

The Woman Atop The Beast (Part 2)

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The aged John had never seen anything like this before! God had shown him a number of incredible visions: the very throne of God, the 144,000 and innumerable multitude, the Two Witnesses, various beasts and plagues of every description. But this one seemed to top them all—not because it was so strange or unbelievable, but because it portrayed something so horribly evil!

What the apostle saw, described in the first six verses of Revelation 17, graphically depicts the great false church that sat upon the revivals of the Roman Empire. This "great harlot" has made the whole world "drunk with the wine of her fornication" (verse 2) and controls millions of people with her idolatry. Over the centuries, she has manipulated kings and emperors and prime ministers to do her ungodly bidding worldwide.

In the previous issue, we looked into why God illustrates this false church as a prostitute, and saw that she has brewed a foul mixture of paganism and Christianity. This syncretistic doctrine has presently intoxicated over one billion people and many millions more in the past two thousand years. We also saw that her meddling in the affairs of nations—as she has done incessantly since the days of Constantine—is another proof of her whoredoms.

We looked into the matter of Mary worship and how she has been elevated to the point that she virtually replaces the Holy Spirit in the supposed Trinity. Mary is simply the modern manifestation of the ancient goddess Ishtar, also known as Semiramis, Astarte, Rhea, Ceres, Diana, Venus, etc. Finally, we noted how the harlot's colors, purple and scarlet, have come down to today in the garments her clergy wear for official activities.

Already, the proof unmistakably points to the largest and most powerful of "Christian" churches, the Roman Catholic Church. However, much more evidence exists to put this fact beyond question. We **know** who controls the Beast!

Wealth and Luxury

Another clue to the great harlot's identity is her adornments: "gold and precious stones and pearls" (Revelation 17:4). This woman is one rich prostitute! From her fornication with "the kings of the earth" and making "the inhabitants of the earth . . . drunk with the wine of her fornication" (verse 2), she has made a killing!

The Roman Catholic Church is by far the wealthiest institution on the face of the earth. Not even considering her wealth in priceless art, ancient documents and properties, the Catholic Church has invested in projects, corporations and nations all over the world, giving her vast returns yearly. She owns or controls hundreds of schools, colleges and universities in many countries. And, of course, she receives donations from the faithful in every type of currency in the world.

The golden cup that the harlot holds in her hand is further evidence of her identity. The chalice, states *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, "[is] the most important of the sacred vessels. . . . [It] may be of gold or silver, and if the latter, then the inside must be surfaced with gold" (Broderick edition, 1976, pp. 103-

104). Multiple thousands of these "sacred" cups adorn the altars of Catholic churches around the globe.

Dave Hunt, in his 1994 book, *A Woman Rides the Beast*, writes:

Most of Rome's wealth has been acquired through the sale of salvation. Untold billions of dollars have been paid to her by those who thought they were purchasing heaven on the installment plan for themselves or loved ones. The practice continues to this day — blatantly where Catholicism is in control, less obviously here in the United States. (p. 75)

This "sale of salvation," historically called "indulgences," precipitated the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. For certain sums of money, a Catholic could buy his release from purgatory or decrease his stay there. Dominican Friar Tetzel, commissioned by Pope Leo X (1513-1521) to sell indulgences, used this sales pitch to rake in vast sums for "Mother Church": "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs!"

Today, the Catholic Church sells masses. Many devout people stipulate in their wills that an amount of money should be given to the Church so that masses may be performed in their behalf every week, month, quarter or year. By this posthumous devotion, they hope to be accepted more quickly into heaven from purgatory.

D. Antonio Gavin, a Spanish writer of the late seventeenth century who fled the Inquisition to England, describes the wealth of one Catholic church in the Spanish town of Zaragoza:

[The crown on the image of the Virgin Mary is] twenty-five pounds weight, set all over with large diamonds, so that nobody can see any gold in it, and everybody thinks it is all made of diamonds. Beside this rich one, she has six crowns more of pure gold, set with rich diamonds and emeralds. . . . The roses of diamonds and other precious stones she has to adorn her mantle are innumerable; for though she [the statue of Mary] is drest [sic] every day in the colour of the church's festival, and never useth twice [in a year] the same mantle, which is of the best stuff imbroidered [sic] with gold, she has new roses of precious stones every day for three years together, she has three hundred and sixty-five necklaces of pearls and diamonds, and six chains of gold set with diamonds, which are put on her mantle on the great festivals of Christ. (*A Master Key to Popery: In Five Parts*, 1773, pp. 157-158.)

Tourists can see these and many other treasures today in the church of Our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragoza. This is only one church in one small town!

Blood of the Saints

The final description of this wicked harlot centers on her bloodthirsty persecution of God's people: "And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Revelation 17:6). After he saw this, the apostle John was simply dumbfounded! What he saw probably far surpassed anything the early church had experienced under the Roman emperors. Just imagine how horrifying it would be to watch someone drink and become intoxicated on the blood of family members! That is how John felt!

This clue also squares with what we know of the Roman Catholic Church. She is famous, not just for persecuting those she deems "heretics," but also for *three* Inquisitions: Medieval (1227-1492), Spanish (1478-1834) and Roman (1542-present)! The Inquisition, now called the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, still occupies the Palace of the Inquisition next to the Vatican.

Beyond that, the Church decreed crusades against non-Catholics all over Europe. She hunted down thousands of Bogomils, Huguenots, Albigenses, Waldenses, Anabaptists and others, and imprisoned, tortured, massacred and/or burned them. Many thousands of Jews and Moors died in Church-sponsored pogroms and wars. This does not even consider her several crusades to free Jerusalem from "infidels."

How many people does this involve? It is literally **MILLIONS**! Over three million died in the Spanish Inquisition alone (R. W. Thompson, *The Papacy and the Civil Power*, 1876, p. 82)! The inquisitors believed that it was "better for a hundred innocent people to die than for one heretic to go free." The Roman Catholic Church justifies these deaths as a necessity of the times to keep the Church doctrinally pure. Historian Will Durant, author of *The Story of Civilization*, writes:

Compared with the persecution of heresy in Europe from 1227 to 1492, the persecution of Christians by the Romans in the first three centuries after Christ was a mild and humane procedure. . . . Making every allowance required by an historian and permitted to a Christian, we must rank the Inquisition, along with the wars and persecutions of our time, as among the darkest blots on the record of mankind, revealing a ferocity unknown in any beast. (Vol. IV, p. 784.)

Peter de Rosa, a Catholic historian and a former Jesuit, describes Roman Catholicism as

the most persecuting faith the world has ever seen . . . [forcing] the throne to impose the Christian religion on all its subjects. [Pope] Innocent III murdered far more Christians in one afternoon . . . than any Roman emperor did in his entire reign. (*Vicars of Christ: The Dark Side of the Papacy*, 1988, p. 180.)

It is easy to understand why John "marveled with great amazement."

The Harlot Exposed!

"But the angel said to me, 'Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery [*hidden truth*, margin] of the woman. . .'" (Revelation 17:7). It is as if the angel says to John, "What did you expect? You know how much persecution the church has already received. It could only get worse!"

The angel then primarily concentrates on the beast upon which the woman rides, but he scatters a few tidbits about the harlot along the way. The first appears in verse 9: "Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads [of the beast] are seven mountains on which the woman sits." Mountains are biblical symbols for governments or nations, as in Isaiah 2:2-3:

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the *mountain* of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the *mountains*, and shall be exalted above the *hills*; and all *nations* shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the *mountain* of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and

we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Thus, God reveals that the harlot sits upon—or controls like a rider guides a horse—seven governments or nations. These seven heads or mountains, as Herbert Armstrong often explained, are seven revivals of the Holy Roman Empire from Justinian (AD 554) to the final world dictator who will rise in Europe soon. It was the Roman Catholic Church that pulled the strings in the past six revivals, and she will do so again in the seventh.

The next item comes in verse 15: "And he said to me, 'The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.'" This verse is a biblical definition of what "waters" often means symbolically in Scripture. Thus, when the serpent spews "water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood" (Revelation 12:15), we can surmise that Satan will send an army of many people after the true church of God when she flees to a place of safety.

The angel is showing the worldwide influence and dominance of the great harlot. The Roman Catholic Church has adherents in every nation, speaking every language. Wherever the Pope travels, throngs gather to hear him speak and celebrate mass. No other church or religious system can claim such a global impact.

The angel discloses the clinching evidence in Revelation 17:18: "And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." We must remember when John wrote this book: about AD 95. At the time, only one city reigned over the kings of the earth—Rome! From Britain to the Caspian Sea and from Gibraltar to the Red Sea, Rome reigned supreme!

More amazing is that the Catholic Church took the name "Roman" and chose Vatican City—sitting in the heart of Rome—as its headquarters! For centuries, the Church controlled Rome itself and came to be associated with it. Today, even more than during the height of the Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church truly reigns over many nations of the world. Most countries exchange ambassadors with the Vatican, and many Catholic nations consider the Church's wishes before making secular decisions. The Pope still retains the authority to excommunicate kings and prime ministers, as well as to put cities and nations under interdict. (An interdict is a censure withdrawing most sacraments and Christian burial, consigning everyone to hell; this fundamentally excommunicates everyone in the area under it.)

What is the end of this horrible woman on the beast? The biblical principle, "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52), is apropos to the fate of the false church. The angel says in Revelation 17:16, "And the ten horns [*kings*, verse 12] which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire." As she persecuted, tortured and killed thousands, so God will destroy her!

Watch and Come Out!

There is little room for doubt. All the evidence fits the Roman Catholic Church! Many books and articles have been written detailing the power, wealth, idolatry and atrocities of this great false church that claims to represent God on earth, and the authors have reached the same conclusion as we have.

As Will Durant writes in *The Story of Civilization*, the activities of the great harlot are a dark blot upon the history of man. Worse than that, though God is not involved with her, the harlot's activities reflect upon Him because she claims to be Christian. An anonymous Catholic, quoted by Peter de Rosa, said, "It would be better to be an atheist than believe in the God of the Inquisition." God says through Isaiah, "My name is blasphemed continually every day" (Isaiah 52:5).

For those of us in God's true church, this knowledge helps us to watch world events as they begin to develop into fulfilling the prophecies of the Bible. Jesus warns us:

Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch! (Mark 13:35-37)

The identity of the great harlot of Revelation 17 is a key piece of understanding that will help us to identify the coming Beast power in Europe. We will be able to recognize when the political power begins to use religion to unite the nations of the new Roman Empire—just as Constantine did in AD 325—and how the harlot in turn will use the Beast to further her aims. Thus, we will have advance warning on the rest of the world—if *we are watching!*

Of greater importance is the warning God gives in Revelation 18:4-5:

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."

Though Revelation 18 speaks generally about the whole Babylonian system that this world follows, the great false church plays a major role in it. We need to be examining ourselves and our mode of life to see if we have absorbed any of the harlot's ways. If we have, we still have time to "come out" of them, purifying ourselves as the Bridegroom is pure (I John 3:3).

The bride of Christ, unlike the great harlot in her opulent and vainglorious scarlet and purple, wears "fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Revelation 19:8). Our Savior is hard at work sanctifying His bride,

that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:27)

Soon, we will be able to say, "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready" (Revelation 19:7)!