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I've become interested of late in the way that racialized and homosexualized antichrists appear in discourses concerned with the threats to family and nation. As constantly proclaimed, there are at least two threats to the nation right now, both of which are elaborated in apocalyptic terms. One is, obviously, the threat of terrorism. The other is the threat to the family from gay marriage. Given the long tradition in U.S. history and culture of finding the antichrist behind any and every political threat (Boyer; Fuller), it is not surprising that the racialized Middle Eastern Muslim antichrist and the homosexualized antichrist are seen to be behind terrorism and gay marriage, respectively.

Because these depictions of the antichrist are othering in the extreme, it is imperative to emphasize in the classroom that the traditions producing the antichrist bear close relation to those producing the Christ. Indeed the Christ and the antichrist are figures built from cultural difference, both borrowing from the religious traditions of the surrounding Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Conveying such ideas in the classroom is no easy feat (and not one I profess to have mastered), since even liberal atheist students can be protective of received ways of reading the biblical text. Students do not necessarily want to know that these figures borrow from other cultures' myths, let alone that there might be more affinity between the Christ and the antichrist than usually recognized. Nonetheless, I think it is important at least to try to approach these issues, as part of a larger strategy of teaching students about the multiple ways in which

scripture depends upon the excluded Other.

In what follows, I would like briefly to look at some appearances of the racialized homosexualized antichrist, then to problematize the exclusion of this figure by showing the family resemblance to Christ, and finally to indicate how I approach this material in the classroom.

Racialized Enemy as Antichrist

Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden have of course been designated as possible candidates for antichrist by conservative Christians like Jerry Falwell (2001) and Hal Lindsey (Kinsella 2005). But since these figures are no longer visible or viable candidates, Islamic militants in general have taken their place. Armageddon Books sports over a dozen titles produced since 2001 that situate Muslim terrorism within the timeline of biblical prophecy. These include: *Christianity and Islam: The Final Clash* (Robert Livingston, 2004); *Muhammad's Monsters: A Comprehensive Guide to Radical Islam for Western Audiences* (David Bukay, editor, 2004); *War on Terror: Unfolding Biblical Prophecy* (Grant R. Jeffrey, 2002); and *The False Prophet* (Ellis H. Skolfield, 2001). In this discourse, the racialization is not precise, but Islam does seem to stand in for brown.

The naming of the Muslim terrorist as antichrist also operates in coded fashion in Bush's speeches. For instance, in a speech on the war on terror (October 6, 2005), without ever mentioning the antichrist, Bush painted an apocalyptic and antichristic picture of "the enemy." The speech began with an apocalyptically drawn recollection of 9/11. Within this frame, the enemy was described as "Evil men, obsessed with ambition and unburdened by conscience," who in "their cold-blooded contempt for human life" are "the enemies of humanity." The description of these men as "part of global, borderless terrorist organization" taps into the fear in apocalyptic thought that the antichrist will establish a one-world order (see, for instance, Kjos).

Gay Antichrist

Another strand of apocalyptic biblical interpretation has recently informed Christians that the antichrist may be gay (hence a threat to the family). The antichrist's probable sexual orientation is derived from a particular way of translating one verse in the book of Daniel — whose metaphorical depictions of Antiochus Epiphanes IV as a boastful, apostate ruler have been interpreted in apocalyptic Christianity to be describing the antichrist. One such text, Daniel

11:37, has been translated as follows: “He [the proud ruler] will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women” (NASB). With this translation in hand, TV and Internet evangelist David Reagan (one among many) interprets this verse saying, “Daniel indicates that [the antichrist] will be a sexual pervert, most likely a homosexual. As Daniel puts it, the Antichrist will show no regard ‘for the desire of women’ (Daniel 11:37).”

Indeed, some commentators blame the antichrist’s sexual orientation for the problems facing marriage today. So for instance, Joseph Chambers of Paw Creek Ministries (North Carolina) suggests that marriage is under threat from the antichrist and his “sodomite” followers:

Satan is on a rampage to defile the family of humankind and the future family of the redeemed....I do not believe that there is any question but that the Antichrist will be a homosexual. The world is literally hell-bent on making the sodomite lifestyle the order of the day....Sodomites are thrilled to destroy any institution that stands in their way. Their motives and methods cannot be called anything but demonic (2005).

So racialized and homosexualized antichrists acts as a threat to the nation, to the family, and to Christians’ final future.

Filiations

One is tempted to ask if the antichrist’s lack of regard for the desire of women proves that he will be gay, what does that say about a certain insistence on Christ’s lack of regard for women (as, for instance, made manifest in much commentary on *The Da Vinci Code*)? What difference is there really between the sexuality of Christ and the antichrist?

More substantively though, the figure of the antichrist represents strands of Ancient Near Eastern culture that are also gathered in the Christ figure, but disavowed. To illustrate, let me take a brief look at another place in Daniel (7:1–14), which is thought by many literalist apocalyptic interpreters to describe the antichrist. Daniel 7 famously allegorizes the history of the political threat posed to the Jews by their various colonizers, culminating in the Hellenizing project of Antiochus IV. In the vision, beasts rise from the sea, one after another. A little horn growing from the horns other beasts symbolizes a particularly deceitful and destructive ruler, who rises to power and sets up an abomination that causes desolation. The little horn is, happily, defeated by the Son of Man, who comes on the clouds and is given authority by the Ancient of Days to reign forever.

Scholars of apocalyptic literature have spent some time trying to determine the historical background and mythic antecedents to Daniel 7, both for the beasts and for the Son of Man. Scholars have argued over whether the text borrows from Babylonian or Canaanite myths of creation. (Shea 1986, Collins 1992, Wilson 2000, Lacocque 2001, Mosca 1986, Walton 2001). In both Babylonian and Canaanite myths, the favored god defeats the chaotic sea god, or sea monster, in order to establish order, creation, or sovereignty. In the Canaanite myth, the rain god Baal, rider of the clouds, defeats the god of the sea (Yamm) and the god of death (Mot). Baal is much like the Son of Man who comes upon the clouds, in victory over the arrogant and deceitful little horn. It is possible, as John J. Collins argues (1997), that in Daniel, the Canaanite Baal is renamed and resymbolized as the Son of Man.

Of course, in the Christian tradition, Daniel's Son of Man becomes Christ. Not to put too fine a point on it, Baal becomes Christ. Yet Baal is also a chief rival to Yahweh's monotheism in the Hebrew Bible. Baal is the icon of idolatry (see 1 Kgs. 18:25–26). As such, he becomes associated in another way, in contemporary apocalyptic interpretation, with the antichrist. The Canaanite Baal, then, gives rise both to the antichrist beast and to the victorious Son of Man figure, who becomes the divine-human son of God. The antichrist shares a cultural history with the Christ. The recognition of cultural difference in the Christ must at the very least change the understanding of the threat of the Other. If, in some virulent, xenophobic, anti-Islam sites, Baal has been associated with Allah and with the antichrist, what happens to this insult if Baal is another form of Christ?

In the Classroom

Because students are defensive about the Bible, I find it best in my "Biblical Heritage" course to let them make the connections themselves, for the most part. Thus, I reverse the order presented here to begin with the Ancient Near Eastern precursors to apocalypse, moving to apocalyptic texts more broadly, then to Daniel, the interpretation of Daniel in the Christian Testament, and subsequent uses of Daniel in defining the antichrist. Along the way, I ask students to think about the relations between the various figures, in the hopes that they will see the connections between Christian figures and Ancient Near Eastern mythology, between what they find to be culturally normative and culturally "other." Finally, I look at contemporary manifestations of apocalyptic thought, and ask them to consider what exclusions apocalyptic thought enables, and what makes the rhetoric persuasive.

In my "Celluloid Bible" course, however, I take a slightly different (and less comprehensive) approach that is well received. There, I use images of the antichrist to illustrate ongoing orientalism in culture and film, whereby men of Eastern cultures are feminized or homosexualized in some way (the satirical representation of the homosexual relation between Satan and Saddam in the movie *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* [1999] is a good

conversation starter). Here — at one remove from the biblical text itself — students easily understand how the othering process works to buttress false notions of cultural purity and religious hegemony.

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