

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE ANTICHRIST

THERE are strong reasons for concluding that Popery, in its present form, is not, in strict prophetic speech, the last Antichrist. It has many of the features of the Man of Sin, but it has not all; it is lacking in some; and it is this partial unlikeness that leads us to anticipate something worse, something more terrible; something which will manifest more vividly what the combined energy of human and Satanic wickedness can effect, when fully expanded and matured.

Still, there is a distinct and observable oneness of feature between these two forms of evil. There are some clear points of difference, but there are more of resemblance. There is a striking family likeness, distinct traces of common paternity, and an undoubted brotherhood. There is more than enough to identify them as belonging to one genus, one plant, one stem. That the fruit and the blossom are very unlike each other in many things, in color and in shape, for instance, is no proof that the one is not related to the other, and that both are not the produce of the same tree. Pagan Rome might be but the branch, Papal Rome the blossom, and the last Antichrist the fruit; but does this disprove their true personal identity? Does it not much rather confirm and display it?

The last apostasy will in all likelihood manifest more of the infidel or the atheist than Popery has done; but still it is an "apostasy," a "falling away." It originates in, springs out of, and is in some way connected with, the professing Church of Christ, just as the fruit is connected with the branch, though but by a slender stalk. Its name, ANTICHRIST, shows that it *professes to be Christ*, which it could not do were it openly and utterly infidel. It is an apostasy which has taken ages to ripen, and which, though perhaps shooting up suddenly into unexpected strength, does not rise from

some separate root of its own, but is the matured offspring of previous apostasies, their consummation and unfolding, towards which every one of them has been pointing, and which every one of them contained in the bud from the beginning.

But though I believe all this, I do not the less surely believe that Popery is the *present* Antichrist, out of which, how suddenly I know not, the coming Antichrist is to spring. Popery is the apostasy of the day, and, as such, ought to be dealt with by the Church of Christ. There are many symptoms about it of a change of form and aspect; but whatever aspect it assumes, it is still the representative of the serpent's seed, the personification of the Wicked one in our day, the enemy of the saints.¹ It is right, indeed, that we should fully understand what God has revealed concerning the darker and more hateful form which it is to assume; but it is wrong to overlook its *present* aspect, as if that which was to come concerned us more immediately than that which is in the midst of us. This would truly be as absurd and perilous as for an army to stand idly on the field, and allow itself to be cut to pieces by a near enemy, because it sees in the rear a more terrible assailant pressing on. I do not mean that the present ought to shut out or supplant the future. But certainly the future ought not to supercede the present, nor blind us to our immediate danger and pressing duty.

Some writers on prophecy seem so engrossed with a future Antichrist as to forget, nay, to deny the present. They are so occupied with the

¹ For a contemporary revelation of Roman Catholicism that will chill the soul, refer to *The Vatican Exposed, Money, Murder, and the Mafia*, by Paul L. Williams, New York: Prometheus Books, 2003, 264 pp. BH

picture which they have drawn of the Man of Sin, as yet to be revealed, that they refuse to see any resemblance at all to him in the Church of Rome. They palliate the atrocities, and apologize for the doctrines of Popery, in order to be able to deny the likeness. They labor to conceal or blot out those features expressive of a common paternity which have been so often pointed out. They spare no effort to persuade men, not only that Popery is not the Man of Sin, but that it has nothing in common with him. They exaggerate the future, they soften and palliate the present, they try to obliterate some of the worst features of Popery, in order to remove everything by means of which it might be identified with the Man of Sin.

Nothing can be more perilous for the Church. It throws her entirely off her guard. It persuades her, that though Popery may be an enemy, yet it is not the bitter and deadly enemy which Scripture represents it to be; nay, that there is nothing so decidedly antichristian about it as to prevent its being, in some measure, recognized as a Church of Christ. It makes her believe that to arm herself against Popery as against Antichrist, is entirely to mistake her enemy. Thus she is soothed into a false and most fatal security; she unfastens her armor, she lays aside her weapons, under the persuasion that her great adversary has not yet arisen.

Thus she is represented as without an enemy; at least without that organized system of hostility of which the Holy Spirit has forewarned her. Is this consistent with Scripture? Does the sure word of prophecy ever teach us this? Are we not continually reminded of the working of Antichrist around us, and in our own day? Is it not God's special object to keep us on the watch against the Antichrist of the day? It is the *present apostasy*, even more than the future, that the Church needs to know and watch against. It matters not how immature that apostasy may be; it may be only in infancy, or it may be in youth; still it is against that particular development or stage of it that is in operation in our own times that we are to watch. It is on that that our eye should be fixed. It is the movements of that power that we are specially to observe. It is on the side on

which that foe assails that we are to throw up our strongest entrenchments. The belief that there is a stronger and more numerous host in the rear, marshalling its troops for the onset, is no reason why we should not repel a present and most formidable enemy, whose fire is thinning our ranks, and whose persevering skill has already carried some of our strongest defenses.

Students of the prophetic word should have been wiser. They know that God in past ages has always been warning His Church of a *present* enemy. While predicting one more terrible, He has never allowed her to lose sight of that which at the moment was assailing her. He never allowed her to disparage or underrate the foe at hand, by comparing him with the greater that was to arise. Now this is, I fear, what some, with the lamp of prophecy in their hands, are doing in our day. They are giving forth such views of the last apostasy as to lead to the impression that all previous apostasies are insignificant and impotent. They are diverting the attention of the Church from a present to a future evil. Thus while they weaken her position, they strengthen that of the adversary. It is one of Satan's devices thus to pervert the prophetic word; nay, to turn it to his own advantage. That word is the special unveiler of his craft and wickedness. The light which it was shedding upon the Papal Apostasy was awakening men from their dream of peace, and threatening to cast a most destructive blight upon his schemes of evil. How is he to meet and repel this? By misleading men as to the *present form* of Antichrist. He cannot get them to deny an Antichrist. The name is too plainly written on the Divine record. But he tells them that Antichrist is entirely a future apostasy; an apostasy *per se*; quite isolated from the present state of things; and that therefore, whatever Popery may be, it cannot be Antichrist. He so engrosses them with an infidel apostasy yet to arise, that they cannot persuade themselves that there is any other that deserves the name.

By thus presenting Antichrist as future, he persuades the Church to ungird her loins. By pointing to it as an isolated object, he shuts off the light which it sheds on Popery,—light of the

most important kind. For if what is to come be but the fruit and issue of what is present, then we may expect to find in Popery, though only budding, *all* the ungodliness, the rebellion, the lawlessness, and the atheism, which are yet to be exhibited in their Satanic ripeness, when the Man of Sin stands up in full-grown strength and energy. I believe, as I have already said, that the worst form of the apostasy has not yet been displayed. But does this render me indifferent to the form of it that now exists? No. It renders me doubly alive to it. For I see what the evil really is even at this moment, though not yet unfolded. I *read* the true character of Popery in the features of the coming Antichrist, who is its lawful offspring. I see the utter hollowness of that mighty and imposing structure of false religion. I see the dark atheism that lurks under her curiously woven veil, the denial both of the Father and the Son. I see the harlot without disguise; no longer decked in many-colored raiment, bright with her gold and silver and precious stones; but stripped of every covering; loathsome, naked, vile.

What is Popery? It calls itself a Church of Christ; nay, it calls itself *the* Church of Christ, thereby denying the title to every other. But though assuming this name, it has set itself in everything to oppose, deny, and subvert the gospel of the Lord Jesus; nay to present itself as a *substitute for Christ himself*. There is not a single doctrine and scarcely a precept of the Bible which it did not profanely burlesque or unblushingly set at naught. Did Christ say, "Call no man father on earth?" It proclaimed one of its own priests, an Italian monk, as the Church's infallible head. Did Christ say to His ministers, "Keep thyself pure?" It set up a standard of purity in opposition to His, which opened a flood-gate to all lasciviousness; and then licensed the impurity by building houses of holy name, in the darkness of whose accursed chambers the foul rankness of monastic debauchery might be screened from every eye. Did Scripture say, "Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbor?" It declared that no faith was to be kept with heretics, that the Church could dispense with oaths, nay, that no oaths

against the interests of the Church were binding, but that in her cause falsehood was no crime, and perjury meritorious. Did an apostle say, "There is ONE Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus?" It exalted the mother of our Lord to an association and co-equal mediator-ship, and canonized a "barbarous rabble of saints" to share this honor. Did God declare, "If any man shall add unto the things that are written in this book, God shall add unto him of its plagues?" It declared that "all saving truth is NOT contained in the Holy Scriptures," but also in unwritten traditions, "which whoever shall not receive with like piety and reverence as he doth the Scriptures, *let him be accursed.*" Did God forbid to curse, and command only to bless? Its whole system, creed, and service, are full of "cursing and bitterness." Did God say, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself?" The spirit of Popery was "hatred, variance, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies," its history one scene of blood and butchery, imprisonment and torture, for conscience' sake; for, even from the year 1540 to 1570, nearly ONE MILLION of Protestants were put to death by it; and from its rise, it is computed that above *fifty millions* have suffered death at its remorseless hands. Her deeds have been the darkest that ever disgraced barbarism. Yet they blacken every page of her annals. She is proud of the enormities; and for their perpetration her Popes have ordered the *Te Deum* to be chanted throughout the churches.

It is a mistake to suppose that only some of its doctrines are unscriptural. Popery is one mass of hideous error. It is, in its very nature and design, subversive of the gospel of Christ. It is, and has been all along, Satan's mighty engine for counterworking and defeating the work of Christ. It has been well named a "stupendous deception and universal counterfeit of truth." Of it one has well written, "Pagan Rome was Satan's work, constructed with his own materials of ambitious aims, policy, and knowledge; but Papal Rome is Satan's work, constructed with the materials of God." And as the Church of Christ may be called the representative of Christ on earth, so may the

Church of Rome be called the representative or personification of the Evil One. It is the truest image of Satan that the world has yet seen, though one truer and greater likeness is still preparing. The aim of Christ's work is to build up men in His own likeness, and to His own stature of perfection: the object of Satan's work in the Papacy is to build up man in his own dark likeness, and to his own stature of wickedness.

It is needful that the true character of Popery should be thoroughly laid bare, that her history should be searched, and her character proclaimed as the "mother of harlots and abominations." It is needful that she should be pointed to as the great persecutor of the saints, in whose skirts is found the blood of saints and prophets, and of all who have been slain upon the earth.² It is needful that we should be reminded of the crimson stains upon the harlot's skirts; of the Inquisition dungeons; of the dark tribunals of Austria; of the massacre of France, when the sewers of Paris flowed red with Huguenot blood; of the "bloody Piedmontese, who rolled mother and infant down the rocks;" of the fires in Smithfield; of the fields of Ireland, reddened with the blood of two hundred thousand Protestants. It is needful thus to read and re-read the history of Popery, that we may learn how thoroughly antichristian it is in all its parts, how nearly it resembles, in features and in principle, the great Antichrist of the last days. And it is the more needful thus to sound the alarm, because some writers on prophecy have spoken in such a manner of Popery, as to soothe Protestants asleep, and animate our great Popish enemy.

Nor is it a false alarm that we should thus sound. Never, since the Reformation, has Popery made so deadly and determined a struggle for the recovery of throne and altar. Hundreds of missionary priests are roaming the

island [of Great Britain], thrusting them-selves into every corner, winding themselves into the confidence of the influential, and introducing themselves with serpent-stealth and subtlety into all seats of power. They mark off their districts, and rear their churches everywhere, carrying on their work of proselytism at any expense, and by every method. They build with costly splendor; they adorn with most attractive grace; they cast the net with consummate art, that beneath its ample stretch they may entangle the thousands of every age, and class, and temper, who love a theatrical religion, that will gratify the carnal sense, and furnish men with a license for the commission of any amount of iniquity. They talk proudly, too, and boast openly of their success, casting of the mask of meekness and modesty which they had in some measure assumed; proclaiming loudly that as no heresy was ever allowed more than a duration of three centuries, the British apostasy has now reached its close. Thus they prophesy of their own speedy triumph, and of our hastening doom.

It is not my part either to confirm or to confute the prophecy. A few years will unfold it all. There may be darker days in reserve for Britain than many will believe. Her day has been long bright, her sky long cloudless. What nation has ever enjoyed a century of such profound tranquility as we have experienced, unbroken save by a few political commotions, or a few murmurs of fretful discontent. The cup of trembling, which was put into the hands and pressed to the lips of every nation in Europe, passed us by. The earthquake shocks that have for the last half century successively laid waste every kingdom around us, convulsing nations and overturning thrones, tearing up a thousand hearths, and agitating ten thousand fearful bosoms with alternate despair and hope, reached us not, nor stirred even one ripple on our sea-bound shore. When God raised up Napoleon as the scourge of the Papal empires, when He called him to His foot, gave the nations before him, and made him ruler over kings, giving them as dust to his sword and as driven stubble to his bow, He appointed him his bounds that he could not pass over, and we

² How can the blood of all the saints be found in Antichrist, if he rises up as a power by himself, in no wise connected with the previous powers of evil? And where is the blood of the saints to be found, but in the Church of Rome,—at least for the last thousand years?

were preserved, unmolested and secure. When every capital in Europe was in flames, from Moscow to Madrid, we were sitting each man under his own vine and fig-tree, with none to make us afraid.

The enemy, with the vanquished might of Europe in his train, prepared to overwhelm us. He threatened, boasted, numbered his armies, talked of a second Armada; but in vain! We were secure. We needed "no bulwarks, no towers along the steep." We were Protestant, and therefore invincible. Our PROTEST was our palladium. From our far-off lonely island, there went forth upon the earth the solitary voice that testified for Christ against Antichrist, in the midst of a world of idolatry and darkness. God heard the testimony, and he blessed the witness!

But since that time, what has taken place? We have laid aside our protest as too bigoted for an enlightened age like ours. We have struck our Protestant colors, and hung out the flag of neutrality, or rather, we should say, of religious indifference. With our own hands we have taken down the old ancestral standard which had braved three centuries of storm; allowing the spoiler to tear in pieces and trample under foot the inheritance of our fathers, the birthright of our sons; proclaiming to the world that our past protest was a stain upon our history, and that it matters nothing to a nation's wellbeing whether the Bible or the Koran be the basis of our statute-book, or whether the national ensign be surmounted by the cross, the crescent, or the triple crown. We may well be troubled for our land. We have little reason to hope that we shall ride out another storm as we have done the last. The anchor that held us fast is gone.

It is the practice of a certain class of prophetic expositors to depreciate the Reformation. Their system requires this; for unless evil, nor Protestantism so great a blessing, as has been believed, the proof of their theory is defective. The class I allude to is not yet a large one; but I fear it is on the increase. And it is because of this that I have introduced the present chapter. Whilst agreeing with them on some things, I think the application which they make of these things so perilous and

unscriptural, that it ought to be protested against by every right-minded student of the prophetic word. It will be sad indeed, if, in order to build up our prophetic system, we set out with defending Popery or disparaging the Reformation.

It will be a fatal day for the Church when Satan shall thus succeed in silencing, or at least in muffling, the prophetic testimony against the abominations of Rome. It would be a master-triumph indeed if he could now persuade the people of God, out of the word of prophecy, that the Reformation was a very doubtful blessing; that Popery has no resemblance at all to Antichrist, and that they should be looking beyond the present into the future for him against whom they are to contend. And then when that day arrives, and the last Antichrist stands before us, the great deceiver will show them how all the predictions regarding the apostasy have been long ago exhausted in the Papacy, just as he teaches Papists to believe that they were all exhausted in Pagan Rome.

There are a few fair pages in the polluted scroll of time. There are a few periods on which the eye delights to rest with exalted satisfaction and untiring interest. Of these, one of the brightest is THE REFORMATION. It was a glorious day for Europe. Over all its kingdoms the blessed light broke forth; but it remained only with a few. To most it was but the flash of the lightening that left the gloom the deeper. In Spain, in France, in Italy, it burst forth with momentary brightness; but it was quickly quenched—quenched in blood. But it was the rising of Britain's day-star, a star which has shone for three centuries upon us with benignant influence, which, though struggling at times with many a storm, and laboring they can prove that Popery is not so great an through many a cloud, has never yet gone down, but continued to shed peace, prosperity, and triumph upon the hills and valleys of our island home.

From the beginning of this age, antichrists have been rising up one after the other, each manifesting a maturer form of wickedness. And in each successive age the prophetic word spoke aloud, and warned the Church against the

existing form of antichristian evil as that against which she was called on especially to wrestle and protest. Let us not despise the warning, nor postpone it to a future generation as a matter with which we personally have nothing to do. For Satan is working unceasingly on our right hand and on our left, putting forth every effort to build up and complete his mighty fabric of evil. The work is proceeding with most appalling swiftness. The builders of this temple, of which he is the architect, are energetic and full of hope. They compass sea and land in their ambitious projects; for nothing, save the worship of the world, will content their master. He has from the beginning been seeking divine homage; he has been receiving it, surreptitiously, by means of every antichrist that has arisen; and he hopes to receive it yet more openly and fully before he is cast out of the earth for ever.

The connection of Satan with this earth is full of mystery. It seems strange that he should fill its atmosphere and occupy its soil. It is somewhat unaccountable that he should put forth such unceasing efforts to obtain dominion in it. It is as if it had been the sphere originally intended for him; of which he had been dispossessed on account of his rebellion; in which Adam had been placed in his stead; and around which, therefore, Satan still lingers, like a dethroned monarch, aiming at its recovery to his allegiance, and stirring up insurrection in every region, in his efforts to replace himself upon its throne. How he has labored for six thousand years to secure its loyalty to himself, and to obtain, even upon its fallen soil, a place of abode, instead of that hell which is prepared for him and his angels! How he shrinks from his final imprisonment in the lake of fire, imploring not to be sent into the abyss (Luke 8:31), nor to be tormented before the time! If he can but gain a footing here, he is willing to be unseen; he will consent to reign by another; he will be satisfied that a man should be his vice-regent. Nay, perhaps, this is his true aim. His object is to rival and to mock Jehovah, whose declared purpose from the beginning has been to rule the earth by man. Before long, his

dark device will too awfully prevail. He will succeed in maturing Antichrist as his vice-regent, his truest image and representative, impregnated with his own God-hating spirit, and eager to execute to the uttermost his God-defying designs. All the world shall wonder after him. All nations shall receive his mark on their foreheads and on their hands, in scornful mimicry of the saints who have their Father's name written in their foreheads. But just when his triumph seems consummated, and his representative is seated on the throne, with his myriad retinue of evil, shall the world's true King appear; and, casting the usurper, with all his hosts, into that dwelling of fire out of which they have striven so desperately to keep themselves, shall take the kingdom, and, with His holy ones, reign in peace over a delivered earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

But, up to the moment when Christ appears, Satan in the person of Antichrist, prevails and prospers. The whole period of Christ's absence from the earth is marked by the presence and prevalence of that adversary who is seeking to imitate and supplant Him. Age after age the apostasy ripens and spreads abroad its branches, offering false shelter to the inhabitants of earth in mockery of the Plant of Renown [the stem/root of Jesse, Isa. 11:1; Rom. 15:12], under whose shadow the nations are yet to rejoice. But in a moment the axe is lifted up against the tree; it is cut down and cast into the fire. It is not doomed to wither slowly down, leaf by leaf, till branch and stem are gone. Its end is swift destruction by the stroke of the Husbandman, while it is yet in its greenness and prime.

And then, what a change to this weary earth which has so long been groaning! What deliverance and joy! Christ upon the throne, Antichrist in the Abyss, and Satan bound in chains! The saints exalted and glorified, the wicked trodden down and put to shame! The curse removed, Paradise restored, Israel gathered, the Gentiles converted, creation blessed, and Jehovah, in the person of Immanuel, taking up His everlasting abode with the children of men.³

³ With reference to the above view of a *personal* Antichrist, I may quote Dr. Urwick, a well-known *Anti-Millenarian*. The idea of *personality* in Antichrist has generally been condemned as one of the dreams of modern Chiliasm. Let Dr. U. be heard on this point:—"The statements in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, with regard to the 'mystery of iniquity,' the 'man of sin,' the 'lawless one,'—though they have had a fulfillment in the Papacy,—will have a more precise and appalling fulfillment. I confess that the style of expression seems to favor the idea of some *one person*, rather than a succession of persons."—On the Second Advent, pp. 222-225. Both Augustine and Jerome, who were strenuous *Anti-Chiliasmists*, held the doctrine of a personal Antichrist. No one, for instance, can read the commentary of the former upon the 9th Psalm without observing this. And as for the latter, he introduces the idea in numerous places both of his Epistles and Commentaries. He even goes the length of telling us that Antichrist is to be a Jew, (vol. iv. 523), that he is to be hailed by the Jews as Messiah (v. 131), and that he is to perish on the Mount of Olives, *qui in Monte Oliveti consumendus sit* (iv. 93). He gets the last of these ideas out of

Isaiah 25:6-7, and Daniel 11:45. I may notice, in passing, that both of these fathers, though postmillennialists, frequently allude to the destruction of Antichrist by *the* second advent of the Lord. They do not attempt to explain away II Thessalonians 2:8.—If, then, the doctrine of a personal Antichrist be an unscriptural fancy, let both Millenarians and Anti-Millenarians bear the blame of holding it. I suspect, however, that the question is very much of words. Both parties hold that there will be a personal head of the Antichristian body; only the one lays greater stress upon the head than upon the body, while the other does the opposite.

Come, my God Jehovah, come,
 With all thy saints appear;
 Antichrist expects his doom,
 And we thy kingdom here.

Thee Jesus, Lord of lords we know,
 The kingdoms of the earth are thine;
 Hasten to erect thy throne below,
 That last great monarchy divine.

Charles Wesley
on Zechariah 14