

Treatise on Revelation (Section 3)

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* See the Catch Words

that heaven of the Roman throne & in its room the Christian religion was exalted to the throne: then did the honour, riches, power & temporal advantages of this religion begin to tempt the heathens dayly to turn Christians; & in such converts who for temporal interest thus flowed into the Church the Devil now came down amongst the Christian people of the Eastern & Western Empires called the Inhabitants of the Earth & Sea. For such Converts being the most hypocritical sort of men, & under profession of Christianity retaining their old heathen vices & their inclination to all kinds of superstition, they were still heathens in reality thô in profession Christians, & may deservedly be called the Synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews (that is Christians) & are not but do lye.

The visions of the woman & Dragon are a prophetical history of the fall of the heathen religion & the rise of the apostacy in its room & that fall was on this manner. Dioclesian A.C. 302 raised a persecution of the whole Church which was far greater then all the former persecutions taken together & lasted in the western Empire two years & in the eastern ten. In the end of this persecution Constantine the great was converted to Christianity, & at the same time by the conquest of Maxentius became Emperour of the West. Licinius {who} was now Emperour of the East & still vexing the Church but not violently for fear of Constantine, endeavoured by treachery to circumvent Constantine & make himself Emperour of the whole: whereupon a war arose between them, & Constantine overcame, & then the flourishing of Christianity brought in great numbers of converts. Now all this is thus designed in the prophesy. The woman [or Church] in heaven with Child [of a Christian Empire] cried [in this persecution of ten years] travailing in birth and pained to be delivered. And [at the same time] a great red Dragon [the Greek Empire] with his tail [or trains of attendants & officers civil & military] drew the third part of the stars of heaven [the saints of the Greek Empire] & cast them to the earth [that earth out of which the two horned beast afterwards arose] & the woman brought forth a Manchild [the Western Christian Empire under the dominion of Constantine the great] & the Dragon was ready [by the treacheries of Licinius] to devour her child as soon as it was born. And the Manchild [by the victory of Constantine over <2r> Licinius] was caught up unto God & to his throne [for at that time as we explained above] there was war in heaven; Michael [or the Manchild] & his Angels fought against the Dragon, & the Dragon fought & his Angels, & the great Dragon was cast out that old serpent called the Devil & Satan [the heathen religion] which deceived the whole world: he was cast out into the earth [of the Eastern Empire] And there was heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, Now is come salvation [from the persecuting Dragon] & strength & the Kingdom of our God [a Christian Empire] & the power of his Christ [or dominion of his mystical body the Christians.] For the accuser of our brethren is cast out who [in the persecution] accused them before our God, & they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb [slain afresh in his mystical body in that persecution] & by the word of their testimony. [the testimony of confessors & Martyrs] & [in the persecution] they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoyce ye heavens & ye that dwell in them [the victors over the Dragon, as many of them as are truly Saints] Wo to the inhabitants of the Earth & Sea [the hypocritical part of Christians & such as should not endure the following temptation] for the Devil [whom Michael cast out of heaven] is [by the flowing of dissembling heathens who say they are Christians & are not but do lye] come down unto you with great wrath because he knoweth that he hath but a short time [to reign among you untill he shall be cast in chains into the bottomless pitt] So then the Dragon in being cast out of heaven ceases not but begins a new reign on Earth among the Christian inhabitants of the Earth & Sea, the

Empire from these fals converts still keeping the Name of the Dragon & the Manchild in being caught up to heaven soon vanishing out of sight. While the Empire continued heathen the small encouragements for hypocrites to turn Christians was a guard upon the Christian religion to keep it from growing corrupt. For the mystery of iniquity which then worked could not grow to any maturity for want of hypocrites to work upon: but after that the heathen religion which thus withheld the revelation of this mystery, was taken out of the way, that mystery no longer wanting a fit people to work upon must begin to grow proportionally to the increase of hypocrites, & so as in a short time by the prevailing of such fals Christians to be revealed. For in a daily flow of such converts into the Churches, it could not be but that in a few years the hypocrites would be more then double or triple to the <3r> sincere; not to say more then ten or twenty times their number. Now by this influx of fals converts the mystery of iniquity grew in these respects.

First the Churches by the mixture & allay of such converts soon became very corrupt in manners. They that please to read the book of Salvian De Providentia Dei, an Author very sober cordate & pious will find that within less then an hundred years after Constantines victory, the Christians all over the Empire, were grown as much more debauched in manners (whoring, sodomy, blasphemy, covetousness, voluptuousness drinking, swearing, lying, backbiting, malice, fraud, injustice, rapine, oppression) then even the barbarous heretical Christians. This Salvian shews to satisfy his readers that God was just in subjecting the Romans to the violence & dominion of the barbarous Nations who in year 407 invaded the Western Empire. Nor is't a wonder that Christians should become so vicious in so short a time seing the most immoral of the heathens would be most apt to turn Christians for interest, & the most ambitious Christians would seek most for preferment in the Churches. Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical history tells us that Christians between the persecutions of Decius & Dioclesian through a respite of a few years from persecution began to grow very corrupt in manners: & much more would they grow corrupt in a more lasting peace when they were not only freed from persecution, but flourished in riches & honours & dominion over the world, & were dayly assayed & corrupted by the influx of the most hypocritical & consequently the worst of heathens. <4r> <5r> It would require a large discourse to give a full account of the manners of these times, but I do not think it necessary: I shall content my self with two or three passages out of the writers of those times.

Gregory Nazianzen in his Oration Of the Bishops reprehends them as addicted to fals & crafty perverting of right & reason, contentious, proud, as to knowledge rude & unskilfull, as to faith ready to embrace either side being swayed by the laws not of God but of the times, flatterers, Lyons to the inferiour people & fawning dogs to them in power, studious of eating & drinking well, & mindfull not of what is profitable but of what is gratefull to others, & then he crys out: O the mystery of godliness, which is now propagated almost throughout the whole world. He describes also how there was no care in electing Men of deserts into Bishopricks, but any novice who could make an interest was admitted: yesterday at play & publick spectacles, at horsraces, at dancing-bouts, at revellings, a publick Orator, a civil Magistrate, a soldier, to day created a Presbyter or Bishop. Yesterday <6r> a Simon Magus (buying a Bishoprick) to day a Simon Peter. And much to the same purpose he speaks in his Oration to the second general Council, & in several of his verses. And least you should think he did it out of peevishness for the loss of the Bishoprick of Constantinople, he touches upon the same immorality of the Clergy in his Oration, Of the praises of Basil, written about three years before: There is danger, saith he, least the most holy Order become most ridiculous. For the Priesthood is acquired not so much by virtue as by evil-doing & wickedness: nor are the thrones of the most worthy but of the most powerfull. And fifteen years before when upon his first return from the wilderness he was under his Father made Bishop of Nazianzum A.C. 360 in his Apology or first Oration (after the middle of it^[1]) he is large upon the vices & tempestuousness of that age wherein, saith he, the members are at war one with another, & if there be any Charity yet remaining, it is departing; & the Priesthood is an empty name, – & we are all pious in this one thing that we condemn others of impiety – & he is accounted best that can fasten most reproaches upon his Neighbour. – We observe one anothers faults not to lament 'em but to expose 'em, not to cure 'em but to inflict new wounds, & thence draw excuses for our own vices. Neither do we account Men good or evil according to their lives but according to friendship or enmity & what we praise to day we dispraise to morrow, & what we note for infamous in others we admire in our selves & easily pardon any wickedness in those who embrace impiety. Thus magnanimous are we in vice. And all things are in confusion like the world in the first Chaos, or like Men in a nocturnal fight where they cannot know their Friends from their Enemies or in a sea fight & storm wherein they perish in great confusion by falling foul on one another. And as the people is, so is the Priest & so are the Nobles. There are who quarrel about trifles & then engage parties, pretending the faith & so profaning the holy Name for private ends. Whence it comes to pass that we are grown odious to the Gentiles & (which is worst of all) we

can give no reason why not justly & deservedly: & even to the more honest of our own party we are infamous. We are become a new kind of spectacle not to Angels & Men, but to almost all the wicked in all times & places, in the Markets, in Feasts, in pleasures, in mournings. And now we are also acted upon the Stages (which I speak almost weeping) & are derided with the most impure & unchast; nor is there any scene so pleasing to the ear & eye as when a Christian is comically exposed. Also in the same Epistle before the middle describing how novices every where were exalted in the Church, he saith; We are so ill affected that the most of us (not to say all) almost before we cast off our first hair, & cease to babble like Children, before we enter <7r> into the divine Courts, before we know so much as the names of the Books of sacred scripture, before we know the Characters of the old & new Testaments or the Authors (for I do not yet say before we have washt away the spot of our Sins) if we have learnt two or three pious words & those not by reading but by hearing alone, or if we have learnt to sing a Psalm or two or to contract a cloak well or put on a Monastic girdle a little for a shew of piety (O the chief seates & the high-mindedness! For Samuel was holy from his cradle,) we are presently Wisemen & Masters & sublime in divine things & the chief among the scribes & Lawyers, & ordain our selves heavenly men & affect to be called Rabbi; nor is there any thing spoke literally in the Scriptures, but all things are to be understood mystically, & if for this we be not praised & extolled we are angry. These are the manners of those who have most of goodness & simplicity among us. For those who are more spiritual & generous, much condemning us & vexing us & accounting us triflers of no value, depart from us despising our communion as the communion of Men not pious. Thus Gregory of the Churches of that early age. In his other writings he describes a vehement contention between the eastern & western Churches, both in the Council of Constantinople (which in his Epistle to Olympius^[2] he calls πάσης ἀνατολικῆς καὶ δυτικῆς σύνοδον an universal Council of both the Eastern & Western Churches) & before & after. And being afterward invited to Synods he wrote in a letter to Saturninus: ^[3]All things by Gods blessing are well with us, this one thing excepted, that we are anxious & sollicitous about the Churches so filthily at variance. Reduce 'em if you can by any means to concord seing the Bishops meet again: for it is to be feared again least we now be shamed if this Synod has no happier an end then the former. And to Procopius;^[4] that he never saw a happy event of any council, they increasing rather then averting evils. For saith he, the contentious & desirous of dominion are pertinacious beyond what can be explained by my words. ^[5]And to Theodorus Bishop of Tyana: That he declined coming to Synods & conferences ever since he found many of them (to speak sparingly) wicked & flagitious. ‡ < insertion from f 6v > ‡ In the Council of Nice there was such traducing & libelling one another that nothing could be done till the Emperor Constantine came himself in person & moderated. And therefore in the Council of Tyre to prevent the like discords ordered a Prefect to be present there with a band of soldiers at hand. And in the following Councils where {t}his method was not taken, there were such doings as Gregory describes. Which made him in his poems compare the convening Bishops to Cranes & Geese & pertinacious warriors & profane stageplayers only drest in the habit of Bishops. < text from f 7r resumes > These ecclesiastical feuds & calamities so much complained of by Gregory & others of the same kind are mentioned by Socrates in the preface to the fifth book of his Ecclesiastical History as judgments of God upon the age for their wickedness. And the like manners of the Western Bishops amongst themselves, Sulpitius Severus (who wrote about the yeare 400) makes this mention. ^[6] Ac inter nostros perpetuum discordiarum bellum exarserat: quod jam per quindecim annos fœdis dissentionibus agitatum, nullo modo sopiri poterat. Et nunc, ut maximè discordijs Episcoporum turbari aut misceri omnia cernerentur, cunctaque per eos odi, aut gratia, metu, inconstantia <8r> invidia, factione, libidine, avaritia, arrogantia, desidia, essent depravata, postremo plures aadversus paucos bene consulentes; insanis consilijs & pertinacibus studijs certabant: inter haec plebs Dei et optimus quisque probro atque ludibrio habebatur. And in another place, speaking of the manners of the Clergy, he saith, ^[7]Præcepti hujus [ut servirent Deo] non solum immemores sed etiam ignari mihi videntur tanta hoc tempore animos eorum habendi cupido veluti tabes incessit. Inhiant possessionibus, prædia excolunt, auro incubant, emunt venduntque, quæstui per omnia student. At siqui melioris propositi videntur, neque possidentes neque negociantes, quod est multo turpius sedentes munera expectant, atque omne vitæ decus mercede corruptum habent dum quasi venalem præferunt sanctitatem. Sed longius quam volui egressus sum dum me temporum nostrorum piget tædetque And again in describing the Persecution of Dioclesian: ^[8]Multo avidius tunc martyria gloriosis mortibus quærebantur quàm nunc Episcopatus pravis ambitionibus appetuntur. So also Saint Augustine: ^[9]Multi sunt qui gemunt – et dolent ob iniquitates quæ fiunt in medio eorum, volentes resistere sed timore secularium rerum non audentes, quas adhuc vel adipisci desiderat humana fragilitas vel amittere formidat infirmitas – quod rem non timendam timent, omnes declinarunt, simul omnes inutiles facti sunt: quia plus æstimatur timor hominis quam timor Dei, et præferunt homines res quas acceperunt a Deo ipsi

Deo. – In ipso fine rerum posita est in universa provincia, et quotidie frequentantur spectacula, sanguis hominum quotidie funditur in mundo et insanientium voces increpant in circo – Meritò omnes sub flagello conterimur et doctor et factor, et auditor et contemptor. Studemus invicem reprehendere et non studemus opera nostra discutere. Detrahit proximus proximo, detrahit clericus clerico, detrahit laicus laico. Video quidem se invicem accusantes, sed neminem video justè se excusantem. – An ideo filios videres deligere, quia eorum voluptatibus faves? audis blasphemantes et patienter fers, vides frequentare spectacula et non revocas, vides luxuriantes et non verberas. So Sidonius Apollinaris ascribes the sinking of the western Empire under the Barbarians to the exactions & vices of the Romans, & that the Bishops study not the publick but their private fortune, & the governors oppress the people. Those Authors I have cited who write before Salvian that you may see he is not alone in lamenting the vices of his age. For if the degenerating Romans were so bad in their times, they were worse in his. To tell you what he says of them would be to transcribe his book, & therefore I had rather send you to it: I shall content my self to note that after many things said of the vices of several provinces he at length comes to compare the Romans with the Barbarians, Duo genera, saith he, in omni gente omnium Barbarorum sunt, id est aut hæreticorum aut Paganorum. His ergo omnibus quantum ad legem divinam pertinet <9r> Dico vos sine comparatione meliores: quantum autem ad vitam et actus doleo ac plango esse peiores. – Præter religiosos ac nonnullos etiam seculares religionis pares, cæteros aut omnes aut pene omnes majoris reatus dico & criminatioris vitæ esse quam barbari. Irascens forsitan qui hæc legis & condemnas insuper quæ legis. Non refugio censuram tuam: condemna si mentior, condemna si non probavero. For the proof of this I refer you to the Book where you will find it explained; first of the heathen Barbarians how several nations being noted for peculiar vices, as the Saxons for ferity, the Franks for perfidy, the Huns for unchastity, the Alans for drunkenness, the Alans for rapacity, the Roman Nation is more criminal in all these things, because they do against a known Law, what the other do out of ignorance: then at large comparing the Romans & the Christian Barbarians how that the Romans generally hate, envy, & vex one another, the Barbarians of the same Nation love one another; the Romans are intollerable in exactions, oppressions & injustice, the Barbarians (& particularly the Goths, Vandals, Franks, & Huns) are free from these crimes; the Romans frequent Theaters and Shows, the Barbarians suffer them not so much as in the Roman Cities which come into their power; the Romans are ungrateful to God for their victories, & other blessings, not giving him thanks but attributing them to fortune or conduct, the Goths & Vandals do not so; the Romans are extremely unchast, & which is worst they are so amidst the chaste Barbarians, & by their unchastity offend them. Amongst the Goth's a fornicator is not tolerated, the Romans only (by the prejudice of their Name and Nation) excepted. Almost all the Romans do these things of which it is hard to find but a few Barbarians guilty. To Salvian I might add Gildas & other Authors: but I shall rather confirm their testimonies with matter of fact in the following instances.

Victor in the second book of his history of the Vandalick persecution relates how that when the King of the Vandals was minded to persecute the Africans he caused their sacred Virgins to be searched by Midwives, & those who were found vitiated to be urged by questions & tortures till they had confessed who had layn with them saying, Tell us how your Bishops & Clergymen lye with you. For, saith Victor, he endeavoured to find a way to begin that persecution which he made. And thereupon were 5000 Bishops Priests & Deacons & other Members of the African Church sent at once into banishment. Now as the Vandals designed by this means to blemish the African Church, so the Africans laboured on the other hand to purge themselves by celebrating all these both Virgins & others for Confessors & Martyrs. For whilst Salvian tells us that the Romans were abominably unchast & the Africans the unchastest of all the Romans, & that {God's judgment was manifest in making} the <10r> Vandals lord over them who were the chastest of all the Barbarians, & by their laws had almost made the Africans chaste: I leave the Reader to consider whether the Africans were not guilty of a double crime, unchastity in the Virgins & those who were banished, & the patronizing of unchastity by the rest who celebrated such for holy Men & confessors: a practise which the Roman Church has ever since followed in sanctifying those who suffer by the hand of justice when ever she thinks it her interest to do so.

Basil & Gregory Nazianzen while they speak much of the persecution of the Emperor Valens, they sometimes let fall words from whence it appears that the persecution consisted in punishing Men not directly for religion, but upon accusations of various crimes. Now in an age wherein all men (as Nazianzen & Saint Austin saith) accused one another, & few justly excused themselves, how far the objected crimes were true or the witnesses false I cannot determine. But be it as it will the immorality of the one side or the other or both is hence argued, & if either party was then grown immoral, the other scarce continued vertuous.

In the end of the reign of Constantius, The Egyptian Christians assembled in a Church of Alexandria resisted & beat the Emperors Soldiers sent against them & hung up their arms in the Church in triumph, & sent about a letter to stir up the people to their assistance, saying that they had already resisted unto blood. (all which you may see in their letter extant in the works of Saint Athanasius) & then were overcome by fresh supplies of Soldiers & the ringleaders taken & sentenced for the disturbance, some to imprisonment some to be whipt, some to death: The greatness of this sedition Hilary in his book against Constantius written in the last year of that Emperor thus describes: Adest mecum Alexandria tot concussa bellis, tantum commotorum expeditionum pavens tumultum. Brevius enim adversum Persam quàm adversum eam armis certatum est. Mutati Præfecti, electi duces, corrupti populi, commotæ legiones ne ab Athanasio Christus prædicaretur. So long as this war lasted against the city so long you may be sure the City was in arms against their Emperor. And such was the Spirit of these Egyptians, that when Valens would have expelled Athanasius again, he durst not for fear of a new war. Now it seems to me a very great argument of the levity & corruptness of those times, first for the Alexandrine Christians to behave themselves so seditiously & then for the Churches of that age to patronize & encourage such doings by celebrating all those for Martyrs & Confessors who were punished for it. And if it be suspected that any of them suffered otherwise then upon accusations for rebellion or other crimes, the Reader may inform himself otherwise out of Saint Athanasius . For Athanasius two or three years after speaking of these things & of some new stir in Egypt, made (if I guess right) at some news about the Council of Ariminum, writes thus: Be it so, saith he, that against Athanasius & other Bishops which they have sent into banishment they could feign fals pretexts of crimes; yet what will they say to this new kind of evil. [And Hilary in his book against Constantius written in the last yeare of that Emperors reign <11r> If the Bishops were not banished but upon being arraigned & condemned for crimes, much less did the inferior people suffer directly for religion. I know some will be offended that I lay open these things, but in being so they shew themselves to be men of such a spirit as I am describing, that is who are for colouring over & sanctifying crimes when they think it makes for their interest.

[1] p 33

[2] Epist 77

[3] Epist 72

[4] Epist 55

[5] Epist 80

[6] Sulp. Hist. lib. 2 in fine.

[7] Hist. lib. 1, c. 43

[8] Hist. lib. 2. c. 47.

[9] Serm. De tempore Barbarico.
