

Is the Pope Anti-Christ?

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IT has become the order of the day in Presbyterian circles at home and abroad to find fault with the statement in the Confession of Faith in which the Pope is described as Anti-Christ, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God” (*Confession of Faith, chap. xxv. sec. 6*).

Some of the largest of the Presbyterian bodies have cut out the passage altogether. It is well, therefore, that we should consider the proof-texts advanced by the Divines for their statement.

The first is II. Thess. ii. 1-12:” Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you; I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way: and then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

The second is in I. Tim. iv. 1-3:” Now, the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils: speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which

believe and know the truth.” These are solemn words and one naturally asks is there any system or organisation among men answering to the description given in these verses? Our forefathers had no hesitation in saying there was and that the system was Romanism culminating in its head, the Pope, and we believe they had scriptural authority for so saying. Let us briefly note the following points from the foregoing verses.

1. The Apostasy. The Apostasy referred to in the foregoing verses was a much more serious departure from the faith than that which characterised the early Christian Church in common with Churches in all ages of gradual decay in spiritual life and love. This is pre-eminently called “*the apostasy*” and the description given of it makes it plain that it refers to no ordinary “*falling away*.”

It was to be such an outbreak of clerical ambition that was well-nigh impossible when Christians were a persecuted people. It supposes the Church an organised body and its ministers able to mount to heights almost incredible (*Brown's Structure of the Apocalypse, pp. 152, 153*). Has such a condition of things been actually realised? Let us notice the claims put forward by the Church of Rome. Has not the Pope claimed to have supreme authority in the Church of Christ and over nations? Hildebrandianism¹ has become the accepted order of the Romish Church.

The Pope wears the triple crown - no other ruler does so. This position has been further strengthened in the place assigned to him by the prelates of the Church in Council assembled in 1870. So it is not merely an individual claim - serious and all as that would be - but it is now an acknowledgment of the whole Roman Church. Principal David Brown commenting on the words in Thessalonians says: “If this does not come up to all that is here predicted of the 'man of sin' we may safely say that the prediction will never be realised” (*Structure of the Apocalypse, p. 153*).

2. Anti-Christ is further described as “the man of sin” (*ho anthros tes hamartias*),” the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” To Anti-Christ is applied the description given to Judas by our Lord - “the son of perdition.” The Pope, like Judas, professes reverence for Christ, but by his teaching and works actually

¹ The doctrine that the State is in subjection to the Church. It is so called after Hildebrand (Pope Gregory VII). It is the opposite of Erastianism.-Editor

betrays him. The Pope claims the divine prerogative of forgiving sins by the priests delegated by him. Titles have been ascribed to Popes which no mortal man had a rightful claim to and did our space permit many of these might be quoted.

3." Forbidding to marry." The reference here means more than the entrance of the ascetic spirit which crept so early into the Christian Church. It is this asceticism organised into a system and worked out by church authority in the specific form of prohibition of marriage. "Now, in point of fact there is one, and only one such body existing. The Church of Rome forbids clerical marriage, and holds celibacy forth as a holier state of life, and therefore the fitting thing for those who minister in holy things" (Dr. Brown's *Structure of the Apocalypse*, p. 154).

4." Commanding to abstain from meats." The Church of Rome has commanded that the faithful abstain from flesh meat one day of the week.

It is remarkable that the foregoing descriptions of Anti-Christ should find their embodiment in the Church of Rome as represented in the Pope and Richard Baxter's comment is pertinent to the point when he remarks: "If the Pope be not Anti-Christ, he hath ill-luck to be so like him!"

It is not necessary to enter further on a discussion of the subject as we are sure it will be generally admitted that the Westminster Divines had solid grounds for the statement they made in the Confession of Faith