

SECTION V  
THE REFORMATION STAGE

V

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"After three days I will rise again."—Matt. 27 : 63.

IT was on the 5th day of May, 1514, at the ninth session of the Lateran Council that the Papal Orator pronounced his pæan of triumph over the extinction of heretics and schismatics."

"*Jam nemo reclamât, nullus obstitit.*"

"There is an end of resistance to the papal rule and religion : opposers there exist no more."

*Three years and a half later on, to a day, on October 31st, 1517, Luther posted up his Theses at Wittemberg.* "The voice of an obscure monk rang through Europe, like the mighty thunder peal ; awakening men from the slumber of ages, and shaking to its foundation the usurped dominion of Romanism."<sup>1</sup> In Luther and the Reformers the slaughtered witnesses to the truth of the gospel, risen from the dead, stood once more upon their feet before Rome and the world.

This was what the martyr Huss, a hundred years before, had foretold. "I am no vain dreamer," he said, "but hold for certain that the image of Christ shall never be effaced. They wish to destroy it : but it shall be painted afresh in

<sup>1</sup> Pennington, "Epoch's of the Papacy," p. 276.

the hearts of gospel-preachers better than myself. And I, *awaking as it were from the dead, and rising from the grave*, shall rejoice with exceeding great joy."

Jerome of Prague, his fellow martyr, named the interval one hundred years, "after which their memory would be vindicated, their cause triumphant."

This double prophecy was fulfilled.

Pope Adrian, Leo X's successor, in a brief addressed to the diet of Nuremberg in 1523, wrote thus: "*The heretics Hus and Jerome seem now to be alive again in the person of Luther.*" "Not in the compass of the whole ecclesiastical history of Christendom, save and except in the death and resurrection of Christ Himself, is there any such example of *the sudden, mighty, and triumphant resuscitation of His cause and Church from a state of deep depression.*"<sup>1</sup> Their lofty and animated descriptions of this divine revival are clothed by the writers of the period in metaphors borrowed from the pages of the Apocalypse. Thus Milton wrote,—

"When I recall to mind at last, after so many dark ages, wherein the huge overshadowing train of error had almost *swept all the stars out of the firmament of the Church*: how the bright and blissful Reformation, by divine power, struck through the black and settled night of ignorance and *anti-christian tyranny*, methinks a sovereign and reviving joy must needs rush into the bosom of him that reads or hears; and the sweet odour of the returning Gospel imbathe his soul with the fragrant of heaven. *Then was the sacred Bible sought out of the dusty corners where profane falsehood and neglect had thrown it*; the schools opened, divine and human learning raked out of the embers of forgotten tongues, the

<sup>1</sup> Elliott, II, p. 457, 460.

princes and cities now trooping apace to the new-erected banner of salvation; *the martyrs* with the irresistible might of weakness, shaking the powers of darkness, and *scorning the fiery rage of the old red dragon.*"

A new era had dawned upon the world: an era of Light, Liberty, Life, Progress; *the Age of the Book*. Then was the Bible translated into the vernacular languages of Europe, and later on into all the leading languages of the world, its sacred pages opened in the eyes of the nations, its truths expounded in their ears, its records placed in their hands, yea, its teachings written in the hearts, and reflected in the lives of millions emancipated from the prison house of papal bondage.

Then, to use the language of the historian, Gibbon, "the lofty fabric of superstition, from the abuse of indulgences to the intercession of the Virgin, was levelled with the ground. Myriads of both sexes of the monastic profession were restored to the liberty and labours of social life. An hierarchy of saints and angels, of imperfect and subordinate deities, were stripped of their temporal power . . . their images and relics banished from the Church; and the credulity of the people no longer nourished with the daily repetition of miracles and visions. *The imitation of paganism* was supplanted by a pure and spiritual worship of prayer and thanksgiving. . . . The chain of authority was broken . . . the popes, fathers, and councils, were no longer the supreme and infallible judges of the world; and each Christian was taught to acknowledge no law but the Scriptures, no interpreter but his own conscience."

#### ADVANCE IN PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION

The advent of the Reformation shed a broad beam of

light upon the very centre and heart of Apocalyptic prophecy. It illuminated the visions in the tenth and eleventh chapters, removing the obscurity which had hitherto hung upon their meaning; and caused the trumpet call to God's people in the eighteenth chapter, *to come out of Babylon*, to sound forth as never before.

Now was the mighty cloud clothed, rainbow crowned angel of the vision in the tenth chapter seen as it were to descend from heaven *holding in his hand a little book open*; and setting his feet on land and sea, he was heard to cry aloud as when a lion roareth. Then were heard the seven thunders of Rome's anathemas, pealing forth their defiant reply. Then did the Reformers *take from the hands of the angel the "little book" of the newly-opened Word of God*, and eating it themselves, as Ezekiel had done before them, renew their prophecy, "before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings."<sup>1</sup> Then did the Reformers "*rise and measure the temple of God*," as commanded, "and the altar and them that worship therein," leaving out, or *casting out*, as bidden, "*the outer court*," as given to the Gentiles *to remain unreformed*, and continue trodden under foot. Then too, was "the great city which *spiritually* is called Sodom and Egypt" denounced as such;<sup>2</sup> and the prophesying of *Christ's sackcloth clothed witnesses*, like that of the Jewish prophets in the days of the Baalitical and Babylonian apostasies, clearly recognized: the "olive trees" or anointed ones, like the faithful reformers in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, after the return of Judah from the ancient typical Babylon seen to be "candlesticks" or light bearers, "standing before the God of the earth."

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 10: 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* 11: 8.

Now was the mystery cleared up; now was the meaning of these wondrous visions revealed, and the testimony of prophecy confirmed the faith, and justified the position of the Reformers. What Ezra and Nehemiah, Joshua and Zerubbabel had been in the great work of the *restoration of Judah from Babylonish captivity*, of the rebuilding of the altar, and temple of God, and of *the ruined walls of Jerusalem*, such were the modern Reformers in the still more glorious work of the Reformation of the Church *after her long captivity in the anti-typical "Babylon the Great"*; and the visions of the Apocalypse based as to their symbolism, upon the history of Judah's restoration, stood forth explained by the events of modern history; a brilliant lamp lighting the Reformers' feet; a miracle of divine prescience; a seal of approbation upon the Reformation movement; a warrant for its work, a pledge of its success.

#### A TWOFOLD DISCOVERY

The Reformation was born of a twofold discovery; the discovery of *Christ*, and the discovery of *Antichrist*. This discovery was first developed in the mind of Luther; and from his mind it passed into the mind of Western Europe; from whence it has since gone forth throughout the world. It arose from Luther's finding a Bible. To the awakened monk God revealed through His word the glorious gospel of salvation. Profoundly convinced of sin, Luther embraced "the righteousness of God" revealed in the Scriptures, and justification by faith in contrast with justification by works became the thrilling theme of his testimony.

There followed the posting up in October, 1517, of Luther's ninety-five theses against indulgences, which he

affixed to the door of the chief church at Wittenberg, boldly offering to maintain them against all impugnors. "The truths most prominently asserted in them were the Pope's utter insufficiency to confer forgiveness of sin, or salvation,—Christ's all-sufficiency,—and the true spiritual penitent's participation, by God's free gift, independently altogether of papal indulgence or absolution, not merely in the blessing of forgiveness, but in all the riches of Christ. There were added other declarations also, very notable as to the gospel of the glory and grace of God, not the merits of saints, "being the true and precious treasure of the Church";—a denunciation of the avarice and soul deceptions of the priestly traffickers in indulgences;—and a closing exhortation to Christians to follow Christ as their Chief, even through crosses and tribulation, thereby at length to attain to His heavenly kingdom. Bold indeed were the words thus published; and the effect such that the evening of their publication<sup>1</sup> has been remembered ever afterwards, and is ever memorable, as *the Epoch of the Reformation.*"<sup>2</sup>

Following Luther's discovery of Christ came his discovery of *Antichrist*. In the month of June, 1520, the Pope hurled a thunderbolt at Luther, condemning his doctrines in a bull, and ordering that "unless within sixty days he retracted his errors, he was to be seized and sent as a prisoner to Rome."

On December 20th, 1520, "a pile of wood was erected at the east gate of Wittenberg. One of the oldest members of the university lighted it. As the flames arose, Luther advanced arrayed in his frock and cowl, and amid bursts of approbation from the doctors, professors and students,

<sup>1</sup> *All Hallows' Even*, October 31st.

<sup>2</sup> Elliott, *Horre*, II, p. 100.

hurled into the fire *the Canon Law, the Decretals, and the Papal Bull.*" "The defiance of Wittenberg was followed by the emancipation of half the nations of Europe from their spiritual and temporal bondage."<sup>1</sup>

Hidden from his persecutors in a lonely castle in the Wartburg forest, Luther now translated the New Testament into vernacular German. He prefixed to the Apocalypse, in his great edition of the German Bible, in 1534, an outline of his views as to the meaning of the prophecy. He considered it contained a prefiguration of the chief events in the history of the Christian Church. The woman clothed with the sun, and crowned with twelve stars, who flees to the wilderness from her persecutors, represents in his view, the true Church; and the two witnesses a succession of faithful witnesses for Christ. Of the opposing wild beast powers, the *first beast* represents the papal secular revived Roman Empire; and the second beast the Pope's ecclesiastical or spiritual empire. The number of the beast, 666, signifies according to Luther, *the number of years* that the beast may be destined to endure, measured, he says in his Table Talk, from Gregory, or perhaps Phocas. The Antichrist is, in his view, an ecclesiastical person. In his "De Antichristo," he says, "The *Turk* cannot be Antichrist, because he is not in the Church of God." "Whoever so came in Christ's name," he exclaims, "as did the Pope?"

As the Reformation advanced, the true meaning of the predictions in the tenth and eleventh chapters of the Apocalypse more and more forced itself upon men's minds. Bullinger, at Zurich, in his expository discourses on the Apocalypse, published in 1557, boldly explains the *angel*

<sup>1</sup> Pennington, "Epochs of the Papacy," p. 287.

vision in Apocalypse 10, as representing Christ's intervention through the Reformers. The "little open book" in the hand of the angel he interprets as the gospel, opened to men by the Reformers, and given to the world with the aid of the newly invented art of printing. He says the oath in the tenth chapter alludes to the three and a half "times" of Daniel 12, and surmises that the redemption of the Church at Christ's coming, to raise the dead and transform the living was even then drawing nigh. As to the *witnesses*, the number *two* indicated that they were to be few, yet sufficient. The great city of their slaughter is the empire of Papal Rome. The falling of the tenth of the city represented the mighty defections already begun from the Papal Church and Empire. On the seventh trumpet he says, "It must come soon, therefore our redemption draweth nigh." He explains the second beast as the Papal Antichrist, rising under Gregory I, and his successor Boniface, to the position of Universal Bishop. "On the name and number of the beast he adopts Irenæus' solution, dwelling on the Latinism of the Papacy, much like Dr. More afterwards."

Bale, Bishop of Ossory under Edward VI, published an Apocalyptic Commentary entitled "Image of Both Churches," *i. e.*, the true and the false. He explains the vision of Apocalypse 10, like Bullinger, as representing the Reformation; the *book opened* being the Scriptures then newly translated into the vernacular languages, and expounded by gospel-preachers. The *measuring rod* in Revelation 11 he explains as God's Word, "now graciously sent as out of Zion," the *temple* as God's congregation or Church, distinguished by His Word from the synagogue of Satan; the *witnesses* as faithful protestors for Christ that

continue with God's people all through the time of the Church's oppression by her so-called "Gentile" foes. The fall of the tenth part of the city, represents the diminution of the Papal Church. We have here, says Bale, "what is done already, and what is to come under this sixth trumpet, whereunder we are now; which all belongeth to the second woe."

In *David Chytræus' Explicatio Apocalypsis*, published at Wittemberg, in 1571, the *1,260 days of the Gentiles treading down the holy city are explained as 1,260 years*, to be calculated either from Alaric's taking of Rome in A. D., 412, or from *Phocas' decree*, A. D., 606; and thus to end in A. D., 1672, or in A. D., 1866. The resurrection of the witnesses he explains of their speedy revival "on each individual occasion of their temporary suppression by Antichrist."

*Augustin Marlorat's* exposition of the Revelation of St. John, published in 1574, under Queen Elizabeth, "is professedly collected out of divers notable writers of the Protestant Churches, viz.:—*Bullinger, Calvin, Gaspar Meyander, Justus Jonas, Lambertus, Musculus, Æcolampadius, Pellicanus, Meyer, Viret.*" On Apocalypse 10 he sets forth "the clear decisive explanation of its *Angel-vision* usual among the Reformers, as figuring the opening of the Scriptures and revived gospel preaching at the Reformation: also the exclusion of the outer court in Apocalypse 11, as signifying the exclusion of Papists."

Thus similarly the venerable martyrologist *John Foxe* in his exposition of the Apocalypse written in the year 1586, —a work interrupted by his death,—applies the magnificent vision of Christ in Apocalypse 10 to the restoration of gospel preaching, the book in the angel's hand representing God's Word. The *temple* of Apocalypse 11 he takes to

be the Church; its *inner* court the true worshippers; its *outer* the false; the *measuring* of the temple its separation and *reformation* "as in our day," implying a previous corruption under Antichrist. All this had been done under the sixth, or Turkish trumpet, whose end he considered to be near. Under the seventh trumpet which would follow, the Church would have its time of blessedness accomplished, in Christ's coming, and the saints' resurrection.

*Brightman's* "Commentary on the Apocalypse" dedicated to "the holy reformed churches of Brittany, Germany and France," was published in A. D. 1600 or 1601, before the death of Queen Elizabeth. In this remarkable work which was deservedly popular with the Protestant Churches of the time, Brightman rightly identifies the *locust* *woe* of the fifth trumpet with the *Saracen* invasion, and the *Euphratean* *woe* of the sixth trumpet with the *Turkish*. The casting down of the dragon in Apocalypse 12, and his restoration in a new form under the beast of Apocalypse 13, he applies to the casting down of the rule of heathen Rome under Constantine, and the subsequent revival of Roman rule under the Popes; the head of the empire being wounded to death by the Gothic invasions, and *healed by Justinian and Phocas* in the exaltation of the papacy in the restored empire.

Considering the Apocalyptic interpretation of the sixteenth century as a whole we recognize not only a considerable advance in the understanding of the prophecy, but a practical application and use of its leading predictions of the highest importance. The glorious work of the Reformation was built upon doctrinal, practical, and prophetic grounds. Apocalyptic prophecy was accorded a prominent position among the stately pillars of its foundation. To

the reformers the Church of Rome was "Babylon the great" of the Apocalypse, clad in purple and scarlet, adorned with "gold, and precious stones, and pearls," a faithless harlot seated on a wild beast power, intoxicating the nations with the cup of her idolatries and superstitions, and drunken with "the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus." The duty of separation from the Church of Rome was boldly proclaimed on the ground of the divine command in Revelation 18, "Come out of her my people that ye be not partaker of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." The duty to reform the Church was urged on the authority of the command in Revelation 11, "Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein." While Rome excommunicated the Reformers, the Reformers excommunicated Rome in obedience to the command in Revelation 11, "The court which is without the temple, leave out (or rather 'cast out') and measure it not." The Pope of Rome was resisted and condemned as "the Man of Sin," "the Antichrist," the "standard-bearer" as Calvin calls him, "of an abominable apostasy." The long line of pre-reformation martyrs, and the reformers and martyrs of the Reformation, were regarded as the sackcloth clothed and faithful witnesses of the Apocalypse, God's anointed "prophets," like Elijah and Elisha in the days of the Baalitical apostasy of Israel, and Ezra and Nehemiah in the time of the restoration of Jerusalem, and rebuilding of the temple, who, warred against and overcome by the wild beast power, had been figuratively raised from the dead, and exalted in full view of their amazed antagonists. To the Reformers of the sixteenth century the era of the seventh trumpet was at hand, when "The kingdoms of this world" would become "the kingdoms of

our Lord and of His Christ." And they awaited the predicted and proximate hour when "like a great millstone" "that great city Babylon" should be "thrown down and found no more at all," and the "great voice of much people in heaven" should lift up the rejoicing utterance, with thrice repeated hallelujahs, "salvation, and glory, and honour, and power unto the Lord our God, for true and righteous are His judgments: for He hath judged the great whore which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand." The prominence of Apocalyptic interpretation in the voluminous writings of the Reformers is one of their most marked features. They wielded the word of prophecy as the sharp two-edged sword of the Spirit, "piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit." And while God sealed their testimony with lasting spiritual success, they, on their part, sealed their witness with their blood. They inaugurated an era of light and liberty such as the world had never seen before, which remains as the colossal confirmation of their testimony, as interpreters and teachers of "the Word of God which endureth forever."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The view that the Church of Rome is the "Babylon" of the Apocalypse, and the succession of the Popes the predicted "Man of Sin," or Antichrist, seated in the Christian Church, was universally held by the Reformers in the sixteenth century. See the works of Luther, Knox, Tyndale, Latimer, Hooper, Ridley, Cranmer, Jewel, Coverdale, Foxe, Fulke, Grindal, Bale, Bradford, Beacon, Bullinger, Rogers, Sandys, Norden, Nowell, Hutchinson, Whitaker, Whitgift, Melancthon, Zwingli, Calvin, etc. One of the fullest statements of the view will be found in Jewel's eloquent and able "Commentary on Thessalonians," and abundant references to it in Foxe's "Acts and Monuments of the Martyrs"; a view embodied in the confessions of faith of the Reformed churches.

Numerous references to the teachings of the Reformers on the subject are given in the Index Volume to the works of the Reformers published by the Parker Society. Thus on Babylon as Rome, see Ridley, 70, 415. Bullinger IV, 11. Bradford I, 443; II, 329. Fulke II, 371. Jewel IV, 881, 1,063. Latimer I, 173. Tyndale I, 188.

Coverdale II, 586. Bale, 458, 517-524, 533. On the Pope as the Man of Sin, or Antichrist, see Bale, 38. Bradford I, 435, 441; II, 142. Fulke II, 269, 366. Hooper V, 44. Hutchinson, 304. Jewel I, 109; II, 903, etc. Ridley, 53, 263, 414, etc. Sandys, II, 389. Tyndale I, 147, 148, 185, 191, 208, 232-252, 266, 340; II, 178, 179, 181, 182, 196; III, 96, 102-107, 171. Marks or signs by which he may be known, Bale, 203. Hooper II, 44, 56, 512. Jewel II, 913, 921, 991, 992. Seated in the temple of God, *i. e.*, the Church, Bale, 208. Bradford I, 505, 523, 529. Jewel II, 991; IV, 727-729. At Rome, Jewel II, 915; IV, 743, 744. How to be destroyed, Bullinger IV, 34, 162. Fulke II, 393. Jewel II, 927, 928. Tyndale I, 312. Types of his destruction, Jewel II, 928, 929. St. John's account of it, *ib.*, 930-932. His destruction begun already, Sandys, 389. The Pope proclaimed as Antichrist by the Council at Rheims, Rogers, 182, 347; by the returned exiles, Zurich Letters, I, 27; by the legislature of Scotland, Zurich Letters, 199. See also the antipapal applications of prophecy in Knox's "History of the Reformation in Scotland"; John Foxe's "Acts and Monuments of the Martyrs," and the "Homilies of the Church of England."