

IS POPERY THE ANTICHRIST?

THE TENDENCY OF PROPHECY TO DESCRIBE THINGS ACCORDING TO THE REALITY, RATHER THAN THE APPEARANCE OR PROFESSION

The interpretation which has been given in the text of the strongest terms in the apostle's language respecting the antichrist, by understanding them of a virtual, in contradistinction to a formal and avowed assumption of blasphemous prerogatives, is so much in accordance with the general style of prophecy, and so plainly demanded by the connection, that we cannot refrain from expressing our wonder, at finding interpreters of note still pressing the opposite view. Their doing so must be regarded as another instance of that tendency to literalism, which has wrought such confusion in the prophetic field, and which, at particular points, returns upon some, who in general have attained to a correct discernment of the characteristics of prophecy. The practice of describing things by their real, as opposed to their professed or apparent character, is one that peculiarly distinguishes the Apocalyptic imagery. Thus the worldly kingdoms, both in Daniel and the Revelation, are represented as beasts—not that they actually were, or gave themselves out to be such, but because they pursued a course which partook largely of the bestial nature; they were, one might say, virtual beasts. And the false, seductive power designated Babylon, the mother of harlots and abominations, we may be sure, was not going to proclaim her own shame by declaring herself to be what those epithets import. Beyond all doubt, she is described according to what she really was, not by what she would profess, to be. In like manner, the names of blasphemy on the head of the beast indicate a real rather than a professed dishonour to the God of heaven; for open profanity and avowed atheism have, with few exceptions, been studiously avoided by the worldly power. It has almost uniformly striven to associate with its different forms of government, and political aims, the name and sanctions of religion. Even in the more prosaic parts of the Apocalypse we find the same characteristic prevailing—as when it describes the soaring spirit of the Gnostic teachers, by their knowing the depths of Satan (not those of God, which they themselves rather affected to understand), and designates them by such epithets as Nicolaitans (people-destroyers), followers of Balaam, Jezebels—which they were so far from professing to be, that they laid claim to the highest gifts and the most honourable distinctions. Nor could it be otherwise with the wolves, of whose coming St Paul warned the Ephesian elders (Acts xx.); they were not going, when they appeared, to avow their own wolf-like character, but would, doubtless, aspire to the place of guides and shepherds of the flock. All prophecy, indeed, abounds with examples of this mode of representation; for, speaking as with Divine intuition, it ever delights to penetrate through showy appearances, and to strip deceivers of their false disguises. Thus the self-

deifying pride of the Chaldean conquerors has its representation in the prophet Habakkuk, by their being characterised as successful fishers, sacrificing to their own net (chap. i. 16); and the corruption of degenerate Israel is exhibited with singular boldness by Ezekiel, under the form of their having had an Amorite father and a Hittite mother (chap. xvi. 3); and by Isaiah, under the announcement, as from themselves, that they had made a covenant with death, and come to an agreement with hell (chap. xxviii. 15). By a still bolder figure the prophet Amos calls the tabernacle in the wilderness the tabernacle of their Moloch, because the idolatrous and un sanctified spirit which still clung to them rendered it practically an idol-tent rather than that of the true God (chap. v. 26). These and many similar representations are obviously designed to set before us the real state and character of the parties described, though entirely different from the outward profession and appearance. On any other principle it were impossible to render much that is written in prophecy either intelligible in itself, or consistent with the facts of history.

The violation of this principle in regard to the passages which treat of the antichristian apostacy, by adhering to a mistaken literalism, is the more to be regretted, as it is doing with this portion of the prophetic Scriptures what it has already done with those which have respect to the promised Messiah—it is altogether destroying in the hands of its abettors their apologetic value. As, with the one class of predictions, Jewish Rabbis find themselves backed by Christian literalists in denying the fulfilment of some of the clearest prophetic intimations in the history of Jesus of Nazareth, so Romish controversialists are sheltering themselves under the wing of Protestant interpreters of the same school, in rebutting the application of the Scriptural antichrist to Popery. Thus, in a small volume recently published on "The End of the World, or the Second Coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by the Very Rev. John Baptist Pagani," a very adroit use is made of the name of the late Mr Faber. An astonishment is first expressed that any intelligent person could ever have thought of identifying the Pope of Rome with the antichrist of Scripture, especially that this could be done in so enlightened a country as England; and then a passage from Mr Faber's "Calendar of Prophecy" is quoted to show how a sensible Protestant writer exposes the absurdity of the idea. In the passage referred to the argument is thrown into what is considered both by Mr Faber and by his Catholic admirer a conclusive syllogism. "I shall throw my argument," Mr Faber says, "into the form of a syllogism, and if any person be able to confute me, I shall be very ready to own myself mistaken. According to St John, he who denies the Father and the Son, this is the antichrist. The line of the Roman Pontiffs did not deny the Father or the Son; therefore the line of the Roman Pontiffs is not the antichrist." Embracing with satisfaction this triumphant syllogism, Mr Pagani proceeds to give it additional strength by affirming, that so far from denying the Father and the Son, the Roman Pontiffs have always maintained the doctrine of the Trinity against Deists, Sabellians, Unitarians, and other heretics; that they have uniformly held, that Christ has come in the flesh; that they have also been remarkably distinguished for their humility, taking for their ordinary title, "unworthy ministers of Christ," "servants of the servants of God," whereas antichrist is to exalt himself above all that is called God. P. 41, sq.

One might go through a considerable portion of prophecy with this sort of syllogism, and ask in vain for any thing in the transactions of real life, that would answer to the terms of the predictions. What, on such a style of interpretation, could be made of the passages to which we have been adverting?

Must we suspend the veracity of one prophet on the question, whether the proud Chaldeans actually hung up a net in some temple and did sacrifice to it? Or that of another, on the similar question, whether the Israelites literally bore about during their long sojourn in the wilderness an idolatrous tabernacle in impious rivalry to that of Jehovah? Or must we have credible testimony to the fact, that the great worldly monarchies, as they successively arose, did each proclaim their own beast-like and blasphemous character? Or, finally, shall we hold that nothing can verify the description given of the mystic Babylon, which does not set itself openly to establish and avow the prostitution of all righteous principle? If such be the kind of expectations, with which we proceed to examine the prophetic word, we may certainly lay our account to meet with few instances of fulfilment; we know not where they are to be found in the past, and are afraid they shall in vain be looked for in the future. But surely, if the apostle in his day knew persons in the Christian church, whom he could declare to be the "enemies of the Cross of Christ," even while they were avowedly looking to that cross for salvation, the pontiffs of Rome might justly enough be characterized as denying the Father and the Son, if they should be found claiming prerogatives, and upholding a system of error and delusion, which virtually subvert the revelation given of the Father and the Son in Scripture. Let it just be granted, that in the descriptions of the collective antichrist, the apostles had their eye on the realities, not on the mere appearances of things--no very extravagant postulate surely--then the proper syllogism will stand thus: the antichrist, according to St. John, is he who denies the Father and the Son; but the line of the Roman Pontiffs, by their own blasphemous assumptions, and by their system of legalized falsehood and corruption, utterly opposed to the spirit and design of the Gospel, have denied what is revealed of the Father and the Son; therefore the line of the Roman pontiffs is antichrist. This we take to be a truer form of syllogism than Mr. Faber's. But it only meets one fallacy involved in the interpretation. There is another in its taking for granted, that the representations in John's epistles are to be regarded as comprehensive of all that was to characterize the spirit and conduct of the antichrist. He merely points to one of the first forms and manifestations of the evil--that which took shape under the hands of the Gnostic teachers. By and by this was to lead on to others, of which not less distinct intimation was given elsewhere in the New Testament writings. The antichristian spirit was to assume different phases, according to the peculiar influences of the time, and the changing fortunes of the church. But they were all to have one thing in common: under a profession of Christianity, there was to be something in doctrine or practice, which in effect made void the Christian truth and life. This in every form was to be the characteristic of antichristianism as contradistinguished from atheism, heathenism, or undisguised worldliness. And hence, so far from expecting that the Popes, or any other embodiments of the antichrist, should formally assume what is predicted of this power, we should rather expect the reverse. We should expect a studious effort to disguise the truth of the case, though such a one as should only impose upon the ignorant or the corrupt. And precisely as the Servant of servants can in lordly arrogance place his foot upon the necks of princes, and claim the ascendancy over all earthly power and authority, so under a boastful proclamation of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the conversion of the Cross into a magic charm, may there be found the most substantial denial of the Father and the Son. In a word, the question is, not what Popery pretends to be, but what it really is; with this alone we have to do in determining its relation to the prophetic delineations of Scripture. And when the subject is viewed in this light, he must be strangely blinded or unhappily biassed, who fails to perceive the striking correspondence between the one and the other.

1. Even Hengstenberg has given too much countenance to this utterly groundless and extravagant idea, when, in discoursing upon this passage of Amos in the first volume of his work on the Pentateuch, he thus unfolds the general sense of the announcement: "The great mass of the people had, for the larger part of the time during their march through the wilderness, given up honouring the Lord by sacrifices, and instead of Jehovah, the God of hosts, had set up a spurious king of heaven (the Egyptian Pan), whom with the rest of the host of heaven, they honoured with a spurious worship." It is against all probability, that such an openly idolatrous worship, as is here supposed, should have been practised by the mass of the Israelites during their stay in the wilderness. Occasional defections there no doubt were, but we have no reason to think more-at least, nothing approaching to such a regular, systematic, and general idolatry. We are told even of the comparatively smaller and isolated offences of a public nature-such as the gathering of sticks on the Sabbath, and the blaspheming of God's name-being capitally punished; and can it be imagined that an idol-tabernacle should have been allowed to be carried about, and openly frequented? Assuredly not. It is of the state of the heart, of its still unsanctified and idolatrous spirit, that the prophet speaks; this practically turned Jehovah's tent and worship into the interest of heathenism; in God's sight it belonged to Moloch rather than to himself. When thus viewed, also there is no need, with Hengstenberg, of rendering "your king" instead of "your Moloch;" indeed, to do so rather obscures the meaning. The prophet is seeking to identify the idolatrous spirit of his own day with that of earlier times; they were then going after Moloch; and so, says the prophet, you have always been substantially doing. You did so through your forefathers in the wilderness; even then you bore the tabernacle of your Moloch, and sacrificed to strange gods, and the old doom must return upon you. It is, therefore, the later form of idolatry, which is used to characterize the earlier, not (as Hengstenberg would have it) the earlier the later.

The preceding article was excerpted from Appendix "L," Page 367, of Patrick Fairbairn's *The Interpretation of Prophecy*, 1864 (Recently reprinted by Banner of Truth Publishing)

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FAIRBAIRN, PATRICK

The Interpretation of Prophecy

This is Fairbairn's best-known work. Like all his writings it is characterized by a deep familiarity with the text and language of Scripture, careful and thoroughly-researched scholarship, and a sane and balanced approach to exegesis. Here we have "the mature reflections of a lifetime of devoted scholarly study of the subject of prophecy. Part one deals with the principles of interpretation. Part two applies these principles to matters related to the kingdom of Christ (and its victory), Antichrist and the beast (and their doom), the millennium, the mystery of iniquity, and much more. If you want to know, from a practical standpoint, why in our day so-called Protestants are signing compromising agreements with Roman Catholics, why there is so much disunity and defection in the church, why age old standards are being dropped, and why there is general turmoil all about, this book will certainly help to give you the clear and sobering answer.

FAIRBAIRN, PATRICK

The Prophetical Future of the Church and Kingdom of Christ, in their Relation to the Character, Working, and Fate of the Antichristian Apostasy

Excerpted from the book *The Interpretation of Prophecy* this book gives us a fascinating look at what the bible has to say about the period in which we live. It focuses on one of our great enemies, Antichrist, and exhibits the manner in which he is portrayed in "Daniel both Typically and Antitypically;" "as represented by our Lord and his Apostles;" "as represented in the Apocalypse;" and in regard "to its Overthrow and Final Doom." A fine short introduction to classic Protestant Historicist Postmillennialism and a good way to whet your appetite for the major release (sometime next year, D.V.) of David Steele's *Notes on the Apocalypse*, which should prove to be one of the most important books on eschatology to be published in quite some time.

WYLIE, J.A.

The Papacy is the Antichrist (1888)

Few Christians know that the anti-Protestant Futurist theory originated with a Spanish Jesuit by the name of Ribera, who, in 1585 published a Commentary on the Revelation, in which he laboured to turn aside the Protestant application of the Apocalyptic prophecies and symbols from the church of Rome. It is also not well known the anti-Protestant Praterite (preterist) theory came from the pen of a Spanish Jesuit, Alcasar of Seville, who in 1615 published a work having in view the same end as Ribera, viz, to set aside the commonly accepted Reformation view that the Roman Papacy is the Antichrist (adapted from Original Covenanter and Contending Witness magazine). This book demonstrates that the Pope is the Antichrist using Scripture, history and the Pope's own words. Or as Ian Paisley states: "It is the purpose of this book to demonstrate that the preaching of the Great Cloud of Witnesses of all ages in the Church is true and that the little horn is none other than the Dynasty of Rome's Popes and that therefore THE POPE IS THE ANTICHRIST." This view (the "continuous historical Protestant theory") stands in agreement with Luther, Calvin, Knox, the Westminster Divines, Owen, Ames, Spurgeon, Baxter, Matthew Henry, Jonathan Edwards, Cunningham, Ryle, Cotton, Brown, and virtually all of the other standard Protestant interpreters of the book of Revelation. Have you fallen for a Jesuit ruse or are you standing in the footsteps of the flock? Read this book and find out.

WILKINSON, HENRY

The Pope of Rome is Antichrist (1675, 1845 edition)

Calvin (on I John 2:18) writes, "Those that think that he (Antichrist) would be just one man, are dreaming! For Paul... plainly shows that it would be a body or a kingdom (II Thes. 2:3). He first foretells a falling away that would spread throughout the whole Church... Then he makes the head of this apostasy the adversary of Christ who would sit in God's temple and claim divinity and divine honours. Unless we deliberately want to err, let us learn to know Antichrist from Paul's description" (Cited in Nigel Lee, 666: Luther and Calvin's Doctrine of Antichrist: Antichrist in Scripture [Focus Christian Ministries, 1992], p. 58). Wilkinson's book takes the classic Protestant position, called "historicism;" held by Luther, Calvin, Knox, the Westminster Divines, and most other Protestants, until the Jesuit inspired "futurist" and "preterist" systems began to gain ground, when Reformation hermeneutics waned. Shows how Protestants prove that the Pope is that "Antichrist" and "man of sin" set forth in Scripture. Deals with the mystery of iniquity, the great apostasy, and practical applications of the doctrines examined.

FLEMING, ROBERT, Jr.

The Rise and Fall of Papacy, The Import of God's Dealing with Men of Earth, Etc. (1848)

"Originally published in 1701. The first of these discourses has been the most celebrated. It arrested public notice, and awakened the interest of Europe. After laying down the principle upon which the author conceived the Apocalypse should be interpreted, he explained the pouring out of the fourth vial with reference to Anti-Christian France, fixing 1794 as the date of the expiration of the vial.

When the French Revolution took place it was then remembered that it had been so predicted by a forgotten Scottish pastor. The work was reprinted both in England and America, translated into different languages, and once more fell out of sight till the revolution of 1848 led to a fresh perusal. Referring to Italy, the author wrote: 'The Fifth vial, which is to be poured out upon the seat of the Beast will probably begin about 1794 and expire about the year 1848.' The downfall of the Papacy, according to Fleming, is going on; the Mohammedan Antichrist will follow, and about A.D. 2000 (Jewish reckoning, about 2017 on the Julian calendar--RB), the millennial epoch will begin. In that memorable year (1848) the Pope was compelled to become a fugitive from Rome; and it was certainly a striking coincidence" (Johnston, *The Treasury of the Scottish Covenant*, 371). "A reprint," wrote *The Patriot*, "of one of the most remarkable and sagacious works extant on the subject of unfulfilled prophecy, deserving a perusal as a succinct, learned, and eminently devout exposition of the Apocalypse." Reprinted without abridgement from the 1701 edition.

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