

SPIRITUALISM, RITUALISM, THEOSOPHY.

All this is hard to say, for one who prefers the charity which covers a multitude of faults to the criticism which lays them bare. And in dwelling on this subject we are not insensible to the perversions of another kind which have crept into our non-liturgical bodies. For, so far as we know, the liturgical churches, have not fallen into the cooking stove apostasy, which is turning so many of our church basements into a place of feasting; nor have they been ensnared with the entertainment heresy, which sets up all sorts of shows and exhibitions for amusing the unchurched masses into an interest in the gospel. We deplore these things and here and now lift our warning against them as another device of the enemy for corrupting and enervating the church of God.

But while considering ourselves lest we also be tempted we must none the less warn our neighbors against the fatal infatuation of ritualism. We take the Trinity church catechism of Dr. Dix and find it streaked through and through with the tinge of the scarlet woman – baptismal regeneration, eucharistic sacrifice, apostolic succession, prayer for the dead, intercession of departed souls, when we find its eminent author so enamored of the Papacy that he draws away from all Protestant bodies and embraces her, declaring that the three chief branches of the holy Catholic church are the church at Rome, the Greek church, and the Anglican church, and that the body thus formed is the true church catholic "because she endures throughout all the ages, teaches all nations, and maintains all truth." When we find Protestant ecclesiastics so smitten with what reformers used to call "the trinkets of anti-Christ," as to allow themselves little by little to be reinvested with the cast-off clothing of Babylon Papacy, so that a recent writer describes the Bishop of Lincoln as "adorned with mitre and cloth of gold, his orpheys so lavishly decorated with amethysts, pearls, topazes and chrysolites set in silver as fairly to dazzle the beholder;" when we see all these we are moved to repeat with solemn earnestness the

warning of Bradford, the Smithfield martyr, "O England, beware of anti-Christ; take heed that he doth not fool thee."

Theosophy, is the latest religion of transcendentalists. In it the attenuated unbelief of our times is seeking to find relief from the ennui of denial. How to describe that which takes for itself the name of "Occultism;" how to give an idea of doctrines which claim to be hidden from all but the initiated we do not know. It is enough to say that substantially it is Buddhism seeking conquests in Christian lands; "the light of Asia," offering itself to those who have been turned away from "the light of Christ." It has its circles in many of our great cities, where its occult philosophy is diligently studied; though its following is small compared with that of spiritualism, it being the religion of the literary elite, as the other is of common people. If we question it in regard to its doctrines, it tells us that they are the same as those of "the sacred mysteries of antiquity." It inculcates a very attenuated philosophy of evolution; it teaches the pre-existence and the transmigration of souls, and instructs its disciples how by a rigid asceticism they may cultivate what is called "the intuited memory" by which they can enter into profound recollection of what they knew in far distant ages. In a couplet which it is fond of repeating, it declares that –

Descending spirits have conversed with man
And told him secrets of the world unknown.

And those words give the most remarkable hint of its origin. For its creed is "the doctrines of demons" from beginning to end. No personal devil, that which is mystically called the Devil being but the negative and opposite of God. No atonement except man's "unification" with himself; no forgiveness of sin, souls being required to wear away their guilt by self-expiation, miracles, mysteries, ultimate deification – these are specimen articles of the delusive creed. Its whole character and contents so far as we can comprehend them as yet is another phase of Satanic delusion. Now if we compare these three systems, counting ritualism as incipient Popery, we find them agreeing remarkably to fill up the outlines of the predicted apostasy. The "forbidding to marry"

realized in the celibacy of Romanism, the enforced continence of theosophy and the anti-marriage doctrines of spiritualism; the "commanding to abstain from meat" appearing in the superstitious fasts of ritualism, and the rigid abstinence from flesh enjoined on the initials of esoteric Buddhism; the doctrines of demons manifested in the magic idolatry which ritualism substitutes for the chaste and simple doctrines of the ordinances of Christ, and which in many particulars hold a common ancestry with those of theosophy and spiritualism, and the fantastic miracle-working which characterizes them all. All three of these delusions give a practical denial of Christ's second advent – that doctrine at which demons fear and tremble – spiritualism and theosophy declaring that in them the promised Epiphany of Christ is taking [R1009 : page 7] place; while ritualism by its doctrine of transubstantiation makes the communion [R1010 : page 7] declare the "real presence of Christ" in flesh and blood, when the Lord ordained it to declare his real absence "till he come" – I mean, of course, bodily absence.

What now is the prophetic significance of all that we have said? Thus it seems to me, that according to the predictions of Scripture we are witnessing an irruption of evil spirits who are again working powerfully along their favorite lines – ritualism, superstition and "philosophy."

We hear much said about infidelity and communism "heading up" in a personal anti-Christ. Believing as I do, that anti-Christ came long ago, and that he was crowned a few years since in St. Peter's at Rome as the deified man infallible and supreme, I see in the present aspect of affairs his final dodging forth, rather than his ultimate heading up. As in the case of Christ, so in the case of "the man of sin," the head is revealed first, and the body gathered throughout the generations grows up in all things into him who is the Lord. For the career of anti-Christ, the exact parody and evil counterpart of that of Christ, if you say "the anti-Christ must be an individual as certain as Christ is," I remind you that the word Christ does not always stand for a single individual in

description, for in 1 Cor. 12, the apostle describes the body or beloved, gathered to the Lord through all time with its divine gifts and administrations, and this corporate whole with its many members, but "all baptised by one spirit into one body," he names Oxpitos – the Christ. So that evil system with its various offices and administrations, yet baptised into unity by "the spirit which now worketh in the children of disobedience," is the anti-Christ. The one is the head of the *ecclesia*, and the other is the head of *apostasia*; but the head and body are so identical that they bear the same personal name.

"But he is called 'the man of sin,'" you say, "and therefore must be an individual." Not of necessity. For the line of believers is declared by the apostles to be taken out from the Jews and Gentiles to "make of twain one new man."

I cannot believe that "the mystery of iniquity," which Paul declared to be already working in his day, has been toiling on for nearly two thousand years in order to bring forth a single short-lived man, and he so omnipotently wicked that the pope anti-Christ, with the blood of fifty millions of martyrs on his skirts, is too insignificant a sinner to be mentioned in comparison. And now then, the objections coming thick and fast. "But is he not an open infidel since he is said 'to deny the Father and the Son?'" Search your concordances for the meaning of the word "deny," and observe how constantly it signifies the denial of apostasy and false profession. But is he not the incarnation of Satan since he is called "the son of perdition?" Yes, Judas was named "the son of perdition;" and "Satan entered into Judas Iscariot;" but so far from atheistically denying Christ he openly professed him, saying, "Hail, Master," and then betraying him with a kiss. But is he not a godless blasphemer, since he is declared to have "a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies?" The counterfeit of Christ again, for Christ was twice falsely accused of blasphemy, because he made himself equal with God, and because he presumed to forgive.

The pope is justly accused of blasphemy on both these grounds, for he profanely calls himself God, and assumes to forgive sins. Said Alexander VI., "Caesar was a man; Alexander is a God." But must he not be a Jew established in Jerusalem, since it is said that he sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God?" No. The particular phrase "temple of God," is never in a single instance in the New Testament applied to the temple at Jerusalem, but always to the church, the body of Christ, to its head or to its members in heaven or on earth. But could the Holy Ghost call that "the temple of God" which has become apostate? Just as possibly as Christ could call the apostate Laodiceans whom he spat out of his mouth "the church at Laodicea."

"But does not this view commit one to the year-day interpretation, since the career of anti-Christ in three years and a half and the papal system extends through centuries?" Yes, for the one instance of prophetic time which has by unanimous consent been fulfilled, the seventy weeks of Daniel, is demonstrated to have been upon this scale. Since the period was actually only 490 years – a day for a year – this may be taken as a clue to the prophetic time of Revelation. But if the Holy Spirit meant years in the Apocalypse why did he not say years? you reply. Why, when he meant churches and ministers, and kingdoms and kings, and epoch, did he say candle-sticks, and stars, and beasts, and horns, and trumpets? Yet, having used these miniature symbols of greater things, how fitting that the accompanying time should also be in miniature! To use literal dates would distort the imagery – as though you should put a life-sized eye in a small-sized physiognomy.

I have said that anti-Christ is the evil counterpart of Christ. When Satan offered Christ all the kingdoms of the world if he would fall down and worship him he refused, accepting present rejection and crucifixion, and waiting the Father's time for the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. The Papal anti-Christ accepted the kingdoms of this world when the temptation was presented him, and proceeded to announce himself the "king of kings" and that the kingdom had come, and that in himself was fulfilled the

Scripture. "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from river to river, unto the ends of the earth."

The bride of Christ, the church, was left in the world to share the Lord's rejection and cross, enduring present suffering and widowhood, and waiting for the return of the bridegroom. But the harlot bride of anti-Christ accepts an earthly throne and a present glory, boastfully saying, "I sit a queen and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow." Do we not see that it was this usurpation of the headship of the church by the man of sin, this premature grasping of the kingdom, and the setting up of a mock millennium under rules of a pseudo-Christ, that destroys the millennial life of the church, and has infected all, generation after generation, with the delusion of a present reign and a present kingdom, while Christ is yet absent in person from his flock? But this enemy of God and his saints must soon come to an end. In Daniel and Thessalonians this end is predicted in two stages, the gradual and the sudden and complete. "They shall take away his dominion to consume and destroy unto the end," says Daniel. "Whom the Lord shall consume with the breath of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming," says Paul in Thessalonians. The consuming process has been going on mightily in our generation by the breath of the Lord's mouth, in the world-wide diffusion of the inspired Scriptures. "And now the devil is come down with great wrath because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." He is putting forth the energy of despair. He is sending his legions to work along various lines, which all center, visibly or invisibly, in one head. On the line of sacerdotalism he is seeking to thwart the work of the Reformation by again insinuating popish worship into its churches; on the line of superstition he is aiming to bewitch the godless and curious multitudes through the energy of unclean spirits; on the line of culture he is moving to foist upon the literary elite a diluted Paganism as an extra fine religion. But these things cheer us rather than sadden us, for all the shadows point to the dawn. The church's salvation means anti-Christ's destruction, and the same Scripture which speaks to us so powerfully to-day in the light of passing evils, "Yet a little while and he that shall come will come and

will not tarry," says also, "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, Amen." All this which I have set forth, I have declared with unutterable sorrow. All this I can think of only with weeping and crying "O bride of Christ, how are they increased who would rob thee of thy chastity."

I need not remind you that one of the first tasks which the ritualistic leaders fifty years ago felt called upon to undertake was that of getting rid of the Protestant interpretation of anti-Christ as the pope of Rome. How desperately they wrought at this task will be apparent to those who read Newman's essay on "The Man of Sin," and observed especially his earnest wrestling with the ominous saying of Gregory the Great, that, "Whosoever adopts or desires the title of universal bishop is the forerunner of anti-Christ."

If I must take sides between parties on this question my sympathies will be with Latimer and Cranmer and Bradford, whose vision was clarified by the fires of martyrdom, who recognized their persecutor, and called him by name, rather than with Manning and Newman, whose eyes are holden by the charm of mediaevalism.

I speak rather of the book than of any human books, and avow my conviction that the papal "Man of Sin" was accurately photographed on the camera of prophecy thousands of years ago; that no detective searching for him to-day would need any other description of him than that which is found on the pages of the Bible. Taking these photographs of Daniel and John and Paul, searching the world upside down for their originals, I am confident that this same detective would stop at the Vatican, and after gazing a few moments at the Pontiff, who sits there gnawing the bone of infallibility, which he acquired in 1870, and clutching for that other bone of temporal sovereignty which he lost the very same year, he would lay his hand on him and say: "You are wanted in the court of the Most **[R1011 : page 7]** High to answer to the indictment of certain souls beneath the altar, who were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they bore," and who are

crying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell upon the earth?"

My brethren, let us search the Scriptures anew, and let us be sure that they do not require it of us before we silence our testimony against the man of Rome as anti-Christ.

– *A. J. Gordon.*

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"THERE is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."
