

The Antichrist: the Present and Future Threat

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Introduction

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” So we read in the Book of Proverbs (29:18). A nation without vision will literally be “made naked”. It will be stripped of its honour and left defenceless against its enemies. This is happening in our country right *now*.

Some of the worst times in Israel’s history were during the period of the judges. Before Samuel was called there was “no open vision” (1Sam.3:1): the Lord had ceased making His will known by the prophets. The problem today is a little different. It is the one Amos spoke of when he foretold “a famine of...*hearing* the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). We are not suffering from a lack of divine revelation but from an *ignorance* of it. And the Lord is saying to us as He said to Israel, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos.6:4).

As Christians we believe that the vision we need is found in the Bible, the inspired and infallible Word of God. It is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psa.119:105).

Everyone has heard of the Antichrist but how do we understand the term? In particular, who or what is the Antichrist?

A popular online dictionary defines ‘Antichrist’ as “a great personal opponent of Christ who will spread evil throughout the world before being conquered at Christ’s second coming.” (1) That is fine as far as it goes. The definition is based on the understanding that the prefix ‘anti-’ means ‘against’, which it does. But the prefix ‘anti-’ also means ‘in place of’. Taking the two meanings together we have the idea of opposition by *substitution* and indeed by *imitation*. So Jesus could say: “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” (Matt.24:24)

The Bible has plenty to say about the Antichrist. Naturally it is by way of prophecy. The apostle John says, “antichrist shall come” (1John 2:18). When dealing with biblical prophecy there are two extremes to avoid. We should not be over-literal in our interpretation, as though there were no place for types, symbols and so on. This would lead us into many absurdities and we might end up missing the wood for the trees. Neither should we be unduly shy in our approach to the details, thinking that they are too difficult for us to comprehend. If we never consider the trees we will tend to forget the wood altogether!

I believe that the Papacy is the Antichrist foretold in Scripture. I believe that it is the great rival to our Lord Jesus Christ, heading up the false church and constituting a lasting menace to the nations of the world. I will not attempt to prove these things directly but trust they will become apparent as we proceed.

We shall look at the papacy in terms of the threat it poses to our own land. We shall note the history of the papacy and then consider the risk it presents to us now and in the days ahead. Finally we shall see how the papacy will be overcome.

1. The Development of the Papacy

We must spend some time looking at the past for it is the key to the present. The great problem affecting the human heart is *pride*. It was the downfall of many angels and of our whole race. We tend to exalt ourselves above others, even above God. Pride was probably there in the disciples when they disputed among themselves who should be the greatest (Mark 9:34). It was definitely there in

Diotrephes, who loved to have the preeminence in the church and sought to dominate his brethren (3John 9,10).

In this spirit lies the seed of the papacy. The Lord directs that the church be governed by a plurality of men rather than single individuals: a body of elders rather than one bishop. If we set aside this divine requirement pride will have a great opportunity to assert itself and Satan will exploit it. We see this in church history and especially the papacy. The shocking thing is that the popes are actually elected to their position of unwarranted privilege and power by their fellow men.

We may identify several periods in the development of the papacy.

i. The Early Centuries

Soon after 50 A.D. Paul declared that “the mystery of iniquity doth already work” (2Thess.2:7). The Roman Empire was the dominant world power and would reach its peak early in the second century, extending to southern Britain. The Empire was tolerant of most religions but increasingly persecuted Christians. Many deities were worshipped and cults grew up around the various emperors. This was certainly iniquity but it was hardly a mystery for it was open and obvious. Paul indicates that the emperors would eventually be replaced by another more sinister power already developing but presently hidden: “he who now letteth [or, hinders] will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then that Wicked shall be revealed” (2Thess.2:7,8). This is the unveiling of the Antichrist. How did it happen?

In 313 A.D. the Emperor Constantine announced that Christianity was to be tolerated throughout his domain, having professed conversion to the faith. But what sort of Christianity did he favour? Historians tell us that Constantine continued to acknowledge the Roman gods and countenanced sun-worship. Notably Roman Catholicism is a syncretistic religion, embracing pagan traditions and symbols wherever it goes. Constantine also held on to the title *Pontifex Maximus* which belonged to the emperor as head of the pagan priesthood. It means literally “the great bridge-builder”. The emperors were understood to provide a connection between men and the gods: they were mediators of a sort. Significantly this title would later be transferred to the popes. Yet despite all this Constantine called the Council of Nicea in order that the church might deal with the heresy of Arianism. So while in reality Constantine was far from God he had a zeal for orthodoxy in certain things. Does this sound familiar?

ii. The Middle Ages

During Constantine’s reign the seat of the empire shifted from Rome in the West to Constantinople in the East. Rome ceased to be the imperial centre and became the ecclesiastical centre, with its bishop claiming supremacy over others. The Middle Ages began with the fall of Rome and the western empire in 476 A.D. The collapse followed invasions by Germanic tribes, each building its own kingdom upon the territory seized. But the emperors who ruled the eastern empire kept a claim upon the west and none of the new kings dared to raise himself to the level of the old emperors. So there was a “power vacuum” in the west. There were two attempts to fill it.

The first attempt was by Islam beginning in the seventh century. Large parts of the western empire were conquered and came under Muslim rule, including most of modern day Spain and Portugal. The progress of the Muslim armies was stopped in central France at the Battle of Tours in 732 A.D. and Europe was preserved as a Christian continent, in the broad sense. How sad that today Islam is advancing throughout Europe, including in our own country, without having to fight a single battle!

The second (and successful) attempt was by Roman Catholicism. Its advance was more subtle. Romanism is a departure from the religion taught by Christ and the apostles. The Bible gives three signs of a great apostasy which would take place in the latter times (1Tim.4:1-3). The first sign is “speaking lies in hypocrisy”. The idea that a lie may be told in the service of religion is associated with the Jesuit order founded in 1540. The second sign is “forbidding to marry”. The Roman Church has imposed celibacy upon her priests and nuns since 1079 A.D. The third sign is “commanding to

abstain from meats”. Fasting on Fridays and in Lent dates from 998 A.D. Yet long before these things there were other “doctrines of devils” such as the daily celebration of the Lord’s supper (394 A.D.), purgatory (593 A.D.) and papal headship over the church (607 A.D.).

So papal Rome emerged out of pagan Rome, as Daniel prophesied. He saw four great beasts coming up from the sea, representing four great empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The fourth beast was very powerful. It had ten horns, representing ten kings, but from among these horns emerged another little horn, with a man’s eyes and mouth (Dan.7:7,8): it spoke great things and had a stout look (v.20); it spoke against the Most High and made war with the saints (v.25). There you have the pride and arrogance of the papacy.

How did Roman Catholicism succeed in its takeover (indeed makeover) of the Roman Empire? As the empire declined the role of maintaining civil society fell to the Church. It had the network and structures, the literacy and learning. Papal power grew and in 800 A.D. Pope Leo III resurrected the empire by crowning Charlemagne, the king of the Franks, as Holy Roman Emperor. Yet by establishing the crown and title as in his gift the Pope was asserting temporal power as well as spiritual and claiming superiority over the Emperor. John glimpsed this in his Revelation when he saw “a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy” (Rev.13:1). The papacy is as much a political as a religious power.

In the following centuries the papacy appeared unstoppable but its determination to dominate everything eventually provoked a reaction. Following two hundred years of rising opposition, from Wycliffe and Hus among others, in the sixteenth century the Reformation took place.

iii. The Reformation

The Reformation was triggered in 1517 when Martin Luther issued his ninety-five theses exposing the doctrinal errors and corrupt practices of the Roman Church. There is a Latin expression which describes what led up to this: *ad fontes*, meaning literally “to the fountains”. It is the idea that for the most accurate information on any subject we must go back to the ultimate sources of our knowledge. In the secular world there was a return to the Greek classics and in the religious world a renewed interest in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. There was a real thirst for the truth. “As the heart panteth for the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” (Psa.42:1) The Lord was reviving His work.

We know the result. The great gospel doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone was rediscovered. The authority of the papacy gave way to the authority of the Bible. When the Scriptures were translated into the common languages both priests and people turned to God and the church in much of Europe was reformed and purged of papal corruptions, especially the Mass, and society itself was transformed.

2. The Danger of the Papacy

We must now bring things up to the present day. The Reformation dealt the papacy a great blow but not a fatal one. John beheld this too in his vision: “And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast” (Rev.13:3). How is this remarkable recovery to be explained? John tells us that the beast gets his power from the dragon (Rev.13:2,4). The papacy is sustained by Satan for the papacy is Satan’s great champion in his war against Christ and His church.

It is said that a wounded animal is a dangerous animal. So it is with the papacy. The danger is evident when we consider what has taken place since the Reformation.

i. A new strategy by the papacy

Following the Reformation the Roman Catholic Church was no longer in the ascendancy and had to adopt a new method in her scheme to control the world. Previously the papacy had made use of

military might to accomplish its ends but having lost much of its temporal power it had to employ more deceitful means. The result was the Counter-Reformation which continues to the present day. What has happened during this period?

Apparent Reform

During this time the Church of Rome has held three councils. There is a common perception among Christians that these have led to real reform. This is very far from the truth.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563)

The Council of Trent made reforms intended to curb corruption within the church, improve the education of the clergy and promote the piety of the people. However it also rejected Protestantism and anathematised all who believe in justification by faith alone. It reaffirmed the sacrifice of the Mass, purgatory and the worship of saints. The Pope was asked to ratify all the Council's decrees, which he did. So in effect the Pope was above the Council.

The First Vatican Council (1870)

Vatican I repudiated liberalism, rationalism and atheism. Yet it also confirmed papal primacy in the government of the church and papal infallibility when pronouncing on matters of faith and morals. It was a victory for the Jesuits, viewed ever since as the guardians of the papacy. They had been opposed by the Jansenists, who wanted the Church to be under the authority of the general church councils. One bishop made an impassioned three-hour speech dissuading the Council from making Papal Infallibility a dogma of the Church. He failed and tragically he later yielded. The centralisation of power in the papacy had reached its goal. Now the papal portrait sketched by Paul could be clearly seen: "he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (2Thess.2:4).

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)

Vatican II modernised the Church's liturgy, ending the exclusive use of Latin in worship. But the Mass is an abomination in any language for Christ, "after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb.10:12). Our Saviour's atoning work is complete. The Council also reasserted papal infallibility and stressed that the Church's teaching authority is centred on the Pope: the bishops are unable to define or decide anything of importance without him at their head.

The lesson is that Rome will make superficial changes but never substantial ones. She might alter something like the rule on priestly celibacy. In the case of married Anglican priests who have gone over to Rome she has. (The trick here is that Anglican priests are not regarded as proper priests. In 1896 Pope Leo XIII declared Anglican orders "absolutely null and utterly void" and this judgment was reaffirmed in 1998 by Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. How ecumenical is that?! Every Anglican priest has to be ordained again before serving in the Roman priesthood. So they are viewed as having been lay persons when they married.) Rome justifies such changes by appealing to circumstances, not to Scripture.

So when people think that Rome is moving in the right direction they are wrong. Rome will never abandon her core principles, however unbiblical. Though the great whore may array and deck herself differently she is still the great whore (Rev.17:4). This is the danger.

As we have seen, with regard to the papacy Rome has established new dogmas since the Reformation, making it a worse institution now than it was in the time of Luther, Calvin, Cranmer and Knox. But the iron fist is concealed in a velvet glove. We must not be deceived by the 'softer' image.

Minority Rights

At the Reformation Roman Catholicism was greatly reduced in strength and in the United Kingdom today it remains a minority religion compared to Protestantism as a whole.

In countries which embraced the Reformation it was common for Roman Catholics to be denied civil and political rights, on the grounds that their loyalty lay with the Pope rather than the monarch. From

the late eighteenth century there was a process of Catholic Emancipation throughout Great Britain and Ireland. By 1829 the political climate had changed sufficiently to allow Parliament to pass the Roman Catholic Relief Act, giving Roman Catholics in the United Kingdom virtually equal civil rights, including the right to hold most public offices and even to sit as members of Parliament. Since then all that is really barred to Roman Catholics is the throne.

We spoke of Rome's appearance of change. But there is also her change of appearance. You may have heard the saying which goes something like this: "Rome in the minority is as meek as a lamb, in equality as sly as a fox, and in the majority as bold as a lion." The only reason the papacy does not manifest itself in our country as the fierce little horn of Daniel's vision is that Roman Catholicism is in the minority.

In our modern democratic era Rome plays upon this fact. She never fails to raise a real or imagined grievance on the part of her people, crying 'discrimination' and pleading for 'justice'. This has been the case in Northern Ireland for decades. Somewhat hypocritically Roman Catholics are willing to make use of those civil liberties which were only won for us at the Reformation. The danger is that if Rome was ever in the majority and had the authority she would deny others the same rights that she presently demands for herself.

Rome may be in the minority but over 10% of the population is a significant minority. According to her own figures there are 3,000 Roman Catholic parish churches in Great Britain, with 4,400 active priests. There are more than 5,000 members of female religious orders and over 1,000 members of male religious orders. There are numerous individuals in important positions in government, the civil service, the media and education. This gives Rome a lot of scope for influence.

Rome's separate schools are a danger. A Roman Catholic publication states: "The Catholic system remains the single most significant exception to the view that there should be a uniform educational culture in Britain today." (2) Sadly that is correct. The 'uniform educational culture' is the state system which has become increasingly godless and immoral. With her own education system the Roman Catholic Church is able to give her children a thorough indoctrination in her distinctive beliefs. For their children's sake and for the sake of Christ's cause in our nation, Protestants must consider an alternative Christian education.

Today 'equality' and 'diversity' seem to be everything, whichever party is in power. When applied to religion this means that all beliefs are welcome and none is to be regarded as inherently superior. This is a denial of absolute truth and a denial of divine revelation in Scripture. Have you noticed that the one religion which is given no place today is biblical Christianity? Have you noticed that Roman Catholicism still has a place? One day the scourge of political correctness will collapse under the weight of its own absurdity. The people will reject it, recognising the harm it has done to our society. But until then Christians will have to make their stand for truth and righteousness and suffer as a consequence.

Ecumenical Moves

The modern ecumenical movement began with the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. Its aim was to unite Protestant Christians to evangelise the world. No Roman Catholics were invited. In 1942 the British Council of Churches (BCC) was set up by the major Protestant denominations. In 1960 Pope John XXIII established the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. When Vatican II ended in 1965 the Roman Catholic Church sent observers to the meetings of the BCC. In 1990 the BCC was succeeded by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, in which the Roman Catholic Church is a full member.

Shortly after his installation Pope Benedict XVI laid out the priorities for his papacy. He said that his primary task would be unifying all Christians and that he would do everything in his power to improve the ecumenical cause.

To those who are ignorant of the institution the Pope's words may appear encouraging: in reality they are full of cunning. You have to look below the surface. How does Rome really view herself – today? Here are some quotes from 'What is the Catholic Church?' – a Catholic Truth Society publication from 2008:

“Only in the Catholic Church can we be confident that we share in all the gifts that Christ wishes to give us.” “Only the Catholic Church possesses *all* the good things that Christ has given to help us to share in his salvation.” “The Catholic Church alone is the universal and guaranteed sign of Christ's presence in the world. It is not one denomination among many.” (3)

Rome believes she is the one true church, because it is the Pope, the priesthood and the Mass that really “make” the church. In Rome's eyes ecumenism does not mean merging with other churches but absorbing everyone else into her ranks. That is the strategy and that is the danger.

ii. A new attitude to the papacy

With this new approach by the papacy has come a new attitude to the papacy. We see it in three areas.

On the part of the State

There is a new attitude to the papacy on the part of the State. The United Kingdom is officially a Protestant country, as it has been since the passing of the Act of Settlement in 1701. Legislative changes since then have not changed the fact. However over the last century there has been an obvious weakening of attachment on the part of our monarchy and government to the historic constitutional arrangement.

The Monarchy

In 1903 King Edward VII became the first monarch since the Protestant settlement to visit and consult with the Pope. In 1910 his son and successor King George V, prior to his coronation, refused to open Parliament unless a “more tolerant formula” for his accession was found. Monarchs were required to swear that “in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper there is not any TRANSUBSTANTIATION of the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, at or after the consecration thereof by any person whatsoever” and that “the invocation or adoration of the Virgin Mary or any other saint, and the sacrifice of the Mass, as they are now used in the Church of Rome, are superstitious and idolatrous”.

Parliament then enacted a simplified oath, removing all references to Roman Catholicism. It reads: “I do solemnly and sincerely in the presence of God profess, testify, and declare that I am a faithful Protestant, and that I will, according to the true intent of the enactments which secure the Protestant succession to the Throne of my Realm, uphold and maintain the said enactments to the best of my powers according to law.” While the monarch still binds himself to Protestantism the declaration has been softened as a sop to Rome.

In 1980 Queen Elizabeth visited Pope John Paul II in the Papal Palace in the Vatican, dressed in black. In 1982 at the Queen's invitation John Paul made the first visit by a Pope to Britain since the Reformation and was greeted by her at Buckingham Palace. In 1986 Prince Charles attended a Mass with Roman Catholic friends. In 1994 the Duchess of Kent converted to Rome, the first senior member of the Royal Family to do so publicly since the Act of Settlement. In 1995 the Queen became the first monarch since the seventeenth century to attend a Roman Catholic service. In September of this year the Queen met Pope Benedict during his state visit. The Royal household is being courted and beguiled by the papacy.

Government

The United Kingdom re-established formal diplomatic relations with the so-called Holy See in 1914, appointing an ambassador to the Vatican. A ‘see’ is the official seat of a bishop and also refers to the area over which the bishop exercises his spiritual authority. The Bishop of Rome is of course a little different from other bishops. He claims temporal authority as well. And he wants both to extend worldwide. Daniel saw that the fourth kingdom, “shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour

the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces” (Dan.7:23).

Until the nineteenth century the Pope ruled over the Papal States, covering a large part of northern Italy. In 1860, the papal army (yes, the Pope had an army – and still does – known as the Swiss Guard) was defeated in the war for Italian unification and the Papal States were absorbed into the kingdom of Italy. Ten years later the Italian forces finally occupied Rome itself. From 1871 the Pope was a prisoner in the Vatican, a walled enclave within the city where the Popes have generally resided. In 1929 a treaty was signed between the Holy See and the Fascist dictator Mussolini establishing the State of Vatican City and making Roman Catholicism the state religion of Italy. At just over 100 acres and with around 800 people the Vatican may be the world’s smallest state but to the papacy its founding was very important: it meant that the Holy See could now logically enjoy once again the political benefits which come with a sovereign territory.

The Pope is the ruler of both the Holy See and the Vatican City State. The Holy See has been recognised as a sovereign entity since medieval times and today it is recognised under international law and enjoys diplomatic relations with 178 states and is a permanent observer at the United Nations. The Vatican does not regard itself as subject to the laws of other sovereign states.

In 1917 the Foreign Office issued a memorandum saying that Britain’s representative at the Vatican “should not be filled with unreasoning awe of the Pope.” There was a policy not to fill the post with a Roman Catholic. Tony Blair changed this in 2005 when his former private secretary, Francis Campbell, a practising Roman Catholic from Northern Ireland who once considered becoming a priest, was appointed. Blair has said since that it was “stupid” to refuse to have someone as ambassador to the Holy See who shares the Roman Catholic faith. We would say rather that it is “stupid” to have anyone in such a position who does not adhere to the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law. We would say further that it might be wiser not to have anyone in this position at all.

Campbell is still there because another Roman Catholic, the former Member of Parliament Ann Widdecombe, has declined to take on the role. Campbell says that he is both “British and Irish” and that he is not “going to exaggerate one identity at the expense of the other”. What other country would tolerate this in one of its ambassadors? Campbell has said correctly of the Roman Catholic Church: “This is an entity with a defined head that speaks to at least 17.5 per cent of the world’s population, and many more beyond, one of the world’s key global opinion-formers. ...this organisation is one of the biggest, if not the biggest.” The danger is that with this precedent further similar appointments will follow. Sadly the increasing number of visits by Prime Ministers to Popes in recent years suggests that the Vatican has a growing influence in our nation’s politics and international relations.

On the part of the Church

There is also a new attitude to the papacy on the part of the church and in particular the established Churches.

Church of England

In 1960 the Archbishop of Canterbury Geoffrey Fisher visited Pope John XXIII. This was the first such meeting since the English Reformation and an ecumenical milestone. In 1982 the then Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie said: “I dream of unity with Rome” and expressed the hope that the two churches would be unified by the year 2000.

Over this period the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) held meetings on various subjects. It was an attempt to bring about unity through ambiguity. Statements were agreed on ‘Ministry’, ‘Eucharist’ and even ‘Justification’: apparently the Reformation was “a misunderstanding about certain key words and concepts” (4)

It is astounding that any Anglican could agree with Rome on the Eucharist or Lord’s supper. The Mass is sheer idolatry. We noted that in pagan Rome there was sun-worship. Remarkably this has been taken

on by papal Rome. Apparently the Mass wafer must be perfectly round. Why is this? There is no such requirement in the Bible concerning the bread in the Passover or the Lord's supper. We go back to the revival under king Josiah when "they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down" (2Chron.34:4). In the margin it is "sun images". A heathen form of devotion had crept into the worship of God's people and had to be removed. But it is there in Rome today! A consecrated Mass wafer is placed in the centre of a monstrance, a device made to resemble the rays of the sun. The people then bow down and adore the wafer as God. And do Anglicans agree with this?!

Of course the subject of the papacy could not be left out of the ARCIC discussions. A document issued in 2007 stated: "We urge Anglicans and Roman Catholics to explore together how the ministry of the Bishop of Rome might be offered and received in order to assist our Communion to grow towards full, ecclesial communion."

What a betrayal of our English Reformers! This was Thomas Cranmer, the first Archbishop of Canterbury: "I give warning in God's name unto all who profess Christ that they flee far from Babylon, if they will save their souls, and to beware of that great harlot the pestiferous See of Rome, that she make you not drunk with her pleasant wine."

Church of Scotland

As you know, north of the border Presbyterianism holds sway and the established church is the denomination known as the Church of Scotland. This denomination has been on the way to apostasy for decades. In 1986 the General Assembly passed an Act which declared that the Church no longer affirmed certain contents of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The passages specified were the references to Roman Catholicism, including the statement that the Pope of Rome "is that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God." (XXV.vi) The Act concluded: "This Church therefore dissociates itself from the above statements and does not require its office-bearers to believe them."

Sadly this new attitude has also infected the smaller Presbyterian denominations which still officially subscribe to the Confession in its entirety. During the recent papal visit the Rev. David Robertson, minister of the Free Church of Scotland in Dundee, said regarding the Pope: "I would like to welcome him as a religious leader. I would like to welcome him as a fellow Christian. Personally I would love to meet him and to hear him. I feel perfectly free to disagree with many things that he stands for and says but overall I think it is a good thing that he is here." Sadly there has been no hint of any disciplinary action against Mr. Robertson for the succour he has given to the Man of Sin. That is alarming.

On the part of Christians

Finally there is a new attitude to the papacy on the part of Christians in general. In former days evangelicals were of the mind that the Church of Rome was a false church and that Roman Catholics needed to hear the gospel and be converted. Now many evangelicals regard Roman Catholics as fellow Christians, despite acknowledging doctrinal and other differences.

Evangelical Compromise

The compromise of Billy Graham has been well documented. As early as 1952 he said: "Many of the people who have reached a decision on Christ at our meetings have joined the Catholic Church and we have received commendations from Catholic publications for the revived interest in their church." In 1957 he said: "We're coming to New York not to clean it up, but to get people to dedicate themselves to God and to send them on to their own churches – Catholic, Protestant or Jewish ... The rest is up to God."

In 1977 John Stott told the National Evangelical Anglican Conference that "the visible unity of all professing Christians should be our goal...and evangelicals should join others in the Church of England in working towards full communion with the Roman Catholic Church". (5)

In 1994 Jim Packer wrote an article in which he explained why he had signed the ‘Evangelicals and Catholics Together’ document. He said: “Do we recognize that good Evangelical Protestants and good Roman Catholics – good, I mean, in terms of their own church’s stated ideal of spiritual life – are Christians together? We ought to recognize this, for it is true.” He described disagreements about salvation and the church as “domestic differences”. (6)

This is a far cry from the reformers! Martin Luther wrote: “What is the whole papacy but a beautiful false front and a deceptively glittering holiness under which the wretched devil lies in hiding?” John Calvin wrote: “To the end we may keep the people in the sincere doctrine of the gospel, we are ever now and then enforced to show and testify how much Papistry differeth from Christianity.”

What has brought about this dramatic shift by Christians generally? I suggest four things:

I believe that *the decline of confessional Christianity* is involved. Many of the confessions of faith drawn up at the Reformation refer to the papacy as the Antichrist. Not surprisingly Rome is keen to promote alternative theories regarding the identity of the Antichrist, particularly the idea that the Antichrist is a figure to appear at the end of the world – either “a Furious Fuehrer, a Diabolical Dictator, or the world’s greatest atheist” as someone has put it. (7) But none of these characters will fit the biblical identikit. Who will? We know that one of the favourite papal titles is ‘Vicar of Christ’. In Greek this title can only be expressed by one word – ‘antichristos’ – a substitute Christ. There you have it.

I believe that *the rise of Arminianism* has also been responsible. Augustus Toplady maintained that Arminianism, with its denial of predestination and assertion of free will, “came from Rome, and leads thither again.” Toplady was right. He quoted a Jesuit writing to his superior in 1628 about civil and ecclesiastical affairs in England: “We have now many strings to our bow. We have planted that soveraigne drugge Arminianisme, which we hope will purge the Protestants from their heresie; and it flourisheth and beares fruit in due season.” (8) For some Arminianism has indeed proven to be the road to Rome.

I believe that *the spread of the Charismatic movement* has likewise had an effect. Emphasising experience at the expense of doctrine the movement is an ideal ecumenical vehicle and Rome has gladly climbed aboard. Gullible evangelicals think it wonderful that charismatic Roman Catholics can speak of their love for Christ and their appreciation of the Bible – overlooking the fact that the same individuals also testify to their renewed devotion to the Mass and to Mary. They forget the Scripture warning that there is “another Jesus” and “another spirit” and “another gospel” which are not of God (2Cor.11:4).

I believe that *the use of modern versions of the Bible* has played a part too. Vatican II in 1965 referred to the possibility of “co-operation with the separated brethren” in translation projects. The following year the British and Foreign Bible Society amended its constitution so that it could include the Apocrypha in its translations. The United Bible Societies have adopted the same policy so that by now the great majority of translation projects around the world are of the interconfessional kind. (9)

Modern bible versions have blurred the distinctions between Protestant and Roman Catholic doctrine, sacrificing faithfulness to the truth for the sake of ecumenical peace. Listen to the New English Bible, in which the Roman Catholic Church had a hand, at Matthew 16:18: “And I say this unto you: You are Peter, the Rock; and on this rock I will build my church.” With no textual warrant Peter is declared to be the Rock on which Christ founds His church. The New International Version has a footnote here which says, “*Peter* means *rock*.” It does not. It means stone, as we learn from John 1:42. Christ is the Rock of our salvation.

Or listen to the NIV at Luke 1:28: “The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.’” The words “blessed art thou among women” are omitted. Mary was blessed among women but not above women. God might have chosen another virgin to be the mother

of Jesus but He chose Mary and that is why she was blessed. The omission tends to exalt Mary and bolsters the Roman Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception.

Or listen to the English Standard Version at Matthew 1:25: “but knew her not until she had given birth to a son.” The words “her firstborn” are omitted. That Jesus was Mary’s firstborn son suggests that other children were born of her. The omission is of help to Rome in maintaining her false dogma of Mary’s perpetual virginity.

It is well known that the Roman Catholic Church has never accepted the Authorised Version and she never will. Let us stick to it.

Co-operation with Roman Catholics

If we cannot join in fellowship with Roman Catholics because of Rome’s doctrinal errors can we make common cause with them on issues of moral and social concern?

We are often asked to sign petitions or statements addressed to government which present the Christian viewpoint on various matters. They may have been drawn up or sponsored by Roman Catholics as well as evangelicals.

While the aims of these documents may be acceptable often they make little reference to the Bible. This is the nub of the matter. We might ask those who profess to have a Christian conscience: What informs and directs your conscience? What is the ultimate authority for your belief and behaviour? The true evangelical will say, The Bible. The Roman Catholic will say, The teaching of the Church. The one looks to Christ as the Head of the Church, the other to the Pope.

I suggest that for this reason we should not make common cause with Roman Catholics on moral matters. Even when the point of view held on a subject is the same, for example on abortion, it is arrived at by a different route. We come from the direction of the inspired and infallible Scriptures, which are timeless. Roman Catholics come from the direction of the latest papal encyclical.

There is also the fact of the gospel itself. Can we really present a united front in which we effectively say: “While the gospel does not unite us it is not important enough to divide us”? No! Morality will not save us. And the world looking on concludes that we view Roman Catholics as Christians like ourselves. That is what the papacy wants and that is the danger.

iii. A new chapter for the papacy

In recent decades Rome has concentrated more and more on pushing the Pope as the world’s moral and spiritual leader, while continuing her political intrigues. A new and significant chapter in the history of the papacy began this year.

The Papal Visit

Rome achieved a first in September when the Pope paid a state visit to Britain. Some of the most offensive aspects of Romanism, such as mariolatry, were not very prominent. Yet the basic papal claims were not hidden away. In his address at Westminster Abbey the Pope referred to “my ministry as the Bishop of Rome and the Successor of Saint Peter, charged with a particular care for the unity of Christ’s flock”.

The visit included the beatification of John Henry Newman, the famous (or infamous) convert from Anglicanism to Romanism. Beatification is a step to canonisation or sainthood. A person who has been beatified is regarded as probably in heaven and worthy of local devotion. A person who has been canonised is regarded as definitely in heaven and worthy of universal devotion. John Paul II beatified over a thousand people and canonised nearly five hundred, more than all previous popes combined. Saint-making is being used as a clever tool. It can rehabilitate notorious characters, turning villains into heroes in the public mind. The quarrelsome Thomas Becket, the fanatical Thomas More and the treasonous Edmund Campion have all been through the process. Expect Guy Fawkes to follow soon!

The Present Pope

Benedict XVI, like his predecessor, is a conservative in Roman Catholic terms. As head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly known as the Holy Office and before that the Inquisition) he was the Vatican's enforcer of church orthodoxy under John Paul II for nearly twenty-five years. He silenced the radical priests and liberation theologians and wrote in defence of traditional Roman teaching. During his papacy Benedict has revived a number of traditions including the Tridentine Mass, the Latin form dating from the Council of Trent.

There was a time when it may have looked as though Rome was succumbing to the liberalism which has ruined so many mainline Protestant denominations. Pope John XXIII decided to adapt the church and called Vatican II. But with John Paul II and Benedict XVI the papacy has returned to its traditional, reactionary type.

The Prospects

We shall now consider the most important concerns we have regarding the papacy in the future.

Anglicanism

If we are not Anglicans we may think that the future of the Church of England is of little concern to us. That would be a mistake – because of the place the denomination holds as the established church in England.

Historically Rome has worked both to 'romanise' the Church of England and to encourage Anglican clergy and people to go over to her. The 'romanising' process foundered somewhat when the Church of England voted to ordain women to the ministry. Now the Church of England is riven by the question of whether to ordain men (and one supposes women) living in homosexual relationships.

It was announced in October 2009 that Pope Benedict intends to create a new type of ecclesiastical structure, called a personal ordinariate, for groups of disaffected Anglicans. The plan would create diocese-like structures for former Anglicans within the Roman Catholic Church. It would allow them to preserve elements of Anglican liturgy, spirituality and religious practice. Priests will be expected to remain celibate, although married men may be ordained on an individual basis. The establishment of this Ordinariate is expected to be approved early next year.

Since the papal visit a parish in Kent has declared its intention to defect to Rome. The Bishop of Fulham has announced that he will take up the Pope's offer and more bishops are expected to follow. Rome expects that the new body will eventually accommodate "thousands" of converts.

The Church of England is in a feeble state, epitomised by the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. Likewise the Church of Scotland. The result is a lack of moral and spiritual authority throughout our nation. A Roman Catholic commentator wrote after the papal visit: "Human nature abhors a vacuum, and now into this vacuum of moral leadership strode Pope Benedict, proclaiming truths that might not be welcomed by a secularized audience, but must be recognized as consistent and compelling, worthy at least of some consideration – enough to make people 'sit up and think.'" (10) Just as with the Roman Empire of old there is a "power vacuum" in our country and just as then Islam is trying to fill it and Romanism too. The papacy has an ideal opportunity to occupy the vacant territory and that is what she is attempting to do.

Rome wants to present herself as the 'Catholic Church' but we must never allow her that name: she is not the church which Christ founded. The papacy is like Judas Iscariot: a pretended friend of Christ but in reality an implacable foe, betraying Him with a kiss.

Act of Settlement

This Act was designed to secure for all time the Protestant succession to the English throne and was later extended to Scotland. The Sovereign is 'Supreme Governor' of the Church of England and required to "join in communion with the Church of England." The Act also requires that if an heir to

the throne becomes a Roman Catholic or marries one then they forfeit their right to become monarch. In recent decades there have been attempts by Members of Parliament from all three main political parties to abolish this section.

The Act is bound up with the establishment of the Church of England. If the Act was reformed or repealed it would produce a momentum towards disestablishment, for if a Roman Catholic occupied the throne then he or she would not be able to fulfil the monarch's role as Supreme Governor of the Church of England. Conversely disestablishment of the Church of England would remove the rationale for the religious provisions which dictate the succession to the throne.

Doubtless politicians at Westminster and also at Holyrood will not rest in their attempts to amend the Act. Their real agenda is to change the Protestant Christian character of our country. We may be thankful that it is very difficult to make changes to the Act of Settlement. However we need to watch and pray that this beneficial provision of our constitution is maintained. As the Bill of Rights of 1689 states: "it hath been found by experience that it is inconsistent with the safety and welfare of this Protestant kingdom to be governed by a papist prince."

European Union

From its small beginnings the European Union (EU) has become a major political power embracing twenty-seven countries and with all the trappings and authority of a State. There is an EU army, police force, court system, currency, bank, anthem and flag. Soon there will be an EU tax and then perhaps an EU religion. Why not? Other states have one.

Although the EU is officially a secular body Roman Catholics were instrumental in its formation. The union of Europe was their target, following the failure of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. The majority of individuals within the EU are Roman Catholics and Protestants are probably less than 20%. As the EU has expanded eastward Rome has been trying hard to woo the Orthodox churches. She wants to make the EU the greatest Roman Catholic "power" the world has ever seen. In reality the EU is the resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire.

Rome is working through the EU to ruin the Protestant countries of Europe. Once a country is in the system it is subservient to Brussels and any method will be used to achieve the abolition of national sovereignty. The English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote: "Look through the whole history of countries professing the Romish religion, and you will uniformly find the leaven of this besetting and accursed principle of action – that the end will sanction any means." The only sensible course for our country then is to get out of the EU as quickly as possible.

It is quite likely that the papacy is now looking beyond the confines of the EU to a New World Order where the Pope will assume even greater power. Let us be watchful. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and the Sadducees for their inability to discern "the signs of the times" (Matt.16:3). We must not be guilty of that.

3. The Destruction of the Papacy

It is good finish on this note. We believe that the papacy will one day be destroyed. But what will bring this about? Let us consider three things.

Clerical Scandals

We are all now aware of allegations of criminal behaviour by Roman Catholic priests. Generally it is the Church which is accused of covering up matters but sometimes it seems that our government colludes with the Church. We learned recently how a priest named James Chesney was shielded from justice after his involvement in the murder of five Roman Catholics and four Protestants in Northern Ireland in 1972.

Since the beginning of the new millennium the papacy has been embroiled in scandals involving paedophile priests. The real scandal is that the Roman Catholic Church has known about this abuse for years but has protected the guilty parties right up to the highest level. Pope Benedict has been implicated in such attempts when he was an Archbishop in Germany.

The Vatican has blamed the crisis on “sexual licentiousness” in society. It has also made it clear that the Church will maintain “secret canonical norms” in order to avoid a “culture of suspicion”. In other words, it will continue to try and keep the issue out of the public gaze.

Such scandals involving the Church of Rome are not new. However in our modern age with an intrusive media they can no longer be hidden as they once were. This may work to weaken the papacy. The hurt over the lack of redress for clerical abuse is likely to grow rather than diminish. John was shown how the nations would eventually turn against the papacy. “And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.” (Rev.17:16,17)

More than this is needed to bring down the Antichrist however. The papacy works with “all power and signs and lying wonders” and with “all deceivableness of unrighteousness”. Multitudes sinners perish because they are bewitched by the legends and apparitions, by transubstantiation and purgatory.

Because men receive not “the love of the truth, that they might be saved” God punishes them by sending them “strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” and be damned. (2Thess.2:9-12) Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, stated: “if [the Church] shall have defined anything to be black which appears to our eyes to be white, we ought in like manner to pronounce it to be black.” It is this satanic blindness and hellish darkness that makes popery such a fearful menace.

Yet Paul also tells us of the destruction of the Antichrist: “whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming” (2Thess.2:8). The Antichrist will be brought to an end in a twofold way.

Gospel Preaching

By “the spirit of his mouth” the Word of God is meant. This we have in the Scriptures and also in the faithful preaching of the gospel, which is the chief means of grace to sinners. Some may leave the Church of Rome because they have ceased to believe in God at all but others leave because they are converted to Christ and hear the call which says, “come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2Cor.6:17). In this way the papacy is wasted through time. “With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked” (Isa.11:4). The church of Christ is growing, especially in traditional Roman Catholic strongholds such as South America and parts of Africa and Asia. It will do so until “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab.2:14).

Charles Spurgeon wrote: “In our fathers’ days the gigantic walls of Popery fell by the power of their faith, the perseverance of their efforts, and the blast of their gospel trumpets...”. Joseph Irons wrote: “Oh if my brethren in the ministry would but speak out these things we should heave Antichrist overboard, I do believe, even now.” This is for our encouragement.

Christ’s Return

Despite the spread of the gospel and the consuming of the papacy this devilish institution will be with us until the end of time. In Revelation Chapter 19 the saints in heaven praise God for judging the great whore and avenging the blood of his servants at her hand. Then a few verses later they are saying, “the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready” (Rev.19:2,7). The downfall of Rome and the coming of Christ for His own go together.

The papacy has been responsible for the persecution of God’s people in a way that no other organisation, system or religion ever has. Yet she claims to be the Church which Christ founded! This

is the incredible thing. We might understand a pagan power harassing the saints, but a church?! That is why in the Bible the name 'MYSTERY, BABYLON' is given to this evil power. That is why John "wondered with great admiration" or amazement when he saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints (Rev.17:5,6).

The Lord's people have been enlightened in the knowledge of the truth however. We can look forward with utter confidence to the final destruction of the papacy when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in power and glory. Then Babylon will finally fall. If there are three religions which aim at world domination – Islam, Romanism and in a very different way biblical Christianity – the first two will not succeed but the third will!

In opposing the papacy we may be called bigots. So be it. We should remind ourselves that we are simply being true to Christ and to our country's heritage. Our dispute is not with Roman Catholic people, who are in a real sense victims of the papacy. Our desire for them is that Christ would grant them salvation through the gospel. Let us all heed the call of our Lord as He exhorts us concerning Rome and the papacy. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev.18:4). May God deliver us from the peril of the papacy!

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