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Discourse...

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A DISCOURSE.

2 Thess. ii. 4.—Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

PREACHED BEFORE THE
SYNOD OF MONTREAL AND OTTAWA,
MAY 9TH, 1876.

BY REV. W. TAYLOR, D.D.

Senior Minister of Erskine Church.

MONTREAL.

PRINTED BY DIRECTION OF SYNOD.

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At Montreal and within St. Paul's Church there, on Tuesday the ninth day of May, one thousand eight hundred and seventy-six years, which day the Synod of Montreal and Ottawa met and was constituted :

Inter alia,—It was Resolved,—That the thanks of the Synod be given to the ex-Moderator, the Reverend William Taylor, D.D., for the excellent Sermon which he has delivered to the Court at this time, and that he be requested to allow the same to be published.

Subsequently the Synod Resolved, on motion of Dr. Macvicar, seconded by Mr. McLennan, of Cornwall:—That the Sermon of Dr. Taylor be published in pamphlet form, by a Committee, consisting of Revds. N. McNish, L.L.D., J. S. Black, Peter Wright; and Messrs. J. Croil and W. King.

Extracted from Minutes of Synod of Montreal and Ottawa, this Seventeenth day of May, one thousand eight hundred and seventy six.

JAMES WATSON, A. M.

Clerk of Synod.

TO THE READER.

It will be seen from the Resolution of the Synod on the preceding page, that this Discourse is printed at the request of Synod, and under its direction. It was not written with any design of publishing it. And in writing it again for press, I have found it necessary to make some changes, on words or modes of expression; in some instances I have changed the order of the sentences, and where the connexion seemed to be obscure, I have, in a few places, introduced a clause for the sake of perspicuity. But the Discourse is substantially the same as when it was preached before the Synod.

The Reader is not to expect a discussion of the points of controversy between Protestant Christians and Roman Catholics: I have confined myself to the text. My sole object is to give a fair explanation of the words used by the inspired Apostle, and to show that they may be applied to the system of Romanism, and to no other that the world has ever seen. I disavow being actuated by enmity against any man, or body of men; I desire humbly to call the attention of Protestants to certain portions of the "sure word of prophecy," which have been too much neglected of late years, perhaps through a mistaken sentiment of liberality, and which "the signs of the times" require should be more frequently and faithfully proclaimed.

W. TAYLOR.

MONTREAL, May 19, 1876.

SERMON.

2 Thess. ii. 4.—Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped ; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

This is a very remarkable prediction. It has attracted the notice of the students of Scripture from the earliest times down to the present day. To enumerate the books that have been written, and give even an outline of the various theories of interpretation that have been put forth, would itself form a large volume. Those interpreters, that have any right to be regarded as Evangelical, have been generally of the opinion that it is Antichrist that is here spoken of under the names of “the man of sin,” and “the son of perdition”; but who Antichrist is, or where he is to make his appearance, or what are his characteristics, are all questions on which there is a wide divergence. I shall not take notice of their various opinions, or hypotheses, farther than to express my accordance with what may be here called “the unanimous consent of the Fathers,” namely, that the Man of Sin is Antichrist. And without attempting, at present, to identify Antichrist with any historical personage, or system whatever, let us first endeavour to understand the description which is here given of him, by a careful analysis of the words of the inspired writer.

And first of all, he is called "*the opposer.*" The first part of this word is the same that is found in the first part of the name Antichrist. It is rather feebly translated in our version "*who opposeth,*" for, if strictly rendered, it means, "one whose habit it is to oppose"; or who is so well known to be an opponent as to have gained for himself the name and reputation of being such. The thing which he opposes is, mainly, the honour of Christ, as the name, Antichrist implies, but it is not necessarily confined to this. His object is to set himself above all authority recognized amongst men, whether it be human or divine; and he sets himself in opposition to everything that stands in the way of his unholy ambition. Let it be a doctrine of Scripture, or a commandment of God, or a law of the State, he claims the sole right to sit in judgment upon it, and oppose and condemn it, if it is in any way derogatory to his power.

He is next described as one "*that exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped*"; literally, "above every one called God, or an object of reverence." This is the most important statement which the Apostle makes in this description of Antichrist; it is indeed the key to the whole passage, and everything depends on the right interpretation of it. Does he mean to include the true God, under this expression, *every one that is called God*? There are some interpreters, of high name, who affirm that he does; but we decidedly differ from them, and maintain that he alludes only to those who were called Gods in the current language of the heathen world, especially of the Roman Empire, in his day. In the second term, an object of worship,* we think there is an allusion to the Roman Emperors, and the worship that was given them. The word occurs only here in the New Testament, as a substantive noun. As a verb, it occurs in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and is

* Sebasma, *an act, or object of reverence*, see Lidd. and Scott.

there applied to the *worship of the creature*. As an adjective, it is used only as the title of the Roman Emperor himself, *Augustus*, Acts xxv. 25; or as an honorary distinction bestowed by him on a certain band of soldiers, called *Augustus' band*, Acts xxvii. 1. These references seem to indicate that there is a tacit allusion here to Cesar Augustus. It is well known that the Roman Emperors claimed, and received, divine honours from their subjects; and all this goes to strengthen our opinion that the Apostle alludes only to such Gods as were called Gods, and to persons that were worshipped, especially within the bounds of the Roman Empire.

There were many that were called Gods. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, this same writer employs the same term, and the same mode of expression, in speaking of the false Gods of the heathen; and that ought, we think, in all fairness, to decide the meaning of the expression in the text. *For though there are those that are called Gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as there are Gods many, and Lords many*. Now, it is never the practice of the inspired writers to include the true God in the same list with those who were called Gods, but rather to separate and distinguish him from them; as in the above passage in 1 Cor. viii. 5, 6. He is not one that is merely called God, he is God, the living and the true God. Besides if we were to admit that the expression, *every one that is called God*, in the first clause of the verse, includes the true God, that would be to set it at variance with the concluding clause, *showing himself that he is God*, for here he does not exalt himself above God, but only aspires to equality with him.

In the Scriptures the name, God, is not unfrequently given to Magistrates, and other rulers, because of their authority and power; as, for example, in these well-known words of Christ, *if he called them Gods unto whom the word of God came; and the Scripture cannot be broken*; that is, it cannot be set aside, it cannot be charged with mistake,

in giving such a high title, in a qualified sense, to Kings and Rulers. They are God's ministers, and may therefore lay some claim to the name or authority of Him whom they represent.

These are the only two classes of beings who, while they were not God, are yet acknowledged in Scripture to be called Gods; namely, false Gods, and lawful magistrates, and the Apostle declares that Antichrist exalts himself above them both.* Much light is thrown on the passage, by comparing it with the following language which the prophet Isaiah puts in the mouth of Lucifer, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." A similar personage, or perhaps the same personage in a prophetic sense, is spoken of by the prophet Daniel—"the King shall do according to his will, and shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every God, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods." † And, we think, it can scarcely be doubted, that the "Lucifer" of Isaiah, and the "King" of Daniel, and "the Man of sin," of the Apostle Paul, have all a typical relation to one another.

It could not be charged against Antichrist as a sin, if he were only to exalt himself above the false Gods of the heathen, for they were mere fictions; creatures of the imagination; one living man or woman is more than the whole catalogue of them. But the Apostle goes on to inform us, that, while Antichrist sets them aside, it is only to substitute himself in their room; for, ‡ *as God he sitteth*

* It is worthy of notice here, that the reading in the Vulgate is "every thing that is called God." That was the reading in Jerome's time, in the latter part of the 4th century. Calvin prefers it, and thinks that the reading in the authorized version is a corruption of Paul's words.

† As Daniel does not include the true God in the expression *every God*, it affords a strong presumption that the Apostle does not include the true God in the expression, *every one, called God*. It therefore corroborates our exegesis.

‡ The words *as God* are thrown out of all the late recensions of the New Testament.

in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God; or rather, as if he were God, for the Latin translation of Jerome comes nearer the original here than our own. There are some who argue that the Apostle means here the temple in Jerusalem, because that was the only material temple which such a writer as Paul could speak of as the Temple of God; and that consequently Jerusalem is the place where Antichrist is to make his appearance, or, at least, to fix his seat. But it is sufficient to reply, that Paul uses this phrase in a figurative sense, in more than one of his epistles, and it is therefore quite agreeable to his usage to understand it in the same sense here. He says to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you;" and to the Ephesians, "in whom the whole building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." The temple then means the New Testament Church; and the following comment of Calvin appears to explain the real purport of the Apostle's words; namely, that Paul does not intend to specify any temple in particular, but to teach that Antichrist is not an enemy, who is to come against the Church from without, but is a domestic foe, who arises within the Church herself. As Jesus Christ has his seat above, in the Church triumphant, so Antichrist has his seat below, in the Church on earth, where he affects to be Christ's vicar or representative, and to exercise supreme authority in his name.

Thus far, all that I have attempted is to explain the words which the Apostle employs in the text, according to the rules of Biblical criticism, comparing Scripture with Scripture. And we have found his words amount to this: That Antichrist is the opponent of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his honour and authority; that he exalteth himself above all objects of human worship, whether it be a God, so called; or a lawful Magistrate; that he has his seat in the Christian church, and exhibits himself

there, to the gaze of the world, as if he were God, the very representative of God on the earth.

And now we come to the important question, "of whom speaketh the prophet this?" And I put it to yourself, or to the judgment of any candid man, whether there is any other personage to whom these characters can possibly apply, except the Popes of Rome, as the Head and Representative of the Roman Church. I may possibly be reminded of the Pagan Roman Emperors, whose claims were almost equally blasphemous. And I admit that many of the early Fathers believed that the Apostle did refer, in this passage, to the Emperor Nero, whose wickedness was so enormous; and, when Nero died without fulfilling their expectations, they supposed he would rise again from the dead, and appear in the true character of Antichrist. But there are these two fatal objections to the opinion that this personage is to be found in any Roman Emperor: First, that none of them ever sat in *the temple of God*. And second, that, whereas it is evident from the context in this chapter, that the Apostle is speaking of some one who had not made his appearance at the time of writing, but was still future; the outrageous claims of the Roman Emperors were matters of history long before his day. We think it not improbable, however, that in drawing this picture, he had these Emperors in his eye; perhaps, they suggested some of the traits; perhaps, it was his design to teach that Antichrist would resemble them—would have some connexion with them—would, in fact, be their successor. But, with the exception of these Emperors, let me ask you to cast your eye back over the whole compass of history, sacred or profane, and tell me if you can find a single personage, to whom even the half of these characteristics are so applicable, as the whole of them are to the Head of the Roman Church?

First Identification: Antichrist is the opponent of Christ; so are the Popes of Rome in their office as the

Heads of the Papal system. For that system deprives Christ of the place of honour and authority which belongs to him as sole King and Redeemer. It opposes him in all his offices, of prophet, priest and king. It suppresses the word of Christ, or even commands it to be cast into the flames, and never allows it to have any other meaning than the Pope is pleased to assign to it. Christ claims to be the only Mediator between God and men, but the Church of Rome declares that there are many other mediators, and, in point of practice, makes less use of the mediation of Christ than that of the saints. Christ claims to have "all power in heaven and in earth," but the Church of Rome takes that power out of the hand of Christ, and puts it into the hand of the Pope, that he may use it as he pleases. Agreeably to the symbol of his triple crown, he has authority in Heaven, earth, and hell. Thus Christ is supplanted, and dethroned, and another reigns in his stead.

Second Identification : Antichrist exalts himself above all human authority, civil or sacred, so does the Head of the Church of Rome. Of the two classes of beings, called Gods, that are spoken of in the text, one only remains now ; for the false Gods of the heathen have, in a great measure, passed away ; but civil Magistrates still continue ; Kings, and Princes, and Rulers ; and it is scarcely necessary for me to say, that the Pope exalts himself above them all. There is no other claim that is more zealously urged than this, by the adherents of that Church, at the present day. In fact, the world rings with it ; from the Vatican downwards, it is the great theme,—the supreme power of the infallible Pope. In the decrees of the late Council, in the Syllabus, and the Encyclical letters of the Pope, it is the main thing insisted on, and every one who opposes it is doomed to destruction. Cardinals defend it ; apologists declare it to be a logical necessity ; Bishops and Archbishops proclaim it in their pastorals ; and the Catholic Press is every where thrusting it on the public notice. The Governments of the nations, and the friends of human

freedom, find it constantly rising up before them, and demanding submission to its dictates. In short, it is the question of the day, whether there should be any other authority in the world, except that of the Church of Rome, through its head, the Pope, or his subordinate representatives. But, with these words of the inspired Apostle before us, we hold, that, the greater the boldness with which the Church of Rome puts forward this claim, and publishes it, and discusses it, and inculcates it, through the length and breadth of the land ; the clearer is the evidence which she furnishes, that it is in her the person is to be found "who exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped."

Third Identification : He sits in the temple of God. By this we understand that Antichrist is to arise in the church herself, and is to assume a Christian, not a heathen, name and profession. All this is true of the Popes of Rome. If it should be objected, that, by this, we concede the character of a true church to the Church of Rome ; I answer, that, while cheerfully admitting that there are many in the communion of that Church who are sincere followers of Christ, according to the light which they possess, it does not by any means follow, that, as a church, she must be sound and true, in her organisation and administration. She may be a church "fallen." The following words of Calvin are equally candid and just : "I admit she may be called *the temple of God*, not because she possesses all the qualities of a Christian church, but because she still retains a *residuum* of them ; yet, if she is a temple, it is one that is polluted with many sacrileges." The expression, *the temple of God*, may also be understood in connexion with the past, and as describing what the Church of Rome was, and not what she continues to be. The temple in Jerusalem was once the habitation of God, but after Israel's apostacy, it became a den of thieves. And there is no denying, that, in the early ages, the Church in the City of Rome was one of

the most faithful, zealous, and energetic of all the churches ;—a true temple of God : but, carried away by her inordinate ambition, her character has suffered a complete transformation. She is now the seat of Anti-christ, Rev. xvii. 9.

Fourth Identification : Seated in this temple, he exhibits himself to men as if he were God. This does not mean that he claims superiority over the true God, but only equality with him. Yet this is an assumption sufficiently daring to fill every mind with astonishment, and even to lead one to ask, if it can be possible that any mortal man can be guilty of such a blasphemous usurpation. It is admitted, indeed, that such a claim is not put forth openly, and in so many words, either by Pope or Prelate. But it is undeniable that the Pope claims attributes and prerogatives that belong only to the Divine Being ; nay, according to his own profession, he is, every day of his life, performing acts that can be performed only by the Most High. He avows himself to be infallible ; he maintains that he can forgive sins, and send men to Heaven or to hell as he thinks proper. He possesses the key of the gate of Paradise, and can admit or exclude whomsoever he pleases. He has power to change laws and ordinances at his pleasure. By his mere decree he can change the character of an action, so that what was unlawful before shall become lawful, and what was lawful shall become a sin. In these, and many other ways which I have not time to mention, he exhibits himself to the world as if he were God ; he claims to be next to God himself, a terrestrial divinity, who holds the destinies of men in his hand, and can send them to happiness or misery according to his sovereign will.

I again appeal to yourself, Christian reader, whether you can find any person, in the whole compass of history, to whom these words in the text will apply, except the Head of the Roman Church. It seems to me that the Head of that Church has sat here for his picture. He is

here photographed in lineaments that are strikingly true, and that will never be obliterated. And the fact, that this strange prediction, written in the middle of the first century, at a time when, humanly speaking, it must have seemed exceedingly improbable, should have been so remarkably fulfilled, as it is in our day, in 1876, after the revolution of eighteen centuries and a half, must be held to be a clear proof, that the Apostle Paul, like other holy inspired men, spoke and wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost ; for no human foresight could have anticipated anything of the kind.

I wish it, however, to be understood, that I do not refer to the Popes of Rome, either past or present, in their personal characters, but only as the Heads, or Representatives of the Antichristian system. In personal character they have been very different from one another ; some better, and some worse. According to universal report, the present Pope is one of exemplary moral character ; according to the testimony of history, some of his predecessors have been monsters of vice. But, in their official capacity, they have all of necessity, put forth the same blasphemous assumptions ; claiming to be regarded as the Vicars of Christ,—the Vicegerents of God on earth. It is not an uncommon thing, in the scriptures, to take the name of an individual, or a city, as the synonym of a class ; as, for example, Abraham, Moses, Sion, Babylon, &c. Now, there never was a system in the world which could be so fairly represented by an individual, as the Church of Rome by its Popes ; for there never was a system to which a certain individual is so indispensable. The Pope is every thing to the Church of Rome ; he is so necessary to her that her ministrations cannot be carried on without him ; he is the head, without which the body is dead ; he is (on Catholic principles) the last link of the chain by which the vessel is moored, if that link is wanting the whole becomes useless.

The reason why I have chosen to address you on this

subject, is because I feel persuaded the time has come, when Protestants in this Province must grapple with this question, and all questions connected with it. The encroachments of the Papacy are increasing from year to year; the ambitious designs of the Vatican are becoming more and more clearly developed; its claims are put forth with greater effrontery than ever before. The education of the people in this Province, is controlled by the Church of Rome; public moneys are squandered in supporting her schools and monastic Institutions. She claims and enjoys exemptions from taxation,* and yet, with a strange inconsistency, she demands the right to tax her own adherents at her will. She overawes the Courts of Justice, so that persons who assault Protestants, or destroy their places of worship, can scarcely be brought to punishment. She fills Parliament with her own creatures, so that no law can be enacted which is not acceptable to her. The political franchise of the people is virtually in her hands; for, in most constituencies, it is a vain thing for a Protestant either to be a candidate or a voter. By the terrors of excommunication, the priest can turn the scale as he pleases. Our parliamentary franchise is "a delusion and a snare."

I have no doubt that, in certain quarters, I will be accused of illiberality, perhaps of fanaticism, for bringing these things before the public, in the way I now do. But, if I am so accused, it will be only on the same ground on which the highwayman accused his victim of creating a disturbance, because he would not submit to be robbed quietly, but had the audacity to defend himself. When the intolerant pretensions of the Papacy are thrust every day before our face, often in an insulting and offensive

* In primitive times, it was the boast of the Christians that they paid their taxes into the public treasury, with greater faithfulness than the Romans themselves, excepting those that were levied expressly for the support of the idol temples: Now to ask [the Church of Rome to pay taxes, is "impious"!

way, it cannot be thought an extraordinary thing if we should remonstrate, and attempt to defend the right. We are willing,—we are desirous to live in peace with the adherents of the Church of Rome, and with all men ; but if they will not permit us to do so, we cannot help the breach. We have ever demanded the same rights for them as for ourselves ; but if we were to consent they should have more, we would be unworthy of the place which we occupy, and the name which we bear.

I trust that, while faithful to Protestant doctrine, in all our pulpits, and to Protestant discipline in all our Congregations, we shall be no less faithful to our Protestant liberties. And I think, the times demand that we should pay greater attention to the unscriptural claims, and the alarming encroachments of the Papacy, than we have been in the habit of doing for some time past. I remember being struck with a remark, made by one of the leaders of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in the debates which were raised, many years ago, by, what was called, the Papal Aggression ; he said, “ the best way to meet that aggression ” (and with his words I shall conclude) “ was for every minister to preach as their forefathers had done, who never thought they had done justice to their text, whatever it might be, if they did not show, before concluding, how it stood opposed to the doctrines and claims of the Papacy.” May the spirit of the fathers be rekindled in the children !

MAR 27 1931

