

## The Spirit of Antichrist

by Wayne Northey

*Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist-- he denies the Father and the Son (I Jn 2:22).*

*If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother (I Jn 4:20-21).*

One of my good friends several years ago gave up on the church. Still a “believer”, he embarked on a private study of Christian doctrine, only to “discover” that the traditional biblical texts were no longer to be trusted, and instead needed to be rewritten à la Bishop Spong, the Jesus Seminar authors, and other historical Jesus questers. Rightly, evangelicals and others critiqued these mainly flights of fancy approaches to the traditional texts as unbiblical “liberalism”. (One of the best critiques is *The Real Jesus* by Luke Timothy Johnson.) My friend, an accomplished professional educator, nonetheless further discovered that the essence of Jesus’ way was his ethical teachings. Only for him, not surprisingly, Jesus’ ethics sounded remarkably similar to the enlightened, politically correct, post-modernist liberal mindset of late-20<sup>th</sup> century Western academia. That cultural norm had in fact become my friend’s new “text” instead of the Bible.

It therefore is not surprising that Jesus’ disturbing ethic for authentic spirituality - nonnegotiable consistent love of neighbour/enemy (Matt. 5:38 - 48) - was jettisoned by my friend in the wake of NATO’s recent war against Yugoslavia. In its place was (reluctant) support of the bombings to gain justice for the Kosovars. That is, after all, what “liberals” do: in the language of I John, they “deny [imitation of] the Father and the Son” as ethically the standard. (Compare Eph. 5:1 & 2: “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”)

But a ubiquitous spirit of the antichrist, no less “liberal” to the core though largely unrecognized, is majority evangelical/traditional Christian teaching and practice about enemies. The war against Yugoslavia by NATO has typically elicited a resounding silence from evangelical leaders across the spectrum, with isolated exceptions. The only difference from my “liberal” friend is protestation. My friend and his ilk do not protest close allegiance to the traditional biblical texts: on the contrary! But evangelicals loudly proclaim such loyalty, then inevitably join the ethical camp of “liberals” almost univocally when it comes to the stark issue of response to injustice and violence.

A premier New Testament theologian concludes (Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, pp. 339 and 340): “The story of Jesus’ exemplary renunciation of violence is in turn reflected in stories such as the death of Stephen and in the exhortation of I Peter that believers should follow ‘in his steps.’ Nowhere does the New Testament

provide any positive model of Jesus or his followers employing violence in defense of justice.” Hays then argues convincingly that Jesus’ nonviolence is the standard for the church.

Gandhi once charged: “The only people on earth who do not see Christ and His teachings as nonviolent are Christians.” Ironically, in response to that challenge, like the Emperor in Hans Christian Andersen’s famous fairy-tale, conservative Christians *en masse* usually only raise their heads a little higher, and step more brightly! Then they openly flaunt disregard of and disobedience to Jesus’ “love your enemies” ethic. For most “Bible-believing Christians”, there has customarily been at work a blatantly “liberal” footnote theology of John 3:16 (“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life - KJV).” The footnote reads, after “world”, “whosoever”, “not perish” and “have everlasting life”: “except our enemies”. (They must indeed “perish”!)

The spirit of antichrist has since the Enlightenment been discernible enough amongst the openly identifiable “liberals”. It has also been no less alive and well amidst traditional Christians/evangelicals since the fourth-century era of Emperor Constantine. Such a spirit enjoys to this day unperceived ascendancy within that tradition in response to enemies. Yet the tradition all the while protests loudly (“too much”- Shakespeare) its very allegiance to Jesus as Lord!

“*Who is the liar?*”, asks the text above. Who displays the spirit of antichrist? The answer, “Conservative Christians too!” - in response to enemies - is profoundly disturbing.

Jesus said of another “liar”: “He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth.... (John 8:44)”. Violence and lies go together as surely as “conservatives” and “liberals” on the issue of... violence and lies! Both allegiances need a strong dose of Paul’s words in I Cor. 1:17 - 31. And may God have mercy on us all.