

Catholic Paranoia

or

Future Persecuting Power

Background

The SDA Community has always viewed the Pope and the Catholic Church with great interest – and fear. It seems that for any move or any statement the Catholic Church makes, there is always someone on his/her toes ready to report it to the rest of the SDA community. Nothing seems too small or insignificant to be talked about. The process of spreading this information has sped up considerably with the internet and e-mail.

It is a historical fact that the Catholic Church under the Papacy severely and wrongfully treated any opponents. That occurred in Europe during the so-called Dark Ages. The United States of America came into existence because of religious persecution in the “old world.” There is no question in my mind that the Papacy is the fulfillment of Daniel 7. In this newsletter we will look at some Biblical facts that will challenge our attitude toward the Catholic Church. Do we really need to fear a future, severe, and systematic persecution by the Catholic Church?

Bible Support #1

Daniel 7:25 says that the Little Horn will speak pompous words, it will be boastful towards God and intend to change times and laws. The Catholic Church has made claims through the years actually taking responsibility for changing “set times and laws” even though it was Emperor Constantine of Rome who in 321 A.D. was the first one to legislate Sunday as a day of rest. All statements in Daniel 7:25 fit to the Catholic Church:

*He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. **The saints will be handed over** to him for a time, times and half a time. (NIV)*

The focus of our study here, however, is the last sentence of this verse. Due to judgment in heavenly courts, the saints were “handed over” to this persecuting power *for a certain time*. Since we are dealing with a judgment and a time span we should use the Year-Day Principle. (Please see Numbers 14:34.) A time, times and half a time is 3½ years or 1260 days which prophetically equals 1260 years. Most scholars start counting from A.D. 538 and end with 1798 when the Pope was taken captive by Napoleon and brought to France.

The starting point was questioned by Samuele Bacchiocchi, who wrote his dissertation at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome in 1974 where he had access to historical documents. He could not find anything that supported the year 538 A.D in Roman Catholic history. But the good news is that we do not need to have this fit with earthly historical events. The time for the saints to be “handed over” was a *heavenly decision*! No earthly historical event was needed!

It is true that the power of the Catholic Church was reduced for some time, after the Pope was taken captive in 1798. However, during the last part of the twentieth century the Papacy has regained strength and power and Protestants are fearful that the Catholic Church will come back as a persecuting power.

Let us again look at the last part of Daniel 7:25. It states very clearly that systematic persecution would be happening during this time and historically we know it did. But there is nothing in the text that indicates that the saints would be “handed over” *again*! No, this was the time, A.D. 538–1798, and that was it! *Consequently, this text does not give support for any further systematic persecution by this power!*

Bible Support #2

In Inductive Bible study it is important to find agreement between statements in a certain passage. If a passage is not in harmony or worse; if the different verses in the passage even contradict each other, there is a problem with the translation or interpretation. God is NOT the author of confusion or contradictions! Daniel 7:25 has a clear message and therefore verse 26 must tell the same story.

The common understanding of Daniel 7:26 is that when the 1260 years had come to an end, the heavenly court would sit and make a judgment. According to this interpretation, the court's decision was to take the power away from the Papacy, which happened in 1798. The rest of the verse indicates a final judgment of the Papacy that eventually will consume and destroy it forever. The destruction of this power is believed to be an event that will happen sometime in the future. Let's read as it is written in Daniel 7:26:

“But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy *it* forever.” (NKJV)

But if you look at the text more carefully, you will find something interesting. The quote above is from the New King James Version. At times the translators add words “for clarity.” They indicate which words they have added by putting them in italics. NKJV does that, but not all versions do.

An Interlinear Bible confirms that the word “it” in the last phrase is *added* in the English translation and consequently does not exist in the original text. The translators add words to make a sentence clear and complete in the English language, but we have the right and *duty* to see if they did a “good job” or not. With the word “it” in place the last part of the verse indicates that this persecuting power will be judged, consumed and destroyed forever – and that all this will occur sometime in the future. Let's now read the same verse again, Daniel 7:26, *without* the added word “it.”

“But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy forever.” (NKJV, with my modification)

Now the interpretation is completely different! It is not *the Papacy* that will be consumed and destroyed but rather its “*dominion to consume and destroy*” that forever will be taken away. What did this persecuting power consume and destroy? Yes, the saints! That is the persecution we read about in Daniel 7:25, and also in verses 21 and 22. The “dominion to consume and destroy” saints will never again be accepted by the heavenly court! Do you see that? After 1798 God will not allow this power to systematically persecute saints, regardless of how strong or important the Catholic Church becomes. The court made the decision to take away “his dominion to consume and destroy” – forever.

It is a fact guaranteed by God. The promise is right here in Daniel 7:26! Consequently, I believe the word “it,” does not belong in verse 26 because it totally changes the understanding of the verse. Without the word “it” there is full harmony between Daniel 7:25 and 26. The persecution took place for a certain time and ended in 1798. Never again will this power regain the ability to systematically persecute believers. God is the author of these two verses and He is a Promise Keeper!

More Biblical Support

It is outside the scope of this newsletter to study Revelation 13 and 17 but I have dealt with these chapters as well as the study of the Seven Seals in my book on Revelation. The interpretation of these two chapters is in full harmony with the above. My book “The Second Coming In a New Perspective” quotes every single text in the Bible that deals with The Second Coming. In it you will find more Biblical support for the interpretation of Daniel 7:25-26 given here.

Spiritual Reason

There is another important reason why we should *not* view the Catholic Church as a persecuting power. This comes close to us because it deals with our attitude and therefore has spiritual and eternal consequences. Listen to a word of caution from E.G. White:

“But in regard to this line of work I am instructed to say to our people: Be guarded. In bearing the message make no personal thrusts at other churches, not even the Roman Catholic Church. In the different denominations angels of God see many who can be reached only by the greatest caution. Therefore let us be careful of our words. Let not our ministers follow their own impulses in denouncing and exposing the mysteries of iniquity. Upon these themes often silence is eloquence.” {PUR, October 23, 1902 par. 2}

A paranoid attitude towards Catholics and the Catholic Church does not induce love and a longing to share the gospel truth with them. I would rather say the opposite happens. It is of utmost importance that we interpret the passages that deal with this church correctly. There is also a danger, a temptation, to feel spiritually superior toward members of other churches including Catholic Church. Here is a fitting and very important statement by E.G. White:

“There are many among the Catholics who live up to the light they have far better than many who claim to believe present truth, and God will just as surely test and prove them as He has tested and proved us. And just according to their willingness to stand the testing, of whatever character it may be, will be their accountability before God. From that which God has shown me, a great number will be saved from among the Catholics. There has been but little done for them except to make them appear in the worst light.” {2SAT 40.4}

Wow! Those are harsh words. Ellen White actually says that many Catholics are better off than we within the Adventist Church are, since they better live up to the light they have. Let us humble ourselves and pray that the God of Mercy will forgive us our sin, our wrongful and unloving attitude towards the believers in the Catholic Church, including the Pope! We have truly made “them appear in the worst light.” Let us also pray that as many as possible in the Catholic *and* in the Adventist church will be found faithful.

Conclusion

There is no indication in Daniel 7:25-26 for a future systematic persecution by the Catholic Church. Its dominion to consume and destroy saints was forever taken away. God stands by His Word!

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