Rev 11:7-10 The Murder of the Church. Rev. Herman Hoeksema

The council of God is certainly, for all of his creatures, most certainly for all men, and most certainly of all for his church, incomprehensibly amazing. In the final analysis, for the church, the council of God is incomprehensively amazing. When I say that the council is incomprehensible, I do not refer to the hidden things of God. We are often accused of prying into the hidden things of God. But that’s impossible. How can anyone speak of those things that are hidden? That is not the case. The council of God, not as it is his unrevealed, but as it is his revealed will is the object of that amazement. That council therefore as it has been revealed in history, as it has come under our eye, whereby we know it, that which is plain in history - is amazing. In the beginning, that which transpired in the garden through the fall of man into sin, that was the council of God. That realization of the council of God whereby man fell into the deep way of sin and grace through redemption is amazing. That was according to the council of God. Let us never hesitate to say that. Adam fell. But there are questions. In amazement, we ask those questions. Who is there that can fathom all those implications? None. The council of God is amazing in the beginning. There is no argument there. It is that throughout history. Because after all, history is nothing but the realization of that council. Outside of that council, nothing happens. Therefore, it is that way at the end of all time from the point of view of revelation. Surely it is true, (that is also the picture of the word of God), that if those later days were not cut short, even the elect would fall away. You also have a picture of that in the words of our text.

Nevertheless, who can harmonize this with the scriptural passages that speak of the continued goodness of God? That prophecy of the fact that God will surely make all things work together for good to them that love him, that assure us that the way of salvation is only in the realization of his everlasting plan? There are the passages where God assures his people that, “I will never forsake thee and I will never leave thee”. How can it finally be that God is in agreement with the promise of our Savior when he says, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against thee.” It is amazing – the council of God. However, because it is the council of God it shall surely stand. Because he does all his good pleasure. It is adorable. You realize that only such an incomprehensible beginning as we have in the beginning of history could bring us Christ. Only if that first Adam died, (and God killed him) could the second Adam come who is the quickening spirit from heaven. Only if God, as it were, were to strike and cast him down could he fall into the hand of the mercy of God. So also it is none the less, (no less!) in the revealed will of God all the way through history. So it is also in the latter days. You understand, the end of the ages is upon us. We are certainly speeding to the end. Everything preaches to the right and to the left that the council of God is being filled and filled speedily. There is suffering untold, also for the church of Jesus Christ. But, because it the filling of the council, it is good. Not because it is suffering as such. No one wants suffering. No one is comforted by suffering as such. But, because it is the way of the revealed council of God, whereby God says, “This is the way that leads home, this is the way that brings eternal rest and salvation and glory”. God says “This is the way”, “Here is your signpost” “This leads to eternal glory”. The child of God is not going to ask for a detour. He is not going to ask for a shorter route. He is not going to ask for an easier way. He says, in faith, in confidence, “Lead Lord, I will follow wherever thy way may be.” It is the only way that leads to glory. That is Gods promise.

Therefore, we as churches have always emphasized the sovereignty of God. Pray that never changes and let nothing and no one rob you of that comfort. Because that is the heart of the truth of God. That is not harping on a pet notion. It is the only comfort of the church of God. According to the measure that we monkey with that truth, we will increase misery. All the misery in the church institute in the midst of the world was occasioned by that everlasting fighting against that cardinal truth of the sovereignty of God. And that is why, even in view of the gloomy text we read to you, the church of Christ can be comforted. I hope that we see that when we speak of:

The Murder of the Church.

1. Instigated by Satan
2. Celebrated by the reprobate
3. Appointed by God

I: Instigated by Satan

The killing of the church is upon the instigation of Satan. In order to understand that, there are certain facts that come to light in the context of the words of our text that we have to keep before our mind. In the first place, the witnesses constitute the church. That is, the church in its faithful witness of the truth. Or, the church as it clings to the revelation of the word of God. Anything that does not do that is not the church. That may sound sharp, but that is the word of God. That church is not every witness. That is not church that has a proclamation or that has a gospel. That is church which has a faithful witness. The witnesses are the church as that church is faithful to its calling. That is plain from the fact that church, those witnesses, become the object of persecution. (Not the other church) Not all churches, as institutes, are persecuted. Only that manifestation of it that is faithful to its calling is persecuted, hated, fought against, battled against, that suffers, that is killed.

Remember, behind all persecution is Satan. We must not be afraid (in our “enlightened age”) or ashamed to say, “That is the work of the devil”. In our civilized, enlightened age, we don’t say that anymore. That is “out of style”. It is a little “old fashioned” to think about what the devil does. Nevertheless, we must understand that when the church of God is murdered, it is upon the instigation of Satan. Behind all persecution is Satan. Very really, very personally, very individually. That does not deny the fact that there are wicked instruments. It is the world that causes you to feel that pain and agony and persecution. That does not deny that there is the malice of the world and of the wicked to be reckoned with. Nor is that an excuse for the world. The world can never say, “that was the work of the devil, and the devil instigated it and therefore it is his problem.” The wicked will never testify before Christ, that because it was at the instigation of Satan and therefore it is his guilt. Guilt is like a very personal check. It is non-transferable. One cannot shirk responsibility. The wicked world that persecutes the church is responsible and goes to hell for it! Nevertheless, the maneuvering, the instigation, the controlling, the teaching, the guiding hand of it, is none other than Satan. The strategy whereby the world kills the church is hatched in the evil mind of him that comes from hell. That is the word of God. The diabolical plan to kill and extinguish the light can only come from the prince of darkness. We must be careful. We do not want dualism. It is not so, that God, wants to save the church and does not want the church to suffer, but the devil makes the church suffer anyway. The devil is not the independent instigator of that plot. Behind the wicked world and behind that general that moves that strategy is the sovereign God. God works out his council through the devil. But, spiritually, ethically, that diabolical plan is hatched in hell. Satan works out that devilish scheme through his instruments, through his children, through his followers, through all the wicked, without a single exception. Therefore, in the text, Satan works through the beast that ascends out of the abyss, out of the pit.

As to the identity of that beast, it is the manifestation of the power of Antichrist in the midst of the world. It is not a physical beast. It is the spiritual, ethical power of Antichrist. Therefore, it comes from the abyss. The Antichrist is that which is over against Christ. That which always contradicts Christ. That which calls everything of the truth a lie and always calls the lie the truth – that is Antichrist. The power whereby that lie is maintained in the midst of the world, that is the beast that comes out of the abyss. Satan uses that beast in order to militate and fight against the church. So, we can understand that Satan always uses the wicked. He does. Never forget it. We sometimes view our sins as “little mistakes”. We say, “That was an error”, “I should not have done it”, “It was wrong”. We must understand that every sin is spiritual, ethical obedience to him that lives in darkness and proceeds from hell. That is why sin is horrible. Sin is not a mistake! Sin is rebellion against God and it is swearing allegiance to the devil and serving him. Sin is saying to Satan, “Satan, what you command that is what I want. What you desire, I love, and when you want to kill the church, I want to kill the church too.” That is why he always uses the wicked to that end. That is why it is so foolish and illogical, that the wicked at any time, in any circumstance, at any given moment can ever do any good. That is folly. The powers of Satan always aim at the same purpose, and that is the death of the church, without a single exception.

Those wicked (in the text) are not the down and out godless in the world, as they are apparently wicked. The church is killed by the church. This is not suicide. But, the church is killed by that which is called church. The persecution from the viewpoint of the text, the murder of the church is brought about by the wicked that are religious. That is Antichrist. Antichrist comes out of the temple, does he not? He kills, not by openly coming with the sword and fighting, not by openly advocating the lie. If the devil comes into church with wooden shoes, that is not dangerous at all, because you can hear him come. But, when he walks stocking-footed. When he sneaks in. When he speaks like a lamb, but he is the wolf. When he talks Reformed, but he is Arminian. When he speaks love, and is filled with hate. When he speaks protection, and he means to murder, that is Antichrist.

It is also plain that he has but one object – kill the church. I do not say that. I do not say that whenever the lie is advocated the purpose of that lying advocate is to kill the church. That would not mean a thing. But when God says that, we have to take it from him. When God says that the only purpose of that lying advocate is in order to deceive his church, we are going to have to say “Amen”. If you do not do it here, you will have to do it afterwards, because God is no liar.

It is plain that he accomplishes his desire. He overcomes them and kill them. Finally, he succeeds. The battle of the ages has raged since the time that God put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. There has never been an armistice. Finally it comes to its consummation and he kills. All that is left of the church is corpses. Dead bodies. That does not mean that all Christians will be killed and that there will not be any children of God left. That is impossible. It will be a small number, but they will be there. There will be those that will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. But the picture is that there is a sufficient number of the faithful witnessing church killed whereby officially, the voice, the witness, the testimony of the church is silenced.

II: Celebrated by the reprobate

When that is accomplished, there is a celebration. It is celebrated by the reprobate. That is a matter of course. The reprobate fighting in the battle of the ages as spiritual instruments of the devil have hated that church from the very beginning. If you say, “we have no battle, we have peace”, that is not due the fact that the world became better. That is because we are asleep. If we are not experiencing hatred and malice in the church world in general, not being persecuted or hated, it is due to either being lax and not calling it forth, and therefore don’t elicit it. Or, we are already so spiritually so obtuse that we don’t even see it. God forbid that either one of those cases goes on.

When the church is faithful in its witness, the wicked followers of Satan will surely hate with a perfect hatred those that manifest the life of Christ. The life of Christ is light. When the light comes in darkness, Christ says the light will reveal the works of darkness. Those works of darkness must remain in darkness. Therefore, that light is hated. That testimony and witness is hated. That witness is hated so thoroughly because God is exalted and debases man. The religious false church cannot stand it that God is magnified. This also true of us in our own heart. The first thing that we rebel against is the testimony of scripture that God is so unchangeably sovereign. When God is exalted and man is debased, man, as *his religious enemy,* is manifest.

A heretic never says he is wicked. He always says he is Reformed. He says that he loves God. But, he comes with subtle innuendos. He comes with imperceptible little changes. He says that he loves God and that God ought to be praised, but we ought to have a little credit somewhere along the line. The result of this is that God is debased and man is raised. Therefore, anything that goes against that becomes the object of hatred, malice and persecution. This is the point of the text that the testimony of the witnesses tormented them. The word of God hurts. When the church is faithful and speaks the truth in the midst of the godless religious enemy, that enemy is hurt.

They rejoice in the fact that the church institutionally is killed. Its official voice is killed because those prophets tormented them. They shout for joy. Their words were darts of fire in their soul that killed them. The word of God always kills the wicked. The war of the ages that was begun in the beginning never stops. It cannot. When the point is reached when the church is officially silenced, then there is a celebration. That is understandable. From the point of view of the world, it has been a matter of life and death all along the way. Finally, the church is licked and they rejoice – of course!

Notice how they celebrate. First, they leave the bodies where they are. They leave them out in the street. The picture is of a great city and they refuse to bury them. This is symbolism. This does not refer to some particular city. It is not a reference to earthly Jerusalem. Some commentators think that the last two prophets of God are killed and that the whole world sees it. That is physically impossible. The symbolism is that the God’s church has become a spectacle of reproach and shame all over the world. But, on the streets of the city. Not a city, but the city. That city is Jerusalem. Not literally, but in the figurative sense. That Jerusalem is the church. Not the church. Not the elect. But the church world as it stands under the dominion of Antichrist as it has become the apostate church world. Or as the text says, Sodom and Egypt. John says “where also our Lord was crucified.” But that was in Jerusalem, not Sodom or Egypt. He is saying that Jerusalem has become the whore. It has become Sodom. It has become like unto Egypt. It is the oppressor of the church of Christ at all times. And because it was that, it killed Christ. It celebrates it. They think that they have robbed that miserable opposing church that faithfully held to the truth, of its power. We have finally become successful. We injected into it enough of the philosophy of man and the lie of our potentate, the devil, so that its power is gone. They never confront us any more with the painful testimony of the truth. Thus, you have a satanic celebration.

When you have a battle between opposing armies, when one army is vanquished from the field, then all hostilities cease. Those who were enemies help each other out. However, that is not the case in this passage. Here, they refuse burial. That is bestial. The word of God does not say in vain, that the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. We need to understand for our peace of mind’s sake, for our covenant seed’s sake and for God’s sake, that there is no hatred that is so acute, malicious, insatiable as the hated of that which is called church and is not, over against the church. The worst enemy the church can have is a foe within the gates. Who killed Christ? – The church.

When with the eye of faith we see the bleeding, indefensible, that never-talking-back Christ, whose back had been furrowed, whose brow was beaten and bleeding, whose hands and feet were pierced, who was dying and who died, was that enough? No. Around that helpless (humanly), defenseless Christ, we see and hear the apostate church taunt him, “If thou art the Christ (You are not, but if you were) come down from the cross and we will believe”.

They would not let it go at that. We will let the followers of Christ suffer the reproach of the cross. We will let that church be a spectacle in the midst of the world because of their pig-headedness. We will make a holiday of it. They sent gifts to one another. When the apostate church and the anti-Christian world power has killed the church, they take the hand of the world and make common cause. The apostate church and the world become fast friends. At the time of Christ, Pilate and Herod became fast friends. The world and Antichrist become friends when the truth is vanquished. They send gifts to each other. They celebrate they are so happy. They can preach their doctrine unhindered. They can build up man without hearing the rebuke of the faithful witnesses. They say, “We can go on in our way of sin and corruption.” We can steep ourselves in the things of the night. We never have to fear those miserable prophets of God anymore.” There is no opposition. They celebrate. They say “We have attained our goals.”

This is not intended to be a picture of just a few days before Christ comes. We must not think that it will be 3 ½ days and Christ will come and take us to glory. The 3 ½ days are not days of 24 hours. The 3 ½ days here is the same as elsewhere in the book of Revelation as 42 months. That is 3 ½ years. This is meant to represent the new dispensation. That means that time is now! It is the spiritual reality that the servants of God in the old dispensation already cried out in anguish of the soul, “We are killed all the day long!” This is not something that someday may be true. It is always true. It is true. I must know that these things are true according to the eternal decree of God or I cannot stand. History teaches me that that this is exactly the case. From the point of view of history, the church is always killed. There are reformations and high points. But it always goes down. Then, God comes along with a knife and he cuts it off. We are killed all the day long. But God does not do that directly. God uses the hatred of Satan, and the hatred of the wicked and he realizes it time and time again. Why? That no flesh shall ever boast before him.

III: Appointed by God

The murder of the church is appointed of God. God says that he does all his good pleasure. Nothing happens outside of his good pleasure. This is dogmatic, but we must have the spiritual truth of the mater. God in his council to realize the salvation of his church, puts that church and puts the individual in the position where at one time or another he cries out – “Oh God, I cannot be saved!” God says, “I will do it”. The cause of Christ will appear to be lost (and how often has that not happened?) and it will look as if the devil has the victory (it is going to look that way in the future). The small remnant according to election will not have an organized church left, maybe not even a consistory, much less a classis and synod, and will have no official expression of the truth anymore. For all the world, it will look as if hell has triumphed over heaven, the devil over God and the wicked over the believer and the saints.

God testifies that he does all these things because he loves and wants to save his people and because that is the way to glory. This is plainly the teaching of the text as is evident from the fact that God has all this in his control. When the testimony for that particular occasion was accomplished, then he came and not before. That means that it is our Lord Jesus Christ who is in heaven and is king over all things and into whose hand God gave all things. God said to Jesus, “Here is my council – realize it”

Written into that council is this – That the church will be killed all the day long. But, there is in that council this specification, that this cry is not lifted up until the testimony of the church, the prophets and the faithful shall have been completed in every age. Christ said to “Go out into all the world.” When that organic process is accomplished and all peoples and ages have heard that word of God and rejected it. God says to the church that has been killed – “Arise!” “Come up hither!” He calls the church that was conquered and killed into eternal glory. The grave is the portal to heaven for the church that always loses but is always victorious, that always moans but always sings, that always dies but lives forever. Because God is the God of salvation for the church and no one can be against his elect. That is heaven. That is comfort. That is joy. Amen.