



SAVED TO SERVE

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THE GREAT CONTROVERSY PT.3: ERA OF SPIRITUAL DARKNESS.
NOON OF THE PAPACY IS MIDNIGHT FOR THE WORLD

1. Let us study the third chapter in *The Great Controversy*, entitled "An Era Of Spiritual Darkness."

What scripture does the author, Ellen White, use to begin this chapter? What did the apostle Paul see and foretell? _____

The apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, foretold the great apostasy which would result in the establishment of the papal power. He declared that the day of Christ should not come, "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 worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." And furthermore, the apostle warns his brethren that "the mystery of iniquity doth already work." 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4, 7. Even at that early date he saw, creeping into the church, errors that would prepare the way for the development of the papacy. {GC 49.1}

2. Note: The man of sin in the primary sense is Satan; in the secondary sense, it is the Papacy. It is Popery that opposes God, receives worship and claims to be God. A man who claims to be God, blasphemes God. See John 10:30-33; Mark 2:5-7; Revelation 13:1-8.

3. What had to take place first before the rise of the Papacy? 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4 _____

4. Note: This falling away took place in the Christian church in the third and fourth centuries that led to the rise of the Papacy. Revelation 13:3,4 states that the Papacy will rule the world again. Therefore, a falling away in the Christian church again in these last days will lead to the resurgence of the Papacy. **It was apostasy that led the early church to seek the aid of the civil government, and this prepared the way for the development of the papacy--the beast.** Said Paul: "There" shall "come a falling away, . . . and that man of sin be revealed." 2 Thessalonians 2:3. **So apostasy in the church will prepare the way for the image to the beast.** {GC 443.4}

5. Note: As we consider why this chapter is called "An Era of Spiritual Darkness" the answer is given in the last sentence of the chapter. Read the following. **"Such were the results of banishing the word of God."** {GC 60.3} As the church banished the word of God, the church was in darkness; therefore the world was in darkness for that specific time period.

7. One of the thematic statements in the following paragraph is that Constantine brought an end to the persecution of Christians. As a result, Christians joined with the state and laid aside the truths of God.

"The spirit of compromise and conformity was restrained for a time by the fierce persecutions which the church endured under paganism. But as persecution ceased, and Christianity entered the courts and palaces of kings, she laid aside the humble simplicity of Christ and His apostles for the pomp and pride of pagan priests and rulers; and in place of the requirements of God, she substituted human theories and traditions. The nominal conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century, caused great rejoicing; and the world, cloaked with a form of righteousness, walked into the church. Now the work of corruption rapidly progressed. Paganism, while appearing to be vanquished, became the conqueror. Her spirit controlled the church. Her doctrines, ceremonies, and superstitions were incorporated into the faith and worship of the professed followers of Christ." {GC 49.2}

Pope Francis wrote that many Christians in many parts of the world still experience discrimination "and at times pay with their own blood the price of their profession of faith." **He noted that 2013 marked the 1,700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan – a proclamation of tolerance of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, which is often seen as a symbol of the first affirmation of the principle of religious freedom.** The edict "put an end to religious persecution in the Roman Empire in both East and West, and opened new channels for the dissemination of the Gospel," he wrote. **"Today, as then, Christians of East and West must give common witness so that, strengthened by the spirit of the risen Christ, they may disseminate the message of salvation to the entire world,"** the pope said. <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2013/12/02/christians-must-cooperate-to-help-the-persecuted-church-pope-tells-patriarch/>

8. Consider the following for the application. Pope Francis, who is both a civil and religious leader, arguably has the loudest voice to put an end to the persecution of Christians. As he works to this end, the Christians will unite with him and lay aside Bible truth.

"It [the Edict of Milan] came out of a two-man [Emperors Constantine and Licinius] summit meeting in the northern Italian city of Milan in January 313... And after the failure of the Great Persecution (initiated by the emperors Diocletian and Galerius in 303–304), the Christian church had begun to recover its stability...**This [the Edict of Milan] required a guarantee of full religious freedom to the Christians, setting them on a par with those who followed other religions. It marks the Roman Empire's final abandonment of the policies of persecution of Christians. The age of the martyrs was at an end.** The transition to the era of the "Christian Empire" had begun. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1990/issue28/2809.html>

9. Which biblical account was used for us to follow when the temptation comes for us to unite with the Papacy? Matthew 4:8-10

Satan once endeavored to form a compromise with Christ. He came to the Son of God in the wilderness of temptation, and showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, offered to give all into His hands if He would but acknowledge the supremacy of the prince of darkness. Christ rebuked the presumptuous tempter and forced him to depart. But Satan meets with greater success in presenting the same temptations to man. To secure worldly gains and honors, the church was led to seek the favor and support of the great men of earth; and having thus rejected Christ, she was induced to yield allegiance to the representative of Satan--the bishop of Rome. {GC 50.2}

10. What was one the titles give to the Pope during the era of spiritual darkness? _____

It is one of the leading doctrines of Romanism that the pope is the visible head of the universal church of Christ, invested with supreme authority over bishops and pastors in all parts of the world. More than this, the pope has been given the very titles of Deity. **He has been styled "Lord God the Pope"** (see Appendix), and has been declared infallible. He demands the homage of all men. The same claim urged by Satan in the wilderness of temptation is still urged by him through the Church of Rome, and vast numbers are ready to yield him homage. {GC 50.3}

"Pope Francis: Read Robert Hugh Benson's Lord of the World to understand me" <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/the-times/pope-francis-read-robert-hugh-bensons-lord-of-the-world-to-understand-me/news-story/a39fd3ae3806b94d923b81b51c9ec19a>

"The book that highlights the dangerous potential of secularist ideology" "Moynihan also provides a link to [Fr Robert Barron's blog about Benson's famous book](#). Barron writes that **it is the story "of the cataclysmic struggle between a radically secularist society and the one credible alternative to it, namely the Catholic Church."** Some people bridle at this claim, yet **it is significant that innumerable converts cite it as the single most important reason for their conversion to the Church.**" "Essentially the novel imagines a socialist and humanist world where religion has been either suppressed or ignored." <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2014/01/03/the-book-that-highlights-the-dangerous-potential-of-secularist-ideology/>

11. During the era of spiritual darkness, what charges did the Papacy bring against the true Christians? _____

Romanists have persisted in bringing against Protestants the charge of heresy and willful separation from the true church. But these accusations apply rather to themselves. They are the ones who laid down the banner of Christ and departed from "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Jude 3. {GC 51.2}

"Pope: Luther's intention was to renew the Church, not divide her" <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-luthers-intention-was-to-renew-the-church-not>

"Pope Francis: Martin Luther wanted to 'renew the Church, not divide her'" <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2017/01/19/pope-francis-martin-luther-wanted-to-renew-the-church-not-divide-her/>

"C of E archbishops call on Christians to repent for Reformation split...Justin Welby and John Sentamu recall 'damage done five centuries ago' that saw Christian people pitted against each other." https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/17/church-of-england-archbishops-call-on-christians-repent-reformation-split?CMP=share_btn_link

12a. How did the Pope become ruler over church and state? _____

In order for Satan to maintain his sway over men, and establish the authority of the papal usurper, he must keep them in ignorance of the Scriptures. The Bible would exalt God and place finite men in their true position; therefore its sacred truths must be concealed and suppressed. This logic was adopted by the Roman Church. For hundreds of years the circulation of the Bible was prohibited. The people were forbidden to read it or to have it in their houses, and unprincipled priests and prelates interpreted its teachings to sustain their pretensions. **Thus the pope came to be almost universally acknowledged as the vicegerent of God on earth, endowed with authority over church and state.** {GC 51.3}

12b. Application: "Pope Francis Criticizes Fundamentalists Who Believe They Possess 'Absolute Truth'" <http://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/pope-francis-criticizes-fundamentalists-who-believe-they-possess-absolute-truth.html>

Pope Francis again returned to the theme of rigidity today, saying **those who unbendingly follow the law of God are "sick" and in need of the Lord's help.** <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/pope-francis-rigidity-is-something-pathological>

"How the rigid suffer! When they are honest and realize this, they suffer! They appear good because they follow the Law; but they are concealing something else: either they are hypocritical or they are sick. And they suffer!" **"Let's pray for our brothers and sisters who think that by becoming rigid they are following the path of the Lord.**" <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/pope-francis-rigidity-is-something-pathological>

Satan is . . . constantly pressing in the spurious--to lead away from the truth. The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Satan will work ingeniously, in different ways and through different agencies, to unsettle the confidence of God's remnant people in the true testimony. {1SM 48.3}

There will be a hatred kindled against the testimonies which is satanic. The workings of Satan will be to unsettle the faith of the churches in them, for this reason: **Satan cannot have so clear a track to bring in his deceptions and bind up souls in his delusions if the warnings and reproofs and counsels of the Spirit of God are heeded.-- Letter 40, 1890.** {1SM 48.4}

13a. What did the Papacy change during the era of spiritual darkness and why? _____

The detector of error having been removed, Satan worked according to his will. Prophecy had declared that the papacy was to "think to change times and laws." Daniel 7:25. This work it was not slow to attempt. **To afford converts from heathenism a substitute for the worship of idols, and thus to promote their nominal acceptance of Christianity, the adoration of images and relics was gradually introduced into the Christian worship.** The decree of a general council (see Appendix) finally established this system of idolatry. To complete the sacrilegious work, **Rome presumed to expunge from the law of God the second commandment, forbidding image worship, and to divide the tenth commandment, in order to preserve the number.** {GC 51.4}

13b. Note: Professed Christians today guilty of doing similar things. Pastors are lowering God's standards of present truth and baptizing the unrepentant people, in order to increase church membership. Additionally, professed Christians are inviting worldly preachers, singers, and other people that they idolize to minister to them and to create an excitement in the churches. As a result, darkness enters the churches.

14a. During the era of spiritual darkness what did the Papacy do? _____

In the early part of the fourth century the emperor Constantine issued a decree making Sunday a public festival throughout the Roman Empire. (See Appendix.) **The day of the sun was revered by his pagan subjects and was honored by Christians; it was the emperor's policy to unite the conflicting interests of heathenism and Christianity. He was urged to do this by the bishops of the church, who, inspired by ambition and thirst for power, perceived that if the same day was observed by both Christians and heathen, it would promote the nominal acceptance of Christianity by pagans and thus advance the power and glory of the church. But while many God-fearing Christians were gradually led to regard Sunday as possessing a degree of sacredness, they still held the true Sabbath as the holy of the Lord and observed it in obedience to the fourth commandment.** {GC 53.1}

14b. 237. ["Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world... Rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others. And so the day of rest \[Sunday\], centered on the Eucharist, sheds its light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor."](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

14c. "The Sunday service is going to be a first point of contact for the unchurched in the community and for people who, [for whatever reason - beliefs, work - can't come on Saturday](http://www.al.com/living/index.ssf/2015/02/seventh-day_adventist_sunday.html). We have communicated to **the Conference office** (the regional center) because they wanted clarity on this, but once we communicated the purpose to them, **they saw that it is not a big deal.**" http://www.al.com/living/index.ssf/2015/02/seventh-day_adventist_sunday.html

15a. How did Sunday finally become honored as a divine institution? _____

The archdeceiver had not completed his work. He was resolved to gather the Christian world under his banner and to exercise his power through his vicegerent, the proud pontiff who claimed to be the representative of Christ. Through half-converted pagans, ambitious prelates, and world-loving churchmen he accomplished his purpose. **Vast councils were held from time to time, in which the dignitaries of the church were convened from all the world. In nearly every council the Sabbath which God had instituted was pressed down a little lower, while the Sunday was correspondingly exalted.** Thus the pagan festival came finally to be honored as a divine institution, while the Bible Sabbath was pronounced a relic of Judaism, and its observers were declared to be accursed. {GC 53.2}

15b. Note: The end result of these ecumenical movements and gatherings is to trample upon God's Sabbath and to finally exalt and enforce Sunday observance.

16. What happened to the saints once Sunday was enforced by law? Revelation 12:6,14 _____

In the sixth century the papacy had become firmly established. Its seat of power was fixed in the imperial city, and the bishop of Rome was declared to be the head over the entire church. Paganism had given place to the papacy. The dragon had given to the beast "his power, and his seat, and great authority." Revelation 13:2. And now began the 1260 years of papal oppression foretold in the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation. Daniel 7:25; Revelation 13:5-7. (See Appendix.) **Christians were forced to choose either to yield their integrity and accept the papal ceremonies and worship, or to wear away their lives in dungeons or suffer death by the rack, the fagot, or the headsman's ax.** Now were fulfilled the words of Jesus: "Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake." Luke 21:16, 17. **Persecution opened upon the faithful with greater fury than ever before, and the world became a vast battlefield.** For hundreds of years the church of Christ found refuge in seclusion and obscurity. Thus says the prophet: "The woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and three-score days." Revelation 12:6. {GC 54.2}

17a. What did the Papacy do in order to sustain her deception over the people? _____

Notwithstanding that vice prevailed, even among the leaders of the Roman Church, her influence seemed steadily to increase. About the close of the eighth century, papists put forth the claim that in the first ages of the church the bishops of Rome had possessed the same spiritual power which they now assumed. To establish this claim, some means must be employed to give it a show of authority; and this was readily suggested by the father of lies. **Ancient writings were forged by monks.** Decrees of councils before unheard of were discovered, establishing the universal supremacy of the pope from the earliest times. **And a church that had rejected the truth greedily accepted these deceptions.** (See Appendix.) {GC 56.1}

17b. As we all know and as many of our well established textbooks have argued for decades, **the Inquisition was one of the most frightening and bloody chapters in Western history.** Pope Pius XII was anti-Semitic and rightfully called "Hitler's Pope," **the Dark Ages were a stunting of the progress of knowledge to be redeemed only by the secular spirit of the Enlightenment, and the religious Crusades** were an early example of the rapacious Western thirst for riches and power. **But what if these long held beliefs were all wrong?** In this stunning, powerful, and ultimately persuasive book, **Rodney Stark**, one of the most highly regarded sociologists of religion and bestselling author of *The Rise of Christianity* (HarperSanFrancisco 1997) **argues that some of our most firmly held ideas about history, ideas that paint the Catholic Church in the least positive light are, in fact, fiction.** Why have we held these wrongheaded ideas so strongly and for so long? And if our beliefs are wrong, what, in fact, is the truth? <https://www.amazon.com/Bearing-False-Witness-Debunking-Anti-Catholic/dp/1599474999>

17c. Note: A large class of Seventh-day Adventist leaders who support women's ordination have also tampered with the writings of Ellen White to support their cause.

"Like the Bible writers, Ellen White used the language of her day. However, writing styles change, as do the meanings of words. Thus, when the Comprehensive Index of the Writings of Ellen G. White was published in 1963, a 'Glossary of Obsolete and Little Used Words and Terms With Altered Meanings' was included at the end of volume 3. The purpose was to help readers understand better what Mrs. White was saying. In her time, words such as 'he,' 'man,' 'men,' and 'mankind' were accepted as generic terms that included both men and women. Today this not so common. Thus, without making any change in Mrs. White's thought, this devotional book uses gender-inclusive language." <https://text.egwwritings.org/publication.php?pubtype=Book&bookCode=CTR&lang=en&pagenumber=6¶graphReferences=1>

17d. In the recent summary by Dr. Angel Rodriguez, in which he responds to the principal arguments used by opponents of women's ordination, the following statement from *Christ Triumphant* is quoted:

Those placed in positions of responsibility should be men and women who fear God, who realize that they are humans only, not God...(10).

Just prior to quoting this statement, Rodriguez writes:

Ellen White supports the idea of placing women in high administrative positions...(11).

After quoting the above statement, he writes:

The statement is important in that it makes clear that a woman can be placed in positions of responsibility that would require them to 'rule under God and with him' and to teach God's will to the people (12).

Rodriguez obviously assumes that the gender-inclusive language found in this statement was in fact written by Ellen White herself. But if one consults the original statement, from the unpublished manuscript cited in this compilation, gender-inclusive language is entirely absent. Here is what the statement says in its original form:

Those placed in positions of responsibility should be men who fear God, who realize that they are men only, not God...(13).

Here we see very clear evidence that the contemporary altering of Ellen White's language so as to make it 'gender-inclusive,' is being urged in the present controversy as if it represents the thought of Ellen White, when the original wording is in fact gender-specific."

Here is the website to view the article: <http://advindicate.com/articles/2014/4/16/the-insertion-of-gender-inclusive-language-in-recent-ellen-white-compilations>

17e. **Note: It was the same person, Angel M. Rodriguez, who wrote the following that was voted and accepted by the world church during the General Conference session of 2005.**

"The resolution notes the study of Mrs. White's writings "will constantly lead the Church back to the Bible as the very foundation of faith and practice." Dr. Angel Manuel Rodriguez, Biblical Research Institute director, said that for Adventist Christians, the "Bible is the fundamental ground of the Adventist faith and practice." He added that the gift exercised by Ellen G. White **"can enrich but not define our faith and practice."** <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2005-07-02/world-church-spirit-of-prophecy-resolution-voted-points-church-to-bible/>

18a. What assumption was made by the Papacy during the eleventh century? _____

Another step in papal assumption was taken, when, **in the eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII proclaimed the perfection of the Roman Church. Among the propositions which he put forth was one declaring that the church had never erred, nor would it ever err, according to the Scriptures.** But the Scripture proofs did not accompany the assertion. The proud pontiff also claimed the power to depose emperors, and declared that no sentence which he pronounced could be reversed by anyone, but that it was his prerogative to reverse the decisions of all others. (See Appendix.) {GC 57.2}

18b. "...when the Pope speaks ex cathedra he teaches the doctrine of the faith infallibly" <https://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/papab3.htm>

18c. During what crisis will church appear as about to fall? What does that statement mean? _____

We are to be ready and waiting for the orders of God. Nations will be stirred to their very center. **Support will be withdrawn from those who proclaim God's only standard of righteousness, the only sure test of character. And all who will not bow to the decree of the national councils and obey the national laws to exalt the sabbath instituted by the man of sin,** to the disregard of God's holy day, will feel, not the oppressive power of popery alone, but of the Protestant world, the image of the beast. {2SM 380.1}

Satan will work his miracles to deceive; he will set up his power as supreme. The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out--the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place. None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony will be found with the loyal and true, without spot or stain of sin, without guile in their mouths. We must be divested of our self-righteousness and arrayed in the righteousness of Christ. {2SM 380.2}

19. What other errors did the Papacy establish during the era of spiritual darkness? _____

Serious errors were thus introduced into the Christian faith. **Prominent among these was the belief in man's natural immortality and his consciousness in death. This doctrine laid the foundation upon which Rome established the invocation of saints and the adoration of the Virgin Mary.** From this sprang also the heresy of eternal torment for the finally impenitent, which was early incorporated into the papal faith. {GC 58.2}

Then the way was prepared for the introduction of still another invention of paganism, **which Rome named purgatory**, and employed to terrify the credulous and superstitious multitudes. By this heresy is affirmed the existence of a place of torment, in which the souls of such as have not merited eternal damnation are to suffer punishment for their sins, and from which, when freed from impurity, they are admitted to heaven. {GC 58.3}

20. What other error did the Papacy establish during the era of spiritual darkness? _____

Still another fabrication was needed to enable Rome to profit by the fears and the vices of her adherents. **This was supplied by the doctrine of indulgences.** Full remission of sins, past, present, and future, and release from all the pains and penalties incurred, were promised to all who would enlist in the pontiff's wars to extend his temporal dominion, to punish his enemies, or to exterminate those who dared deny his spiritual supremacy. The people were also taught that by the payment of money to the church they might free themselves from sin, and also release the souls of their deceased friends who were confined in the tormenting flames. By such means did Rome fill her coffers and sustain the magnificence, luxury, and vice of the pretended representatives of Him who had not where to lay His head. {GC 59.1}

21. What other error did the Papacy establish during the era of spiritual darkness? _____

The Scriptural ordinance of the Lord's Supper had been supplanted by the idolatrous sacrifice of the mass. Papal priests pretended, by their senseless mummary, to convert the simple bread and wine into the actual "body and blood of Christ."...With blasphemous presumption, they openly claimed the power of creating God, the Creator of all things. Christians were required, on pain of death, to avow their faith in this horrible, Heaven-insulting heresy. Multitudes who refused were given to the flames. {GC 59.2}

22. What other error did the Papacy establish during the era of spiritual darkness? _____

In the thirteenth century was established that most terrible of all the engines of the papacy--the Inquisition. The prince of darkness wrought with the leaders of the papal hierarchy. In their secret councils Satan and his angels controlled the minds of evil men, while unseen in the midst stood an angel of God, taking the fearful record of their iniquitous decrees and writing the history of deeds too horrible to appear to human eyes. "Babylon the great" was "drunken with the blood of the saints." The mangled forms of millions of martyrs cried to God for vengeance upon that apostate power. {GC 59.3}

23. **But "the noon of the papacy was the midnight of the world."**— The Holy Scriptures were almost unknown, not only to the people, but to the priests. **Like the Pharisees of old, the papal leaders hated the light which would reveal their sins. God's law, the standard of righteousness, having been removed, they exercised power without limit, and practiced vice without restraint.** {GC 60.2}

Pope Francis' popularity among Americans goes from high to higher" <http://www.sltrib.com/home/4843425-155/pope-francis-popularity-among-americans-goes>

"Pope Francis More Popular Than Donald Trump, President Barack Obama In US, Survey Shows" <http://www.ibtimes.com/pope-francis-more-popular-donald-trump-president-barack-obama-us-survey-shows-2478489>

"Pope Francis: Still Popular" "The Pew Research Center has released new data showing that Pope Francis is still very popular among the American people, with 70% viewing him favorably. That matches his previous peak of 70% in February 2015. Francis has been on an upward climb since he began his papacy in March of 2013, when his favorability rating stood at 57%. Francis remains even more popular among U.S. Catholics, with 87 percent viewing him favorably in the most recent survey. <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/pope-francis-still-popular>

[The movement that propelled Donald Trump into the White House is not isolated to the United States. It is a global phenomenon. All over the West, a populist backlash is brewing against the elites of society.](#) And that backlash all too often takes the shape of authoritarianism and ethnonationalism....**Which is why we desperately need a world leader who can articulate a vision of what's true, good, and beautiful, and can serve as an alternative to Trumpism. [And there's a man who's made for the role: Pope Francis.](#)**

24. Note: What happened and will happen at midnight in a spiritual sense? Exodus 11:4 and Exodus 12:29-33; Matthew 25:6-13; Acts 16:25

25. During the time period of Jesus' earthly ministry, the church and the world were experiencing "an era of spiritual darkness" until John the Baptist and Jesus brought the true light as they carried forward their gospel ministries. See Luke 1:79; Matthew 4:12-17; John 1:4-9.