

The Divine Programme of The World's History Chapter VII. The Christian Programme – Part IV.



Continued from [Chapter VII. The Christian Programme – Part III.](#)

APOSTOLIC PREDICTIONS OF THE APOSTASY.

Paul—the apostle who was commissioned to unfold the hidden mystery of the vital union of Christ and His members, the mystery of the *true* Church—was inspired also to reveal a second and strangely contrasted “mystery,” the mystery of the false Church, or great apostasy of the Christian religion.

He does this especially in his first letter to Timothy and in his second letter to the Thessalonians. His words are as follows:—

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.” (1 Tim. iv. 1-3).

In his letter to Thessalonica, Paul tells them that the second advent of Christ will not take place—

“Except there come a *falling away* first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 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. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish;

because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thess. ii. 3-10).

These passages are evidently *prophetic*; they predict what had not come to pass at the time they were written, what was to happen later on, "in the latter times" of the dispensation. Hence it falls within the scope of our investigation to ask, Have these predictions been fulfilled? Before adducing the facts which constitute the reply, we must conjoin with these Pauline notices of the great apostasy John's more detailed though symbolic prediction of it, as it will be convenient to consider the apostolic outline of this subject *as a whole*. If two artists have painted portraits of the same individual, one giving the face only, and the other the full figure, any question of identification will be best decided by an examination of both.

In the symbolic language of the Apocalypse the *true* Church is described as "the bride, the Lamb's wife," and as clad in fine linen, clean and white. She is also seen under a second figuration as the heavenly Jerusalem. The false Church is also represented as a woman and as a city, but of wonderfully contrasted character.

"And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: and upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken With the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration " (Rev. xvii. 1-6).

John wondered at this vision, and the angel interpreted for him its leading features, as follows:

"I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, . . . The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth; . . . the waters are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues, . . . — and the woman which thou sawest is *that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*"

The last verb is in the present tense, implying that the city was regnant at the time when the angel spoke to John, A.D. 96,—i.e., in the days of Domitian.

Now, as the bride and the heavenly Jerusalem represent the true Church, this harlot, who is also called "Mystery, Babylon the Great," represents a *false Church*.¹

¹ These prophecies present two broadly contrasted women, identified with two broadly

contrasted *cities*, one reality being in each case doubly represented as a *woman* and as a *city*: the harlot and Babylon are one; the bride and the heavenly Jerusalem are one. It is evident that the true interpretation of either of these double prefigurations must afford a clue to the true interpretation of the other. The two women are contrasted in every particular that is mentioned about them: the one is pure as purity itself, "made ready" and fit for heaven's unsullied holiness; the other foul as corruption could make her, fit only for the fires of destruction. The one belongs to the Lamb, who loves her as the bridegroom loves the bride; the other is associated with a wild beast, and with the kings of the earth, who ultimately hate and destroy her. The one is clothed with fine linen, and in another place is said to be clothed with the sun, and crowned with a coronet of stars—that is, robed in Divine righteousness, and resplendent with heavenly glory; the other is attired in scarlet and gold, in jewels and pearls, gorgeous, indeed, but with earthly splendour only. The one is represented as a chaste virgin, espoused to Christ; the other is mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. The one is persecuted, pressed hard by the dragon, driven into the wilderness, and well-nigh overwhelmed; the other is drunken with martyr blood, and seated on a beast which has received its power from the persecuting dragon. The one sojourns in solitude in the wilderness; the other reigns "in the wilderness" over peoples, and nations, and kindreds, and tongues. The one goes in with the Lamb to the marriage supper, amid the glad hallelujahs of heaven; the other is stripped, insulted, torn, and destroyed by her guilty paramours. We lose sight of the bride amid the effulgence of heavenly glory and joy, and of the harlot amid the gloom and darkness of the smoke that "rose up for ever and ever." It is impossible to find in Scripture a contrast more marked; and the conclusion is irresistible, that whatever the one may represent the other must prefigure *its opposite*. They are not two disconnected visions, but a pair—a pair associated, not by likeness, but by contrast.

Now Scripture leaves us in no doubt as to the signification of the emblematic bride, the Lamb's wife, the heavenly Jerusalem. What, then, must the contrasted symbol, the Babylonian harlot, represent? *Surely some false and apostate Church*—some Church which, while professing to belong to Christ, is in reality given up to fellowship with the world, and linked in closest union with the kings of the earth; a worldly Church, which has left her first love, forgotten her heavenly calling, sunk into carnality and sin, and proved shamelessly and glaringly faithless to her Lord.—("Approaching End of the Age," pp. 143-145.)

Hence John presents the same contrast as Paul. For the apostasy which the latter describes as headed up in "the man of sin" was an organization contrasted in every respect to the true bride and body of Christ. It was one which would owe its origin and existence to "the working of Satan," instead of to the operation of the Spirit of God. It was a "mystery of iniquity," instead of a mystery hid in God; its votaries are "wicked," full of lying, of deceivableness, of unrighteousness; deluded and unbelieving, instead of being fruitful in every good work, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. It has a mere earthly human head instead of a Divine and heavenly one; and its ultimate destiny is "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" at His second coming, instead of the rapture to be "for ever with the Lord" which awaits the true Church at that crisis.

Both apostles thus predicted that there would arise in the course of the Christian dispensation a great, powerful, and conspicuous ecclesiastical organization, like the true Church in some respects, but utterly *unlike* it in others, produced by Satan to oppose and counterwork Christ and the true Church.

Now this was a strange prediction. It would have been natural to foresee for

the Church *Jewish* opposition, or *heathen* opposition, or even general declension and backsliding. But *Christian* opposition! —that was something which human intelligence would never have surmised as possible in the apostolic era. That the Christian Church should ever reign over the kings and nations of the world at all seemed extremely improbable. But that, being so exalted, its influence should be for evil, and not for good,— used to oppose Christ and His true witnesses,—that would have seemed well-nigh incredible! An evil world? Yes! But an *evil Church*? That was no native idea in Paul or in John! It was inspiration that foretold the actual though most improbable future. True, Christ had Himself predicted that Christendom would present a mixed condition of wheat and tares, good and bad; but this is something very different. It is a revelation that just as out of the incoherent mass of a Christianized world there would be gathered, by the working of Christ's Holy Spirit, a true Church, so out of the same mass would be also gathered, by the working of Satan, a false Church. This last would equally with the first be *an organic unity*, something different from a number of individual false professors, scattered all over Christendom like tares in a wheat-field. It would be one whole, a body with a head, which would govern and direct all its movements. But as no bond of true spiritual life would exist between its members, as in the case of the true Church, *this* body would have visible bonds of outward uniformities to unite each to all and all to the head. Moreover, this false Church would also be in some sense a bride. Not the chaste and beloved bride of Christ, joined to the Lord in one spirit, but a corrupt, faithless, worthless "harlot," selling herself to the kings of the earth for filthy lucre, until by them detested and destroyed prior to being whelmed under Divine judgments at the second advent of Christ.

It would be a counter "mystery," a Satanic parody of God's true Church. And its head would be a counter-Christ, an anti-Christ,—not by opposition, but by imitation,—not by fighting against Christ, but by substituting himself for Christ, putting himself in Christ's place, making men regard him as Christ's vicegerent. Just as the real Church would be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, so this false Church would be the leaven of the earth, corrupting it more than it is naturally corrupted, and would obscure the gospel light, love darkness, teach lies, and deny the truth. So far from witnessing for Christ, she would kill His witnesses; and so far from shedding her own blood for His sake, she would drink herself drunken with the blood of His martyrs.

Moreover, and this is a most important point, the existence of this false Church with its sinful human head—this imitation Church born of the working of Satan—would run parallel with the existence of the true Church; it would form the most conspicuous of the dangers and difficulties of the saints of God during the Christian dispensation. Its incipient workings were already apparent in the days of Paul; they would never cease until they produced, in his full-blown iniquity, "the man of sin," or human head of this false Church, and *he* would continue his career of blasphemous self-exaltation until destroyed by the second advent. Thus the *entire interval from Paul's day to the end of this age at the return of Christ*, would be occupied by the rise, culmination, reign, and decay of this corrupt Church system and its head. No time of peace and purity, no age of truth and righteousness, could

consequently be expected. The reign of "the man of sin," the rule of a false and persecuting Church, a Satanic propagation of delusion and error,—this was the future which the apostles foretold—this, and nothing but this, —until Christ comes again, and His people are caught up to meet Him in the air.¹

¹ Our subject here forbids us to do more than make A.D.ssing reference to the strange fact that while this is unquestionably *the apostolic programme*, the Church has so neglected its predictions as positively to have come to expect a state and age of millennial blessedness *before* the return of Christ! *No prediction of such an age can be found in the New Testament programme.* On the contrary, it uniformly presents the interval as one filled with most un-millennial characteristics—wars, famines, bloodshed, persecution of the truth, sackcloth witnessing, Jerusalem trodden down, the Jews dispersed, the leaven working corruption, the anti-Christ tyrannizing, iniquity abounding, love growing cold, faith failing, the virgins slumbering, the servants, many of them unfaithful, scoffers mocking, perilous times, even in the last days; and the question asked is, "When the Son of man cometh, will He find faith on the earth?" Where in *such* an age shall we place a millennium? Our New Testament programme never speaks of one at all until *after* the return of Christ, consequently the second advent must be *pre-millennial*.

Could the Holy Spirit have *omitted* the prediction of a prolonged age of purity and peace, if such were to come before the return of Christ? Why, it would have been naturally the most prominent feature of the programme! But He places the second advent, *not* the millennium, before the Church, as its hope. This advent *closes the existing Christian age*. The millennial age is a distinct one, *beginning* with the advent.

This is, however, a question of *unfulfilled* prophecy, and hence beyond our subject here. Those who wish to consider it are referred to our work on "The approaching End of the Age."

The apostolic predictions of this apostate Church are copious. They comprise more points than space will permit us to take up here. As our argument is evidential and not controversial, it will suffice if we show that an organization of immense importance, calling itself a Christian Church, and answering to every feature of these prophetic portraits, came into existence centuries after the prophecy was given, rose to a position of supremacy in the earth, ruled and reigned for ages, and exists in a decadent state to this day, awaiting the just judgment of God.

As the prediction of this apostasy is but *one* feature of *one* section of our programme, we can give but a few pages to its consideration; less than the immense evidential value of the fulfilment demands, but sufficient, we trust, to prove that it has been fulfilled.

Combining, then, the features of these two apostolic predictions, what is foretold in relation to the great apostasy of the Christian dispensation as to—

1. The *place* where it should arise.
2. The *historic juncture* at which it would appear.
3. The *period* which it would last.
4. The *political relations* it would sustain.
5. The *moral character* of its influence.
6. The *agents* by which it will be wasted.

7. The *climax* at which it will be destroyed.

Now, just as in looking for a certain place on the map we take its latitude and longitude from the table, and at the point where the two intersect find the spot we seek; or as in searching the heavens for a certain star we learn first its right ascension, and then its declination, and are thus guided to its exact position;—so the intersection of *all* the above lines cannot fail to enable us correctly to apply this complicated prophecy; and the application gives us the fulfilment.

If, at the place and in the sphere indicated, there arose at the predicted juncture an ecclesiastical power which has lasted for the period and stood in the political relations prophesied, which has borne the moral character and done the deeds foretold; if it has been gradually undermined and consumed by the very agents described, can we doubt that we have found the power intended?

The last point, the climax of its destruction, is still future. If all the other lines intersect in one and the same organization, and in *no other*, it must be the fulfilment we seek. Our point here is neither controversial nor theological, but simply evidential. If the result of search for a fulfilment leads us, as it inevitably must do, to stigmatize a certain ecclesiastical power as the great predicted apostasy, that is an incidental result only in this place; as the prophecy predicts an apostasy, the historic fulfilment, when discovered, must of course *be* an apostasy. We glance, then, over the whole eighteen Christian ages looking for the predicted apostasy, for a great, long-lasting, mighty, influential, reigning ecclesiastical power calling itself the Church of Christ.

We see many Churches—the “Catholic” Church, the Greek Church, the old Armenian and Nestorian and Coptic Churches, the young Protestant Churches of many lands. Many of them are grossly corrupted, some of them are decayed, half-dead. Which is THE great apostasy? Which is *the* false Church *par excellence*, the great enemy, the principal and cruel foe of the true Church, of that invisible “body” consisting of all true saints?

The apostolic predictions say you will find it seated at a certain *place*, and that place the seven-hilled city which reigned over the kings of the earth in John’s day—ROME.

Now we have our longitude! Turning away, therefore, from all Churches which have not had their centres at Rome, we fix our attention on those that have. We note that the apostles themselves planted a Church there, and that throughout the pagan persecutions that Roman Church yielded crop after crop of blessed martyrs, who fought and died in the Colosseum and other amphitheatres of the city, who were burned for Jesus’ sake on its lamp-posts, and whose ashes were laid in the dark catacombs, “in peace,” “in hope,” “in love.” Could this early Church—before the conversion of Constantine—be the apostasy? or can the young Protestant communities which have grown up in Rome of late years, can they be the Church of Rome which we seek?

We want our latitude as well as our longitude. The predictions give it. The

great apostasy was to arise at a certain juncture of history—in that notable period of time when the old Roman empire of the Caesars was just breaking up under the barbarian invasions, and when the young Romano-Gothic kingdoms were forming out of the fragments; that is, during the sixth and seventh centuries. The Western empire fell when Romulus Augustulus was persuaded by Odoacer to abdicate, A.D. 476; and the settlement of the new kingdoms which emerged from the flood occupied at least a couple of centuries. Hence the martyr Church of the first three centuries, though it was a Church of Rome, will not at all fit the prediction, nor will the modern Protestant Church there, since it only rose this century.

But there is a Church which, according to its own account of itself, exactly answers to this test. It is *the* Church of Rome, which began at that very period, has ruled all Europe from Rome for twelve centuries, and whose head is called the Pope of Rome. The prophecy shows that the head of this apostate Church would be a temporal sovereign as well as a chief priest. Cardinal Manning's "Origin of the Temporal Power of the Popes" traces it back to the historical juncture in question, and shows that the simple primitive bishops of the local Roman Church grew into popes after the fall of Romulus Augustulus, in consequence of the absence of imperial rulers in Rome.

So Paul said, alluding to the then existing imperial dynasty, "He who letteth will let" (or that which hinders will hinder) "until he be taken out of the way" (or providentially removed). "And *then* shall that Wicked" (the great head of the apostasy) "be revealed." On the removal of the imperial throne from Rome, the papal throne took its place.

The intersection, then, of these two lines of place and time withdraws our gaze from all other Churches, and proves that we must seek the fulfilment of all the other features of the prophetic portrait in THE PAPAL CHURCH OF ROME.

And here we must make a distinction, and quote one more prediction to make the matter clear, There is a great difference between a body and its head. We must distinguish between the papacy or papal dynasty—which is the *head* of the Church of Rome—and the Church which it founded, governed, and used as its tool. There is a difference similar in kind, though greater in degree, between the Head of the true Church and the Church which He founded, governs, and uses as His instrument to do His will in the world. Now the duration of the corrupt *Church* is never mentioned, but only that of *the reign of its head*. The prophecy represents this papal dynasty of temporal rulers, as it had previously symbolized other dynasties, as "a beast," a head of the ten-horned Roman beast. What period does it assign to the power of this dynasty? *Twelve hundred and sixty years*— between twelve and thirteen centuries.¹

¹ Rev. xiii. 5, xi. 3, xii. 6. The period indicated is the same in each case,—42 months of 30 days is 1,260 days,—and a day is the miniature symbol for a year, as a beast is for an empire. Daniel assigns the same period to the "little horn" of the Roman beast, which rules during its later history—another symbol of this power of the Roman papacy.

Can this period be traced in the history, not of the Romish Church, but of the reign of the papal dynasty? When did it rise? Between the two pope-exalting decrees of the Roman emperors of the East, Justinian and Phocas. Each of these potentates made a decree conceding to the bishops of Rome the

headship "of all the holy Churches, and of all the holy priests of God"; or, as the latter put it, "the headship over all the Churches of Christendom." The first was issued A.D. 533, and the second A.D. 607, while Phocas died in A.D. 610, The seventy-seven years between these dates were in a special sense *the era of the rise of the papacy*. It includes the life of the celebrated Gregory the Great, whose successor, Boniface III, may be considered in certain senses the *first of the popes*.

To these dates add 1,260 years, and the result is the period from A.D. 1793 to A.D. 1870. This period may be broadly considered as that of the downfall of the temporal power of the popes, the close of their reign over Europe, which had lasted for between twelve and thirteen centuries, as predicted. The first year marks the date of the reign of terror and crisis of the great French revolution, in the course of the wars of which the pope was dethroned by Bonaparte, Rome seized by the republican armies, a Roman republic proclaimed, and the pope removed from the Vatican and obliged to take refuge in Florence. In 1849 the pope (who had been restored) was again deposed, and a republic proclaimed; in 1860 there was an insurrection in the Papal States; in 1866 papal Austria was overthrown by Protestant Prussia at Sadowa; next year the monasteries in Venetia were suppressed, and the country annexed to the newly-formed Italian kingdom; the year after papal Spain was convulsed by a liberal revolution, and Garibaldi attempted an insurrection in Rome, which was suppressed only by French troops; while in 1870 came the great war between France and Germany, which led to the overthrow of the popish French empire, the withdrawal of her troops from Rome, and the union of Italy under Victor Emmanuel. He established his throne on the ruins of the temporal sovereignty of the popes in Rome, which had lasted for between twelve and thirteen hundred years.

Thus the series of events which ended in the complete destruction of the papal temporal sovereignty occupied a period of seventy to eighty years, removed by 1,260 years from the similar period which witnessed its first establishment. The popes are still rulers in their own apostate Church, and will be till the end. *They are no longer rulers in Europe, and never will be again*. Divine prophecy limited the days of their domination, and the same year which witnessed the decree of the new and blasphemous doctrine of papal infallibility witnessed also the downfall of the papal sovereignty, which had endured for more than twelve centuries.

How came John, in Patmos, in the days of Domitian, to foresee a downfall so distant? How came those events to fall out in harmony with his predictions—ay, and with Daniel's still earlier prophecy?

The line of *duration* intersects the others in this same Church of Rome with its dynastic papal head.¹

¹ There is an elaborate exactitude about the fulfilment of this chronological prophecy which we cannot even indicate here. The period has *various termini*, and is measured by lunar, calendar, and solar years, and crises of rise and fall correspond. The subject is carefully and fully treated in our work "Light for the Last Days." (Hodder & Stoughton.)

The Apostle John represents this apostate Church as corrupting the nations of the earth, and its head as ruling over them. He represents the *woman* as

sitting upon "many waters," and the angel explains that the waters are "peoples and nations." He represents her also as sitting on and upborne by the Roman beast—another expression of the same thing. What was the fact? That all through the middle ages the Romano-Gothic kingdoms of Europe submitted to papal Rome, and secured to her temporal benefits, in return for her supposed spiritual favours and blessings. Enlargement is needless for those familiar with history: Rome's domineering and tyrannical relations to the kingdoms of Europe in the past is a gigantic fact, and the cessation of that power of late is equally conspicuous.

The *moral character* attributed by the apostles to this power is exceedingly evil—about as dark as it well could be. Its main features are the practice and inculcation of idolatry under Christian names, corruption of doctrine, blasphemous self-exaltation of a man in the Christian Church, "showing himself that he is God," *quasi Deus*, as the popes claim to be, together with false miracles and lying wonders, and, above all, sanguinary persecutions of the saints of God, and systematic opposition to His truth.

Were these features one and all characteristic of the false apostate Church and her papal head?

Let the Reformation and its copious literature reply! The great fact of the secession of the sixteenth century speaks for itself, and its causes may be appreciated by a study of the burning accusations against Romish corruptions of such men as Wycliffe, Jerome of Prague, and John Huss, Tyndale and John Frith, Luther and Zwingli, Calvin and Melancthon, Cranmer, Latimer, and Hooper. The deceptions, wickednesses, and crimes of Rome are incredible, and all the more so because of her Christian profession. Her prohibition of marriage to the clergy, in opposition to the apostolic direction that a bishop should be the "husband of one wife," deluged Europe with the grossest immorality for centuries. Her withdrawal of the Bible from the people, her mixture of licentiousness and formality, her saint and virgin worship, her Jesuit principles, her tortures and inquisition, what words shall describe or what mind conceive their effect in darkening and exterminating the truth of God! Well are the ages of Rome's dominion styled "the dark ages"!

In brief, the apostles predict "a tyrannical power, of a Christian kind, to be seated at Rome, dressed in a robe of gaudy decoration; spreading its abuses and errors over the kingdoms of the earth, persecuting the Church of Christ, and deeply stained with its blood, especially that of its martyrs, its public witnesses and confessors, that same State holding a number of dependent kings under its yoke, and turning their strength and power, with their consent, to the furtherance of its designs. The complexity of the things in this single prophecy is sufficiently manifest. And since the complex whole has, point by point, been fulfilled, and that not in an obscure corner, but in the heart of Christendom, . . . the inference is not to be evaded."

And lastly, the fate which Paul predicts for this apostasy prior to its final judgment is that it shall be "consumed" or wasted by the spirit of God's mouth; while John foretells also that political judgments will overtake it. The ten horns will at last hate, and reject, and desolate the whore they have

so long carried and supported.

This double prediction has been fulfilling for the last 300 years. The recovered Word of God—the “spirit of His mouth”—was the cause of the Reformation—a movement that diminished and consumed Rome to an enormous extent. Prior—*just* prior to the beginning of the Reformation there was not for a brief time a single witnessing Church in Europe. They had all been exterminated by persecution. There was not an avowed meeting of protesters against Rome’s corruptions anywhere. Now there are about *a hundred and fifty millions of Protestants* in the world! Rome’s dominion was all but universal in Christendom in the sixteenth century, in the nineteenth nearly half Christendom (omitting the Greek Church) has escaped her tyranny, rejected her corruptions, and spurns her intoxicating cup. That is one fact; and another is, that even nations which remain in Romish darkness have, ever since the French revolution, been throwing off the yoke of Rome’s authority, refusing her guidance, secularizing her revenues, closing her monasteries, expelling her Jesuits, neglecting her confessionals, and ridiculing her pretensions. Infidelity, as well as true religion, has been at work for her overthrow. The spirit of God’s mouth on the one hand, and the revolt of human intelligence against superstition and selfish tyranny on the other, have combined to lower the pride and abate the power of the once mighty papal dynasty; and, though its claims are as great and as blasphemous as ever, its ability to enforce them is gone.

All the six tests we proposed to apply concur, therefore, in showing that the papal Church of Rome has fulfilled, in the course of its long career, every feature of these apostolic predictions, and that on a scale which, before the event, no one would have believed possible. The marks of Divine prescience in these predictions are singularly clear.

“To foretell that a religion pure and excellent as that of the gospel would in some future time be depraved was to foretell nothing improbable. For what is there so sacred in truth which the wickedness and mistakes of men, or the love of novelty, or the spirit of enthusiasm, or policy and interested designs, will not model anew, and distort from its original rectitude? Error and heresy are nearly coeval (existing during the same period) with truth. They began to work as soon as Christianity was taught, and they may be expected to attend it to its latest day of trial. But in the predictions of the corrupted state of the Christian faith, which we are now considering, there are definite signs of a foreknowledge very different from the deductions of probability, calculated on the general principles of human weakness or human depravity. The prophetic criteria are precise, and they are such as must be thought to have militated with all rational probability, rather than to have been deduced from it. For that the doctrines of celibacy, and of a ritual abstinence from meats, against the whole genius of the gospel, by an authority claiming universal obedience, should be set up in the Christian Church; that “a man of sin” should exist, exalting himself in the temple of God, and openly challenging the rights of faith and honour due to God; that he should advance himself by signs and lying wonders, and turn his pretended miracles to the disproof and discredit of some of the chief doctrines or precepts of Christianity; and that this system of ambition and

falsehood should succeed, that it should be established with the submission and, indeed, with the deluded conviction of men still holding the profession of Christianity, which is the prophecy of St. Paul, is a *paradox of prediction* which must be allowed to surpass the ordinary limit of human observation, and almost to exceed the power which man has to corrupt the best gifts of God. The natural incredibility of it is, not that such errors and abuses should be established in the world, but that they should be grafted on the Christian faith, in opposition to and in outrage of its genius and its commands, and take a bold possession of the Christian Church. There, however, they have been grafted, and there they have had possession, and the strength of the improbable fact is the proof of the prophetic inspiration." ("Davidson on Prophecy" (Warburton Lecture), pp. 327, 328.)

Continued in [Chapter VII. The Christian Programme – Part V. The Apocalyptic Section of the Programme](#)

All sections of The Divine Programme of The World's History By H. Grattan Guinness

- [Introduction](#)
- [Chapter I. The Adamic Programme. – Part I](#)
- [Chapter I. The Adamic Programme. – Part II](#)
- [Chapter II. The Noahic Programme. – Part I](#)
- [Chapter II. The Noahic Programme. – Part II.](#)
- [Chapter II. The Noahic Programme. – Part III.](#)
- [Chapter III. The Abrahamic Programme – Part I.](#)
- [Chapter III. The Abrahamic Programme – Part II.](#)
- [Chapter III. The Abrahamic Programme – Part III.](#)
- [Chapter IV. The Mosaic Programme – Part I.](#)
- [Chapter IV. The Mosaic Programme – Part II.](#)
- [Chapter V. The Davidic Programme. – Part I.](#)

- [Chapter V. The Davidic Programme. – Part II.](#)
- [Chapter VI. The Daniel Programme – Part I.](#)
- [Chapter VI. The Daniel Programme – Part II.](#)
- [Chapter VI. The Daniel Programme – Part III.](#)
- [Chapter VI. The Daniel Programme – Part IV. The Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks](#)
- [Chapter VII. The Christian Programme – Part I.](#)
- [Chapter VII. The Christian Programme – Part II.](#)
- [Chapter VII. The Christian Programme – Part III.](#)
- [Chapter VII. The Christian Programme – Part IV.](#)
- [Chapter VII. The Christian Programme – Part V. The Apocalyptic Section of the Programme](#)