

did not exist until the church apostatized from the New Testament pattern. The term can hardly refer to an elder for all the churches of the first century had a plurality of elders. It would seem more likely to refer to the preachers or evangelists of the churches. Particularly does this become so when we recall that each church represents a church epoch or period. This apocalyptic uncovering is entrusted to the preachers throughout the sevenfold history of the church. Christ was holding them in His hand to support and strengthen them throughout the gospel age.

CHAPTER II

LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

INTRODUCTION

The letters to the seven churches of Asia were composed in accordance with an exact literary arrangement. Each one consists of the same parts: a salutation to the church addressed; a description of Christ from some particular aspect with direct relation to the spiritual condition of the church; a message of praise or censure; exhortations in keeping with the special need, a promise to him that overcometh and an admonition "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

The only exception to this symmetry is in the matter of the last part—the admonition. In each of the first three letters it precedes the promise to the overcomer; in the last four letters it follows his promise.

The distinction makes two groups of letters, one of three and the other of four, just as the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven vials are divided into two groups each, of four and three. In this study of the seven letters see chart following page 41.

The Church in Ephesus

Text (2:1-7)

1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: **2** I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and

didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not, and didst find them false; 3 and thou hast patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast not grown weary. 4 But I have this against thee, that thou didst leave thy first love. 5 Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent. 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

vs. 1 It was perfectly natural that the first church addressed should be the one in Ephesus. The city was the capitol of the province and its chief religious and commercial center. It was called "The light of Asia". One of the seven wonders of the world, the temple of Diana, or Artemis, was located there. Here Paul founded the church and labored with it for more than three years, (Acts—chapter 18) and afterward addressed to it one of the New Testament epistles. Later he sent Timothy there and addressed two letters to him. Here, too, if early church tradition is to be accepted, John labored from about A. D. 70 until his death.

It was natural that the first message should be addressed to the church nearest to the apostle's heart.

"These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the golden candle sticks." By some such phrase each letter is linked to the divine Christ.

In Bible language, to have a thing in one's right hand means to have it under one's power. "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. (Exodus 15:6)

The word "holdeth" in this verse is a stronger term than the "had" in (Revelation 1:16). In this salutation Christ assured the Ephesian church, which represented the infant church of the first century that he was not only walking among the churches but holding them in his strong right hand.

vs. 2 The patience of the church had been severely tried in its very inception, but Christ said, "I know thy works, and thy labor."

The church was not only to be praised for its work for Christ, but for the travail of labor in bringing the man-child, Christ, to the world.

The church also was commended for its utter abhorrence of those who were evil. This is all the more remarkable when we re-

member that these Ephesian Christians had but recently left the vileness of paganism. It puts the modern church, with its tolerance for all kinds of worldliness, to shame.

Again the church is commended for its rejection of false apostles. How well they had learned of John himself how such a test should be made. He had taught, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of anti-christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come. And even now already is in the world." (I John 4:1-3)

There was no false softness in those first Christians; they found such to be plain liars.

vs. 3 For Christ's name sake the church had borne the labor of opposing those who would corrupt the gospel and had not grown weary, knowing in due season they would reap if they fainted not.

vs. 4 After these words of praise a stain on the church is pointed out. They had been loyal to the truth, orthodox in the faith and outstandingly clean in life, but they had not maintained the ardor and devotion of their first love. Nothing but the fervent love of the bride can satisfy the Bridegroom.

The church had fallen into the temptation to which contenders for the faith once and for all delivered to saints are peculiarly exposed, namely, that of censoriousness, suspicion, bitterness, factiousness and division over non-essentials. Zeal for pure doctrine easily degenerates into hatred for those who differ in their beliefs.

vs. 5 Christ's rebuke is sharp. If they fail to remember from whence they are fallen and repent and do the first works, he will come, and that quickly, and remove their candlestick out of its place.

He would not come in person, but in providence and judgment.

vs. 6 But here is another ground for commendation. "Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate."

The exact origin of this sect and character of its beliefs are in dispute, but it is generally thought that the followers of Nicolas taught that Christian liberty meant licence. More will be given on this sect when it comes to full flower in the life of the Pergamos church.

vs. 7 "He hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches."

Since he addressed this injunction "unto the *churches*," it becomes evident that the epistle was not addressed to one local church alone, but to all the churches of the Ephesian period of church history.

This is a characteristic saying of the Lord. None other makes use of it. He employs it in connection with certain of His utterances in order to impress upon us their peculiar importance. It occurs eight times in the gospels, where in each case the plural "ears" is used. (Matt 11:15, 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9,23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35)

It occurs eight times in Revelation, in each of the seven letters, and again in Rev. 13:9, where the singular "ear" is used—in each case.

"To him that overcometh", is an expression peculiar to John. It occurs once in his gospel, six times in his epistles, I, II and III John, and sixteen times in Revelation, but only three times in all the remainder of the New Testament.

The reward to the overcomer is "to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God". This tree is seen in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9; 3:22), then here in this letter to Ephesus and, finally, in the New Jerusalem. (Rev. 22:2)

The Tree of Life is seen in the garden of Eden and man was driven from it after he had sinned in eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, lest he should eat of the Tree of Life and live forever. Now in overcoming sin, of transgression, of omission and seduction to false teaching, he is given access to the Tree of Life that he may live forever sinless.

Thus we see the tree figures prominently in the sinless earth at first and then again it figures conspicuously in the vision of the glorified earth with which the book ends. It is a figure of eternal blessedness, eternal salvation in its fullest sense.

The Church in Smyrna *Text (2:8-11)*

8 And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who was dead, and lived again: **9** I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them that say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. **10** Fear not the things which thou art about to

suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life. 11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

INTRODUCTION

“To the angel of the church of Smyrna write”:

Following the letter to the church in Ephesus, it is quite natural that the church in Smyrna should be the next addressed. The city lay just forty miles north of Ephesus and still is second in importance. As Ephesus was called “The Light of Asia”, Smyrna, because of its charming surroundings, was called “The Beauty of Asia.”

The history of the planting of the church is unknown, but during the second century the church was quite prominent. Since the city had a large Jewish population, which was bitterly opposed to Christ and His church, it came to be known as “the suffering church”, because of persecution.

vs. 8 To the church in Smyrna, Christ very fittingly presented himself as “the First and the Last, who was dead and is alive.” To this martyr church came the cheering word that its head and Lord had triumphed over death and the grave.

It was well for the church now farther removed from Pentecost to be so saluted. He had been with the church from the beginning, as symbolized in the Ephesian epoch and he would be with the church through this church period, yea, even to the last one.

He wanted them to know that he was not dead, but alive. While he had given up His life, He had broken the shackles of death in the resurrected life. So if persecution should exact the extreme sacrifice of their lives He wanted them to hold fast to the promise, “For if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.” (Romans 8:11)

vs. 9 He wanted them to understand that He knew of their works, which stirred up such persecution that they experienced great tribulation. Also He knew that their tribulation had produced their poverty.

The first century with its advantage of the newness of the gospel message has now passed and persecution sets in. Like Jesus enjoyed the period of popularity to be followed by that of opposition, so the Smyrnan church meets persecution.

But they were rich—rich in faith, hope and fruitful works.

Their witness for Christ was accompanied by vilification and slander. This form of blasphemy was attributed to Christ's old enemies, the Jews. They were experiencing what Paul earlier had experienced at Antioch of Pisidia where the Jews blasphemed and contradicted the preaching of Paul and Barnabas. (Acts 13:44-46)

While all this was true yet there is a deeper meaning here. These were claiming to be Jews in the sense that they claimed to be the true Israel of God in opposition to the rightful claim of the persecuted church to this designation.

Paul said, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Romans 2:28, 29)

This is further evidence by these Jews being called "the synagogue of Satan, who is called the devil in verse 10. This is the first mention in Revelation of the great adversary.

Christ here denies the right of these opposers to employ the term "Jews" in the sense of being God's chosen people.

Here in verse nine the reference is made to what might be called ecclesiastical activities of the adversary; for one of the most successful devices against the true church is the organization of religious societies in imitation of the true church.

The pure primitive church was not an organization of government, but an organism of life, Christ being the head of his mystical, spiritual body. The church at Smyrna was opposed by such an organization. Those, who opposed the true church, professed to be "Jews", the symbolical name of God's people.

They set up substitute organizations for the church and declared they were just as good as those who refused to depart from the scriptural pattern. Christ calls this blasphemy. He stripped off their outward pretention and revealed them for what they were "the Synagogue of Satan."

Paul, the apostle likewise employs the name "Satan" in the same connection for in warning against false apostles who sought to pass

themselves off as the apostles of Christ, he said, "And no marvel for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:13-15)

It is significant that the only other church, besides that at Smyrna, which received unqualified commendation from Christ (The Philadelphia church) was also opposed by them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie." (Rev. 3:9)

vs. 10 The church was to fear none of those things because of the reasons about to be presented. The activities of the adversary take the form of physical persecutions. He wanted them to know that back of their suffering, imprisonment and trials was none other than the devil, using men and institutions as his agents.

He declared, "Ye shall have tribulation ten days" The number "ten" in Bible symbology indicates a complete testing, or trial to the limit of human endurance. Thus Jacob complained that Laban had changed his wages "ten times". (Gen. 31:7,41). The plagues of Egypt were "ten" in number (Ex. Chapters 7,8,9,10,11,12,13) Israel was tested with ten commandments. (Ex. 20:1-19). God's patience had been tried to the limit. He said, they had tempted him now these "ten times". (Numbers 14:22) Daniel requested that he and his companions be tested "ten days". (Daniel 1:12-15).

So the church at Smyrna was to be fully tested, as the persecuted church.

He said, "Be thou faithful unto death" (unto martyrdom). For this they were to have, not a royal crown, but the garland crown of victory over death. (I Cor. 9:24,25) (II Timothy 4:8)

vs. 11 Again it is a call to be heeded, not only by the Smyrnan church but "the churches", which the one at Smyrna represented. "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." Those who win this incorruptible crown shall live forever. This corruptible shall put on incorruption (I Cor. 15:54,55). To die the second death is to me sent from the final judgment throne into hell (Rev. 20:14,15). They might suffer the death of the body, but not of the soul.

The Church in Pergamos
Text (2:12-17)

12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword: 13 I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is; and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwelleth. 14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner. 16 Repent therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.

INTRODUCTION

This church was the farthest north, geographically speaking, of the seven churches in Asia. The city was a great religious center. The temple of Aesculapius was located there, to which sufferers came for healing from the four corners of the empire. Here also were the temples of Zeus, or Jupiter, Dionyson or Apollo. It was a perfect pantheon of pagan dieties.

Here Polycarp, that great Christian martyr was burned alive.

vs. 12 The salutation. Christ here presents Himself as, "He that hath the sharp sword with two edges."

How appropriate this salutation! Owing to the fact that conditions were to be found in this church which called for refutation by the word of God it was altogether fitting that, the two-edged sword, which is the Word of God, should be the symbol under which Christ presented Himself to this church period.

The bearing of this is seen in verse 16, where speaking of those whom He had just reproved, He says, "Repent or else I will come quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

vs. 13 This verse contains strong commendation. "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is." "Seat" here signifies "throne". This church was in a place of peculiar danger, being directly exposed to the Adversary. "Satan's Seat" here;

some have supposed referred to the worship of Aesculapius, from the serpent being his characteristic emblem.

But there seems to be a deeper meaning here. It is called "Satan's seat" here because it was where Satan's authority was in some special way acknowledged.

It must be noted that his devices in this case did not take the form of either spurious Christianity, or of physical persecutions as at Smyrna, but were of the nature similar to the device employed by Baalam against Israel of old.

Of course, these epochs blend somewhat and we do find some faithful saint, named Antipas suffering martyrdom, and we also know Polycarp was burned alive, but the opposition took on a new dress here;—something more subtle and deceiving.

vs. 14 It will be profitable here to give a brief study of the doctrine of Baalam. Baalam taught Balak, the King of the Moabites, to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel. Balak wanted the children of Israel cursed, but God would not permit Baalam to curse them as long as Israel was faithful to God's commandments.

So Baalam then taught Balak to induce the children of Israel to indulge in the heathen worship and orgies, and then, of course, they would fall under the curse of God. This was accomplished through the women of Moab, by whom the Israelites were seduced into to take part in idolatrous practices and to commit fornication (Numbers 25:1-3).

Evidently, here the true church, the Israel of God in the Christian dispensation, was enticed to commit spiritual fornication. The sin that answers to this on the part of the "Israel of God" today (Gal. 6:16) is their participation in the formal and ceremonial exercises of religious bodies, whose form of worship is not after the New Testament pattern.

And this is just what happened historically to the church in the Pergamos period. The church had just gone through the persecution under Diocletian A. D. 303 to A. D. 313. Myers describes that persecution:

"Toward the end of his reign, Diocletian inaugurated against the Christians a persecution which continued until his abdication, and which was the severest, as it was the last, waged against the church by the pagan emperors.....

For ten years, which, however, were broken by short periods of respite, the Christians were subjected to the fierce flames of persecution..It was during this and the various other persecutions that vexed the church in the second and third centuries that the Christians sought refuge in the catacombs."Pp. 522, 523 Myer's Ancient History. Revised Edition 1904

After the abdication of Diocletian, and the joint reign of Galerius and Constantine of only one year, Constantine was proclaimed emperor. In the now famous Battle of Milvian Bridge A. D. 312, Constantine's standard on this celebrated battle field was the Christian cross. And it was beneath this emblem that his soldiers marched to victory. This act constituted a turning point in the history of the Roman Empire, and especially the fortunes of the Church of Christ.

By a decree issued at Milan A. D. 313, the year after the battle of Milvian Bridge, the Edict of Toleration was issued and Constantine placed Christianity on an equal footing with the other religions of the empire. The Edict read as follows: "We grant to Christians and to all others full liberty of following the religion which each must choose." Hear Myers again:

"By subsequent edicts Constantine made Christianity in effect the state religion and extended to it a patronage which he withheld from the old pagan worship. By A. D. 321 he had granted the Christian societies the right to receive gifts and legacies, and he himself enriched the church with donations of money and grants of land. . . . From this moment can be traced the decay of its (the church's) primitive simplicity and a decline from its high moral standard. It is these deplorable results of the imperial patronage that Dante laments in his well-known lines!

Ah Constantine! of how much ill the mother,
Not by conversion, but that marriage dower
Which the first wealthy Father took from thee."

Inferno XIX 115-117

Myers Ancient History P. 526.

As Dante said, Constantine was not converted, but because he won the Battle of Milvian Bridge he embraced Christianity and

made his soldiers and subjects Christian. Being a pagan, there were brought into the church many pagan practices.

Thus the doctrine of Baalam, the doctrine of Compromise characterized the Pergamos Period.

Constantine called the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) at Nicaea, a town of Asia Minor, and the first creed, or formula of faith was adopted, now known as the Nicene Creed. It was the fore-runner of all human creeds.

vs. 15 Here we read, "so hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes which thing I hate."

This departure made its first appearance in the first church period—the Ephesian. There it was referred to as the "deeds" of the Nicolaitanes; here it is their "doctrine."

The clue to an explanation is found in the name itself, and this is worthy of consideration because we find support in the meaning of the name "Baalam", which occurs in the previous verse.

The name "Nicolas" which belonged to the person of whom these Nicolaitanes were followers, means "one who conquers," or "Lords it over" the people.

Now it can hardly be a coincidence in a book where names and numbers, as well as objects, are used as symbols, that the name "Baalam" in Hebrew has practically the same meaning as "Nicolas" in the Greek.

This would point to the conclusion that "Nicolaitanism" was some form of heresy having for its object that of bringing the Israel of God into some sort of spiritual bondage.

In this church period there did occur such a compromise as portrayed in the doctrine of Baalam. Also there occurred in the same epoch, and following closely on the doctrine of compromise, a lording it over of God's people.

How logical then that these Nicolaitanes should first be mentioned in the first church epoch—the Ephesian! There Christ saw the beginning of such a departure.

How many times the Holy Spirit leaves some hidden door, which when discovered, makes proof of a truth crystal clear!

In (Acts 20:28-31), we have an account of Paul calling the elders of this same Ephesian church, which Christ used to symbolize the first church period, to meet him at Miletus. (Acts 20:17).

His conference with them was in the nature of a stern warning, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over

which the Holy Spirit had made you overseers, to feed the church of God." For I know this, that after my departing shall greivous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock. Also *of your own selves* shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

This clinches the proof of the nature of the Nicolaitane doctrine—the doctrine of overlordship. In the New Testament church, there was a *plurality of elders over one congregation*, but never was there one elder, or bishop over a plurality of congregations.

The departure from the primitive order of government began right in the eldership. The seed was dormant in the elders of Ephesus, but came to life and developed in the Ephesian period. And by the time we reach the Pergamos period, we find a bishop presiding over a group of congregations. This was the over-lordship of Nicolaitanes. And it was this very departure that changed the form of government of the first century church, and, the Nicolaitane government meeting in church councils, wrote the first human creed—the Nicene. This inaugurated the apostacy which produced bishops, arch bishops, prelates, cardinals and finally the papa, or pope.

It corrupted the church in government and substituted human creeds, catechisms, and human confessions of faith, for the Authority of the Word of God. No matter of wonder then, that Christ said of the Nicolaitanes in both the Ephesian and the Pergamos periods of church history "I hate this thing." No wonder, then this doctrine only in the embryonic stage in the Ephesian, but now in full flower in the Pergamos period, was so hateful to Christ that He introduced Himself in the salutation to this Pergamos church, "These things saith He that hath the sharp sword with two edges." (Rev. 2:12)

Since the sharp sword with the two edges is the Word of God, His salutation becomes understandable. The only way to fight departures from the primitive order was to wield the sharp sword of the Spirit—the Word of God. Hence the call:

vs. 16 "Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

From the wording of this warning it appears that we have here the case of a whole church being carried away with this evil doctrine, as the Ephesian church was charged with falling away from its first love. For Christ says, "I will come to thee and fight

against them"—those who teach and practice this pernicious and hateful doctrine.

Yet the call to repent was to the whole church, which is, of course, responsible for the evils allowed to exist in its midst.

vs. 17 Finally, came the wonderful promises: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." This appears in contrast to eating things sacrificed to idols. (Rev. 2:14) In connection with the mention of Manna, Christ calls Himself the Bread of life. (John 6:48, 49). Christ is unseen walking among the churches, hence called the Hidden Manna. He is the bread from heaven. "And I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written." Among the Greeks a white stone was a symbol of acquittal, as a black stone was one of guilt. The white stone speaks of justification and victory over this abominable doctrine of overlordship.

The gift of a new name carries with it some great blessing of high honor. Christ is to have a new name known only to Himself, (Rev. 19:12) and His faithful followers also have a new name known only to themselves.

While the order of symmetry is changed, Christ gives the admonition "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Again it is not addressed to one church, but to *the churches*, proving again as in the two former church periods, the Pergamos church is symbolical of a period or epoch in church history.

Without this Nicolaitan apostasy of the Pergamos period, there could have been no following fruition of abomination in the succeeding Thyatira period.

The Church in Thyatira *Text (2:18-29)*

18 And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto burnished brass: 19 I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first. 20 But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication; and to eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication. 22 Behold, I cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into

great tribulation, except they repent of her works. 23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto each one of you according to your works. 24 But to you I say, to the rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, who know not the deep things of Satan, as they are wont to say; I cast upon you none other burden. 25 Nevertheless that which ye have, hold fast till I come. 26 And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give authority over the nations: 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers; as I also have received of my Father: 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

INTRODUCTION

While we have no account of the establishing of the church in Thyatira, it is likely it began when Lydia and her household returned from Philippi, for certainly she was considered faithful by Paul. So she certainly would be expected to establish the church, in her home city Thyatira.

The Salutation

This is the longest of the seven letters. It reveals further the methods employed by the great Adversary, exposing the "depth of Satan."

vs. 18 In this salutation it is noteworthy as being the only time in the apocalypse that Christ is presented as "the Son of God." He, as the Son of God, is also described as He, "who hath his eyes like a flame of fire and his feet are like unto burnished brass."

The combination of these two symbols is very significant. The symbols strikingly present the Lord as the One whose eyes search out every evil deed, and whose feet trample in judgment upon the wicked deeds of men.

There is a special reason, why He introduces Himself to this church period as the "Son of God." It is because of the peculiar conditions found in the Thyatira period.

We must remember always that each of these seven churches is but a type of a succeeding church period, each revealing something in the affairs and history of the church through the ages.

Here in this letter we are given to see the inception of that masterpiece of Satan's deception, that monstrous heresy, which reached fruition in what we know today as Romanism.

vs. 19 Christ begins with the statement: "I know thy works and charity, and service, and faith and thy patience and thy works; and the last to be more than the first." All these are peculiarly characteristic of the Roman Church. But you will note that her works are mentioned twice. While works are mentioned of other church periods, this is the only double reference to works. There is a reason.

A prominent feature of Romanism is its insistence upon works, and works that are wholly unlike those required of the New Testament church.

The works of the Roman church are derived mainly from pagan sources. This is not surprising when we remember our study under the Pergamos period how Constantine, the pagan Roman Emperor, embraced Christianity, not because of conversion, but because of a victory at Milvian Bridge. The unregenerated pagan flooded the church with pagan ceremonies and practices. In proof of this we quote from the *Externals of the Catholic Church*, "Her government, ceremonies, festivals, sacramentals, and devotions, by Rev. John F. Sullivan of the Diocese of Providence, second edition, Revised to conform to the new code of Canon Law. This is published by P. J. Kenedy & Sons New York 1918. It bears the approving names of Arthur J. Scanlan, S.I.D. Censor Librorum, and John Cardinal Farley, D. D. Archbishop of New York. March 27, 1918.

Just a few quotations to show the works of Romanism are pagan.

The Rosary—Page 186.

The use of some means of counting prayers is not restricted to catholics. The Brahmin of India or Tibet has his long rosary which he uses to measure his eternal repetitions of the praise of Buddha. The Mohammedan votary has his chaplet of ninety-nine beads to count his fervent invocations of Allah."

The use of the rosary "was established by St. Dominic, the famous founder of the order of Preachers, and he testifies in his writings that he acted under the direction of the Blessed Mother of God."

The Agnus Dei—Pages 204, 205, 206

"In every form of religion, even in the grossest paganism, it has been customary to consider certain objects as holy and to use them as means of supposed protection from evil."

The origin of this sacramental is a matter of great obscurity. When the people of Italy and other countries had been converted from idolatry, they retained some of their belief in charms and amulets; and it is probable that the Agnus Dei was devised as a substitute for these relics of paganism. The church in many instances took the religious customs with which the people were familiar, and made these customs christian.

They were first used in Rome, and it is possible that they go back as far as the final overthrow of pagan worship in that city, about the fifth century. Indeed, there is some evidence that they were in use even a little earlier, for in the tomb of Maria Augusta, wife of the Emperor Honorius, who died in the fourth century, was found an object made of wax and much like our Agnus Deis of the present time."

Holy Water—Chapter 27 entitled Holy Water

"It is interesting to note how often our church has availed herself of practices which were in common use among pagans. The church and her clergy are all things to all men, that they may gain all for Christ, and she has often found that it is well to take what was praiseworthy in other forms of worship and adopt it to her own purposes, for the sanctification of her children. Thus it is true, in a certain sense, that some catholic rites and ceremonies are a reproduction of those of pagan creeds, but they are the taking of the best in paganism, etc."

Then follows a detailed description of the use of holy water.

Pilgrimages—Chapter LV

"The pious practice of making journeys to distant shrines, . . . is by no means exclusively catholic. The Romans had their shrines of Jupiter Capitolinus at Rome, of Apollo at Delphi, of Diana at Ephesus. To visit Mecca at least once in his life-time is the ambition of the pious Mussulman. The great temples of India have their countless throngs of worshippers who have come to offer their homage to the Hindoo gods and to

pray at the shrines of Buddha. In encouraging the making of pilgrimages our church has made use of a practice which has produced good results in other creeds," pp. 300, 302

These are only a few quotations of many that could be made.

vs. 20 The introduction of the name of Jezebel, as a symbol of evil seen by those flaming eyes, is very enlightening. Jezebel, a name meaning "unchaste" was the daughter of Ethbaal (with Baal). She became the wife of Ahab, King of Israel. Through her influence the pagan worship of Baal became the state religion of the ten tribes.

Baalism was a licentious religion; and hence it fitly symbolized that monstrous apostacy of the church, whose essential characteristic is spiritual unfaithfulness to Christ.

In this church period the one great aim of this enemy of Christ, which is called "the depths of Satan" is to degrade the Lord Jesus Christ from his place as the Son of God.

As the Son of God He is presented in the Scriptures as the only way of access to the Father. He himself said: "I am the way, the truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me!" (John 14:6)

In complete opposition of this, though such opposition is cleverly disguised with almost diabolical cleverness, the Roman church systematically present Jesus Christ, not as the Son of God, but as the son of Mary.

In its doctrine, ceremonies, liturgy, pictures and images, this Jezebel church, with consummate and satanic craft, exalts Mary, making her the compassionate one, the efficacious intercessor in behalf of sinners, the mediatrix between God and man. Her devotees are led to put their trust in Mary instead of the "Son of God." You can see why He presents Himself, as to no other church period as "the Son of God."

Steadfastly, Mary is presented by the Roman Catholic church as the Mediatrix between God and man. The title given her is "Mary Mediatrix."

In the Marian Congress held in Ottawa in June, 1947, a one hundred foot statue of her was displayed in fireworks. She was pictured standing on a new moon, wearing a crown of stars, with a caption

beneath the figure which read, "Ad Jesumper Marian" which translated reads: To Jesus through Mary.

This is pure paganism to present Mary as Mediatrix. In Babylon they had a goddess which bore the name Myletta, that is "The Mediatrix".

In accordance with this role of Mediatrix, she was called Aphrodite—that is the wraths of Douer—who by her charms could soothe the breast of angry Jove. In Athens she was called Amarusia, that is the mother of gracious acceptance! In Rome she was called 'Bona Dea,'—the 'good goddess!'

All this is sufficient to prove the pagan character which is ascribed to the Virgin Mary. It is an extraordinary thing that throughout history across the lives of the people of the pagan world is the figure of a woman which closely resembles the Virgin Mary of today. In ancient Babylon she was Semiramis; in Assyria she was Astarte; in Egypt, Isis, in Greece, Aphrodite; in Rome, Venus. Many of the titles which have been given to the Virgin Mary by the Roman Catholic church have been taken directly from paganism. Hesiod, one of the earliest Greek writers describes her as "the mother of the gods." Catholics call Mary "the mother of God!"

"And this introduction of rank paganism traced back to the Thyatira period of church history which began in the fourth century.

Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople set himself against this. Quoting him, "Has God," said he, "a mother?" Then is paganism to be pardoned for introducing a mother of the gods, and St. Paul is a liar, who said in speaking of Christ's god-head that it is without father or mother or descent. Let us cease to call Mary, her who bore God, that we be not tempted to become pagans." At this point the sermon was interrupted by the shout "That is atheism!"

From third chapter, 2nd volume of his "Handbook to the Controversy with Rome" by Karl Von Hase, professor of Theology in the University of Jena for 53 years, 1830 to 1883.

And this in the light of Mary's declaration (Luke 1:47) that she needed a savior! If she needed a Savior, how could she become a savior? Also this in the light of Paul's statement, "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Jesus Christ." (1 Timothy 2:5). How then can Mary be called "Mediatrix?"

Not until 1854 was she declared Immaculate, on December 8th of that year. After the question had been considered by a special

commission of cardinals and theologians, and after consulting with the entire college of cardinals, Pope Pius IX solemnly declared the dogma in Peter's church in Rome in the presence of more than two hundred cardinals, bishops and others, who had been invited to the assembly. After mass and singing he read as follows:

"That the most blessed Virgin Mary, in the first moment of her conception, by a special grace and privilege of Almighty God, in virtue of the merits of Christ, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin."

He decreed this to be a divinely revealed fact and dogma which must be believed constantly and firmly by the faithful. Those who refuse to accept it must be cut off from the church.

It was not until the end of the so called holy year of 1950 did the present pope declare the doctrine of her assumption. This then reached the fullness of paganism to deify her as ascending directly to heaven in bodily form. No wonder Christ spoke of the Thyatira church as "the depths of Satan."

In Biblical symbology, and particularly in the apocalypse, a woman is the symbol of an elaborate religious system. In this instance Jezebel stands for a system of doctrine, in that she is referred to as "a prophetess" one who taught Christ's servants to commit fornication—spiritual unchastity.

vs. 21 She was given time to repent for this spiritual fornication but she refused to repent. History has shown how she has only grown worse.

vs. 22 Sickness and a bed are scriptural symbols of affliction and punishment. Even today we have a saying; "He made his own bed, let him lie in it."

Her adultery was like the adultery of Israel. (Jer. 3:6-11) (Ezek. 16:23-42)

vs. 23 The words, "I will kill her children with death is significant as she teaches that she is the mother of all churches. Rome delights in the name "mother."

Her children are her adherents and Christ said he would kill them with death. This visitation of judgment would cause all the churches to know that Christ searcheth the reins and hearts of men and will reward every man according to his works. This word "works" calls up the idolatrous works of the Thyatira church, into which Christ looks with "eyes like unto flames of fire." (Rev. 2:18)

vs. 24 Evidently not all in Thyatira were involved in this paganism, because Christ has a special word of encouragement for them, "the rest in Thyatira (as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of satan, as they speak), I will put upon you none other burden.

vs. 25 The only burden he would lay upon them was "to hold fast until I come."

vs. 26 A prominent feature of Romanism is its settled purpose, from which it has never deviated in all the centuries of existence, to exercise "power over the nations." She has always advocated union of church and state and the power to crown and uncrown kings.

How appropriate, then, is this promise to those of Thyatira who overcome this pagan doctrine—the depths of satan. "I will give him power over the nations!" In the coming period when Christ shall rule all kingdoms the saints which have endured shall reign with him.

vs. 27 A sceptre of iron means a firm and enduring power. The word "rule" in the original means "to rule as a shepherd." It will not be the cruel rule of a dictator, but the gentle guardianship of a shepherd, even Christ, the good shepherd, who laid down his life for the sheep.

Christ will break the nations in pieces and all shall become one under the rule of Him.

vs. 28. The promise of the Morning Star points to the possession of Christ in some special way. It is one of the titles of Christ. In Rev. 22:16 He says of Himself, "I AM the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star." Christ will give to those who overcome "the depths of satan," a fellowship with Himself in that they shall share his dominion.

Summary Thus we have traced Paul's "mystery of iniquity (which) doth already work" (2 Thess. 2:7), called in the Ephesian period, "the deeds of the Nicolaitanes;" in the Smyrna period, "the synagogue of satan; in the Pergamos period, "the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes," "where Satan's seat is," and in the Thyatira period, "the doctrine of Jezebel," "the depths of satan."

Here in the Thyatira period the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes—the doctrine of overlordship—reached "the depths of satan."

We traced briefly in the Pergamos period how the simplicity of

the policy of the New Testament church was supplanted by a rising ecclesiastical hierarchy in the elevation of men in authority over the churches. "The depths of Satan" was reached in the Thyatira period when the bishop of Rome—called "papa" or "pope" gradually assumed supreme authority over the churches.

There began the growth of an empire within an empire. Quoting from Myer's Ancient History, pages 582, 583 we read:

"Long before the fall of Rome there had begun to grow up within the Roman Empire an ecclesiastical state, which was shaping itself into the imperial model. This spiritual empire, like the secular one, possessed a hierarchy of officers, of which deacons, priests or presbyters, and bishops were the most important. These bishops collectively formed what is known as the Episcopate. There were four grades of bishops, metropolitans or archbishops, and patriarchs." At the end of the fourth century there were five patriarchs, that is, regions ruled by patriarchs. These centered in the great cities of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

Among the patriarchs, the patriarchs of Rome were accorded almost universally a precedence in honor and dignity. They claimed further a precedence in authority and jurisdiction. Before the close of the eighth century there was firmly established over a great part of christendom what we may call an ecclesiastical monarchy."

This ecclesiastical monarchy reached the "depths of satan" when, after centuries of argument, the doctrine of the infallibility of the pope was made a canon law in the year 1870 A. D. by the council called for that purpose by Pius IX.

With the growth of the papal state spiritually there was also a parallel development of the temporal power of the popes.

"In the dispute about the use of images in worship, known in history as the "war of the Iconoclasts," which broke out in the eighth century between the Greek churches of the East and the Latin churches of the West, drew after it far-reaching consequences as respects the growing power of the Roman Pontiffs. In this quarrel with the Eastern Emperors the Roman bishops formed an alliance with the Frankish princes of the Carolingian house. The popes consecrated the Frankish

chieftians as kings and emperors; the grateful Frankish kings defended the popes against all their enemies . . . Such in broad outline was the way in which grew up the papacy."

Myers Ancient History pages 585, 586.

Thus for centuries we behold union of church and state until July 2, 1871 when Victor Emmanuel entered Rome and took up his residence there.

"The occupation of Rome by the Italian government marked the end of the temporal power of the pope, and the end of an ecclesiastical state, the last in Europe, which from long before Charlemagne had held a place among the temporal powers of Europe . . . the papal troops, with the exception of a few guardsmen, were disbanded. . . . By a statute known as the Law of the papal guarantees (1871), the pope was assured in the exercise of his spiritual functions."

Thus, finally, as a result of the reformation the doctrine of the Nicolitanes, "which thing I hate" said Christ, was refuted, both in its spiritual and temporal functions. However, it must be said in the interest of truth that the doctrine still holds sway, spiritually, in the overlordship of the papacy over the Roman church, and, temporally, in the eternal struggle of the pope to regain his power over the nations.

In these letters we have revealed or uncovered to us those tactics the great adversary, the devil, employs against the church of Christ.

vs. 29 Again we meet with the statement which indicates that Thyatira, like the three churches before it, represents not just one church, but the churches of a period. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the *Churches*."

CHAPTER III

THE SALUTATION

THE SARDIS CHURCH

Text (3:1-6)

3 And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead.