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ENQUIRY

AS TO THE

ANTICHRIST OF PROPHECY.

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G. MORRISH, 24, WARWICK LANE,
PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

PRICE TWOPENCE.



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THE ANTICHRIST OF PROPHECY.

MY DEAR BROTHER,

I beg to send you a series of remarks, which have gradually been assuming importance in my mind for now three or four years, though I still present them only in the shape of enquiry, and shall be glad and thankful to receive the communication of any remarks, or the suggestion of any difficulties (many having presented themselves to myself in the period I speak of).

All who look for a personal Antichrist have been accustomed to assume that he is the head of the Roman empire, in whose hand imperial power will be and the throne of the world. Of this I much doubt. I have no doubt there will be this blasphemous power, the object of universal admiration. The scriptures seem to me to contain a plain revelation of this. The belief of it, therefore, remains of course unshaken in my mind. The question is, Is this power the Antichrist? The outline of the state of things, I would remark therefore, remains unaltered; and I am glad to add this, because it is important that, while open to correction on account of our imperfection, ascertained truth should maintain its weight and authority: as a moral state of the soul this is important. I have often seen "the putting always everything in question" presented as sincerity

and the love of truth. Whereas it is merely the haughtiest pretension of the human mind, which would hold its unshackled despotism to displace everything at pleasure, and make its own thoughts creatures of its will; while love of truth is seen in holding and being subject to known truth, in which we are taught of God, and, as subject to it, not departing from it. But, of course, even where known, we may be imperfect in our apprehension of it. I repeat, then, I see nothing to change in general, though doubtless much to learn, in the belief of this blasphemous imperial power which will act under or have the throne of Satan in the last days. The question with me is, if the saints have not lost sight of another power, of which the scriptures speak more even than of the great public blasphemous government; and that the consideration of this power is necessary to the filling up of the scene according to scripture. And I further question whether *this* power be not properly the Antichrist, though there may have been many morally.

I proceed to consider the passages, and present the thoughts which have occurred to me. Antichrist is not spoken of nominally, that I am aware of, elsewhere than in the Epistle of John. There, it is needless to say, his character is wholly religious—an heretical and apostate activity against the person and glory of Christ and the essential doctrines of truth as connected with Him, and of which Christianity is formed. "They went out from us," thus manifested "that they were not all of us." The apostle then directed the attention of the younger saints who had heard that there would be an Antichrist to this, as giving his character and marking the last times.

Further, he denies the Father and the Son—the revelation proper to and constituting Christianity. He does not confess Jesus Christ come in flesh—the other great cardinal basis of the truth. We may add, not as in contrast with Christianity, but as generally characteristic, “Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ?” This would be the first point to which godly Jews would be brought, without speaking of the doctrines of Christianity. When this was really owned, a man could be recognized as born of God. When the Christ formed the subject of religious belief and expectation, to own Jesus to be it implied a proper work of God. An apostate and heretical character is given then as the mark of Antichrist, and, further, as of Satan (“who is a liar?”). He does not own (which seems to me more Jewish connection and evil) Jesus to be the Christ. *Who* was the Christ, not what He was, is the subject of interest, and that is an answer to Jewish expectation, and the test of Jewish incredulity—(“If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins”), and he who is a liar denies that the blessed Jesus is. It is evident that the presenting Himself as the Son made the Jews reject Him as the Christ, because thus they were, man was, morally put to the test; and it must have been so to be according to truth, and also in order not to present an object to human passions in a religious form, but the truth and glory and Son of God—God himself morally, and the manifestations of the Father in grace to the heart and conscience of men. (See John viii. 14—24.) Still the two things are distinct, though impossible to separate, as both are united in His person.

I may add here that the translation, “this is that [spirit] of Antichrist,” is hardly warranted, that is, the insertion of the word “spirit,” but I do not feel need to say more. In general, it is evident that what the Spirit of God designates as characterizing this Antichrist are religious qualities or energies of evil. He is occupied with religious subjects, and characterized by that occupation, and in connection with Christianity and Judaism. This is not, perhaps, all his character; but it is characteristic: this is the *τὸ τοῦ Ἀντιχριστοῦ*. This is evidently of great importance. There is an energizing spirit of this character.

We have then the fact as to the history of the latter day, that there are two beasts or manifestations of power united in their operations, but at the same time very distinct (Rev. xiii.); each of them amazingly important in the place it holds, though one be distinctively on the throne of the prince of this world, the other not. Whatever title they may hold, those are the two. I speak of this, because, in some passages, and in our minds in reflecting on the spirit of the age, the general character may be presented, and we readily forget that there are certainly historically two vessels of evil power: one having the public authority and a certain character; the other, in whom is the energy which acts and produces the effect on men, in subservience to the throne and public power.

I shall consider first this second beast in whom the energy of seduction is found. It will hardly be questioned that the Antichrist, whatever system of interpretation is adopted, is found in one or other of these two vessels of evil power. First, then, the second is a beast. That

is, there is an analogy in the nature of their existence. Now beasts are a well known figure ; and I am not aware of any case in which they are not a temporal power ; so that we have here a temporal power subsisting along with the great general power who had Satan's throne. This is nothing surprising, as we know horns or kings will so subsist who give their power to the beast. This is different, it is true, but it is a temporal power. It had two horns lamb-like. The Lamb is not Christianity but Christ. This beast, then, in the form of its power resembled Christ, but its language was the full character and pretension of Satan, its speech dragon-like. This is evidently a remarkable character, a form of power like Christ, a language like Satan, not in deceit merely but in public pretension. It is not as a serpent, but a dragon—a royal Christ-like power with Satan-like language. But the power of this beast is exceeding great, though that of Satan. He exercises all the power of the first beast before him ; he does not take it away at all from the former, far from it ; but he exercises it all—the essential energy of evil is in him, though the other may be clothed with it. He makes the earth and its inhabitants worship him who was publicly on Satan's throne, whose deadly wound was healed. But his energy of evil was not only in the exercise or administration of another's power—he acts in intrinsic power as a prophet.

We shall see another character of this power in a moment ; but I confine myself to this passage now. The character of the display of this power is frightful. What the prophets of Baal could not do, and what Elias did, as a contrasting proof that Jehovah alone was the true God, this beast does, at least in the eyes of

men, besides other great signs. He seduces and deceives the inhabitants of the earth through the signs he was given to do before the beast. The beast would be content enough to have such an energy to sustain and support his throne, and exalt and adorn his authority in the eyes of men—authority which rested only in deceit and delusion of mind, or persecution. This seducing prophet and power leads them on to idolatry also, and gives breath to the image of the beast, so as to speak and have those killed who did not worship it. Thus, while sustaining the throne of Satan in the world, this second beast, while Satanic in his language, speaking like the dragon, has the form of royalty and prophecy established by signs, and such signs to the eyes of men as had at first sufficed to establish Jehovah's sole name and authority in the mind of Israel, to the destruction of an incapable Baal. The aim, however, of all is the recognition of Satan's authority in him whom he has placed on his throne; but the energy which produces the effect on the minds of men is in the second beast. While exercising power and bearing its form (a beast with horns), still religious seduction, and properly such as connects itself with ancient Jehovah-testimony, is what characterizes this second beast: he is spoken of in Revelation xix. as the false prophet.

The first beast is evidently the great imperial Gentile power, to whom the empire is given in the accustomed terms of scripture; but with its healed head, in its last blasphemous state, admired and owned by all not kept of God in sovereign grace, and hating and blaspheming them who had their tabernacle in heaven. His rise, as that of other beasts had been, is

out of the general mass of men—the Gentile world at large—out of the sea, as it is expressed. Besides this, we have inhabitants of heaven. What then is earth, out of which the second beast rises? There is no longer any pretension to heavenly association: all that is blasphemed. This religioso-prophetic influence will have its character and origin within the system and order of what subsists where Satan is and yet rules, this earth; but such position and relationship, when assuming a religious character, however blasphemous or seditious, is Jewish. It is the religion of the earth, and, viewed as rejecting Christ, must be false. Such, I apprehend, is the character of the seduction of the second beast—heavenly neither in reality nor pretension, but an exhibition of present power here in the sphere to which Satan is now limited. He is the proper present energy of Satan to lead the world to recognize the throne which he has been able to set up here in the first beast, which had its origin providentially in the world like other previous beasts. The second beast is earthy and Jewish in its character. But it is by present power, signs, and delusions (not, as is evident, by the law and the testimony), that he acts.

I would now turn to another passage, where the last form of evil is spoken of, and see what is its character there. (2 Thess. ii.) Here we can hardly doubt, on reading verse 9, that there is a connection with the false prophet. But the question may arise, if it is not merely to characterize the time and reign of the beast, or if “whose coming” means that he himself is known by these signs. That is, is it generally characteristic, the first beast or the second?

But let us examine the passage. There is a falling away down here, as there is, on the other hand, a gathering together of the saints to Christ in heaven. The heavenly Church takes its own place as gathered up to its Head ; and the falling away or apostasy takes place upon earth. The result is the manifestation of the man of sin, the son of perdition. The removal of the Church and the apostasy give room to this. In this chapter it cannot be questioned, that a religious character also is displayed, however wicked and audacious. Secular power is not spoken of, but first its impious and then its seductive character. He is characterized as the man of sin, and the wicked one, whom a mystery of iniquity has preceded. It does not appear to me that verse 4 gives another idea, or that of secular power ; it is moral opposition to God and insult to Him. It is true that the beast of Revelation xvii. goes into perdition ; but this does not alter the character here given : the two (Rev. xix.) perish together. The falling away, it is evident, refers to that which had the name of Christianity, though it goes much farther than its mere rejection. There is an active energizing personage bearing the title of Judas, who resists, opposes, and exalts himself against all called God or which is an object of veneration. He is an ardent antagonist of divine authority, and sets up as Adam to be God, and, more, he wills our ruin.

I think I see, then, in verses 3, 4, the moral character of this wicked power acting upon others, and shewing the energy of his will in hostility, and setting aside of God, rather than the object of deference or honour on the throne. He is what fills the scene morally when the apostasy takes place—the active energy which works in

man. It is the man of sin—man against God, and pretending to be, or shewing himself as though he were, God upon earth: the contrast of Christ, who was so, but was the man of obedience, righteousness, and humiliation, submitting to everything when it was not disobedience to God His Father. This man was a thing to be revealed. Meanwhile a certain mystery of iniquity was at work—the principles of lawlessness—of the independence of man, and the acting of his will, but in mystery only. There was a restrainer until it should be taken out of the way, and then the lawless one would be revealed. But if he was the lawless self-exaltation of man's will, that was not all. His presence or coming was according to the energy of Satan; and if we have found in the second beast the terrible analogy with the case of Elias in deception, here we have perhaps the yet more frightful one with Christ. The terms by which are expressed what he does in falsehood are the same as those by which, in the Acts, Christ has been shewn a man approved of God (Acts ii. 22); and as Christ was in truth of righteousness, he in deceit of unrighteousness to the *ἀπολλυμένοις* who were given up to be lost, as Christ was to the *σωζομένοις*, to such as should be saved. The true Christ will come from heaven, a heavenly man: this an earthly man, with all the pretensions which could belong to, and the proofs, to those given up to judgment, which would demonstrate his title to glory, but in an entirely earthly way and self-exaltation. God sends an energy of error that they should believe a lie.

It is evident that the point of departure is Christendom naturally as writing to Christians, but the manifestation not connected with it; because, though no date is given

for that, the saints are viewed as gathered up, the rest as apostate. This (though the character be blasphemous man) would throw it, in its deceptions most especially, among the Jews, though it is here as man, and as to men who have not received the love of the truth when it was there, but have had pleasure in iniquity. Whatever partial moral accomplishment (for there were even early many antichrists) this may have had in Christendom, taking the apostasy in its full sense, the temple of God acquires a character quite evident.

We may now turn to other passages. Let us consider Daniel xi. : "The king shall do according to his will." We find a king in the land (uninformed whence he came; for, though it is a continuation of the history of the king of the north as being found in that territory, yet the previous verses had carried us on to the time of the end), lawless, self-exalting, magnifying himself above every god; yet this (which might seem to have put a contrast between the characters of 2 Thessalonians and the second beast) does not hinder after all his setting up idolatry—that unclean spirit now gone out of the Jews, but to enter in with seven others worse. "The God of his fathers"—as strong a claim on nature as we know, and owned in Judaism, "nor the desire of women"—that posterity naturally wished for, but of which Christ was the centre of hope among the Jews (for in this verse it evidently refers to religioso-traditional objects and influence), none of these things have any influence over him: he uses idolatry only for his convenience and divides the land as recompense, causing them (his followers, I suppose) to rule over the mass of the Jewish people. Here we have, then, a royal power in

Palestine doing as he pleases there, having, as to self-exaltation and blasphemy, fully the character of 2 Thessalonians ii. 3, 4, and disposing of the Jewish people, while rejecting his traditional God, and blaspheming the God of gods (the dragon-voice and character, I judge).

I may say here, that the anti-christian power will not be imitation of Christ, save as being king and prophet, but opposition to Christ; for to a Jew, having a form of Jewish holiness, blasphemies could not recommend. But they are given up to delusion, and the dragon-language is taken with the rest, as is idolatry, which will clearly take place. The Lord characterizes it as one coming in his own name. This is the Jewish part of his history in connection with the territorial limits of the Grecian empire. You may find "the king" again, Isaiah lvii. 9, and xxx. 33, where read "for the king also it is prepared."

I now turn to another passage where we have a power clearly distinguished from the beast, and which nevertheless stamps it with his character, and is, at the same time, peculiarly connected at the end with the Jewish people, though hating what was heavenly. I refer to Daniel vii., where a distinct horn rises after all the others, different from them, subduing three—a horn always as such distinct from the beast, but which brings judgment on it, and whose actings at the end make it morally the grand affair. Here we have many characteristics of the first beast's actings, attributed to him in Revelation xiii. We see the horn to be the active agent here, for the horn is looked at as part of the beast here, his generally secular or Gentile totality being the point

of view in which it is considered. Still the little horn is evidently a distinct agent. If it be thought that the horn is really, though locally only, possessing the territory of three, the virtual head of the whole empire as a chief, besides his own territory, and hence that he would correspond rather to the first beast of Revelation xiii. where the general character of the beast itself only is given, I should have nothing that I am aware of to object. The other point would remain untouched. The moral points of union are evident: the two beasts play into each other's hands; one, as we have seen, holding the public authority and throne, the other exercising the energy of Satan. It had even occurred to me that 2 Thessalonians ii. 3, 4, and 8, might distinctively denote them; but I pursue the study of the passage. This horn had the intelligence and foresight of thought and purpose, which was more than power and conquest, design and consideration, place and haughty pretensions avowed: he brings judgment on the beast. Three things are attributed to him: "speaking great words against the Most High" (this is more than the Ancient of days; it is the supremacy of God as above all); he wears out the saints of the high places; and he thinks to change times and laws, (Jewish order and ordinances) and they are delivered into his hand. So that we find atheistical pretensions, a persecution of any saints who are connected with heaven, and a perversion of the order of Jewish polity as outward ordinances. This lasts for three years and a half. He is directly, therefore, in connection with the Jewish order of things. If there are saints who look to higher blessings, he wears them out. That there will be those there who shall have a heavenly position in

the reign, Revelation xv. and xx. assure us. His dominion is taken away in connection with the final judgment on earth. It is the horn who is here considered, who wields it in Palestine (though the beast be destroyed, as is noted in the general history before the explanations). Here then is a distinct power acting in Palestine and subverting Jewish order and ordinances, the beast being distinct yet judged because of what this power spoke. The pretensions of Isaiah xiv. 12—14 have this same character. Reigning in Zion is here one of his pretensions.

I would now turn to the first beast. The first thing I would remark is, that it is characterized by the royalty of the ten horns ; they are crowned. This is characteristic historically. Three fall, but it is, as far as unity subsists, a federate power. The beast implies corporate unity in some measure, as the Roman empire was (whatever its state), a certain known thing, whatever its head or form of government ; and this corporate existence is the meaning of a beast—a bond which enables it to be spoken of as one in relation to those outside it. There is a wounded and healed head, but it is not in any prominence here, save that it is after this that the wondering takes place. It is the beast which is in prominence, and in its general corporate state is characterized by its blasphemy and war with the saints. It is well to remember that the devil is cast out of heaven, and that the heavens and the dwellers upon earth, and earth itself, are the scene of his power. The healing of the head is all that is noticed ; it is the beast itself which is in the scene. Satan, as god of this world, gives him his throne and his power ; and its man is thus set up, while he turns to act, as we have seen, in sustaining it in the second beast. A woman

may ride this beast, but it is the kings who commit fornication with her. But I suppose, whether from xiii. or xvii. there will be some uniting form of government; but it is the corporate or common existence which gives its life and character to the beast. The kings make war; the kings hate the whore, and the beast—not any head. If the comparison of Daniel vii. and the light thrown on that passage shew that the little horn is the same as the head, of which I should feel doubtful, I have nothing to object. It is not my subject at this moment. What I question is the civil head of empire being Antichrist, which seems to me to have a much more religious character—a consideration which has much importance in the study of scripture. There are several difficulties and questions which present themselves in connection with this; as, for example, the placing or displacing of the influence of Babylon in xvii. and the second beast of xiii. which I leave for further inquiry.

But I cannot doubt that there will be a civil-religious power in Palestine, having the energy of Satan, and exercising the power of the beast, to whom Satan has given his authority, and this, I suspect, is much more properly the Antichrist, though there be many. But I present this, specially and avowedly, as a subject of inquiry for the saints and those content to learn and follow any increasing light our God in His goodness may see good to give; and certainly He will give all that may be truly profitable to His Church.

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