

## **Of Excuses & Autocrats**

By: Keith R. Keyser

The unregenerate human heart recoils from taking responsibility for its evil actions and moral failings. A recent book review unintentionally noted a practical example of this problematic but common attitude, citing many former officials from Saddam Hussein's regime as examples. Like the Nazis who were put on trial at Nuremberg after the Second World War, the men interviewed by Wendell Steavenson tried to excuse their actions by shifting the blame to their superiors. In the words of the reviewer:

Perhaps most dispiriting of all, virtually none of those interviewed acknowledges responsibility for what was done. Most of their explanations are variations on 'we were only obeying orders.' 'What could I do?' 'But I helped people, many people!' 'I suffered also, you know.' 'This was usual then.' The gassing of 5,000 Kurds in Halabja was, concedes a seemingly upright general, 'a political mistake.'

Steavenson comments: "I liked them. I joked with them. I sympathized with them. But not one ever looked me straight in the eye and admitted responsibility for the crimes of the government which they had served." At this point, the reviewer interjects: "Even after the depredations of Saddam Hussein, many of those Ms. Steavenson talked to still hankered after someone like him. Iraqis, says one, are 'an unruly mass of *shirugi* – slang for thickheaded Marsh Arabs – who need the rule of the rod, a strongman, to control them.'"<sup>i</sup> Indeed, if people are able to transfer the guilt of their actions to another, then they will cede total power to such a one in order to sin with impunity.

### **The Strongman Complex**

Dictatorship has been a common feature of modern governance. Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Francisco Franco, Mao Zedong, Idi Amin, Pol Pot, Muammar Qaddafi, Manuel Noriega, Nicolae Ceausescu, and Enver Hoxha all achieved near absolute power and lasting infamy through their repressive, authoritarian regimes.<sup>ii</sup> Nearly every corner of the globe has felt the effect of the cult of personality that gives rise to cruel despots such as these. Most of them arose to fill power vacuums. They were readily received by the masses for they promised desirable conditions such as social stability, economic prosperity, and national pride. What is more, they also appealed to baser human instincts like racism, jealousy, and greed. The Bible speaks of a future time when a world leader will wield tremendous power on a global scale. The nations will follow him – even

giving up their independence – for he will embody the traits of these former dictators, and will produce unprecedented economic and political prosperity.

### **Superman or Beast?**

The nineteenth century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche posited the coming of this type of leader, referring to him as the *ubermensch* (German for “Superman,” or more accurately “Overman.”) He saw many such leaders arising at different times in humanity’s developmental history. One modern philosopher remarks: “The *ubermensch* transcends the boundaries of classes, creeds, and nationalities; he overcomes human nature itself, and maintains a lordly superiority to the normal shackles and conventions of social life.”<sup>iii</sup> The characteristics of such extraordinary ones are further described by another scholar: “They must be thinkers, and men of action at the same time. They will choose themselves, and, so to speak, put the crown on their own heads.”<sup>iv</sup> A third comments on Nietzsche intention for the Overman: “...he sought to direct our efforts to the emergence of a ‘higher humanity’ capable of endowing existence with a human redemption and justification, **above all through the enrichment of cultural life.**”<sup>v</sup> The Overman’s aims are further elucidated thus:

It is evident that Nietzsche has in mind a control of humanity such as has not been heard or perhaps thought of before. **He speaks repeatedly of a world-economy, a rule of the earth—and it might be said in reply that there would be need of a God to administer it.** A sort of contradiction might be charged up to him in that the superman who is to be reached as the outcome of a process of evolution would be required to start and guide the process—we should have to be Gods to know how to create them! And Nietzsche could only answer that, as individuals learn by doing and have to venture even if they make mistakes, so with mankind—that **the only practical thing in the present ease is to start with as strong, masterful intelligence as we can get, aiming at world-control, and hope to win sooner or later a world-result.**<sup>vi</sup>

Such thinking quickly won adherents, for it meshed well with cutting-edge scientific notions of Nietzsche’s time.<sup>vii</sup> The Nazis adeptly used this philosopher’s works to promote the Fuhrer as the Overman, who should be blindly followed by the masses.<sup>viii</sup> Correspondingly, large segments of German society blindly followed these wicked men to their personal cost. What is more, under that pernicious regime many were complicit in unspeakable atrocities – while many more ignored the evil in their midst.<sup>ix</sup>

### **The Best of Times, The Worst of Times**

A future dictator will arise and incite the masses to the greatest rebellion ever seen on planet earth. They will not rebel against mere human authority; rather, they will shake their collective fist at the Almighty and revolt against His throne. How will this “Man of Sin” – also called “the Beast” – get the nations to invest him with total power? Rev. 13:2 divulges

that, spiritually speaking, his authority will be of Satanic derivation, saying: "...the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority." The people will be too busy admiring his eloquence, martial prowess, and intelligence – all demonstrated by "wonders" that he will perform (Rev. 13:5; cf. 2 Thes. 2:9 where the wonders are described as "lying.")

He will be a military tactician like Alexander the Great and Napoleon, an orator with the verbosity of Cicero and Churchill, and a ruthless despot like Herod and Stalin. His economic genius will rival Smith, Keynes, and Friedman; and his innovative, problem-solving intellect will rival Newton, Einstein, and Gates. The world never lacks seemingly intractable troubles such as the Israeli-Arab conflict, global warming, world poverty, and natural resource depletion. At the present time, it is impossible to determine which of these extraordinarily complicated difficulties he will seem to solve, but through demonic power and insight he will gain the trust of the nations. They will gladly hand him the reins of power in order to enjoy material prosperity, libertine intellectualism, and world peace. "Who is like the Beast?" will be the headline on a thousand newspapers and websites (Rev. 13:4.) Unbeknownst to them, these "blessings" will be ephemeral.

### **Meet The New Boss, Same As The Old Boss: Autocratic & Opposed To God**

The Man of Sin's name emphasizes his opposition to all that pertains to God. He is further described as "the son of perdition" (2 Thes. 2:3.) The New Testament earlier employed this title to describe Judas Iscariot, the betrayer (Jn. 17:12.) Just as Satan entered that traitor in order to oppose Christ and deliver Him up to the Gentiles, so this son of lostness under the influence of that Old Serpent will try to destroy anyone who is loyal to God (Jn. 13:2, 27.) His speech is characterized by blasphemy and he "...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" (Rev. 13:5; 2 Thes. 2:4, ESV.) The philosophy of Secular Humanism will be embodied in this wicked ruler. Man will finally be deified as supreme – "man, the measure of all things."<sup>x</sup> The old satanic stratagem "You will be like God" will reach its zenith with this wicked pretender to God's throne (Gen. 3:5, NKJV.)

The Lord Jesus predicted the public acclaim that would greet this evil tyrant, telling the Pharisees: "I receive not glory from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in yourselves. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, who receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?" (Jn. 5:41-44.) He came fulfilling the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, performing signs that no one else did. Furthermore, his opponents conceded that "No one ever spoke like this man" (Jn. 7:46, ESV.) The Lord Jesus spoke and operated in the name of His Father; nevertheless, they rejected Him. When the Man of Sin comes flouting the authority of God and espousing the deification of man, the world with its religious, political, and economic segments will

receive him. This is in keeping with the world's essential nature: loving what belongs to it and hating what glorifies and belongs to God (Jn. 7:7; 15:19.)

### **Paradise Regained & Ruled Over by Its Rightful Monarch**

It is sad to consider the wretched consequences that the nations' reception of the Man of Sin will bring upon the earth's populace. Nonetheless, it is God merely allowing people to have what their sinful hearts desire. This false messiah will bring the world to ruin, but after he is consigned to the Lake of Fire, the King of kings will establish a perfect kingdom on this planet (Rev. 20.) The Lord will show the greatness of His reign by bringing about lasting peace and economic prosperity (Isa.35.) In His kingdom the meek will be in positions of responsibility and "the poor in spirit" will feel right at home (Matt. 5:3, 5.) Health rather than disease will be the norm, and longevity, rather than mortality (Isa. 65:20.) "Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end" (Isa. 9:7.) Amazingly, at the end of a thousand years of such glorious governance, some people will rebel, only to be swiftly put down (Rev. 20:7-15.) Such is the restless nature of the sin-tainted human heart.

Thankfully, there is an alternative to embracing the Man of Sin; one may declare allegiance to the Messiah-King, the Lord Jesus Christ instead. To side with Him is to join a kingdom which shall have no end – one which culminates in the "...new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13.) This regime will be based on truth and led by a monarch who shall never fail or disappoint. Rather than give humans permission to cede their moral responsibility to a dictator, the Lord will transform believers into His glorious image (Rom. 8:28-30.) Under His authority, they will live eternally and act righteously.

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<sup>i</sup> "Only Obeying Orders," *The Economist*, March 7, 2009, pp. 90-91. Review of Wendell Steavenson, *The Weight of A Mustard Seed: The Intimate Story of An Iraqi General & His Family During Thirty Years of Tyranny* (London: Collins, 2009.) Electronic edition available at:

[http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=13226332](http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13226332), accessed on 6 July, 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> Of course, those are just a few of the twentieth century's notorious tyrants. Time would fail to tell of Castro, Pinochet, Suharto, Milosevic, Sese Seko, Al-Assad, or those of their ilk.

<sup>iii</sup> Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996, p. 385.

<sup>iv</sup> William Mackintire Salter, *Nietzsche The Thinker, A Study*. London: Henry Holt & Co., 1917, p. 401.

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<sup>v</sup> Richard Schacht, "Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999, p. 616; emphasis mine.

<sup>vi</sup> Salter, *Nietzsche The Thinker, A Study*, p. 405; emphasis mine.

<sup>vii</sup> One early twentieth century comparative religion scholar comments: "Since evolution has been accepted as a truth, we may fairly trust that we all believe in the overman. All our reformers believe in the possibility of realizing a higher mankind. We Americans especially have faith in the coming of the kingdom of the overman,

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and our endeavor is concentrated in hastening his arrival. The question is only, What is the overman and how can we make this ideal of a higher development actual?" (Paul Carus, "Nietzsche & Other Exponents of Individualism", Chicago: The Open Court Publ. Co., 1914, p. 42. Electronic Edition: [http://books.google.com/books?pg=PA42&dq=nietzsche+overman&ei=Xa9SSt-SL4-UzATst8DdAg&id=1HgRAAAAYAAJ&as\\_brr=1](http://books.google.com/books?pg=PA42&dq=nietzsche+overman&ei=Xa9SSt-SL4-UzATst8DdAg&id=1HgRAAAAYAAJ&as_brr=1))

<sup>viii</sup> Historians debate how much Hitler actually read Nietzsche. The Nazi cult of personality certainly expanded on that philosopher's thoughts. What Nietzsche saw as a superior cultural figure, they turned into a supreme political leader, demanding implicit faith & obedience. The Third Reich propaganda machine studiously portrayed Hitler as the fulfillment of the Overman – photographing him looking at a bust of Nietzsche, presenting Nietzsche's leather-bound works to Mussolini, etc.

<sup>x</sup> It should be noted that many ordinary Germans opposed Hitler in different ways, public & private. Niemoller, Bonhoeffer, Barth, & other signers of the Barmen Declaration protested the ascendancy of the Fuhrer cult. Still others like von Stauffenberg actively participated in physical resistance. In spite of these instances of resistance, Niemoller's words must be remembered: "When the Nazis came for the communists, I remained silent; I was not a communist. When they locked up the social democrats, I remained silent; I was not a social democrat. When they came for the trade unionists, I did not speak out; I was not a trade unionist. When they came for the Jews, I remained silent; I wasn't a Jew. When they came for me, there was no one left to speak out." [[http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Martin\\_Niem%C3%B6ller](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Martin_Niem%C3%B6ller); There are several versions of this quote, depending on whether one consults his speeches from the 40's, 70's, or 80's. For an interesting site concerning the historical development of the quote, see:

<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/niem.htm#discsources> .

<sup>x</sup> Paraphrasing the pre-Socratic philosopher Protagoras: See S.W. Dyde, *The Theaetetus of Plato: A Translation With An Introduction* Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1899, p. 22. Electronic Edition: [http://books.google.com/books?id=wt29k-Jz8pIC&pg=PA22&dq=protagoras+measure&as\\_brr=1&ei=A-tXSq73ElzcygTFo\\_WkBw](http://books.google.com/books?id=wt29k-Jz8pIC&pg=PA22&dq=protagoras+measure&as_brr=1&ei=A-tXSq73ElzcygTFo_WkBw) .