

# Antichrist: The Biblical Doctrine

By **Malcolm H. Watts**

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The belief of all professing Christians (outside of the Roman Communion) is that the one and only Head of the Church, both Invisible and Visible, is the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what Scripture clearly teaches: 'He (the Son of God) is the head of the body, the church' (Col 1:18; cf. Eph 5:23 and see Ps 2:6; Is 9:6), and it means that Christ is the Church's Sovereign, not only granting it existence, but establishing its doctrine, instituting its worship, appointing its government, blessing its meetings, effecting its increase, advancing its holiness, and overthrowing its enemies.

Contrary to Scripture's plain teaching, the Pope of Rome arrogantly claims this title

for himself. From the time of Innocent III (1198-1216), the Popes began to call themselves 'the Vicar (or Substitute) of Christ'; and Boniface VIII (1294-1303), in one of his papal proclamations, said this: 'Listen to the Vicar of Christ, who is placed over kings and kingdoms. He is the head of the Church, which is one and stainless...'. This traditional Roman dogma was reaffirmed at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). In its Council Document, 'Dogmatic Constitution of the Church' (De Ecclesia), the Pope is stated to be 'the Vicar of Christ, and visible head of the church in its entirety' (Chapter 3, Article 18). Amplification of this blasphemous assertion follows: 'In virtue of his office, that is, as vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal

power over the church. And he can always exercise this power freely' (Article 22).

Most significantly, it was Gregory I (? AD 540-604) [later himself a Pope] who repudiated any such title as this, stating in a letter written in AD 595 to the Emperor Mauritius that 'whosoever in his elation of spirit called himself or sought to be called universal bishop, or universal priest, that man was the precursor of Antichrist, viz. to withdraw all members of the Church from its true head, CHRIST JESUS, and to attach and connect them in the stead thereof to himself' (Ep. ad Mauritium, lib. vii, ep. 33).

As noted in the last article, Antichrist (Greek: Antichristos) is composed of two words: anti which means 'instead of', 'in the place of' (as in 'Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of (anti) his father Herod', Matt 2:22) and also 'against', 'in opposition to' (as in 'oppositions of science (antithemi, literally "antithesis") falsely so called', 1 Tim 6:20); and Christos which means, of course, 'Christ' or 'Anointed'. The two meanings are almost certainly to be combined, and as John McDonald rightly concludes, 'Antichrist, therefore, means one who pretends to be a vicar of Christ, and assumes to act in his name, but who is at the same time his rival and greatest enemy' (Romanism Analyzed, p.19).

One of the most important passages on this subject is 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12,

where the Apostle gives a prophetic foreview of the rise of the Antichrist, also known as the Man of Sin. We shall now give careful attention to this scripture with a view to demonstrating that these verses apply only to the Papacy as centred in and represented by the Pope.

v. 3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day (the day of Christ's return) shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition

As in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:2-6), Paul has made mention, in the first two verses, of the Second Coming of Christ (2 Thess 2:1,2). It seems that the believers at Thessalonica had misunderstood his teaching in the First Epistle, coming to the conclusion that 'the day of the Lord' was 'at hand' or 'imminent' - something altogether contrary to the teaching of God's Word elsewhere (Matt 24:4-8, cf. Mk 13:5-8; Lk 19:12) - and, as a result, they were greatly perturbed or agitated. The apostle points out that they needed to be guarded against such deception ('Let no man deceive you by any means...').

There must take place, before ever Christ returns, a 'falling away' (literally, an 'apostasy'): some signal defection from the Christian Faith. Paul alludes to this in another of his epistles, saying, 'Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the

latter times (this Christian age, Acts 2:16,17; Heb 1:2; 1 Jn 2:18) some shall depart (apostesontai - "fall away", or "apostatize") from the faith (the body of Christian Truth)... (1 Tim 4:1ff.). Now if this is true, that some professing Christians will abandon pure, biblical and apostolic Christianity, to what (we venture to ask) will they turn as a theological alternative? Paul continues, '...giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their consciences seared with a hot iron'. The Devil - more strictly, his emissaries - will move such men to embrace other 'doctrines' which are actually 'lies', and these errorists, in 'hypocrisy', will still profess to be Christians, 'their consciences', being so 'seared with a hot iron', that they will be insensible to their heresy as well as to their guilt. What, then, will be the doctrines promulgated? Paul tells us with crystal clarity: (1) 'forbidding to marry'; (2) 'commanding to abstain from meats'. The former has been practiced since the 4th century in what has become known as 'clerical celibacy' or 'an unmarried priesthood'; and the latter, decreed in the 6th century, became common practice as meat was avoided on certain days (Fridays) and during certain seasons (Lent). Historically, these two doctrines became associated with Roman Catholicism.

It is out of this apostasy that Antichrist will arise, to become its leader in the Church: 'that man of sin...the son of

perdition'. The first title certainly points to a 'man', but not to one particular man, rather to a succession of men, as when Scripture refers to 'the high priest' (Lev 21:10), 'the king' (Deut 17:18), 'the just' (Rom 1:17), 'the man of God' (2 Tim 3:17) and, perhaps with some special relevance here, 'the son of wickedness' (Ps 89:22). Such titles indicate a body or succession of men answering to a certain title or character. Thus, it was correctly observed by Dr. H. Grattan Guinness that 'a singular expression in a prophecy may find its fulfilment in a plurality of individuals'.

What then are we to make of qualifying words - 'that man of sin'? It appears to suggest that the men of this order will not only be given to sin themselves, but they will be leaders of others to sin (in this apostasy). Now, more specifically, the 'sin' would seem to be idolatry, the reference appearing to be to Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who, while professing to worship the true God, introduced to Israel the grossest form of idolatry (1 Kgs 12:25-33), thereafter being justifiably and repeatedly named, he that 'caused Israel to sin' (13:34; 15:25-26, 30; 16:19,26; 2 Kgs

3:3;10:31; 13:2,6,11; 14:24; 15:9,18; 17:22). So, we are clearly looking for a line of men who have been distinguished for bringing idolatry into the Christian Church.

The second title is 'the son of perdition'. Undoubtedly such men will bring judgment of damnation upon themselves. But there is more here: in Scripture there is only one other occurrence of this particular phrase. It is the descriptive name given by our Lord to Judas Iscariot. In his Great Prayer, recorded in John, chapter 17, the Lord Jesus Christ says, 'While I was with them (the apostles) in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition (Judas Iscariot); that the scripture might be fulfilled' (v.12). This therefore means that the Antichrist will claim to be, like Judas, an 'Apostle' and 'Bishop' (Matt 10:2-4; Acts 1:20), but although a pretended friend, he will prove to be a false friend of the Lord Jesus Christ. Like Judas, he will show seeming devotion to the Lord, and yet well may he be asked, 'betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?' (Matt 26:47-50; Lk 22:47,48). Like Judas, too, he will be 'guide' to those who turned against our blessed Saviour (Acts 1:16). Summing up this point, Thomas Manton, the Puritan, comments as follows: 'Antichrist then is like Judas - in profession, a disciple of Christ; in office, a governor of the church; but, in practice a traitor.'

Who is the great promoter of idolatry, pretending to be an Apostle and Bishop? There is, I believe, but one answer to that question: the Pope. To quote Manton again: 'The Pope boasteth that his seat is apostolical, his chair is St. Peter's chair, and that he is the successor of the apostle. Grant it, but there is an error of the person - not (the successor) of Peter, but of Judas.'

v. 4 Who opposeth and (exceedingly) exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God

The Roman Antichrist 'opposeth' and '(exceedingly) exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped' - that is, he stands in opposition to Christ, putting himself in the highest position. He sets himself 'above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.' Despite the restrictions of space in such an article as this, it is not at all difficult to show that the Pope 'opposes' the Lord Jesus Christ: his Person, by denying the reality of his presence on earth as Head of his Church (contra Matt 28:20); his office, by sanctioning a mediatorial priesthood and the intercession of the saints (contra Jn 10:9; 14:6; 1 Tim 2:5); his work, by making the Mass 'a true, proper and propitiatory sacrifice' (contra Heb 9:24-28; 10:12); his gospel, by teaching that baptism remits the guilt of original sin and that subsequent good works are

'meritorious' (contra Acts 16:31; Rom 5:1); his commandments, by maintaining the Rule of Faith is not the Bible only, but the Church, the Fathers, the Ecclesiastical Traditions, the Councils, and the Pope (contra Matt 15:3,6; 22:29); his worship, by adding ritual, ceremonies, Mariolatry, images, and Saint-worship (contra Matt 28:20; 1 Cor 11:2); and his people, by persecuting the Paulicians; the Albigenes, the Waldenses, the Hussites, the Lollards, and the Huguenots, not to mention the English Reformers and Martyrs (contra Mk 9:38-40; 2 Cor 10:4). With respect to this last point, it is estimated that the Church of Rome has been responsible for more than 50 million martyrs.

Does he then '(exceedingly) exalt himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped'? Here, I judge it best to let various Popes speak for themselves:

Boniface VIII (1303) - 'The Roman Pontiff (Latin: pontifex, meaning a bridge; here, a bridge between God and men - MHW) judges all men, but is judged of no man. ...We declare, assert, define, and pronounce to be subject to the Roman Pontiff is to every creature altogether necessary for salvation ...that which was spoken of Christ: 'Thou hast subdued all things under his feet' may well seem verified in me. ...I have the authority of the King of Kings. I am all in all and above all, so that God Himself and I, the Vicar of God, have but one consistory, and I am

able to do almost all that God can do. What, therefore, can you make of me but God?'

Leo XIII (1894) - 'We hold the place of Almighty God on earth.'

Pius X (1912) - 'The Pope is the guardian of dogma and morals; he is the depository of those principles which render families honest, nations great, and souls holy; he is the counselor of princes and of people; he is the head, under whom no man can feel himself tyrannized over, because he represents God Himself. He is the Father (par excellence), because he unites within himself all that there is that is lovable, sacred, and Divine.'

Pius XI (1922) - 'You know that I am the Holy Father, the representative of God on the earth, the Vicar of Christ, which means that I am God on the earth.'

During the Inaugural Mass of Benedict XVI (April 24th, 2005), this present Pope - the Cardinals having already (at his election) kneeled before him to signify their complete submission and obedience - received the homage of twelve people, representing the Twelve Apostles and also the people of the world, who publicly came and knelt before him. Although the Papal Tiara was not on this occasion worn by the Pope (unlike at the coronations of John XXIII and Paul VI), it presently remains on the flag and coat of arms of the 'Holy See' and the 'Vatican', and papal documents issued since this Pope's

Inauguration have had the Tiara printed upon them. What exactly is symbolized by the Tiara, or Tripal Crown, is a matter of some dispute, but one 'official' view is that it represents the Pope as sole Sovereign - King of heaven, earth, and of the lower regions.

In these 'ecumenical' times, Rome tends to avoid all such claims and displays. As a consequence, most people are altogether ignorant of them and find these facts hard to accept. However these things are on record and they are indisputable. They show that the men who have held this office stand condemned by their own blasphemous claims - claims which actually fulfil, to the letter, this most solemn prophecy.

The verse continues: 'he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God'. Here, the apostle reveals where the 'man of sin' will be found - 'in the temple' (Greek: naon). This is not a reference to the Jewish Temple which, since Jewish rejection of Christ, is rejected by God and therefore called 'your house' (Matt 23:38) or, more commonly, just 'the temple' (Acts 22:17; 24:12,18; 25:8; 26:21) but never is it referred to as 'the temple of God'. This is rather a metaphorical reference to the Visible Christian Church, as in such verses as the following where the identical Greek word (naon) is used: 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?' (1 Cor 3:16); 'What agreement hath the temple of

God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God' (2 Cor 6:16); '(Ye) are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together growth unto an holy temple in the Lord' (Eph 2:20,21).

Antichrist is therefore not, as commonly supposed, a secular humanist or a political dictator: instead, he is someone professing to be Christian, an ecclesiastical person of some kind, and evidently associated with the Christian Church.

Does the passage take us any further? Yes, assuredly it does. The person here described 'sitteth' (kathisai) in the Church. Now why is he represented as 'sitting'? The word is connected with kathedra - a bishop's seat. The 'man of sin' is a bishop who appears to preside over the whole Church. It is difficult to see how these words can be applied to anyone other than the Pope. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) states: '...the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as the Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered' (para. 881-2). His office, then, is that of 'universal bishop', an office symbolized by 'the papal chair' on which the Pope 'sits' in order to preside and to rule. According to Roman dogma (formulated in 1870), the Pope is 'infallible' when he makes pronouncement 'ex cathedra', or 'from the chair'. 'The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks ex cathedra, that

is, when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal church, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that his church should be endowed...' (The First Dogmatic Constitution Concerning the Church of Christ [1870], Ch.. 4).

Thus usurping the highest place and reaching a pitch of daring impiety, the 'man of sin' - though a mere man - will be intent on 'shewing (or exhibiting) himself that he is God'. How will he do this? Not simply by asserting that he is actually the true God, but by behaving like God: taking his place, assuming his authority, and claiming the adoration of multitudes.

The Pope allows himself to be called by such titles as, 'Our Lord God, the Pope' (Canon Law), 'His Holiness', 'Another Christ' (by the Irish Hierarchy, 1949), King of kings and Lord of lords' (by Cardinal Manning, 1862), 'Supreme Judge', and so on; and then there are his Pontifical actions, as he defines doctrines, ordains laws (even when contrary to those in Scripture), grants indulgences (which remit the guilt of punishment on earth and also in the fictitious 'Purgatory'), discharges oaths (even those pertaining to marriage), and receives worship. What does all this mean but that the Pope is the 'man of sin'? Hear the words of William Hughes, written in his

book on 'Popery' in 1677 - 'Let the reader judge then, whether there be need of further evidence that the Pope opposeth and exalteth himself above the Heavenly Majesty also, which makes us as certain that he is "the man of sin" as we are sure the sun is set at midnight'.

v. 5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

At the point, Paul reminds his readers that he had dealt with this subject of the Antichrist when had been with them in Thessalonica. "I told you these things." The tense of the verb here is the imperfect which, if literally translated, would read, "I was telling you these things": that is, during his visit these matters did not receive a mere passing mention but they were time and again mentioned in his preaching and teaching. His readers should therefore recognize their great importance. They should be prepared for a singular and unprecedented departure from the Faith and so should not be disturbed, or thrown off balance, by teaching of some which suggested that the Second Coming was on the very point of taking place.

v. 6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time

After reminding his readers of his previous warning (v.5), he assumes that they will understand what he is about to write to them - "And now ye know..." What is it, in particular, that that they will recall and therefore "know"? It concerns "what

withholdeth", or "what holdeth back", at that time, so that the Man of Sin could not yet appear. Notice that in this verse it is some "thing" or "power" (the neuter gender), but in the next verse (v.7) - which needs to be considered along with this one - it is "he who now letteth", (an old English word, translating the same as here in v.6). This indicates a prominent individual (the masculine gender). In other words, the "thing" or "power" will manifest itself under a "personal" form.

The great majority of orthodox commentators, ancient and modern, see here a reference to the Roman Empire and to the Emperor (or the Caesar). The Empire was certainly the world power of that time - and one represented by a single person. Now if this is correct, it would certainly explain Paul's reticence and his use of rather vague terms. Had he been more explicit, particularly when referring, as in the next verse, to the removal of the Emperor (see v.7 - "he be taken out of the way"), he would have exposed himself to very real danger, such danger in fact as he had before experienced in the city of Thessalonica (Acts 17:6,7).

It was the understanding of many of the Early Church Fathers that Paul is alluding to the Roman Empire here, and the Emperor (or the Caesar) in the next verse. This may be seen from the following quotations:

Tertullian (AD 145-220) - "There is...a greater necessity for our offering prayer in

behalf of the emperors, nay, for the complete stability of the empire, and for the Roman interests in general. For we know that a mighty shock impending over the whole earth - in fact, the very end of all things threatening dreadful woes - is only retarded by the continued existence of the Roman Empire" (Apology, ch. 32);

Cyril (AD 318-386) - "Antichrist is to come when the times of the Roman Empire shall have been fulfilled" (Catechetical Instruction, Lecture 15);

Chrysostom (AD 345-407) - "What then is it that withholdeth, that is, hindereth him (Antichrist) from being revealed?...because he said this of the Roman Empire, he naturally glanced at it, and speaks covertly and darkly, for he did not wish to bring upon himself superfluous enmities, and useless dangers. For if he had said that after a little while the Roman Empire would be dissolved, they would have immediately even overwhelmed him, as a pestilent person...So indeed he also says here. 'Only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way', that is, when the Roman Empire is taken out of the way, then he (Antichrist) shall come. And naturally. For as long as the fear of this Empire lasts, no one willingly exalt himself, but when that is dissolved he (Antichrist) will attack the anarchy, and will endeavour to seize upon the government both of man and of God" (On Thessalonians, Homily 4)

Jerome (AD 347-420) - "Antichrist will not

come...until the Roman Empire has first been destroyed...If St. Paul had written openly and boldly 'that the Man of Sin would not come until the Roman Empire was destroyed, a just cause of persecution would then appear to have been afforded against the Church in her infancy" (Letter 121, To Algasia)

Augustine (AD 354-430) - "It is not absurd to believe that these words of the apostle 'Only he who now holdeth, let him hold until he be taken out of the way', refer to the Roman Empire, as if it were said, 'Only he who now reigneth, let him reign until he be taken out of the way' 'And then shall that Wicked be revealed': no one doubts that this means Antichrist" (The City of God, Book 20, ch. 19);

How do we explain this consensus among the Early Church Fathers except in terms of this being the received interpretation from the very beginning, that is, from earliest apostolic times?

At the time of the Reformation many Reformers identified with this traditional view of the passage. For example, Francis Turretin, Professor of Theology in the Academy of Geneva, commented on these two verses as follows: "...this prophecy has been fulfilled for a very long time, that is, the dominion of the Roman emperors (which impeded the appearance of Antichrist), has, in fact, been taken out of the way, and as a result of the empire's removal, the Antichrist, as a necessary

consequence, has been revealed" (Seventh Disputation, Thirteenth Topic).

As long as the Empire ("what withholdeth") and the Emperor ("he who now letteth") continued, there would be no emergence of the Papacy or the Pope. Why was that? It was because the Roman world power, under one political head, was extremely jealous of any rival authority and simply would not tolerate it to exist. In the words of John Morison of Brompton, "Such a power as that which the Bishop of Rome ultimately assumed was utterly incompatible with the existing power and prevalence of the Roman empire. How could the Pope find the place which he claimed, while Nero sat upon the throne of the Caesars?" (Paul's Man of Sin Identified with Papal Antichrist, pp. 44-45). History clearly shows that it was very soon after the Fall of the Empire that the Papal Antichrist arose. Romulus Augustulus, the last emperor of the West, was deposed and exiled in AD 476 and very shortly afterwards, in 493, Pope Gelasius asserted his claim to universal supremacy: "The Pope as successor of St. Peter has sole (authority) over the corporate body of Christians, amongst whom the emperor takes indeed a vital place, but one of an assistant nature..." (The Gelasian Theses).

v. 7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way

At the time of writing this, the Roman Empire was still in place exerting its power

of restraint. The Apostle now tells us why that restraint is necessary - "for the mystery of iniquity doth already work." This is a reference to the presently existing system of which Antichrist will soon be the head. This description "mystery of iniquity" makes clear that in view is not unbelief, humanism or secularism. These movements are openly anti-God and anti-Christian; and so there is nothing whatsoever "mysterious" about them, but Romanism is different, because it purports to be holy yet this pretension is wholly false and hypocritical.

"The mystery of iniquity" appears to stand in contrast with "the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim 3:16). Dr. Grattan Guinness perceptively comments: "We read, 'Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh', the Most High stooped and made Himself of no reputation. May we not say, in considering the self-exaltation of the Popes of Rome, great is 'the mystery of iniquity', man sinful, mortal man, exalting himself to be as God!" (The Approaching End of the Age, p.195)

Moreover, in the book of Revelation, the word "mystery" appears again on the forehead of the "whore" or "harlot", symbol of the "fallen, apostate Church." (cf. Is 1:21; Hos 4:15). The passage reads: "And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY BABYLON..." (Rev 17:5 - Babylon was the ancient great seat of idolatry, Jer 50:38). There can be little doubt as to this

Church's identity, since that chapter refers to her as a "catholic" or "universal Church" (Rev 17:1,15 "upon many waters" - "peoples and multitudes, and nations, and tongues"), a "Mother Church" (Rev 17:3 "THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS"), distinguished by certain colours (Rev 17:4 "purple and scarlet colour", the colours of Bishops and Cardinals respectively), known for amazing wealth and impressive ceremonial (Rev 17:4 "decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls"), depicted as carrying a golden cup (Rev 17:4 "a golden cup in her hand", the chalice used in the Mass, which is of gold whenever possible), persecuting the Lord's true people (Rev 17:6 "drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus"), situated in the city upon seven hills, which even then was reigning over the earth (Rev 17:9,18 "seven mountains" - "that great city which reigneth", clearly pointing to Rome as the seven-hilled city, the then capital of the world empire). "Mystery" is evidently the connecting word. As we have seen, it is a word applied both to Rome and to Romanism; and, most significantly, its Latin form *Mysterium* formerly appeared on the front of the Pope's Tiara.

Now, returning to the chapter in 2 Thessalonians 2, we note that the spiritual and doctrinal conspiracy, which will one day culminate in Roman Catholicism, had already, in Paul's own day, begun its course of corrupting biblical doctrine and practice. "The mystery of iniquity doth

already work..." Even in New Testament times, the evil influence was to be clearly seen in: (1) following vain tradition (Col 2:8); (2) striving after supremacy (3 Jn 9; cf. 1 Cor 1:12,13); (3) multiplying of mediators (Col 2:18); (4) indulging in idolatry (1 Cor 10:14); (5) justification by works (Gal 1:6-9;2:16); (6) subjection to human ordinances (Col 2:22,23); (7) adhering to sacramentalism (Acts 15:1; Gal 6:15); (8) observance of festival days (Gal 4:10); (9) practice of asceticism (Col 2:23); (10) adding doctrines to those found in Holy Scripture (Rev 22:18,19). Dr. Thomas Newton rightly says: "The foundations of Popery were laid indeed in the apostles' days, but the superstructure was raised by degrees, and several ages passed before the building was completed, and the man of sin was revealed in full perfection." (Dissertations on the Prophecies, Dissertation 22)

However, the Apostle continues, "only he who now letteth (or restraineth) will let (or restrain), until he be taken out of the way." As we have seen the reference is to the Roman Emperor or Caesar. The time did come when the Empire crumbled and Emperor was removed. The throne at Rome being now vacated, the Bishop of Rome was able to occupy it as the new "Pontifex Maximus" or "Supreme Pontiff" - formerly the Emperor's title.

v. 8 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

After the removal of the Emperor, "that Wicked" - more literally, "that Lawless One" - will "be revealed". The term "Lawless One" may at first sight suggest a rebel and rebellion, but true as that is of Antichrist, it does not seem to bring out the term's full meaning. It rather indicates that, in virtue of his office, he will be "himself above law", that is, exempt from law, subject to no rule except his own.

Now let us hear various Roman authorities concerning the Pope's supremacy. Thomas Aquinas, a leading theologian for Romanists, wrote: "The Pope by divine right hath spiritual and temporal power, as supreme King of the world." Lucius Ferraris, who produced a standard work on Roman Catholic doctrine in the 18th century, states that "The Pope is of so great authority and power, that he can also modify, declare, or interpret the divine Law."

In Rome's Canon Law - Rome's Statute Book or Code - we find such statements as the following: "The bishop of Rome is not bound to any decrees, but he may compel, as well the clergy as laymen, to receive his decrees and canon laws." "The yoke which the holy chair imposes must be borne, although it may seem unbearable." "If the Pope...draws down with himself innumerable people by heaps into hell, and plunge them with himself into eternal torments, yet, no mortal man may presume to reprehend him, forasmuch as his is judge

of all, and is judged of no-one."

As to the claims of various Popes, we give just a small sample. Gregory IX (1148-1241): "In the things which he (the Pope) wills, his will is taken for reason; nor is there anyone to say to him: 'Why dost thou this?' for he can dispense with the law; he can also turn injustice into justice by correcting and changing the law, and he has the fullness of power." Innocent III (1160-1216): "We can dispense from law, according to our plenitude of power over law." Benedict XIV (1675-1758): "To the Pope it belongs to declare, in what circumstances the divine precept ceases to oblige."

Has the Papacy decreed laws, even such as were contrary to divine Law? Indeed it has. In its Catechisms it has expunged the Second Commandment to allow for the adoration of images, dividing the Tenth to make up the number Ten. It has overthrown our Lord's command to administer the Supper with bread and wine, denying the people the latter element; and it has imposed celibacy on its clergy contrary to the clear teaching of Holy Scripture. Furthermore, it has actually decreed doctrines which the Christian Church never recognized or believed before: for example, the Immaculate Conception, that Mary was born without original sin (1854); the Infallibility of the Pope, that, when he speaks and defines doctrine ex cathedra he speaks truth without error (1870); and the Assumption

of Mary, that her body was taken to heaven and there enthroned (1950).

Yes, certainly, the Pope is above law. The evidence proves that he is a law to himself.

The apostle further tells us that "the Lord shall consume (analogous - literally, 'cause to waste away')" the Antichrist, "with the spirit of his mouth" - a reference, it seems, to Isaiah 11:4, "he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked" (cf. Rev 19:15). This denotes the gradual weakening of the Papacy through the preaching of the Gospel, as accompanied by the power of the Spirit; and particularly since the time of the Protestant Reformation, Rome's power has been very considerably diminished. However the Man of Sin will continue (despite impairment) until the end of time when the Lord shall finally "destroy (him) with the brightness of his coming."

v. 9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders

The apostle proceeds to describe Antichrist more fully. "Satan", he observes, is the one responsible for setting him up and for "working" through him. Outside of this passage, this word translated "working" (*energeia*) is always used of the Divine activity (e.g. Eph 1:19; 3:7; Col 1:29; 2:12), which strongly suggests that what Satan does in and through the Papal system is in direct imitation of

and opposition to the Lord and his Church. Indeed, I believe it is true to say that this system is nothing less than Satan's grand device for the corruption of Christianity and the deception of the world.

A threefold description of miracles follows, as found in Acts 2:22; Rom 15:19; 2 Cor 12:12; and Heb 2:4): namely, "power (usually in the plural)...signs...and...wonders". According to Cardinal Bellarmine, the great protagonist of Rome, asserted "miracles" to be "one of the marks of the true church" and thereby deduced that the Church is not to be found among Protestants (De Notis Ecclesiae, bk. 4, ch. 14) Cardinal Newman (who "converted" to Romanism in 1845) maintained the same doctrine, stating it in this way: "It is agreed on both sides (Romanist and Protestant): the two parties join issue over a fact; that fact is the claim of miracles on the part of the Catholic Church; it is the Protestant's charge, and it is our glory" (Present Position of Catholics in England, p. 284ff.). In fact, Newman then proceeds to give his readers some examples of these incredible Romish "miracles". I can do no better here than to quote from his book: "Crucifixes have bowed the head to the suppliant, and Madonnas have bent their eyes upon assembled crowds. St. Januarius's blood liquefies periodically at Naples, and St. Winifred's well us the scene of wonders even in an unbelieving country. Women are marked with the sacred stigmata; blood has flowed on Fridays from their five wounds,

and their heads are crowned with a circle of lacerations...St. Francis Xavier turned salt water into fresh for five hundred travelers; St. Raymond was transported over the sea on his cloak; St. Andrew shone brightly in the dark..." - and so Newman continues, with amazing credulity and gullibility.

If space allowed, details could be given of the so-called "miracles" at Lourdes, Fatima, Conyers and Medjugorje; the Turin shroud with its vague imprint of a human body (which Rome falsely claims to be the dead body of Christ); and the candidates for "canonization", or "sainthood", each of whom must have performed at least four "miracles".

What are we to make of all this? There can be little doubt that the devil with his supernatural power can effect some miraculous things. However the apostle writes here of "miracles" which are simply "lying wonders". The word "lying" (pseudous) qualifies not "wonders" only, but also "power" and "signs". All three are "lying", not merely in the sense that they are wicked shams, but in that they induce people to believe what is patently untrue (Mariolatry, adoration of images, prayers to the dead, and so on)..

v. 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved

The Antichrist works through "all deceivableness of unrighteousness", which

means "unrighteousness dressed up in the garb of righteousness, a false faith under profession of the true" (E.B. Elliott, *The Difficulties and Perils of the Church*, p.143). Romanism is a deceit through and through. In addition to what has already been noted, take, for example, Peter's alleged connection with Rome: the only early reference before AD 325 to Peter being Bishop of Rome is in the "Clementine Homilies", which even Rome now rejects as a complete forgery. A deceit! Then there is the "Donation of Constantine", supposed to be Constantine's expression of gratitude to Pope Sylvester on account of his being cured of leprosy which granted to the Pope and his successors the city of Rome and other parts of Italy; however, the first mention of this in any historical record is in a letter from Pope Hadrian and written in AD 777. Another deceit! We come now to the "Isidorian Decretals", a collection of Epistles purporting to have been written from AD 90 to AD 385, which advanced the Roman Pope to unprecedented power, and by which Pope after Pope claimed power over Monarchs and Kings. These "Decretals", however, originated about AD 800 and were totally "false documents". Yet Rome has unashamedly used them. Yet another deceit! No wonder Paul writes of "all deceivableness of unrighteousness". As a result of such deceits, Rome has a large and devoted following among "them that perish", who are duped into believing such things because they receive not the truth, being wholly destitute of "the love of the truth", through which alone "they might be

saved."

v. 11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie

On account of men's willful and persistent rejection of truth, God sends them "strong delusion": that is, he judicially gives them up so that they fall under the power of their error. The result is that "they...believe a lie". That is what Romanism is. It is "a lie". It is a lie to say that: Roman Catholicism is authentic Christianity, that the Rule of Faith includes Ecclesiastical Tradition, that the Pope is the Vicar (Substitute) of Christ, that Images may be adored, that Mary reigns as Queen of Heaven, that Saints may be invoked in prayer, that Justification before God involves good works, that Baptism effects regeneration with removal of Original Sin, that Forgiveness is obtained through Priests, that Bread and Wine can be transubstantiated (or changed) into Christ's very body and blood, that Purgatory exists and for the purposes punishing and expiating sin, and so on and so forth. Tragically, Romanism is one great and awful "lie".

v. 12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness

The passage concludes with the warning that rejection of biblical truth and infatuation with this particular false religion constitutes a sin both soul-condemning and soul-destroying.

This prophecy in 2 Thessalonians 2 - "the Divine testimony regarding Popery" - has to be taken extremely seriously. In the light of it, we must not be deceived by scheming Ecumenists, compromising Protestants, or beguiling Romanists. Rather, let us hold fast the doctrines of the Reformation, showing ourselves to be, in heart and in life, on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore steadfastly opposed to the Antichrist.