

Pastor: Obama is paving the way for the Antichrist

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(RNS) Already no stranger to controversy, the Rev. Robert Jeffress, a Dallas megachurch pastor, is coming out with a book that claims President Barack Obama is clearing the way for the Antichrist.

Jeffress, head of the 11,000-member First Baptist Church of Dallas, writes in his book “Perfect Ending” that he does not believe Obama is the Antichrist, yet he links Obama’s support of gay marriage to the coming of the Antichrist. Many Christians believe Jesus’ Second Coming will feature a confrontation with an enemy called the Antichrist, based on interpretation of passages 1 John and 2 John.

“For the first time in history a president of our country has openly proposed altering one of society’s (not to mention God’s) most fundamental laws: that marriage should be between a man and a woman,” Jeffress writes, according to an advance copy provided to RNS.

“While I am not suggesting that President Obama is the Antichrist, the fact that he was able to propose such a sweeping change in God’s law and still win reelection by a comfortable margin illustrates how a future world leader will be able to oppose God’s laws without any repercussions.”

Jeffress said on Wednesday (Jan. 8) that he’s particularly concerned with issues such as the current battle over whether organizations will have to provide free contraception to employees.

“I’m not saying the president is an evil man who’s trying to destroy our society, but Americans are willingly giving up their freedom for what they’re told is a greater

good," he said. "A future world dictator will assume power under the guise of the greater good of the world."

Jeffress said whether it's the National Security Agency's surveillance on American phone calls or the implementation of Obamacare, he sees a gradual encroachment on Americans' freedom.

"How it can be that this leader is able to usurp freedom of speech with little or no opposition?" he said. "People will be conditioned to surrender personal rights for the so-called greater good."

Last year, Pat Robertson said on the Christian Broadcasting Network that Islam is the Antichrist, and he has linked security cameras to the end times and "the mark of the beast." Christians have interpreted Revelation 13:16-18 to mean that there will be a marking of humans, or a "mark of the beast."

Pointing to the idea of the Antichrist has not been uncommon for so-called "dispensationalists," who understand God to work in a series of "dispensations," or periods in history. In the 1960s and 1970s, dispensationalists "had a field day identifying who was the Antichrist," said Scot McKnight, a New Testament scholar at Northern Seminary in Lombard, Ill.

"Mercy, when I was in college, the dispensationalists were doing this all the time: Henry Kissinger, etc., were all identified as the Antichrist. Gorbachev was one, especially with that funny birthmark (of the supposed beast) on his head," McKnight said. "People today have stopped identifying the beast and the Antichrist because the former generation was completely wrong, obviously."

A dispensationalist, Jeffress says what happens in the future should impact what Christians do today.

"It is foolish to try to identify the Antichrist, but what we can do is see how what is happening now is paving the way for what may come in 10 years or may come in 1,000 years," he said.

In his book, Jeffress makes his case that Christians should study prophecy more closely. "Evangelist Billy Graham once observed that 'the most neglected teaching in the church today is the second coming of Jesus Christ,'" he said.

Though he never lived in Dallas, Graham was a longtime member of First Baptist Dallas before he switched memberships in 2008 to a church closer to his home in North Carolina. Graham joined First Baptist Dallas during his first Dallas crusade in 1953. At the time, the Rev. W.A. Criswell led the church, considered by many to be the pre-eminent church in the Southern Baptist Convention, according to The Dallas Morning News. Jeffress has been senior pastor of the church since 2007.

The outspoken Jeffress has made controversial claims about Mormons, Muslims, Jews, Catholics and gays and lesbians in the past. He ignited a controversy at a summit hosted by the Family Research Council when he introduced Texas Gov. Rick Perry by calling Mormonism a “cult,” referencing the faith of Perry’s opponent for the Republican presidential nomination, Mitt Romney, before the 2012 election.

In a sermon at First Baptist ahead of the 2012 election, Jeffress urged people not to vote for Obama, saying that the president was making it “relatively easy for the Antichrist to take over.”

Jeffress wasn’t claiming that Obama is the Antichrist, and said he was not questioning the president’s faith. “But what I am saying is this: the course he is choosing to lead our nation is paving the way for the future reign of the Antichrist.”

Last year, former NFL quarterback Tim Tebow was scheduled to speak at First Baptist but pulled out after the resulting controversy.

The church owns and operates a school, a college, several radio stations and Dallas Life, a mission for the homeless on the southern edge of downtown Dallas. Last year, the church completed a \$135 million building campaign to renovate its downtown campus.