

**THE MYSTERY OF GOD  
SHALL BE FINISHED**

**THE  
THYATIRA  
CHURCH AGE**

A STUDY IN THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

**No.6**

# THE THYATIRA CHURCH AGE

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## PREFACE

The fourth Church Age stretches for 900 long dreary years until about 1500 AD. It is the nadir of the downward slide of the Church.

After this there comes a progressive restoration of all that was lost over the centuries, until the Church comes *unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*

Before the three final Church ages, the next study, "Mystery Babylon the Great", is an overview to enable a proper appreciation of the exact nature of the Church's loss and the true character of the fall of the early Church Bride.

Study No. 8, "The Sardis Church Age, Reformation or Restoration", is the beginning of the recovery of Christ Himself by the Church, and the turning point in the general world-wide fortunes of Biblical Christianity.

In addition to the books previously referred to, I have gained assistance in this study from Avro Manhattan, "The Vatican Billions" (Paravision). (Other books by this author give a very useful detailed insight into Vatican meddling in international politics right up to the present day.)

I again acknowledge my gratitude to my late wife, Carol, for her cheerful assistance in preparing the original draft typescript.

In producing the current electronic version, I have taken advantage of the opportunity to thoroughly edit and revise it stylistically whilst not altering its content.

Study No. 9, "The Philadelphia Church Age", is now substantially completed, and will, I hope, soon be available. The first part of No 10, "The Laodicean Church Age", "End-time Deception", is partly completed.

Further studies in this series may be viewed on my website, [www.endtimerestoration.com](http://www.endtimerestoration.com). Hard copies may be obtained by emailing me using the contact form on the website.

**John L Birkin**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## (A BRIEF REVIEW OF PROGRESS TO DATE)

As Paul warned, there was a spirit abroad from the very first seeking to seduce the pure Bride of Christ (2 Cor 11: 2-4; 2 Thess 2:2; 1 Tim 4:1 ff).

This spirit was the spirit of antichrist. It did not merely resist the Truth. It actively sought to pervert and replace it by an organised system of error with its own:

- doctrines (1 Tim 4:1—2),
- ministers (2 Cor 11:13—15), and
- spirit of prophecy (1 Jn 4: 1—6).

It sought thereby to infiltrate and intermingle with that faith once for all delivered to the saints.

There was a definite strategy in the workings of the spirit of error. It was not merely a disjointed, ad hoc or piecemeal opposition to the Spirit of Truth.

The first stage was to gain control over the laity. This was done by usurping the ministry of individual members of the Body and exalting a clergy over them beyond the teachings of the Word (the deeds of the Nicolaitans).

As the deeds of the Nicolaitans increased in influence, the Church progressively lost her vital union with Christ. She permitted the replacement of the God-given gifts of apostles and prophets by an increasingly man-centred government. By so doing she lost her supernatural sense of direction. Along with this she also lost those Spiritual gifts imparted for the profit of all.

This resulted in a growing worldliness in the Church. It led to her downfall when Constantine became Roman Emperor and joined Church and State for the main body of the Church acquiesced to this adulterous union.

The deeds of the Nicolaitans then developed into the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which was accepted as official church doctrine. The power of the clergy was greatly strengthened, especially as it now had access to political power to enforce its will.

Having achieved this, the serpent then used the strengthened Nicolaitan clergy to teach the doctrine of Balaam. The Church was led the Church into an ungodly fellowship with the spirit of pagan Roman, partaking of *things sacrificed unto idols*.

So, the spirit of pagan religion, originating in the rebellious historical Babylon, entered the Church, the holy temple of the Living God. She who was called unto union with her heavenly Bridegroom was instead seduced by His ancient foe. Initially she had aimed at her first calling. But then she relaxed and left her first love. Now she was to be thoroughly married, but not to her only true Lover.

Once supernatural Holy Ghost control over the government of the Church was yielded up to a

Nicolaitan clergy, stage-by-stage the spirit of antichrist sought to squeeze the Holy Ghost out of all areas of Church Life. Step-by-step individual believers were seduced from holding fast in all things to Christ their Head, and progressively denied all vital contact with Him.

The reality of the power of godliness was squeezed out. The blessed doctrines of the Word were left as mere terminology which man either had to achieve by his own endeavours, or were said to have been effected by some "magical" rite performed by the clergy.

Sanctification became identified with asceticism and lost the glowing flow of the Spirit as the means of its attainment. Likewise the supernatural power of regeneration was lost with the acceptance of the arrogant claim of the clergy that by their rite of baptism, children were born again.

Now we come to the fourth age. The scene is set for the final act. We shall see where this awful path was to lead.

Thyatira means literally "domineering female". As in other ages, its name was prophetic of its outstanding characteristic.

#### What does the name, Thyatira, mean?

The following (edited) is very enlightening: <http://sigler.org/jones/chapter5.htm> :

.... The experts are uncertain as to the meaning of its name, so we are left to determine its prophetic meaning, based on John's description and the era it describes (529-1517 AD).

Since the message to this Church refers to "**that woman, Jezebel**" (2:20), **many believe Thyatira comes from the Greek, *thea*, "a female deity, goddess," and tyrannos, "a tyrant or ruler" i.e. "ruled by a woman."**

Others say the name comes from *thuo*, "to sacrifice" and means "continual sacrifice", referring to the martyrdoms at the hand of the Roman Church.

The history of Thyatira and how it was named at the beginning is very instructive. Jezebel's hometown of Tyre has much to do with the founding of Thyatira. In fact, it would appear that Thyatira was meant to be a second Tyre after its destruction by Alexander the Great.

The following gives some very interesting/significant data on an alternative name for Thyatira, Semiramis, the wife of Nimrod who became the mother goddess figure of the ancient world, the great mother harlot of Rev 17: International Standard Bible Encyclopedia - Thyatira

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/thyatira/>

Thyatira was a wealthy town in the northern part of Lydia of the Roman province of Asia, on the river Lycus. It stood so near the borders of Mysia, that some early writers regarded it as belonging to that country. Its early history is not well known, for until refounded by Seleucus Nicator (301-281 BC) it was a small, insignificant town. It stood on none of the Greek trade routes, but upon the lesser road between Pergamos and Sardis, and derived its wealth from the Lycus valley in which it rapidly became a commercial center, but never a metropolis. The name "Thyatira" means "the castle of Thya." **Other names which it has borne are Pelopia and Semiramis.**

In this age the spirit of error would gain full freedom to introduce and enforce all the fulness of its evil doctrine through an all-powerful clergy. This clergy could - and would - use its influence over the political powers to massacre whole regions to maintain its evil rule.

Moreover, this spirit not only used, but also actually took over, the power of the State.

This dreadful process then culminated in the awful depths of Satan.

Yet, however great the power of darkness, the true believer need not fear.

The promise to the overcomer in Thyatira was the morning star (Rev 2:28). This arises at the darkest part of the night to usher in the light of the coming day.

*When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. (Isa 59:19b)*

The flood was about to come in to its full extent.

But it would not swallow up everything.

The tide would turn. And its successive incoming waves would grow increasingly deeper and stronger, ultimately bringing the Church back to her first calling.

## THOU SUFFEREST THAT WOMAN JEZEBEL

### a) thou sufferest

The awful depths of satan just referred to were reached because of an ungodly tolerance:

*But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. (Rev 2:20)*

The sin of tolerance carries serious consequences.

In the Ephesus age we hear the refreshing words of commendation:

- *thou canst not bear them which are evil, and*
- *thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans.*

How different from the ungodly tolerance of Thyatira.

Their toleration cost them dear. Those guilty of it bore the responsibility for the resultant seduction of those who were servants of Christ by the spirit of error. It is a sobering thought that the godly of this age could, by their guilty acquiescence and silence, allow so vile a spirit as that of Jezebel to defile the Lord's servants.

A similar tolerance was found with Eli. Despite his own personal holiness, the testimony of the Spirit is that he despised the Lord, for he restrained not his sons from their iniquity of which he was fully aware (1 Sam 2:30; 3:13).

In order the better to understand what the tolerance of Thyatira opened the door to, let us see how a similar tolerance allowed the historical Jezebel to gain admittance among the people of God, and the dire consequences.

### b) That woman Jezebel

Like his father, king Ahab had the unhappy distinction that he *did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him* (1 K 16:30).

This evil consisted initially in his causing Israel to continue in the calf worship introduced into the northern kingdom by Jeroboam at the division between Judah and Israel.

But that was only the beginning.

*it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam... that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him... and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him..., there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up (Marg. = incited) (1 K 16:31,33b; 21:25).*

Why was Ahab's marrying Jezebel so significant? Why was the worship of Baal introduced in his reign so much more serious in the eyes of the Lord than the idolatry of Jeroboam? Herein lies the key to understanding the significance of the mention of Jezebel in Thyatira.

To appreciate better the spirit of Jezebel, let us first consider something of her background.

According to Josephus, Jezebel's father was a priest of Astarte who came to the throne by murdering the reigning king. Now Astarte (called Ashtoreth, Ashtaroth or Astaroth in the Old Testament) was the supreme female deity of the Phoenicians. In the Bible her worship is normally found in conjunction with that of the Baalim (i.e. the different manifestations of her husband, Baal) the supreme male Phoenician god.

Now the Phoenician Baal is identical with the Babylonian Bel, or Belus (Isa 46:1; Jer 50:2). And he was none other than the deified Nimrod. Babylon was the beginning of Nimrod's Kingdom (Gen 10:10). Its inhabitants deified both he and his wife, Semiramis. Their worship spread far and wide, under many different names in diverse nations.

(A full exposition of this worship and its significant features is provided in Study No 7, "Mystery, Babylon the Great". This shows the exact parallel between what the historical Jezebel introduced into Israel, and the doctrines brought by the Jezebel of Thyatira into the Church.)

The essence of the religion of Babylon is wilful rebellion against God. Babylon is called by the Spirit *the land of Merathaim* (Jer 50:21), which means "the land of the rebels", or "the land doubly rebellious". This spirit was fully shared by Nimrod and his wife as shown by historical records. So, to deify them is to worship a spirit of open rebellion against the Almighty.

Such then was the character of the worship of Jezebel's father. And she herself wholeheartedly partook of it.

Under her influence this worship was introduced into Israel through her marriage to Ahab. She kept at her table the prophets of Baal and of the groves (1 K 18:19). (The "groves" so often mentioned in Scripture were symbols or images representing the goddess Ashtoreth). Ahab himself so embraced this religion that he built a temple for Baal worship (1 K 16:32).

So deeply imbued was Jezebel with the rebellious spirit of the Babylonian worship that even in the face of the open revelation of the glory of God on Mt Carmel she showed no sign of repentance. Even the evil Ahab on occasions showed signs of tenderness and openness to the Lord (e.g. 1 K 21:27-29). But at no time did Jezebel betray any yielding at all to the voice of the Holy Ghost. Her spirit was murderous and obstinately impenitent.

No wonder, then, that when this spirit reappeared in Thyatira, no response was made to the Lord's offer of mercy:

*And I gave her time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication (Rev 2:21, RV).*

(This verse is alternatively translated “is determined not to”, “will not”, and “has shown no desire to” repent.)

Her violent hatred for the true God and His servants is seen in her slaughter of the prophets of the Lord (1 K 18:4).

The foregoing gives some idea of the great evil introduced into Israel through Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel. It is no coincidence that a significant amount of space is devoted by the Holy Ghost in I and II Kings to the ministry of Elijah and Elisha. These were the two men most used of God to fight the introduction of the awful spirit of Babylonian worship into Israel. The contest only ended when Jehu wiped out the line of Ahab and removed every trace of Baal worship from the northern kingdom (2 K 10:18-28).

I hope this throws light upon the spirit which was tolerated and admitted into Thyatira:

- It is the spirit of the rebellious Babylon, an obstinately anti-God spirit incapable of responding to the Holy Spirit.
- It seeks to introduce, and enforce, the worship of Babylon and to eradicate the worship of the true God.

Note these two points well. They bear a remarkable similarity to the actual historical events of the Thyatira age.

### **c) Her children**

Not only did the Lord warn of the influence of Jezebel in Thyatira. He also spoke of her children being there, and in terms which did not speak well of them:

*And I will kill her children with death (Rev 2:23a).*

This, too, matches the historical situation. The children of the Jezebel shared their mother’s hatred of the Lord.

She had two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram. They reigned in Israel before the Lord’s judgement cut off the whole dynasty. Ahaziah especially followed in the evil steps of his parents (1 K 22:52-53).

In addition, Jezebel had a daughter, *that wicked woman* Athaliah (2 Chr 24:7).

She did even more harm. She was instrumental in introducing the abominations of Jezebel into Judah, the southern kingdom, by a most unexpected chain of events.

The king of Judah at the time of Ahab was the godly Jehoshaphat. Just as Ahab was the most evil ruler to date in Israel, so Jehoshaphat was the most godly in Judah since David. Of him it was written:

*he walked in the first ways of his father David(2 Chr 17:3).*

Of only three kings was it said that they walked in the ways of David: Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah. The highest compliment that could be paid to the kings was to have walked in the ways of David, a man after God's own heart.

From the start of his reign Jehoshaphat removed forbidden objects of worship (2 Chr 17:6). He sent princes, Levites and priests to teach the Word in all the cities of the land (2 Chr 17: 7-9), and *brought the people back unto the Lord God of their fathers* (2 Chr 19:4b). To reinforce this work he sent judges throughout all cities (2 Chr 19: 5-7). (This is significant since it was the judges who enforced the Law of Moses, thus ensuring national adherence to, and respect for, the Word).

To appreciate the esteem in which Jehoshaphat was held by the Lord, notice the regard in which he was held by the prophet Elisha (2 K 3:14). Another seer testified of him that *there are good things found in thee... thou.. hast prepared thine heart to seek God* (2 Chr 19:3). No wonder that men said of him, *Jehoshaphat... sought the Lord with all his heart* (2 Chr 22:9).

In spite of so uplifting a testimony, however, one thing marred his otherwise godly reign.

Jehoshaphat made a marriage alliance with the family of Ahab (2 Chr 18:1; AV "joined affinity" = RSV "made a marriage alliance"). By this he introduced the wicked Athaliah into the power centre of Judah and mingled the seed royal, through which would come the promised Messiah, with the mortal enemies of the Lord.

From the division of the kingdom until Jehoshaphat there had been continual war between Israel and Judah. In the days of Ahab's father, however, a new foe appeared on Israel's northern borders, the rising power of Syria. So Ahab designed a new foreign policy: a peace treaty with Judah and an alliance against Syria.

The essence of Jehoshaphat's failure lay in his acquiescence to this policy.

Initially the godly Jehoshaphat had strengthened himself against Israel (2 Chr 17:1-2).

But for some reason he amended his policy and was lured into a pact with the enemies of the Lord. Why? We are not told. Perhaps he felt that since both nations were under the same covenant they should come together again and cease their strife.

Such is the danger of the horrible ecumenical spirit of our day. Unity must be based on unfeigned submission to the Word by both parties, not just on the fact that both parties profess a common Christian heritage.

Whatever the reason, Jehoshaphat was foolishly *persuaded* (a word that reeks of the subtle serpent) to join Ahab in battle against Syria. And he did this despite the clear warning through the prophet Micaiah of God's opposition to Ahab (2 Chr 18:2-34).

No wonder that after the battle the Lord sent a solemn word to Jehoshaphat:

*Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord* (2 Chr 19:2).

Unfortunately Jehoshaphat did not learn his lesson.

He later joined Ahab's wicked son Ahaziah in a trading venture. On this occasion, however, he appears to have taken notice of a further prophetic reproof (2 Chr 20: 35-37; cp 1 K 22:48-49).

Later again, however, he allied himself yet again with the evil house of Ahab. This time it was to Jehoram, Ahaziah's successor, in battle against Moab (2 K 3:7ff).

But the damage was not only limited to Jehoshaphat.

As a direct consequence of his foolish marriage alliance, his son Jehoram embraced the evils introduced by Jezebel into Israel (2 Chr 21:6). Consequently he led Judah, the place of the holy temple, in the same way.

Though Jehoram was smitten of the Lord, the evil influence of his wife Athaliah lived on. Her son Ahaziah succeeded to the throne, and through her counsel he too walked in the evil religion of Jezebel (2 Chr 22:2-5a).

Even worse was yet to come, however.

So far we have seen how godly Jehoshaphat, through his failure to keep wholly separate from anti-Word Israel, was duped. He tolerated the influence of Jezebel on his son, Jehoram.

In the same way the Jezebel spirit in Thyatira, once allowed in through a blameworthy toleration, was able *to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication* (Rev 2:20).

In the godly reign of Jehoshaphat the Jezebel spirit in Judah could not yet compel. But its influence was real in luring and enticing Jehoshaphat into a closer and closer alliance.

Gradually, however, it rose to a position whereby it could introduce and enforce all its evil teachings, firstly through Athaliah's husband and then through her son.

After his father's death, Jehoram, through his royal power, was able to force her religion on the whole nation. He *caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication and compelled Judah thereto* (2 Chr 21:11).

The climax came when Athaliah herself actually came to the throne of Judah, usurping a right due only to the seed of David. To do this she destroyed the entire seed royal, except one child who was hidden away (2 Chr 22:10-12). This was the nearest the Jezebel spirit came to achieving its final objective. Slaying the prophets of the Lord, and seducing the servants of God to commit spiritual fornication was not enough. The ultimate aim was to eliminate the very line through which would come the Anointed One, He who would bruise the serpent's head.

How very near it came, how very near! And all because of the toleration of the most godly king of Judah since David,

#### **d) Conclusion**

I have expounded the actions and influence of Jezebel in such detail because it is an exact

foreshadow of the history of the Thyatira age.

Before Thyatira the Church had known idolatry (or spiritual fornication) through heeding the counsel of Balaam in the Pergamos age. Even that, however, was nothing compared with what was to come when Jezebel was allowed to teach.

The historical Jezebel did not enter Israel by birth, but through Ahab's political marriage alliance with the Zidonians to help strengthen his kingdom.

Likewise spiritual Jezebel was not of the Church. She too was allowed in through a marriage alliance, the adulterous Church-State union whereby Constantine sought to use the Church to achieve his political aims. State assistance was given to further the official "catholic" party. Just as with Jezebel, the fallen woman increasingly used State power to enforce her religion on all.

We have seen this trend grow progressively stronger in our historical study of Pergamos. It is not until Thyatira, however, that the fulness of all that lies in the foul bosom of the spirit of antichrist is uncovered.

Then the Jezebel spirit slays the true ministers of God. It imposes its own religion by force wherever it can. Ultimately it usurps even the political power so that instead of making use of it for her evil ends, it actually replaces it becoming the virtual undisputed political ruler of vast areas of western Europe. At the height of Jezebel's dark rule the true testimony of God would have been wiped out had the Lord not preserved a remnant of the true seed of Abraham, the children of the freewoman.

During the period of the spiritual Jezebel's sway, she had full liberty to teach all the error she wished. Thyatira above all other ages saw the greatest flood of false doctrine. Once able to enforce her will, Jezebel took the Word from the people and replaced It with her awful blasphemies.

Notice the stages in the Church's downwards fall:

- *Nicolaitanism*: the rise of a "special" class separate from the laity (i.e. the clergy), concentrating control of the government of the Church in themselves
- *Balaamism*: the clergy lead the laity into an illicit hybrid union with the political power, letting in a flood of worldliness and gaining the means of enforcing their will, binding the people to their own organisation, and persecuting dissent
- *Jezebel*: the removal of the true teaching of the Word from the people and its substitution with error

This is the progressive revelation of the operation of the one spirit of antichrist. It culminates in the depths of Satan.

How far is the spirit of the fallen woman from the meek and quiet spirit of the Bride of Christ.

*I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets and her hands as bands (Eccl 7:26a).*

The first workings of the spirit of antichrist seemed so harmless. But now the iron arms of the fallen Church hold in a vice-like grip. Like the beast of Revelation (Rev 13:11), she outwardly looked like a harmless lamb. But when she spoke, it was as a dragon.

But the Lord be praised. Despite every endeavour, Jezebel was unable to exterminate wholly the seed royal, those who walked in the liberty of Christ. The Lord kept a hidden remnant that would yet in the ages to come fully reveal the nature and origin of that holy Seed from which they were born.

## THYATIRA: DOMINEERING FEMALE

### (THE CLIMAX OF THE QUEST FOR ECCLESIASTICAL AND POLITICAL POWER)

#### **a) Progress of the spirit of antichrist to date**

Before launching into the historical study, let us summarise progress to date of the satanic objective of attaining total control over the bodies, minds and souls of mankind.

#### *Centralisation of ecclesiastical authority*

Gradually the Nicolaitan spirit had centred more and more power over the affairs of the churches in fewer and fewer hands:

- i) concentration of local church power in one man (the priest)
- ii) consolidation of power over several churches in a locality in one man (the bishop)
- iii) consolidation of authority over all the bishops in a province or nation in one man (the metropolitan, or archbishop)
- iv) emergence of two international power rivals for primacy among the archbishops: the bishops of Rome and Constantinople
- v) growing consolidation of all ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the Western Empire in the bishop of Rome

#### *Political enforcement of ecclesiastical authority*

With religious authority increasingly centred in the hands of an emerging clerical hierarchy, the State was increasingly encouraged to enforce that authority. The stages in that process are:

- i) the legalising and favouring of Christianity by Constantine
- ii) the enforcing of Catholic Christianity upon all citizens of the Empire by Theodosius. Others (e.g. Donatists, Priscillianists) were discriminated against.
- iii) Under the Emperor Valentinian all bishops in the West had to submit to papal authority on pain of State punishment

#### *Quest for political dominion*

From about 450 - 750 AD the Western Roman Empire was greatly weakened by barbarian invasions.

During this period of the inner heart of the spirit of antichrist was further revealed. The growth of papal political power was not just a historical fluke, but the result of a definite master plan.

Initially the bishops of Rome sought political independence as heads of their own sovereign state.

Next, they progressively sought supremacy over all other sovereign states. Not content with using the State to enforce her ecclesiastical authority, Rome sought to actually take over the State. Medieval history reeks of a constant restless lust for more and more power by the Papacy.

Let us see how this came about.

## **b) The beginnings of the political power of the Papacy**

This is not a history lesson but a Bible study. The following notes therefore are only outlines of the reigns of selected popes to show the growth of papal political power. I have, however, tried to reflect the true spirit of this age, and not to impart a coloured view to suit a particular taste.

### **Gregory I (590 - 604)**

Gregory was the chief transitional Pope on the road to papal political power. The infant spirit of Jezebel would thereafter grow apace. Despite excellent traits of character, he was thoroughly imbued with the desire to establish papal claims to universal supremacy.

A virtual power vacuum in Rome after the barbarian devastations led to the clergy's assuming increasing control of public affairs. Gregory was virtual sovereign in Rome.

As his political power grew, with varying success Gregory made ceaseless efforts to increase his ecclesiastical authority in Spain, France, Italy, England and Yugoslavia. He bitterly opposed the claims of the bishop of Constantinople, and even in the Eastern Empire he was granted a primacy of honour, though not of authority.

Calling himself the "Successor of Peter" and "Vicar of Christ on earth", he taught there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church.

### **Zacharius (741 — 752)**

His reign saw the beginning of a very important alliance between the Papacy and the Franks, founders of the French nation. Zacharius arrogantly assumed the right to authorise the removal of the existing ruler by Pepin (the father of Charlemagne). This action would have dire future consequences. Henceforth it was asserted that the kings of France only held their crowns on papal authority, and that the Papacy had the right to give and withhold kingdoms.

### **Stephen II (752 — 757)**

At Stephen's request, Pepin led an army to Italy to defeat the Lombards who were threatening Rome. This invasion was inspired by one of many of incredible forgeries upon which the present position of the Papacy is founded. A letter, purporting to have been sent down from

heaven direct, written in Peter's own hand was sent to Pepin. Its daring is awful. It promised protection in this life and the next, but threatened punishment if Rome were not defended.

(At this time Rome's status was greatly enhanced by a display of Peter's relics. A ceremony was even arranged to enable pilgrims to talk to Peter at his tomb. If this is not encouraging a spiritistic communion with the dead, what is! Such is the true nature of Rome's communion of the saints: a communion with the dead, not the fellowship of the living.)

As a result of Pepin's victory, a large part of central Italy (the Papal States) was given to the Pope. It was retained for the next eleven centuries until 1870.

Not content with this, a later forgery appeared in which the dead Pepin was claimed to have donated also the rest of Italy. It had no practical effect.

### **Hadrian (772 - 795)**

He held great influence over Pepin's son, Charlemagne (742 - 814), who assisted greatly in bringing the Papacy to the rank of a world power. Hadrian heartily supported Charlemagne in his 33 years of wars in Germany against the Saxons "converting" them by the sword,

### **The "Donation of Constantine"**

In AD 774 appeared one of the most successful and influential Medieval forgeries, the "Donation of Constantine". It was not exposed until the 15th C.

This supposed legal document alleged that at his baptism Constantine presented the Pope with the insignia of the whole Western Roman Empire. In one masterstroke the Papacy was thereby put above kings and emperors as rightful heir of the Roman Empire. The aim of this forgery was to antedate by 500 years the legal basis of Pepin's recent political power grant to the Pope.

It is difficult adequately to appreciate the vast influence of this forgery for centuries. The Papacy was able to assert that all her political claims were based on the utmost legality.

As time went on, the ever growing covetousness of the Papacy increasingly enlarged its claims based on successive re-interpretations of this document, Although having only recently acquired territories of her own, Rome's lust for power increased the more:

- Initially the "Donation" was used to justify the Papacy's existing territorial possessions.
- Later it was claimed its aim was to establish the Papacy's universal temporal domain. The rulers of the Western nations were said only to hold their kingdoms as a present. The Pope was the true owner and sole ruler in both ecclesiastical and political affairs.
- Still later it was claimed that Europe had always belonged to the Pope. Constantine's authority was only legitimate when conceded by the Vicar of Christ. His donation was merely a restitution of what was stolen in an unjust way.

Notice a recurring feature in the Papacy's dealings: an intense resentment of any authority greater than her own. The forged "Donation" sought to remove any impression that Pepin had

given the Papacy anything. It was already hers by legal right anyway. Later the same resentful spirit then denied Constantine the right to make the Donation. It was already the Pope's.

This spirit was a cause of constant and recurring friction for centuries between the Papacy and secular rulers. The thought of a ruler having authority of any kind over the Pope or his priests aroused the arrogant Nicolaitan spirit of antichrist. It acknowledged no other authority. Instead it insisted on acknowledgement of its own supremacy in every sphere, ecclesiastical and secular.

The papal dream of universal supremacy in both ecclesiastical and political realms continued to haunt its darkened mind. But there was still much progress to be made. Charlemagne viewed the Pope as chief prelate in the West, but gave him no special deference. Though the Pope crowned Charlemagne Holy Roman Emperor in 800 AD, he also had to prostrate himself at Charlemagne's feet. Papal claims to possess the legal right to confer the Empire were disputed for many centuries.

Ultimately, the crowning papal blasphemy would be the claim to replace God on earth; to sit in the place of God, wearing the triple crown symbolising the claim to be ruler of earth, heaven and hell. But that was yet to come.

*.... thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down... (Isa 14:13 -15a).*

Thou alone, O Lord, art worthy.

### **Nicolas I (858 — 867)**

Nicolas was the ablest and most assertive Pope until Hildebrand. He proudly proclaimed, "that which the Pope has decided is to be observed by all". He used with great effect yet another giant medieval forgery, the "Pseudo Isidorian decretals". Their aim was twofold: to claim reduced power for the State over bishops; and to strengthen papal legal control over archbishops.

Charlemagne had extended the authority of metropolitans (or, archbishops) over all religious affairs in their region. After his death the forged Decretals greatly assisted the bishops and lesser clergy to reduce the power of archbishops by giving the former the right of direct appeal to the Pope. By reducing the archbishops' authority, papal power was enhanced. Increasingly bishops became merely agents of the Papacy. They also became a law unto themselves, not subject to any earthly jurisdiction even in purely secular crimes. The struggle of the Papacy to put all her clergy outside the rule of the law is a continuing story in medieval European history.

The iron bands of the domineering harlot were hardening!

But the next major advance had to wait over 200 years. Political chaos descended upon 9th and 10th C Europe. The Papacy sunk into depths of moral depravity which scarcely any church historian has wished to describe. Even loyal Jesuits have described some popes as "monsters, heretics, usurpers, murderers, robbers, tyrants, adulterers and apostates". Such was the sickening stench of the Papacy's putrefaction that there were moves even within church synods for future popes to be appointed by the Emperor.

But this did not suit the purposes of the spirit of error. An evil genius was in preparation to further its ends.

**c) The vision of world-wide political power: Gregory VII (Hildebrand) (1073 - 1085)**

Gregory's reign was an attempt to establish the papal vision of the Kingdom of God on earth, with fully fledged claims of universal sovereignty.

His claims to infallibility in doctrine, universal dominion, and being the sole means of salvation were not new, Nor was he able to bring these claims to a successful conclusion. But he possessed extraordinary ardour, courage and persistence in pursuing his goal. He left for his successors the haunting inspiration of the grand ideal of the spirit of antichrist: universal dominion over the minds and bodies of men.

The climax, or rather, the nadir, was near.

So greatly did Gregory partake of the inspiration spirit of the Papacy that he was virtually an incarnation of arrogance and intolerance. His language sometimes bordered on the assumption of divinity. In a decree against the German Emperor Henry, for example, he prophesied his death or deposition using the term "saith the Lord". It failed to happen. (Remember Jezebel's claim to possess prophetic gifts: *that woman Jezebel which calleth herself a prophetess* (Rev 2:20)).

Gregory greatly resented the thought of a Christian theocracy in co-operation with the Emperor, such as in the Eastern (or Greek Catholic) Church. He lusted for an absolute papal sovereignty which all must obey, to which all earthly monarchs were responsible, with the Roman Pope controlling the appointment of bishops and emperors, being himself judged by no man.

In ecclesiastical affairs Gregory sought to compel archbishops to come to Rome to have their appointment confirmed. He strongly insisted that all bishops must obey him, and that he must control their appointment. Ecclesiastical government became increasingly centred on the decisions of the Papacy, instead of on regional councils of bishops. The Pope presented himself as the sovereign lawgiver of Christendom, saying "how shall they have pardon for their sins who despise him who openeth and closeth the gates of heaven to whom he pleaseth".

In political affairs his avowed object was the absolute freedom and independence of the clergy from any lay interference. Gregory openly claimed authority over the whole Eastern Empire. Declaring his ultimate goal as the establishment of the universal political rule of Peter, he made continual attempts to possess all the crowns of Europe.

In conclusion, Gregory translated many earlier abstract papal claims of supremacy into action.

Their full reality, however, awaited yet another evil genius. Then would the full wrath of Jezebel be unleashed against the seed royal.

**Urban II (1088 - 1099)**

He initiated the Crusades to gain control of the ancient and venerated churches of Jerusalem,

Antioch and Alexandria (which were independent of Roman ecclesiastical control).

In the continuing struggle to abolish all dependence upon a secular power, Urban sought to prevent any ecclesiastic from swearing loyalty to a political lord.

**(d) The Vision realised: Innocent III (1198 - 1216)**

His reign was the pinnacle of papal political power. Innocent put into effect the bold schemes Gregory conceived, achieving that which had haunted the dark mind of the Papacy for long ages: control over all the churches; to be a political power in its own right; and dominion over all other earthly thrones.

How fascinating to watch the Nicolaitan spirit gradually unveil the full depths of its foul bosom as stage-by-stage the grand vision and object of its policy comes to its consummation. As each pope consolidates the ground laid by his predecessor, so there rise as yet nebulous and hazy visions of still further horizons.

Oh, foul spirit! How dost thou permeate thy malign influence over the hearts and minds of men! But it shall not frustrate the Spirit of holiness bringing to fulfilment His grand design of a Church fully restored to her first vision and calling.

Some idea of Innocent's spirit may be gained from his inaugural remarks. He claimed to be "less than God, more than man; below God, above man"; also, "supreme sovereign over the Church and the world... All things in heaven, on earth and in hell are subject to the Vicar of Christ".

Here is uncovered the Nicolaitan and antichrist nature of Innocent's pretensions. He claims to be above man (i.e. Nicolaitan, conqueror of the laity), and in the place of (i.e. "vicar of") Christ.

This is the climax of what I have said all along: the fall of the Church consisted purely and simply of her progressively weakened grip on her Head, Christ Himself. Stage-by-stage the spirit of antichrist had squeezed out the living Christ from the believer's experience. Now a Nicolaitan high priest arrogates to himself the awful blasphemy of acting in Christ's stead.

So great was the extent of Innocent's political power that by the end of his reign he was acknowledged temporal ruler of Lombardy, the Kingdom of Naples, Sicily, Sardinia, Serbia, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Poland, England, Hungary, Bohemia, the Spanish states, Scandinavia, Syria and the Byzantine (Eastern) Empire. Only Germany withstood, but even here the Papacy emerged supreme under Innocent IV (1241 - 1254). Sovereigns were deeply and publicly humbled by his authority. Innocent's overall objective was complete control of all human affairs. He was possessed of an unquenchable desire for universal dominion over the bodies and souls of men. He sought not just the independence of the Church from State control, but a complete theocracy with the Pope, as near as a man might dare be, set upon the throne of God.

Only one more Pope, Boniface VIII (1294 - 1303), made more sweeping blasphemous claims. He said, "we declare, state, define and pronounce that for very human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff is altogether necessary for salvation".

By this time, however, the Papacy's political fortunes were greatly waning.

Two centuries of relative weakness followed in which the power of the Papacy to control individual nations was much reduced.

So far I have concentrated on the rise of papal political power, giving only brief indications of the final consolidation of papal ecclesiastical power during the Middle Ages.

Let us now consider this more fully.

## 4 THE DEPTHS OF SATAN

### a) The spirit of error allowed into the pulpit

Tolerating Jezebel had dire consequences for the Church.

In the Ephesus and Smyrna Ages it was necessary to proceed cautiously introducing erroneous teaching. False apostles were quickly identified (Rev 2:2b). So, error was introduced by the side-door (2 Pet 2:1), through those who *crept in unawares* (Jude 4).

But now error was taught quite openly.

*thou sufferest that ..... to teach and to seduce* (Rev 2:20)

The word "seduce" is strong. It means fundamental departure from the Truth. The same word is used for seducing spirits (1 Tim 4:1) and, significantly, *the spirit of error* (1 John 4:6).

So, by a foolish tolerance, the spirit of error itself was actually given direct admission to the very household of God, as an authorised spokesman for Truth.

What was the nature and content of the teaching of Jezebel?

Basically it was similar to the doctrine of Balaam (Rev 2:14b; cp Rev 2:20b), which we have already considered. It was more, however, in that it brought the effects of the doctrine of Balaam to its climax, or rather, depths:

*But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan as they speak....* (Rev 2:24)

What are *the depths of Satan*? No such formula or any like it is known in historical records.

This term does not so much describe the content of a particular doctrine as the effects of taking the doctrine of Balaam to its full conclusion under an unscrupulous Jezebel priesthood. A Church weaned from full dependence upon Christ alone by the spirit of antichrist is led progressively downwards until she reaches the very deeps of that foul spirit.

This may seem extravagant or exaggerated. But it is the awful yet sober truth of what happened to the professing Medieval Church.

Before examining the full blossoming of the doctrine of Balaam in the Thyatira age, let us set the historical scene to show how it came about. (A full description of the doctrines introduced by Catholicism in this period is given in Study No 7).

### b) The progress of papal ecclesiastical authority

Despite her high-sounding claims, the practical authority of the bishop of Rome made little

progress beyond Italy until the late 6th C. Gregory was perhaps the first real Pope in developing international jurisdiction over the churches.

By this time the Nicolaitan power structure was strongly developed throughout all Christendom, whether Roman, Eastern (Greek), or Nestorian (Persian) churches. The Celtic Church was the only substantial body where it was much less developed. Local church power was concentrated in the priest. The bishop held power over all the priests in a region. Authority over the bishops in vast provinces was held by metropolitan bishops (or, archbishops as they were later called).

At this stage, final authority in matters of faith and church government was vested in Church Councils (or Synods), when all bishops were summoned to discuss matters of common interest. It came to be taught that when such Ecumenical (or, General) Councils met, their decisions were infallible and to be received as the voice of the Spirit. Hence those most deceived by Nicolaitanism have always treated them with great respect.

This state of affairs has more or less continued in the Eastern (Greek) Church to the present day. No one bishop has supremacy over the others. Every bishop is head of his own particular church subject only to the decisions of a General Council. Their titular head, the Patriarch, is only granted a primacy of honour and not of jurisdiction. He is only first among equals.

Though highly advanced in concentrating ecclesiastical power in a man-made government, this structure did not yet fully satisfy the yearnings and aspirations of the spirit of antichrist. Christ must be totally dethroned and replaced by a single man.

It was in the Roman (Western) Church that these longings would find their deepest satisfaction.

To attain this goal, all ordinary and metropolitan bishops must be brought into subjection to one man.

### **c) The forged "Decretals"**

By the early Middle Ages, the bishops were virtual rulers of emerging national churches. Characteristically, the chief means of attaining this was a massive forgery.

I say "characteristically", because the whole structure of Nicolaitanism was erected by the spirit of error, the father of lies. It is therefore wholly in keeping with the nature of its originator that the structure should be built on such foundations.

The "Isidorian Decretals" appeared in the mid 9th C. They comprised about one hundred forged decrees of the earliest popes, together with spurious decisions of early Church councils and pretended letters of certain famous ecclesiastical figures.

These forgeries were astonishingly successful. Men's ignorance of the Word left them wide open to be deceived. Even elementary errors, such as ascribing a quotation from the book of James to Peter, went unnoticed.

It was not until the Reformation that these were exposed. Now even Catholic historians consider them untenable. But the whole fabric of Catholic Church government built upon them has not been discarded!

Upon these forged Decretals was built the fabric of the supremacy of the bishop of Rome over the different national churches. This altered significantly the constitution and government of the Church. According to Dr Salmon in his book "Infallibility of the Church",

"from these epistles it followed at once that the pope was the sole source of spiritual power; without his consent no council could be held; every bishop, priest or layman might appeal to him from every other judgement; the Church must be withdrawn from the control of all secular power, and be subjected to a single spiritual despot..., for from him there could be no appeal".

These matters were crucial to the climaxing of Nicolaitan aspirations. If the pope alone could summon a council, then he had authority over a council. If all could appeal to him, then he could overrule the decisions of all other ecclesiastical authorities. No longer were individual bishops supreme in their own territory.

Hitherto I have detailed the bishop of Rome's many claims to authority over the Church. These were only actually accepted, however, by some. The power of the State had at times been used to enforce the "Catholic" party's view. But this was not so much on behalf of the bishop of Rome as the whole "Catholic" party of which he was but a member, albeit a highly respected one. There was great resistance, especially by the bishop of Constantinople, to Rome's claims of supremacy.

In the end, the papal lust for power led to an irreversible breach in the 11th C between the (Western) Catholic and Orthodox Churches of the East.

In the West, however, Rome's ecclesiastical power grew apace. Over the years the forged Decretals were accepted among the laws governing the Church (i.e. Canon Law). In a collection (1151 AD) of everything having the force of law in the Church, 313 out of 324 quotations from early popes were from the forged Decretals. So greatly were theologians deceived by them that the famous Thomas Aquinas, for example, wrote of the special rights of popes as an essential part of his studies on the Church.

It is very difficult for an evangelical mind properly to appreciate the significance of Canon Law. Its effects suffocated all churches caught in its clutches from experiencing the liberty of the direct guidance of the Spirit. The existence of Canon Law (enforced by the civil authorities where necessary) enabled the bishop of Rome by the 11th, 12th and 13th C to exercise effective control over virtually the whole of western Christendom.

Before leaving the subject of forgeries, I wish to mention the earliest of all, the "pseudo Clementine homilies". These were the basis of the papal claim of direct succession from Peter. The forgery was necessary since the early church fathers knew nothing of such a succession.

The advantages gained from forgeries such as the "Donation of Constantine", Peter's supposed letter to Pepin, Pepin's will, or the ones mentioned above are no mere coincidence, or simply a reflection of the wickedness of certain individual forgers. These forgeries provided the very foundation for the nature and constitution of Catholic ecclesiastical and political structures, the possession of the Papal States, constant interference in and control of the political affairs of Europe, and the hierarchical structure of ecclesiastical government with the Pope as final judge and ruler. These elements comprise the essence and heart of the Papacy.

The forgeries are not peripheral. They are a revelation of the heart of that false lying spirit which is the inspiration of the papal lust for power. How evil is the bosom of the Papacy, and how deep are the spirits nestled there.

We have seen earlier the spirit of antichrist replacing Christ within the Roman system (we shall see more later) and the spirit of error seducing His servants. Now we see also he who was a liar from the beginning.

**d) Vicar of Christ or Antichrist?**

In 1073 Gregory decreed that he only should be called "Pope". Until then this title (which means "father") was common to all bishops.

Though Paul considered himself a father to his spiritual children, the motive of the Papacy was very different. It was to claim for itself sole jurisdiction over all believers rather than a tender care for the Lord's flock. It is the spirit shown by an earlier pope who resented merely being termed "brother", the spirit that Jesus warned of in the Pharisees:

*And love..., to be called of men Rabbi, Rabbi. But be ye not called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant (Matt 23:6-11).*

By the 11th C papal control of the churches was so strong that all the fulness of its evil ambitions and claims could be unveiled. For long ages they had been present in the heart of its inspiration spirit, but only able to manifest their full extent progressively, as each successive step was acquiesced to by a deceived Christendom, blinded to the Spirit of the Word.

The spirit of antichrist progressively squeezed the living Christ out of the Church, severing the members of His Body from the Head in one realm after another. Now we see the grand objective achieved. The man raised by the spirit of antichrist to the supreme control of Nicolaitan church government would himself replace Christ, and be invested with all His dignity and authority.

In its awful blasphemy the Papacy took to itself the title "Vicar of Christ". "Vicar" means "in the place of". Of course, in many ways the Church (insofar as she goes in Christ's Name and is filled with and led by the Holy Ghost) is God's agent on earth. But the true spirit of the Papacy is not to go in the Name of Christ but in His stead, to actually replace Him and cause men to give to itself the place due to Christ.

All through our historical study I have shown the jealousy of the bishop of Rome towards anyone holding higher authority than himself, and his resentment of any necessity for approval of his actions by any other created being. Now that lustful spirit seeks its ultimate objective: the replacement of Christ Himself.

If this seem too exaggerated, consider the following astonishing words of Pope Boniface VIII:

"The Pope is of so great dignity and excellence that he is not merely man, but as if God and the Vicar of God. The Pope alone is called most holy..., divine monarch and supreme

emperor, and king of kings... The Pope is of so great dignity and power that he constitutes one and the same tribunal with Christ, so that whatsoever the Pope does seems to proceed from the mouth of God. The Pope is as God on earth”.

Pope Leo XIII declared (1885) that the Pope holds “upon this earth the place of God Almighty”.

The New York (Catholic) Catechism says:

“The Pope takes the place of Jesus Christ on earth... He is the true Vicar of Christ, the head of the entire Church, the father and teacher of all Christians. He is the infallible ruler..., the author and the judge of councils,.. the supreme judge of heaven and earth, the judge of all, being judged by no man, God Himself on earth”.

Aquinas, one of the most respected Catholic theologians, wrote:

“The Pope seems to those that view him with the spiritual, to be not a man, but a god. There are no bounds to his authority. He can declare right what he will and can take away from any their rights as he sees fit. To doubt this universal power leads to being shut out from salvation”.

On his head the Pope wears a triple crown, symbolising his (supposed) authority in heaven, on earth and under the earth. On that crown are the Latin words “Vicarius Filii Dei”, meaning “In the place of the Son of God”.

It is no coincidence that the numerical value of the Roman numerals comprising that Latin name total 666 (Vicarius =112; Filii = 53; Dei = 501).

The word “Antichrist” has a dual meaning: “in the place of” or “in opposition to” Christ. The greatest satanic opposition to Christ has not been from direct confrontation, such as the persecution of the pagan Roman Empire. It has been from they who have claimed actually to come in His Name. Such is Rome.

In view of the foregoing, it is little wonder that the popes should wish to claim infallibility also for themselves alone.

Throughout the late Middle Ages this opinion was widely held, but not yet fully accepted by a General Council. Indeed the Council of Constance declared that a pope was subject to “every lawfully convoked ecumenical council”.

This however could not satisfy Rome’s quest for her total authority to be acknowledged and legally established.

At the Vatican Council of 1870 the infallibility of the Pope in matters of faith and morals when speaking “ex cathedra” was proclaimed. By this any effective Bible study within the Roman Church was finally squashed. The Pope alone now had legal authority to define doctrine.

The letter to Thyatira forewarns of Papal pretensions to infallibility:

*.... that woman Jezebel which calleth herself a prophetess.... (Rev 2:20)*

Jezebel, symbol of the Thyatira ecclesiastical system, claimed to be inspired by a spirit of prophecy. And no doubt she was. But the Bible makes clear that her inspiration was not from the Spirit of Holiness:

*the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts (2 K 9:22).*

Jezebel consulted and communed with evil spirits. Her religion was not a dead liturgy. It was deeply imbued with a vibrant satanic breath. Prophets and prophetesses ate at her table. Yes, Jezebel held herself out to be one who spoke under inspiration, but her inspiration spirit was the one that inspired the worship of ancient Babylon.

So it was with the Papacy.

It is astonishing to see the profession of the supernatural in some of papal utterances. I have already referred to a case of a pope claiming to speak the direct words of Peter. To read this document does not convey the impression that it is merely a preposterous claim. It reads as one who really does speak under inspiration. Rome's claims are not just baseless pretensions. There really was a living spirit speaking through a man. But it was not the Spirit of Truth. It was a lying spirit such as the Lord put in the mouth of the prophets of Ahab, Jezebel's husband.

Romanism is a deeply spiritual religion for those who partake to the full of its inspiration spirit, But it is the wrong spirit! It is the spirit of Babylon. And, as seen in the Pergamos Age, it leads to a communion with demons.

A detailed study of the Medieval Catholic system makes clear that it was a religion of the supernatural. Not the godly supernatural wonders promised in the Word, however.

Though many of the "miracles" described by Catholic historians are but the imaginations of the incredulous, it must never be forgotten that there was a powerful spirit of error working wonders, just as there are genuine supernatural manifestations in our own day which are not of God. The term "lying wonders" (2 Thess 2) does not so much imply that the wonders are sham. Rather, they are genuine wonders performed in order to further the effect of a lie.

Thus did the spirit of antichrist seek to ape the supernatural nature of the early Church. It squeezed out the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, and His signs and wonders confirming the Word. It then replaced them by its own supernatural manifestations. Jezebel now gave herself out as a prophetess, claiming to declare the direct oracle of God under the anointing of the Spirit.

Antichrist!

### **(e) The spirit of antichrist permeates the whole ecclesiastical system**

We have seen how the spirit of antichrist raised the Pope to supreme legal control of the Western (Catholic) Church.

Let us now examine how that same spirit sought to replace and drive out Christ from every level of His Church. Just as believers were taught to look to the Pope as their supreme head rather than to Christ, at the lower level they were directed to the priesthood, looking to them to do what Christ Himself achieves.

### **The Parish System**

For the purpose of ecclesiastical government, Europe was divided into parishes, each with its

own cleric. Since bishops appointed priests, this effectively prevented anyone not authorised by papal agents from teaching the people. Only the appointed cleric was allowed to preach or even discuss religion in each parish. (This idea was still causing difficulties in Wesley's day).

Furthermore, no religious gatherings were permitted outside the authorised buildings at the appointed times, (This bears an uncanny resemblance to the means employed in communist lands to control the activities of evangelical churches).

So, the people were only permitted to hear the officially approved cleric and to attend officially approved gatherings in officially approved locations. Since the cleric's appointment depended on the bishop, whose appointment was confirmed by the Pope, every Catholic parish was controlled from the seat of the antichrist spirit.

The power of the State was used to prevent "unauthorised" preachers (i.e. roving missionaries expounding the Word) or meetings outside those permitted and convened by approved clerics.

### **The Sacraments**

Following the State-Church union, preaching and Bible exposition became less and less common and church services more ceremonial. Salvation was viewed not as the result of individual faith in God's revelation of His Word, but as something automatically transmitted by performing outward religious acts called sacraments.

The most important sacraments are baptism, confirmation, mass, penance and extreme unction. Without going into the full meaning of these terms, I would simply say that they are a further stage in the system of binding the laity to the clergy. This is because of the acceptance of the idea that only the clergy could perform certain functions meant that the clergy and the clergy alone were permitted to perform the sacraments. Since these were all deemed essential to salvation by Catholic theologians, it is clear how the people became inextricably bound to the clergy for their hope of salvation,

Thus Christ was replaced throughout. Oh yes, His Name was mentioned much. But He was never presented to the people as the sole Object of their hope. Instead the priests were the channels of administering His grace. As a result the glory of our salvation was taken from the Lord and given to a Church that taught men to seek grace through sacraments that she only could properly administer.

### **Claims of the priesthood**

To further expose the spirit of antichrist in the Nicolaitan system, let us consider the attributes claimed by Rome for her priests.

Innocent III said:

"The priest is placed between God and man: inferior to God, but superior to man.... With regard to the power of priests... we find that in obedience to the words of His priests.., God Himself descends and that He comes wherever they call Him, and as often as they call Him.... God is Himself obliged to abide by the judgement of His priests, and either not to pardon or to pardon, according as they refuse to give absolution,,,"

According to the Canon lawyer Cassian, "The priest.. .is. inferior only to God".

The extent of the yearning of the spirit of error to rule over the hearts and minds of men can be seen in no better way than in Catholic teaching on the confessional.

Here every priest sits in the temple of the human heart as an image of the Pope, his master, presuming to rule and arbitrate over man's every thought and deed. The Catholic "Ursuline Manual" says, "Confessors should not be viewed in any other light than as holding the place of Jesus Christ".

If further evidence is required of the antichristian essence of Catholic teaching, then hear the words of one of their most renowned moral theologians, Ligouri:

"If you receive a command from one who holds the place of God you should observe it as if it came from God Himself. It may be added that there is more certainty of doing the will of God by obedience to our superiors than by obedience to Jesus Christ, should He appear in person and give His command".

How astonishing! Could the antichrist spirit of Rome be expressed more clearly? How completely is Christ taken from the people and replaced by the priesthood, the image of the Pope, their high priest.

### **Control of the interpretation of Scripture**

From the time of the Church-State union, the word "heretic" took on a sense not known in Scripture. Instead of meaning one holding erroneous doctrines, it was applied to those rejecting the Catholic system. Even inquisitors testified to the orthodoxy and godly lives of many of their victims. Their sole crime was to refuse the authority of Rome to control all ecclesiastical activity.

To ensure adequate regulation of the source of all Light, the Spirit-revealed Word, the Catholic system claimed itself to be the sole and infallible interpreter of Scripture. All private judgement was condemned. The Word must be received only in the "official" sense.

Here again we see Rome's resentment of any authority higher than herself. Initially she (falsely) claimed that the Bible was the authority giving Rome power over all the churches. Later she claimed that she had authority over the Bible since the Roman Catholic system produced the Bible! In short, the final authority of the Catholic Church is herself.

She also claims that the Bible and tradition are of equal authority. But it is she who decides what is tradition!

So, she claims the sole right to interpret the Word (a right that belongs to the Holy Ghost alone) and to decide what is authoritative tradition. She thus effectively makes herself the ultimate authority.

Thus the final stage is reached in denying Christ to the laity. They have lost already the experience of the power of His resurrection. Now the only Christ they are permitted to know is the one allowed them by a Nicolaitan priesthood, and who is kept well under the control of his servants.

Despite this, however, the true Christ is still He *who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks* (Rev 2:1). The Roman Christ is another Jesus (2 Cor 11:4).

Theoretically Rome acknowledges the Word. But in practice she does not leave her members free to follow It. They are at best only permitted an approved version within the limits of her own interpretation. Since the Church is the final arbiter in interpretation, and since the Pope is the infallible head of the Church in matters of faith, then the Pope is the ultimate authority of Catholicism.

The Church and her so-called infallible head, the Pope, have replaced Christ and the Spirit-filled Word!

Yes, indeed, the inspiration spirit of Rome is antichrist through and through.

### **Rome and the Bible**

The serpent in the Middle Ages knew well the power of the Word of God in the hands of the people. So, the logical conclusion of Rome's attitude to the Bible was its complete prohibition. Behold the fruit of tolerating Jezebel to teach:

- Firstly her false teaching entered alongside the true.
- Then true preachers of the Word were removed.
- Finally the very Word Itself taken from the people.

There was not only an almost complete neglect of Scripture, but a positive hostility towards it. Priests and even popes knew scarcely anything about it. All the emphasis in theological "training" lay on the decisions and decrees of councils and popes through the ages. The priesthood became deeply imbued with Roman creeds, dogmas and Canon Law, and almost wholly ignorant of the blessed Word of Life.

Despite all attempts to enforce the authority of Rome on the whole of western Christendom, however, different groups constantly arose preaching the Word wherever they went.

Because the strength and authority of such groups was always found in their deep knowledge of the Word, the Roman Church again revealed her true heart by actually banning the Bible.

The first direct prohibition was at the Council of Valencia (1229). Learning that the Bible was the chief source of "heretical opinions", it decreed:

"We prohibit the laity to have the books of the Old and New Testament, unless anyone should wish.., to have a Psalter or breviary.. .But we strictly forbid them to have the above mentioned books in the vulgar tongue".

So, even the meagre allowance granted had to be read in Latin, not the mother tongue, which put them beyond the ordinary man.

Further indications of Rome's attitude to the Bible are seen in the following:

- Gregory IX (1227 - 1241) forbade laymen to possess the Bible, suppressed translations and burned both Bibles and they who possessed them.

- The Council of Trent put the Bible on the Index of prohibited books (!!!), and penalties were fixed against illegal possession or sale.
- Paul IV (1555 - 1559) prohibited the possession of translations without permission.
- Clement XI (1700 - 1721) condemned lay reading of the Bible.
- Pius VII (1800 - 1820) issued a bull against Bible Societies, describing Scripture distribution as, “a pestilence which must be remedied and abolished, a defilement of the faith, eminently dangerous to souls”.
- In 1897, Leo XIII decreed that only Bible translations with notes by learned Catholic writers could be allowed to the laity, (i.e. the Bible may only be interpreted by the Roman Church).

Rome’s attitude to the pure Word unfettered from her interpretative notes shows how deeply the spirit of antichrist fears the Word. Catholic laymen are told the Bible must only be interpreted by their Church speaking through the priest. Priests take a solemn vow not to interpret the Bible for themselves but only as the Church interprets it. Little wonder that the practical effect is that few Catholic laymen or even priests ever seriously study that precious Word which is Life.

### **Rome and coercion**

It is no coincidence that the Middle Ages, the period of the Papacy’s greatest control over the minds and bodies of men, is termed by secular historians the Dark Ages. The objective of the spirit of antichrist was to keep the people in utter darkness as to the mind of the Spirit so that the power of the clergy would be absolute and unquestioned.

To this end the power of the State was used to compel submission to the bishop of Rome.

In Ephesus and Smyrna, before the Church-State union, spiritual offences were dealt with Scripturally by putting the offender out of fellowship.

In Pergamos, after the union, Theodosius declared heresy a crime against the State, though the inquisitors were police not clergymen. Gradually, especially after Augustine’s justification” of coercion in religious matters, proceedings became increasingly severe against those refusing the yoke of Rome. Forced baptism became common. Augustine and later theologians taught that the State should enforce the Church’s laws.

In Thyatira, when papal power was at its greatest at the height of the Middle Ages, Aquinas taught that heresy was a sin to be punished not only by excommunication but also by death.

Such teaching reached an awful climax in the establishing of the “Holy” Office of the Inquisition.

This vile abomination was the climax of antichrist’s desire to rule over the minds of men. It had driven the Holy Ghost out of the Church, and separated the risen Christ from her members. It had banished those not preaching as Rome taught, then banned the very Word Itself in the mother tongue. Now Rome controls all ecclesiastical and political power, she forbids every

thought not wholly pleasing to her antichrist chief bishop, taking over the minds of believers until they are but robots, thinking, speaking and acting exactly as she wishes.

Oh, evil parody of the true Body of Christ, the full and perfect manifestation of Christ, having only His mind, speaking only His Word, and doing only His works.

Oh, the lust to smother and dominate the whole creation of God!

The Inquisition was initially a temporary measure. It was introduced by Innocent III because of the widespread "heresy" of the Albigensians in S France. It was made permanent in 1229.

Once slightly suspected of heresy, a man he was carefully watched. Suspicion may be aroused by liberal opinions or for knowing more of the Word than the illiterate monks. Nothing was more to be dreaded than new light on Truth. In every parish inquisitors were appointed to search all houses and buildings to detect heretics. All were required to inform against heretics. Those accused were liable to be tortured and to have their property confiscated.

This evil institution spread over Germany (though not permanently), Italy, France and above all Spain. Here, according to the Inquisition's own records, 341,000 people were condemned between 1481 and 1808 of whom almost 32,000 were burned alive.

Also during the reign of Innocent III occurred the worst incident to date of the Papacy's attempt to enforce Catholicism.

The majority of the people of S France seemed to have left the communion of Rome. Innocent persuaded the French king to undertake a series of crusades against them from 1209- 1229. Terrible atrocities were committed, at the instigation of monks and abbots. Whole areas were devastated. This was the first time Rome sought to enforce her supremacy on so grand a scale.

Thus Jezebel, who in the beginning was so foolishly tolerated, came to dominate, finally seeking to exterminate the spiritual seed royal, the Church of the firstborn.

### **Rome and freedom of conscience**

To further unveil the intolerant, persecuting spirit of Rome, let us conclude with a few examples of her attitude to freedom of conscience. All are taken from Catholic sources.

Here is an extract from the Syllabus of Errors issued in 1864 by Pius IX (who was later declared infallible). Even today every priest vows that he believes and will defend this Syllabus, none of which has ever been retracted.

15 No man is free to embrace and profess that religion which he believes to be true, guided by the light of reason

17 The eternal salvation of any out of the true Church of Christ (i.e. Rome) is not even to be hoped for

24 The Church has the power to employ force and (to exercise) direct and indirect temporal power

48 Catholics cannot approve of a system of education for youth apart from the Catholic faith

55 The Church ought to be in union with the State, and the State with the Church

73 It is necessary even in the present day that the Catholic religion should be held as the only religion of the State to the exclusion of all other forms of worship

How full a revelation of the inner soul of the Papacy!

Consider also the following:

- Pius also declared “Education outside of the Catholic Church is heresy”.
- Leo XIII (1878 - 1903) declared: “It is not lawful to demand, defend or grant unconditional freedom of thought, speech, writing or religion, as if these were so many rights given by nature to man”.
- Pius XII (1939 - 1958) asserted that “what is not in accord with Truth (i.e. Catholicism) has objectively no right of existence, propagation or action”.
- John XXIII in 1959 claimed that the right to educate belongs pre-eminently to Catholicism. At his coronation in 1958 he said none could be saved “if not under the guidance of the Sovereign Pontiff”.

Rome has never acknowledged that the use of force to compel obedience is wrong in principle.

To this day every Catholic bishop vows:

“with all my power I will persecute and make war upon all heretics, schismatics and those who rebel against.. .the Pope... .“.

In a book given the personal commendation of Leo XIII, one canon lawyer wrote in 1901:

“The Catholic Church has the right and duty to kill heretics.. .Mass excommunication is derided by heretics. If they are imprisoned or exiled they corrupt others. The only recourse is to put them to death”.

It was such thinking that led to the awful atrocities committed against the Waldensians in Italy and France in the 16th C, and to the treacherous St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre in France in 1572 when an estimated 50,000 were slaughtered in a few weeks. The Pope celebrated this with a special medal and public thanksgiving.

Although the awful past crimes of the Papacy seem now largely over, it is essential to recognise that the principles that made these things possible are still upheld.

As an illustration of the breath of the spirit of antichrist still yearning to express itself, consider the words of the late bishop Segura of Seville: “I regret I was not born in the days of the Holy Inquisition”.

Yes, times change, but the essential heart and motive of an evil spirit never changes. The same spirit that found its fullest expression in Medieval Catholicism still haunts the corridors of the Vatican today.

And it will yet make one last effort to express itself.

## THE ANTICHRIST SPIRIT IN THE REST OF CHRISTENDOM

### a) Introduction

The spirit of antichrist and the Catholic harlot are not one and the same. It is just that this spirit has found its fullest expression in the Roman system.

Wherever Christianity spread it underwent exactly the same stages of decline from the full counsel of God as described in the Western (Catholic) Church.

This is important. It reveals the true nature of the forces against the Church of the firstborn.

It is not a quirk of history that the Catholic system developed as it did. It is the result of a concerted deliberate policy originating in the bottomless pit and directed against Christianity wherever found, not just in Western Europe. The Papacy is not an accident of history. It is the fullest outward manifestation of the true nature and objective of the spirit of antichrist.

Likewise the true Church of Christ, when restored to her full original glory, will be the full and perfect revelation of the nature and objective of the Spirit of Christ.

Now I wish to emphasise something. It is not Rome I am opposed to, but that foul spirit which finds its fullest expression in Rome. I oppose it wherever else its putrefying odour may be discerned. Remember, Rome is but an outward manifestation. If it were possible to eliminate now the whole Roman Catholic system, this would not eliminate the spirit of antichrist. This same spirit would remain at work, seeking to achieve the same objectives by the same progressive downward stages already described.

Beware therefore of a sterile anti-Catholicism. It is not so much Catholicism, but the inspiration spirit of Catholicism, which is to be opposed.

Let us now briefly consider the two other most significant branches of Medieval Christendom. They reveal the same spirit at work in them as in Catholicism.

If the letters to the seven churches are prophetic of the successive ages of the Church's history, we would expect that in each age what is described therein should apply throughout Christendom, not just in Western Europe where Catholicism predominated.

I hope that uncovering the workings of the spirit of antichrist in organisations other than Catholicism will show that no one denomination is the sole preserve of antichrist. There are many antichrists (1 Jn 2:18).

This same spirit is even at work in Protestantism. Yes, even in evangelical and pentecostal churches. (When we examine the Sardis Age, I will illustrate this further). The downward progress in these movements is nothing like so far advanced as in Catholicism. Yet a reconsideration of how the fall of Ephesus from her first love saw the beginning of the Church's

long downward slide would have beneficial effects even today. After all, Catholicism is the but the ultimate fruit of a backslidden Pentecostal Church.

## **b) The Persian (Nestorian) Church**

In the early days of the Church, evangelists planted churches not only westwards in Europe, but eastwards in India, Arabia, Syria and Persia.

Cut off from the vast Roman Empire politically and linguistically, these churches developed separately, little influenced by the growing concentration of power in the bishop. During the 2nd and 3rd C the assemblies in the Persian Empire had no definite ecclesiastical organisation or diocesan divisions. There might still be found several bishops in one church at the same time (instead of one bishop controlling several churches).

Just as in the Roman Empire, however, the deeds of the Nicolaitans were present. Papa ben Aggai suggested a federation of the Syrian, Persian and Mesopotamian assemblies under the rule of the bishop of the capital city, Seleucia-Ctesiphon (i.e. himself). Though strenuously opposed, this continued to be pressed for many years until this bishop came to be called "Catholikos", and then "Patriarch of the East".

From 339 - 379 AD Christians were severely persecuted by the Persian kings due to pagan Zoroastrian influence.

At this time a sinister influence appeared. The Roman "Christian" Emperor sent bishop Maruta to negotiate an end to the persecutions. In 410 AD he and Isaak, the Grand Metropolitan of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, obtained royal permission for a synod to reorganise the Persian churches. Isaak was presented by royal officials as "Head of the Christians". Just as at the Nicene Council, where also many of the delegates bore the marks of persecution, the Persian Christians unwisely conceded much to those who promised them peace.

The parallel with developments in the Ephesus and Smyrna period in the Roman Empire is uncanny. It is too great to be coincidental. Indeed, since the same antichrist spirit, having identical objectives, was at work among believers in both empires, it is only natural that the trends should coincide. In both empires:

- Initially there were locally governed assemblies with several bishops (or elders).
- The Nicolaitan trend towards greater organisation was followed by severe persecutions inspired by pagan priests.
- Persecution was followed by peace with the State. But the consequences were dire. The Nicolaitan clergy were permitted to strengthen their hold over the churches by imposing an unscriptural organisation.

Note carefully the part played in Persia by the Roman Empire clergy. Other instances of their influence will follow later showing how often she intervened at crucial moments in church developments in other lands, drawing them more fully down the same road trodden by herself. This highlights how Roman Catholicism is the most developed form of the antichrist spirit's plan,

At the synod the Persian king designated Isaak as head of all the bishops of the East. With the king's approval, regulations were made by Maruta and Isaak for the appointment of future heads. Any opposition to the head would be judged by the king.

A letter from Rome was read at the synod. The laws and canons of the Roman Church and the Nicene Council were introduced, There were not to be two or three bishops in one town, but only one in each town or district. Bishops were to be appointed by no less than three other bishops acting upon the Metropolitan's authority. Parish boundaries were fixed, with only one church in each. Private house meetings were banned. Anyone refusing the ordinances of this synod was to be dealt with by the king as well as being excommunicated.

Following this synod, the Persian ruler ordered the Christian temples and their altars to be beautifully restored.

How amazing is the parallel with the Church-State union of Constantine and developments at the Council of Nicaea! The Persian churches also had entered their Pergamos union.

This union was not, however, as close as in the Roman Empire since the Persian kings did not profess conversion. So they could not be so fully used to enforce the religion of the Nicolaitan Persian clergy, with all the horrors that this led to in the West in the Jezebel Thyatira age.

The Lord's judgement was soon revealed against the Persian Nicolaitan clergy. The king executed some of the new priests because of excessive pride in their new-found positions of honour. A more general persecution followed. It only lessened after a major doctrinal split between the Roman and Persian churches in which the Persians were branded as heretics.

Persecution and separation from Rome slowed down spiritual decline.

From the 7th to the 13th C the Persian (or Nestorian) Church spread throughout Central Asia, China, India, Ceylon and Arabia, and was as important in the East as Rome and Constantinople in the West. From the 13th C, however, a rapid decline took place with the spread of Islam. Christianity quickly shrunk in Western Asia.

The reasons for the swift decline lie in the deep inroads of the same evil trends as in Rome.

Nicolaitanism and Balaamism lead to Jezebel doctrine. A great flood of anti-Scriptural teachings spread throughout Nestorianism, using State power wherever possible. Though the split between the Roman and Persian churches stimulated great missionary zeal, it did not end clerical dominance nor faith in the sacraments. Much of the benefit of a separation of Church and State was lost when the Catholikos (or Patriarch) could obtain State aid to enforce his decrees, or could be used by the State to enforce its influence in religious affairs. Much energy was wasted in carnal competition for the office of chief bishop, or Catholikos.

Government of the Church through the metropolitan system and periodical church synods was introduced everywhere, and the churches were taught to look to the earthly headquarters (just as they did to Rome in the West) whence they received their bishops.

Over the centuries degeneration set in badly. Error spreads quickly in a tight central organisation. Soon such practices as image worship and monasteries were widespread.

### **c) The Greek (Byzantine) Church**

Exactly the same trends and spirit at work in the Persian Churches is seen in the Greek

churches of the Eastern Roman Empire. The parallel is closer to Rome because Church and State were wholly united, unlike in Persia. In fact, at times it seemed that the Greek Church was simply the religious department of the Byzantine government.

After the Empire split into East and West, the Roman and Greek Churches tended to drift apart. But coercion and the doctrines of the Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel were common to both.

The biggest source of contention was the bishop of Rome's quest to be acknowledged as head of all Christendom. Though the Greek churches had an identical Nicolaitan governmental structure to Rome, that they considered bishops as independent heads of their own provinces, subject only to the decisions of all bishops meeting in general council.

Resistance groups sprung up in the Eastern Empire protesting against error. These were often called Paulicians or Thonraks, but had no one all-embracing name.

Amongst them was an absence of organisation. Each assembly was independent of the others. They claimed the Byzantine Church was not a true Church because of the Church-State union, the admission of the unconverted to the Lord's supper and their baptism of infants. The changed lives of these "heretics" (as they were termed) and their understanding of Scripture were common knowledge. Their real error, according to one important ecclesiastic, lay in their free thought and refusal to acknowledge authority (i.e. their protesting against false doctrine and rejection of the Nicolaitan priesthood).

The effect of the godless Nicolaitan system is seen in documents of that age. One man, for example, said he did not read the Word as only the priests could do that. It was even taught at one time that God could only be worshipped in Greek, Hebrew or Latin.

As with Ahab, *whom his wife Jezebel stirred up* (1 K 21:25), so the Byzantine priesthood constantly stirred up the State against those who deviated from their views, and thus troubled their darkened consciences. Intermittent persecution was carried out against the "heretics", including stoning and burning. In 684 AD, for example, an edict was issued against the Paulicians ordering their teachers to be put to death.

By far the most brutal persecution was that of Theodora from 842 - 867 AD. This wicked woman restored the images destroyed by earlier emperors. The idol-loving priesthood urged her entirely to suppress the Paulicians because of their opposition to images. So, she decreed that they should be exterminated by fire and sword, or brought back to the Greek "Church". One hundred thousand were killed, often in unspeakable cruelty.

The spirit of this woman is like an incarnation of the words addressed to the Thyatira age:

*.... thou sufferest that woman Jezebel..., to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols* (Rev 2:20).

Not only does this mirror developments in the Roman Church where the State was used to compel men to submit to blasphemous antichristian doctrines. There is something equally significant. The very inspiration for these awful massacres came from the harlot Rome herself! Pope Nicholas I wrote to Theodora highly commending her conduct. After claiming the "heretics" feared her, he added: "and why so, but because you followed the directions of the Holy See".

Oh, Rome, Rome! Incarnation of Mystery, Babylon the Great! Truly it is written of you:

*in her was found the blood of the prophets and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth. (Rev 18:24)*

In the passage of time the Byzantine Church split off entirely from Rome. There grew up a number of different national Orthodox Churches loosely federated under a Patriarch and holding periodical Pan-Orthodox councils. But, apart from the absence of one single man controlling all the churches as in Catholicism, these all retained a fundamentally Nicolaitan organisation.

Wherever possible they used the State to enforce their authority and suppress non-conformists. In the Balkans, for example, before the communist take-over, much persecution was inflicted on evangelicals even in the 20<sup>th</sup> C. Even today the Orthodox system resents full religious freedom and the existence of evangelical churches. The very Nicolaitan system itself is antichrist. Given the opportunity it cannot but be true to its own essential nature,

Let us conclude with one final example.

#### **d) The Russian Orthodox Church**

From the time of Christianity's introduction into Russia it grew into the most important single Orthodox Church.

It developed along the same Nicolaitan lines as the Byzantine Church. As elsewhere in Nicolaitan Christendom, the Word was taken from the people, and only given to them in a dead language (ancient Slav) unknown to the common man. There was no preaching in their services, only ritual. Dissent was suppressed by the State.

In the 17th C, in the Sardis Age, an attempted Reformation of the whole Orthodox Church was undertaken by the Russian Orthodox Cyril Lucas (1572 -1638), who became Patriarch of Constantinople in 1621. He carefully compared the Orthodox, Catholic and Reformation Churches with the Word. Consequently he denounced tradition, transubstantiation and image worship. A synod met, however, and opposed the Reformation, confirming existing practices.

Significantly, the chief opposition came not from Orthodox priests but the Catholic Jesuits. The old mother harlot herself was ensuring her daughters remained true. Lucas was misrepresented to the Sultan, the political ruler of Constantinople. The Jesuits obtained a hasty order for his death, and he was strangled. Thereafter synod after synod condemned his doctrines.

How significant and timely are Rome's interventions in the affairs of other Churches. How revealing of her own foul bosom.

From then on the Russian Orthodox system continued with an absolute autocratic government wedded wholly to the State. In the late 19th C there was much persecution of dissenters. Their meetings were forbidden and the priests incited the people against them.

Even today, after the destruction of the former Tsarist-Orthodox alliance, the Orthodox vision of

a “Holy Russia” lives on. There is nothing admirable about this concept. It simply means the desire to see again Church and State united, enforcing Orthodox rule throughout the Empire.

The outward form may have been dismantled, but the yearnings of the spirit that inspired that form are unchanged.

### **e) Conclusion**

Space forbids additional examples. These are not lacking, however.

The only other significant Medieval Christian Church not mentioned so far is the Ethiopian Coptic Church. This body also developed a domineering autocratic priesthood who withheld the Word and taught the people antichristian blasphemies. Even up to the second half of the 20th C the power of the State was used to suppress religious dissent.

In conclusion, it is abundantly clear that the spirit of antichrist at work in Catholicism was equally at work wherever Christianity spread. It followed a definite plan of campaign in identical stages.

The Catholic system, however, is the fullest expression of the purpose and objective of that spirit.

## 6 JEZEBEL OVERCOME

### a) The failure of attempts at reform from within

The long dreary Thyatira age lasted from about 600 to 1500 AD.

In that time many spoke out against error and corruption and sought to reform the system from within. Changes were made which served to check the spiritual decline for a season.

In the end, however, the centralised power system would nullify the good effects of these temporary reformations. The Jezebel system was irretrievably corrupt. It was no use merely to prune certain branches. The whole tree had to be completely uprooted. Even in the Reformation the failure to root out the whole vast octopus Nicolaitan power structure would cause dire problems. Wherever a Nicolaitan organisation is permitted to govern the Church, its inspiration spirit will always contrive to squeeze out and quench true Spiritual Life. Nor is it enough to leave one organisation which has degenerated too far just to form another one. The very principle of organisation contains within itself that seed which always progressively squeezes out the Holy Ghost. It may take time, but the end product is always the same.

Herein lay the ultimate failure of every well-intentioned attempt to reform the Roman system from within. Time and time again it is evident that godly men seeking to reform the system from within failed to understand the true root source of the corruptions they opposed.

They sought to check the awful immorality of the clergy, and decried the evil living of high ecclesiastics. Attempts were frequently made better to instruct a priesthood who were more often than not woefully ignorant of the Word.

But these were merely the fruits of an evil tree. They were not just unfortunate chance happenings. The tree itself needed to be burnt up.

A recurring failing of the internal reformers was their acceptance of the system. Even if individual popes were acknowledged as corrupt, and particular priests or bishops as debased, there was no recognition that the system itself produced such effects. The papal system was accepted and revered as the "Holy mother Church", and its power structure respected. Internal reformers failed to see the need to abandon the whole Church-State union along with the hierarchy of power which effectively eliminated all practical exercise of the Headship of Christ.

One historical example must suffice to illustrate the ultimate failure of all attempts to reform Rome from within.

Francis of Assisi (1184 - 1226) was powerfully converted and began to preach far and wide. His followers very quickly spread throughout Italy, N Europe and the Near East. In the first dozen years an exuberant joy accompanied the early Franciscans with remarkable effects on the common people. It is even recorded that Francis' devotional emotions were so deep that at times he would break into "incoherent utterances".

Francis' original vision was for a fellowship in which the leading of the Spirit would make the normal legal rules of Catholic orders unnecessary. More than an order, this was to be a flowering of that fellowship of the Spirit which is a foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, however, Francis submitted to the hierarchical Roman system. He sought approval from the Pope to preach and to found an order. He unwisely imagined his superiors would understand his desires and vision. So deceived was Francis by the Roman organisation that he is recorded as saying, "If I saw an angel and a priest, I would bend my knee first to the priest." When the hierarchy sought to modify Francis' method of working he submitted, even though utterly heartbroken at the frustration of his God-given vision. The leadership of the Spirit was swiftly replaced by rules and unconditional submission, binding the whole movement inseparably to the Roman power structure.

Not all accepted Rome's crushing of the original vision, however. Some, significantly named the "spirituals", continued to resist and were persecuted. Four were burnt at Marseilles in 1318. Others taught the infilling of the Holy Ghost and deliverance thereby from power of indwelling sin. Perceiving the true spirit of Rome they taught she was the great Babylonian harlot of Revelation.

In conclusion, it must not be thought that the Truth was never to be heard within the Catholic system. After all, Luther was taught salvation by Blood by a monk when still a Catholic. He was also much helped in his quest for assurance of forgiveness of sin by Staupitz, a leader of a reform movement within contemporary Catholicism.

The problem is, however, that unless the system is repudiated it ultimately overcomes all attempts to change it. Staupitz today is scarcely known. But Luther is a household word.

Let us apply this to our own day. Many see hope of changes in the essence of the Catholic system just because of the growing search after spiritual reality by individual Catholics. I only wish they would realise that modern trends towards reform within Rome are nothing new. There have been numerous such attempts through the ages.

The whole tree must be uprooted and burned, and not just individual branches cut off

**a). *I know...thy works and the last to be more than the first***

Opposition to the corruptions of the Medieval Western Catholic Church did not only come from within. Many took the dangerous step of leaving the system and raising their voices of protest against the fall of the Church from without.

Times were very difficult for such people. Surrounded as they were by such deep darkness, the Lord's exhortation to the godly in Thyatira was to keep a tight grip on that measure of light and Truth which still remained:

*But unto you I say, and unto the rest at Thyatira as many have not this (Jezebel) doctrine... I will put upon you no other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come (Rev 2:24-25).*

These words do not imply a recovery of what had been lost, but rather a holding fast to the limited measure of Truth that was still retained in such dark days.

Despite the darkness and the many dangers of this evil Jezebel age, the godly remnant received a remarkable commendation from the Lord:

*I know thy works and charity and service and faith and thy patience and thy works; and the last to be more than the first (Rev 2:19).*

How amazing for the true believers in such a dark age to be addressed in such a way whereas Ephesus, living in the light of the early church, had to be exhorted to *do the first works*.

Let us see how the Lord's commendation that the last works were more than the first found its historical fulfilment.

Throughout the whole Medieval period there were groups bearing faithful testimony to much of that Word long lost within the Catholic system from which they had separated, often at frightful cost. According to Harnack, perhaps the greatest authority on the history of Christian doctrine, from Constantine to the Reformation "attempts were never lacking to rupture the bonds of the State-Church/ Priests-Church and to reinstitute the congregational structurization".

Generally speaking such groups preached the need of holiness of life, resisted the Catholic sacraments of mass and infant baptism, and sought the establishment of locally governed assemblies of believers only.

But, although there were always some who spoke out for the Truth, these became particularly numerous and vocal from the 11th C onwards, i.e. in the latter part of the Thyatira age. So, as the Lord foretold, despite repeated papal-inspired purges and massacres, Verduin could write: "There was more.... 'heresy' around on the eve of the Reformation than there had ever been before".

Let us look briefly at some of the major protest groups:

- Bogomils (= Friends of God) were Paulicians who colonised Thrace and Bulgaria to escape the persecution of the Greek Church in Asia Minor, continuing from around 800 - 1400. They suffered much persecution from Hungary at the instigation of Rome.
- Albigenses prevailed especially in the 12th C in S France, N Spain and N Italy. In 1208 a crusade was ordered against them by Innocent III. Within 100 years they were virtually eradicated.
- Lollards were a 14th C group in England inspired by John Wycliffe and his translation of the Bible into the mother tongue. They sent out bands of roving preachers and opposed the Church of Rome.
- Hussites (or, United Brethren) were Bohemians whose chief spokesman, John Huss, was influenced by the writings of Wycliffe. Huss was treacherously betrayed and burnt, and a crusade ordered by the Pope to exterminate his followers.

In addition, there were many evangelical assemblies in the alpine valleys of N Italy. They

eventually were called Waldensians. Though it was thought these were named after the 12th C roving evangelist Peter Waldo, it is now known that their origin went right back to the early centuries of the Church. The inquisitor Reinerius said in a report to the Pope, "they have existed from time immemorial". They themselves said: "Our ancestors have often recounted to us that we have existed from the time of the apostles".

**c) The Promises to the overcomers**

**To him I will give power over the nations**

We have examined the lust of the Nicolaitan antichrist spirit for power over all earthly rulers.

In the light of this, the promise to the overcomer in this age is very significant.

*He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations. And he shall rule (lit. shepherd) them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father (Rev 2: 26 - 27).*

The overcomer suffered long under the iron rod of the evil, fallen Medieval harlot Church in its unbridled lust to rule the nations. But the day is coming when the tables will be turned. It will be the Bride of Christ who will rule with an iron rod. Her rule will not be that of a domineering female tyrant, however, lording it over the flock, but that of a shepherd whose firm rule is only for well being.

It is wholly in keeping with the character of the perverse spirit of antichrist that its ambitions should be identical to those of God, but in a perverted form.

In the Middle Ages satan sought to give his harlot bride that which the Lord has promised to His own pure virgin Bride so that at its height, the Papacy, the fallen Church, foreshadows and embodies the rule of Antichrist.

Likewise the rule of the true virgin Church reveals and embodies the rule of Christ. It is no coincidence that the terms used to describe the rule of the overcomer are also used to describe that of Christ Himself (Rev 12:5; 19:15; Ps 2:9).

**I will give him the morning star**

It is not for nothing that historians have named this dismal period the Dark Ages. Dark indeed they were.

Even the true Church had lost much of her original light and full inheritance in Christ. Despite their faithful testimony, even among the godly much of the power of godliness was lacking. Thyatira saw even less supernatural confirmation of the Word than Pergamos.

But, to such a people in such an age came a blessed and appropriate promise:

*I will give him the morning star. (Rev 2:28)*

What is the morning star? It is said to be the brightest star after the sun so that at times it is still visible even after sunrise. Significantly, it appears just before the dawn, at the time when it is said the darkness of the night is greatest. Hence it is sometimes called the daystar.

So, the promise of the morning star was a promise of a soon-coming day. To hear of this star's appearing in the pitch blackness of the Thyatira night was music to the ears and a sight indeed for sore eyes. In all the awful darkness the believer was encouraged to continue holding firm, for the morning was very near.

*weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. (Ps 30:5)*

Soon their many trials and tribulations would be all over. The Sun of righteousness would arise with healing in his wings (Mal 4:2). The Day would dawn and the shadows flee away. They would enter the city that has no need of sun or moon for the Lamb will be the light of it.

But there is more. This star not only signifies the soon coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Sun of righteousness. That star itself is none other than Christ Himself:

*I Jesus ... am ... the bright and morning star. (Rev 22:16)*

Through the ages the Church had lost much of the full knowledge of Christ, robbed by the evil spirit of antichrist. But the overcomer was promised Jesus Himself. He would see His glory.

In addition to the future eternal hope implicit in the morning star, there is a more immediate relevance to the historical circumstances in Thyatira.

The faithful had patiently endured the long Dark Ages. It was a long hard night. But their endurance ensured that a measure of Truth was preserved and the light of Truth not altogether extinguished by the domineering harlot.

But the Lord's promise of the morning star pointed to a soon-coming dawn. That remaining Truth that the godly had clung to and not let slip would become the starting point and springboard for the progressive restoration commencing in the coming Sardis age. The sun would once more begin to rise and the light to break through the darkness.

The daystar was rising. The Reformation was just over the horizon.

It is no coincidence that John Wycliffe, one of the finest men of the latter end of the Thyatira period, was called "the morning star of the Reformation."

The burden of Paul's prayers would yet be answered. The full knowledge of Christ would be restored to the Church.