out. Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, because they had not obeyed my rules, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their father's idols. Moreover, *I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life, and I defiled them through their very gifts in their offering up all their firstborn, that I might devastate them. I did it that they might know that I am the Lord [YHWH].* Ezek 20:21–26 emphasis added.

Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, retired professor of Theology and Church History, Andrews University, argues in the tenth chapter of his recently published book, *Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical*, that the sacrament of infant baptism became an essential component of “Christian sacralism,” which replaced the worship of the Roman emperor as *dominus et deus* (lord and god) ... sacralism is the social construct that would have all citizens of a country or a state being bound together by the same religion. And I have previously argued that Greek philosophers in Christendom constructed a Roman horse, a mental paradigm like Odysseus’ physical construction of the Trojan horse, that won for Greece the empire heplite warriors and Greek triremes could not win by land or by sea.

In his *ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER* No. 200, Bacchiocchi writes, “When Christianity became in the fourth century the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christian sacralism replaced pagan sacralism as the political and religious creed of Catholic Christianity. “Not surprisingly, this gave added support to the growing practice of infant baptism, because baptism into the church became almost the same as birth into the state. Sacralism survived the Reformation, not only in those nations and states which remained Roman Catholic, but also in Protestant areas which remained state churches a well.”

Baptism and especially infant baptism into Christendom equates to birth (citizenship) into a nation—Bacchiocchi’s point is well made as far as it goes: for

Christian sacralism became the means which God used to keep the Church exiled in spiritual Babylon, the single kingdom of this world, after He delivered this latter Israel into the hand of Satan, the king of Babylon (Isa 14:4), for similar reasons to why He delivered natural Israel into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of earthly Babylon.

Upon reading Bacchiocchi's excerpts from, and condensation of his book *Popular Beliefs*, I realized how far apart we are theologically—and it isn't that Bacchiocchi gets things terribly wrong; it's that he is apparently unable to entertain the concept that the spiritual Body of Christ died in a manner analogous to how the physical body of Christ died and was dead for three days and three nights. Apparently his frames of reference do not allow him to entertain the concept that God would deliver to the lawless Church, as He did to natural Israel, statutes by which the Church could not live. Therefore, in his scholarship, he repeatedly returns to the practices of the early—but not real early—Church and to the writings of lawless theologians as he seeks to show where error was introduced. His focus seems to be on what went wrong within the Christian corpse rather than on what Jesus taught about Moses who wrote of Him. And it is Bacchiocchi's use of the writings of early Church fathers to introduce discussions of doctrines that effectively prevents him from focusing on what Paul, John, Peter, and James taught, but then, this is the problem present in the works of others who have spent lifetimes studying "Church history."

Paul writes,

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God [θεός]. ... And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath [πνεύματι] of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. (2 Thess 2:1–8)

Disciples are the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16). The man of perdition does not take his seat in an earthly temple constructed of stones and timber, but within the Church, the "ekklesia—ἐκκλησία." He is a man that is for spiritually circumcised Israel as King Saul was for physically circumcised Israel. He will do much to take Christendom to the world, and especially into the 10-40 window, but he will have an evil spirit about him and he will be a man of lawlessness, a man of sin.

Paul told the Thessalonians not to be shaken or worried about all of the things that will happen between when he wrote them and when the man of perdition is revealed: although some disciples will argue that the man of perdition is this

Pope or that Pope, their arguments are inherently flawed because this man of sin doesn't declare himself to be the vicar of Christ [i.e., in place of Christ], but θεός, God Himself in the form of Christ Jesus. And this man of sin makes this declaration when the Church is alive as one body of many members. That is not the case today: the Church is a spiritually lifeless corpse, a declarative statement that can be defended by inscribing Christian rhetoric as Lutherans attack Jehovah Witnesses, and Baptists attack Latter Day Saints, and Evangelical Christians attack the Roman and Greek Churches. There is no "head" that controls both Catholics and Mormons as the head of a human body controls the movements of both arms. There is no shared *head* that rules over both Sabbatarian disciples and lawless Sunday-observing disciples—the spiritual Body of Christ is not divided as to which day it enters into the presence of God, or as to when it takes the sacraments of bread and wine. Therefore, the Christendom that is visible to the world for all to see either is not of God or is not now spiritually alive.

As Paul ordered the saints at Corinth to deliver the man who was with his father's wife to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that the man's spirit might be saved when judgments are revealed (1 Cor 5:5), God formally delivered the Church into the hand of the prince of this world at the Council of Nicea (ca 325 CE) for the destruction of the flesh; i.e., for the destruction of that which is visible in this world and what the world identifies as Christendom. Again, Paul writes that the Church is one: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews and Greeks, slaves and free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:12–13). But today, the Church is decidedly not one body with many members, but the trampled and severed and separated remains of one body, with each segment of the body being like a segment of a sunflower starfish, having regenerated a head and the appetites of the belly. What is seen today is not one Church of many members; rather, what's seen is the trampled remains of one body that has been broken into thousands of disconnected and disjointed fractions by Death, the horseman that devours and breaks in pieces and stamps what is left.

Today, there is no one living Body that represents the Church Jesus built. Like His physical body, His spiritual Body was crucified and died a death like His. And as the gates of Hades could not prevail over Jesus' physical body, the gates of Hades will not prevail over His spiritual Body. As His physical body suffered no corruption, His spiritual Body will be resurrected without corruption ... but today, His spiritual Body is a dismembered, putrified corpse that turns the stomachs of Observant Jews and Obedient Christians.

Since Nicea, the Church has been an instrument used by the prince of this world to destroy visible assemblies of saints obedient to God: throughout the Middle Ages, the disciple who would keep the Sabbaths of God was not tortured into recanting by infidels, but by the State Church—by men who professed to worship Christ Jesus and the Father. The worst atrocities committed by barbaric hordes cannot match in pain or abuse or applications of absolute cruelty the deeds of pious inquisitors, protected by the Cross. Christianity became a stench in the nostrils of all human beings, but this was something in which the prince of

this world could take particular pride. And that stench continues to spoil the very word “Christian” as endtime disciple struggle against the perceptions this world has of Christians, and the expectations endtime disciples have of themselves.

How is a Christian to exercise love toward those who have used the name of Christ to commit the most heinous crimes imaginable against dissenters, and will commit even worse indignities in the near future? The natural self cannot forgive State Churches for what has been done in the name of Christianity. Yet, love must be shown to the Catholic and to the Lutheran for Jesus washed the feet of Judas Iscariot a few hours before Judas betrayed Him. Only the inner creature born of spirit is really able to forgive those responsible for a long holocaust against dissent and dissenters. Thus, despite how difficult it is to reach out to Catholic or Lutheran and warn either of what is coming (Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh for he knew the city would repent; his culturally inherited animosity against Assyrians wanted to see the city destroyed by God), and despite how much neither Catholic or Lutheran wants to hear a warning about what will happen, endtime disciples must attempt to do in love what they are naturally loathed to do [many are the Sabbatarian disciples who will preach repentance to lawless Christians out of condescension instead of love].

Endtime disciples must warn those who will not hear that God fully intends to resurrect the Body of Christ from death at a second Passover liberation of Israel; that at this second Passover liberation all firstborns not covered by the blood of the paschal Lamb of God will perish; that the sacraments of bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ on only one night of the year, the night on which He was betrayed. Every other day or night of the year, the sacraments represent Cain’s offering of the fruit of the ground.

The gospel that endtime disciples must deliver is an easy message to preach: all who endure to the end shall be saved (Matt 24:13). But to put this simple message of good news into context takes more words, for those who endure to the end will not be born of spirit until the Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh (Joel 2:28) halfway through seven endtime years of tribulation. Those who must endure in faith unto the end are the third part of humankind (Zech 13:9) that does not now, nor will not before the middle of the Tribulation identify itself as “Christian.” And this third part is even more reluctant to hear a message about Christ Jesus than are Catholics and Lutherans today—this third part is today Muslim or Buddhist or nothing at all, so none of this third part wants to hear a message about living as Jesus lived.

Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, but Christendom, like Judaism before, will not heed the words of Christ Jesus but will continue in sin until the flesh is utterly destroyed. And scholars like retired professor Bacchiocchi will not deliver these words for they were not delivered by earlier generations of disciples ... the mystery of lawlessness was already at work when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. Already there were disciples advocating not using Grace to practice walking uprightly before God, but to continue in sin. Already there were lawless disciples twisting Paul’s epistles into instruments of their own destruction (2 Pet 3:15–17). And what has changed in almost two millennia?

Paul commanded that the sinner who was with his father’s wife be delivered to Satan so that his spirit might be saved, and God delivered the Church into the

hand of Satan so that some who have been born of spirit might be saved when judgments are revealed. Through Christian sacralism, once God delivered the Church into the hand of the prince of this world no disciple escaped from spiritual Babylon to return to heavenly Jerusalem for 12 centuries: heavenly Jerusalem was formally without inhabitants from 325 CE to 1525 CE as physical Jerusalem was without the temple from 586 BCE to 516 BCE ... disciples are the temple of God as Jesus was the temple He would raise up in three days (John 2:19). Natural Jews were not absent from physical Jerusalem for 70 years, for work began on the second temple in 535 BCE when Zerubbabel laid the foundational stones. But the temple was absent from Jerusalem for 70 years—and it is this absence of the temple that satisfied the prophecy of Jeremiah (29:10).

The temple is the house of God, with this “house—οικία” not being a physical structure made from stone and timber, but the lineage or family of the Father ... the house of Israel is the lineage of, or descent from the patriarch Israel, and those who have descended from the patriarch are identified as “Israel,” a noun that names the holy nation of God. In the same way the house of Coco Chanel is known simply by the name “Chanel.” And the house of the Father, where Jesus has gone to prepare many “monai—μοναὶ” or legal stays as in stays of execution (John 14:2), is known by the single icon, “God.” Thus, all disciples born of spirit as sons of God are of the house of God, and as such can be identified by the name of the house from which they take their adopted lineage. It will be these sons of God that are one with the Father and the Son. It will be these sons of God that will comprise New Jerusalem when this holy city comes down from heaven adorned as a bride, and comes as the wife of the Lamb (Rev 21:2, 9–10), not as the unmarried Bride—the marriage took place in heaven a millennium earlier.

Every person who left house and family to follow Christ Jesus will receive adoption into the house of the Father, the house identified by the icon, *God*. Through birth by spirit, a new creature—a son of God—is born within the tent of flesh of the old man or old nature. This new creature is not born as a servant, but as a son, now a little lower than the angels, but a younger sibling to Christ Jesus (Rom 8:29). This new creature that is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, bond nor free (Gal 3:28) is not the tent of flesh that remains male or female, Jew or Greek. This new creature is life that has come from heaven and from the Father now residing inside of time and in a temporary tent, an earthly house, which can and will be destroyed. This new creature will then dwell in a house not made with hands (2 Cor 5:1) if this new creature walks as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6; 1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17).

But the disciple who has not used Grace to practice walking uprightly before God will not continue to walk uprightly when the man of sin is revealed ... from the window seat of a jetliner at 30,000 feet, look out over America and see if you can find a “Christian” who walks as Jesus, an Observant Jew, walked. Certainly many self-identified Christians can be found who walk as Gentiles, hostile to Moses and unwilling to believe Jesus. Many self-identified Christians can be found who sincerely believe they are so special to God that they will be raptured to heaven where they will escape the seven endtime years of tribulation. Many self-identified Christians will be found who look for a third temple to be

constructed in present day Jerusalem. But few if any Christians will be found who keep the Sabbaths of God, and who take the Passover sacraments of bread and wine on the night that Jesus was betrayed, the outward manifestations of inner obedience to God.

Christian sacralism left heavenly Jerusalem a lonely and mostly abandoned house for centuries—a city is a house that has grown large; thus, the great city of endtime Babylon is simply the house of the Adversary that has grown large from God having consigned all of humankind to disobedience so that He could have mercy on all (Rom 11:32). And visible Christendom today dwells in this house of the Adversary ... the evidence that Christendom dwells in the house of disobedience comes from its transgression of the Sabbath commandment. While scholars like Dr. Bacchiocchi will strive to show that Sunday observance entered Christianity during the reign of Hadrian, the Apostle Paul wrote that “the mystery of lawlessness was already at work” (2 Thess 2:7) long before Hadrian attempted to eradicate Judaism and all things Jewish. It was at work from the beginning; so the scholar who believes that he or she finds evidence of Sunday worship among Christian fellowships by 60 CE has found where this mystery of lawlessness was at work—and that is all the scholar has found. That is also all a scholar like Dr. Bacchiocchi finds when he finds Sunday worship beginning about 135 CE. They find nothing that Paul did not say was already present within the Jesus Movement. They spend lifetimes finding what Paul tells readers about ... perhaps their work is self-validating, but it brings almost no one to Christ, or into repentance. Perhaps their work is a necessary part of the restoration of all things. If it is, then let these scholars also believe God and not other men or women, especially not ones that teach disciples to ignore the Sabbaths of God.

Today, Christian sacralism is actively seen in African nations where conversion of a headman causes all of his familial descendants to also convert to Christianity even though few if any of them have been born of spirit. The justification for this family conversion is found in Acts 16:31–33, where Paul baptized the entire family of the Philippian jailer upon the conversion of the jailer. And this justification is expressed in Paul writing, “If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving spouse is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise the children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy” (1 Cor 7:13–14). ... Baptism of the entire family was for sanctification of family members, or for making the entire family holy, thereby placing the family in the same relationship with God as natural Israel had with God under the Old Testament. This is not a baptism unto repentance as John’s baptism was (Matt 3:11), nor is it a baptism unto the death of the old self once God has drawn a person from this world through giving the person the earnest of the Holy Spirit.

When Philip preached Christ to the people of Samaria, many believed when they heard him and saw the signs that he did (Acts 8:6, 12). He baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus, but they did not receive the Holy Spirit or spiritual birth (vv. 14–16), for the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to Gentiles as it had been given to Jews on that day of Pentecost following Calvary. Peter and John had to directly transfer the Holy Spirit to these disciples in Samaria by the laying

on of hands as Jesus directly transferred the Holy Spirit to the ten disciples when He breathed on them the afternoon of the day of His Resurrection (John 20:22). But following the empowering of the disciples on that day of Pentecost, the three thousand were baptized and the Holy Spirit received without the laying on of hands. The direct transfer of the Holy Spirit to natural Jews by the laying on of hands following baptism was no longer necessary. However, it was still necessary for Gentile converts until Cornelius and his household were empowered by the Holy Spirit in the same way that natural Jewish converts were empowered on that day of Pentecost (Acts 10:44–48). Since that day, the direct transfer of the Holy Spirit was not needed when disciples were baptized into the Body until the Body died from unbelief that became disobedience.

Those whom John baptized did not receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:3–5) because when John baptized the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to either Jews or Gentiles; thus, what is seen is that baptism is not for one purpose, nor does it produce one result. It is for repentance and for the death of the old self or old natural. It is also for inclusion into the house of Israel and sanctification, the reason a Jewish proselyte was baptized. And when Paul baptizes the uninformed or less informed members of the Philippian jailer's household—for the sake of argument, the jailer's children and servants—it was for the same reason as a Jewish proselyte was baptized, and not for repentance.

Augustine takes this argument of baptism for inclusion to absurdity: a few drops of holy rain water sprinkled on the forehead of an infant have nothing to do with repentance or with accepting Christ as one's Savior. These droplets have no bearing on whether the human being will be consigned to disobedience because of Adam's transgression: the child will be for this is the will of the Father until the single kingdom of this world is given to the Son of Man. And the condition of being sanctified doesn't mean that a person is not a son of disobedience; it only means that the person has special consideration when it comes to being drawn from this world if that is what the person desires.

The condition of a sanctified child of Christian converts was like that of natural Israel, a sanctified nation, when in a far land. If Israel in a far land turned to God and began to love Him with heart and mind, keeping his laws and statutes by faith, God would bring Israel back into His presence and give to the nation circumcised hearts (Deut 30:1–6). The same applied/applies to the child of a convert: if this child, in a far land, turns to God by faith and begins to love God with heart and mind—this requires undertaking a spiritual journey of faith analogous to Abraham's physical journey of faith—the Father will now draw this child of the convert from this world and to Himself, thereby giving to this child the earnest of the spirit. It is only from being a son of disobedience that the Father draws a person from this world; so until born of spirit, regardless of how pious the person thought he or she was, the person was a son of disobedience. And the commandment pious sons of disobedience are most likely to break is the Sabbath commandment, which includes all of the Sabbaths listed in Leviticus chapter 23 (because of the changed reason under the Moab covenant for remembering the Sabbath — *cf.* Ex 20:11; Deut 5:15). And Dr. Bacchiocchi as the pious son of Seventh Day Adventist parents made no journey of faith when he continued in the tradition of his parents instead of making a journey of faith past

them into full Sabbath obedience ... it will be Dr. Bacchiocchi's parents who cleansed their hearts by faith and who will have had their hearts spiritually circumcised. It seems apparent that this cleansing of the heart by faith still remains ahead of Dr. Bacchiocchi, perhaps the reason he has been given additional time to live. May God grant him the wisdom to use the time he has been given to make the long neglected journey of faith necessary to cleanse his heart so that it can be circumcised; for he must move beyond the house Ellen G. White built. It was from the Roman Church to this house that his parents journeyed, a trek of faith of considerable distance. But his parents' faith will not cleanse his heart so that it can be circumcised.

As God gave lawless natural Israel statutes and rules by which the nation could not live, God has given the lawless Church statutes and rules by which it could not live—and it did not live. The Christianity that is visible for all to see is the spiritual Trojan horse constructed by Greek philosophers to win an empire from Rome, an empire that Greeks couldn't win openly with swords and spears, an empire to be won by stealth and deceit.

Scholars who have spent their careers studying this spiritual Trojan horse have yet to appreciate the subtlety of the Adversary who inspired this construction when God gave to the Church statutes by which the Church could not live ... if God was going to take the life of the lawless Church, then the Adversary was right there to use the corpse to poison generations of disciples, apparently little realizing that Christ Jesus would restore all things, including life to His spiritual Body before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Endtime prophecies had to be unsealed in the time of the end, and they have been; so the scenario is mostly in place for the seven endtime years of tribulation to begin. We're only waiting for the spiritual king of Greece to defeat the spiritual kings of Persia (Dan 10:13, 20; 8:5–7, 20–21) in a manner analogous to how Alexander defeated Darius in a decade, the shadow of the war presently going on in the heavenly realm between these two demonic princes within Satan's reigning hierarchy. For as soon as the king of Greece prevails, the great horn or first king of this federation of kings will be supernaturally broken at the second Passover liberation of Israel, when the ministry of the two witnesses will begin. It is this second Passover liberation of Israel that will see life restored to the Body of Christ, and life with disciples again clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49). Until then, disciples are to remain in Jerusalem, now a city with theological coordinates, not geographical coordinates.

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