

THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE OF THE ANTICHRIST

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The topic assigned presents not a mere academic problem but an essentially practical one, since apparently in these latter days the trenchant confession "*papam esse rerum antichristum*" is no longer considered to be a confession but an historical judgment based on Scripture. In the 1904 volume of *Lehre und Wehre* the sainted Dr. Stoeckhardt stated: "Certainly the fact that the pope has damned and cursed the article of the forgiveness of sin, which is the comfort of the Christian in life and in death ... and that he proclaims this as true and pure doctrine—that is what makes him the first-born of Satan, yes, worse than all devils. That the pope with his work-doctrine, with all his decretals, lies, and blasphemies, tears Christ, the only Savior of sinners, out of the hearts and consciences of Christians, that makes him the real, true Antichrist" (op. cit., p. 494).

In the 1951 Report of the Advisory Committee on Doctrine and Practice (the Praesidium of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod made this report "its own" and the St. Louis Faculty "wholeheartedly consented to the Report") it is stated: "Scripture does not teach that the Pope is the Antichrist. It teaches that there will be an Antichrist (prophecy). We identify the Antichrist as the Papacy. This is an historical judgment based on Scripture. The early Christians could not have identified the Antichrist as we do. If there were a clearly expressed teaching of Scripture, they must have been able to do so. Therefore the quotation from *Lehre und Wehre* goes too far!"

Here we would note that Dr. Deindoerfer (Iowa Synod) held that the teaching that the pope is the Antichrist is a "human application of the Scripture doctrine of the Antichrist ... which must be clearly distinguished from the Scripture doctrine itself." Over against this position Dr. Stoeckhardt then stated Missouri's position: "We confidently assert that it is the teaching of Scripture ... that the pope is the Antichrist. Here, too, it is a matter of accepting the truth in faith or rejecting a clearly expressed doctrine of Scripture." It is this statement of Dr. Stoeckhardt which the 1951 Advisory Committee on Doctrine and Practice rejects and of which it says that it 'goes too far' (*Confessional Lutheran*, January 1957, p. 8).

From Scripture we shall present

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In doing so we shall submit our treatise in five parts: I. The statements found in the First Epistle of John; II. Paul's deposition in II Thess. 2:3–12 (with reference to pertinent passages in Daniel and Revelation); III. Four distinct interpretations of these passages; IV. Our Lutheran Confessions; V. Objections to the Scriptural doctrine of the Antichrist.

I. The Statements Found in the First Epistle of John

What are the characteristics of antichristianism, and what distinction does the Bible make between antichrists in general and the one Antichrist, *kat exochēn*, in particular? The answer to this question can be best given on the basis of several passages in the epistles of John. In I John 2:18 we read, in literal translation: "Little children, the last hour it is; and just as you heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come into existence, whence we recognize that it is the last hour." In I John 4:1 we are told: "Beloved, do not yield belief to every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God, for many pseudo-prophets have gone out into the world," namely such as do not make confession of Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. It is clear

from these passages that antichristianism is represented, in general, by men who are false prophets or deceivers, to whom the Holy Ghost applies the specific name “antichrists,” the word itself indicating an atmosphere of rivalry, giving expression to hostility. Antichristianism is in its very nature a phenomenon of the present *aiōn*, of the world, one that will find its end and culmination on the Day of Judgment. It is not an external power arising against the Christian faith and Christian Church, but it is a movement represented by many deceivers and false prophets, who have fallen away from the truth while still outwardly connected with the Church, so that it was only their going out (I John 2:19) which made them known as no longer belonging to the Church. They arise, they come into existence, and then the separation takes place. It is not stated that this separation means a physical removal, for unfortunately in many instances the false teachers pervert the whole congregations and thus remain in their positions of honor and influence. The *exerchesthai* is further explained by *phanerousthai* for it is the revealing of the antichristian teaching of these men by the faithful teachers that is equivalent to their removal from the ranks of orthodox believers. The serious aspect of antichristianism is brought out by the words of the apostle which characterize their false teachings not as a mere aberration in a minor point of doctrine, but as a refusal to make confession of Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. In other words, antichristianism subverts the doctrines of Christology and Soteriology, the whole basis of objective justification as taught in the Bible, thereby destroying the fundamental facts of salvation. It is clear that antichristianism was not confined to Manichaeism, or any other of the early heresies which subverted the truth of the objective justification and salvation, but is found throughout this last aeon of the world wherever and whenever teachers of this type arise in the Church. There have been antichrists in every period of the Church’s history. The Apostolic Age had its Judaizing teachers, the subapostolic age its Gnostics, the period immediately preceding Nicea the heresies enumerated by Irenaeus, the period following Nicea the Arians, the period of the later ecumenical councils its Nestorians, Monophysites, and Monotheletes, the later Middle Ages the Bogomiles, the Cathari, and Albigenses, and the period since the Reformation the great mass of anti-Trinitarians and antichristian sects, whose false doctrines have culminated in the theology of the social gospel in Modernism.

However, in a very emphatic manner the Bible warns the Christians of all times against one great Antichrist, a phenomenon in history which is unique in almost every respect. The three passages from John’s epistles which we have quoted make a definite distinction between antichristianism as represented by the minor antichrists and the one Antichrist *kat exochēn*, even though the latter is described as possessing some of the characteristics of the former. I John 2:18 states in literal translation: “Antichrist is coming,” the absence of the article giving the subject the force of a proper noun. I John 2:22: “This is the Antichrist, who denies the Father and the Son.” In I John 4:3 we read: “And every spirit that does not confess Jesus, is not of God; and this is the Antichrist, who, as you have heard, is coming and now is already in the world.” Here we must again add II John 7: “This is the deceiver and the Antichrist.”

The characteristics of the Antichrist as given by the Apostle John are the following: He has the spirit that does not confess Jesus; he denies the Father and the Son; and he is a deceiver. Of this Antichrist it is said that he is both coming and that he is already in the world. In other words, he represented a power which was even then in existence, but was also in process of coming, and the most distinguishing feature of this character is the denial of the Father and the Son.

II. Paul’s Deposition in II Thess. 2:3–12 (with Reference to Pertinent Passages in Daniel and Revelation)

In I John 4:3 the Apostle refers to the fact that his readers had heard of the coming of the Antichrist, and there can be no doubt that he intends to have recalled what they had heard from the Apostle Paul, particularly in the latter’s exposition in II Thess. 2:3–12. We take up this passage verse for verse.

“Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” The claim that the Day of the Lord has now come involves a very serious and dangerous error into which the Thessalonians are to permit no one to seduce them (*exapatēsē*) by any means. Two things must come first (*prōton*), must come to pass before the Last Day can

dawn: there must have come the great falling away, and the man of sin must have been revealed. Paul is very definite in expressing himself; both times he uses the definite article: “the falling away,” “the man of sin,” “the son of perdition,” so that we are compelled to conclude: from Paul’s oral teachings the readers knew what he meant by “falling away” and “man of sin.” Accordingly he says in v. 5: “Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I told you of these things?” When he speaks here of falling away, *apostasia*, the apostasy which must occur before the Last Day come, he does not mean any kind of political rebellion, as, for instance, the revolt of the Jews against the Romans, or some other upheaval in the Roman Empire, as claimed by Tertullian and Jerome, but a religious revolt, a falling away from God and from faith in Him. That is clear from the expression he uses, which always has this sense in Scripture. The context, also, compels us to accept that meaning, for immediately upon the word “falling away” follows the expression “the man of sin,” and in v. 7 the falling away is described as iniquity, literally “lawlessness.” The word “falling away,” *apostasia*, however, dare not be regarded as an abstract designation of a person, as though the Antichrist himself were meant. The word must be permitted to retain its specific sense, a falling away from faith. This falling away will then lead to a suspension of all divine order, will result in iniquity, lawlessness, v. 7. Although the Christian Church was still in the prime of spiritual vigor and strength, although Paul in his first chapter of this very letter had praised the steadfastness and loyalty of the Thessalonians, yet the future of the Church looms up dark and dreary before his vision. Combined with the great falling away will be the appearance of the man of sin.

That is clear from the close connection between the two sentences. The falling away from faith will prepare the way for the man of sin. His appearance would be impossible if all were well with the Church.

This man of sin is none other than the Roman Antichrist, the Pope at Rome. Before, however, introducing evidence to that effect, let us examine closely the meaning of the expressions which the Apostle employs, and at the end of the entire section we shall see the more clearly who is meant. But even now it will not be amiss to use the expression Antichrist, since practically all ancient and modern commentators agree that the Antichrist is meant when reference is made to the man of sin, even though they differ widely in their views as to who that Antichrist is.

First, Paul uses the expression, “that man of sin be revealed,” *apokalypthē*. He places the Antichrist on a parallel with Christ. His appearance is a terrible counterpart to the return of Christ, to which he had referred before, II Thess. 1:7. At that time the man of sin was still closely concealed, but in due time he would be revealed. In verse 9 even the technical term used in the Epistles to the Thessalonians when speaking of the return of Christ, *parousia*, is used also in connection with the Antichrist. Just as there will be a *parousia* of Christ, so there will be one also of the Antichrist. And just because the Antichrist presents a parallel (of course, a parallel of contrast) to Christ, just because he is in every respect the opposite of Christ, the name Antichrist, *antichristos*, is employed to designate this particular personage. Still, we dare not forget that Paul himself never uses that expression. The term originated in St. John’s Epistles, where, as we have noted, it is used also in a wider sense and in the plural number. In II Thess. 2 the Antichrist is called the man of sin, not merely a sinner, *anomos*, or *harmatōlos*, but much stronger: The man of sin, the man of lawlessness, “that man of sin,” *ho anthrōpos tēs anomias*. In his lawlessness sin is, so to speak, concentrated and personified. Being a man of sin, he is the reverse of Christ, who so frequently is called the Holy One and Just One, and who is made unto us righteousness; he is a real Antichrist. Again, he is called “the son of perdition,” *ho hyios tēs apōleias*. Because he is the representative of sin, he is doomed to perdition. That is the meaning of the term which originates from the Hebrew and denotes closest and most intimate connection: “The son of perdition”; the meaning is not that he leads into perdition, which, of course, is true, but that he will be plunged into perdition, that he is inseparably connected with perdition, that he is hopelessly in its grasp. The expression is used by Jesus on one occasion with reference to the betrayer, Judas Iscariot, where Luther properly translates *das verlorene Kind*, the son of perdition, John 17:12. In the Book of Revelation, 17:11, the same word “perdition” is used of the beast that is to come, the Antichrist and his kingdom. There we read: “And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition (*eis apōleian hypagei*)”. This is an apt translation, for perdition here as on other passages also means everlasting perdition. Philippians 3:19 (“whose end is destruction”); Matthew 7:13: “broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction.” Some commentators, e.g., the errorist Pelagius, have

maintained that this portrayal can apply only to Satan himself. That such is not the case is clear from v. 9, where Satan is clearly distinguished from the individual here described: the Antichrist's "coming is after the working of Satan." As we shall see later, we will have no difficulty in finding a manifestation that fits the expression here used.

But before proceeding, we should note the evident allusion in this verse to the ancient prophecies of Daniel, where words in general have such an important bearing on the doctrine of the Antichrist Dan. 8:23 "In the latter time of then kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full (literally when rebellious will carry out their apostasy to the limit), a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up." The king referred to is Antiochus Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.), the Illustrious, a well-known type of the Antichrist, and the word translated "transgressors" derived from the verb *pasha'*, which means "to become rebellious," "fall away from," expresses the same idea as the Greek word *apostasia* used by Paul. In the First Book of the Maccabees the same expressions are used in describing the times of the godless Antiochus. I Macc. 1:15: "*apestēsan*"; 2:15: "*apostasia*." Thus Christendom will witness a time similar to that inflicted upon Judah and Jerusalem by wicked Antiochus. In the Book of Daniel we find also the above-mentioned parallel between Christ and the Antichrist. In chap. 9:24–27, we read (in v. 25) concerning the seventy weeks: "Unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks." That is a prophecy of Christ. In v. 26 we then read: "After threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off ... and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary." A prince, the Antichrist, will rise in opposition to the Prince, Christ.

The Apostle continues in his detailed description of the Antichrist, v. 4: "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." These words describe the *modus operandi* of the Antichrist. He opposes and exalts himself above everything that is called God or that is worshiped. He is an adversary (*antikeimenos*) who opposes, who sets himself against. He opposes not only Christ the Son of God, but everything that is God or worshiped as God. He is not only an antichrist (*antichristos*), but, as Chrysostom aptly remarks, an Anti-god (*antitheos*) in the fullest sense of the word. In this respect he corresponds to Satan whose work is to resist, as Zech 3:1 has it: *lesitno*, "to resist him," which the LXX translates with *tou antikeisthai autō*. What Satan is in the spirit world, the Antichrist is among men. True, he is not an incarnation of Satan, but he is a tool of Satan, as emphasized in II Thess. 2:9: "whose coming is after the working of Satan." The Antichrist also is one who "exalteth himself above all that is called God" (*hyperairomenos*); arrogantly he poses as being above the true God and everyone who is called God. The expression "above all that is called God," *epi panta legomenon theon*, includes the true God as well as false gods, which are merely called god without actually being God. This again reminds us of Daniel's prophecy concerning the Antichrist: "He shall speak great words against the most High" and: "The King shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods," 11:36. The Book of Revelation uses similar language in describing the seven-headed beast: "He opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle," 13:6 (Cp Paul's expression "sitteth in the temple of God").

Not only will the Antichrist exalt himself above God but also over everything that is worshiped, everything which is an object of reverence (*sebasma*). In the final analysis, he will revere nothing, will humble himself before no one, but will exalt himself before everything worthy of reverence. He will demand reverence and worship exclusively for himself, will idolize himself. That is why Paul at once adds: "So that he as God sitteth in the temple of God." The infamy, the pride of the Antichrist knows no limits. He himself, the arrogant one, who has lost all respect for things divine, he personally seats himself as on a throne and as God Himself in the Temple of God, in the sanctuary of God; for the word used here, *naos*, indicates the actual temple in contrast to the word *hieron*, sanctuary; the latter means a group of sacred buildings with the temple in the center. He takes his seat there naturally for the purpose of being honored and worshiped. That is clear from the entire connection. —But what is the temple of God? Certainly not a heathen temple, as some have assumed. The definite article "the temple," *eis ton naon*, and in addition the whole phrase "in the temple of God," the true God, *tou Theou*, argue against that interpretation. Nor can the Temple at Jerusalem be meant, which indeed was generally referred to as the temple of the true God. This Temple was still in existence when Paul's letter was

written, but it had lost its significance altogether. In fact, soon thereafter it was destroyed, and the Antichrist portrayed in the Epistle before us never sat in that temple. The spiritual Temple is meant, the one of which the Temple in Jerusalem was a type, the true house of God, the Christian Church, II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; Rev. 3:12. The expressions employed here hark back to Daniel, who prophesied concerning Antiochus Epiphanes, the type of the Antichrist, that he would profane the sanctuary and would “place the abomination that maketh desolate.” Dan. 11:31. Concerning the Antichrist himself Daniel says that in his day the Messiah will be cut off, that he will destroy the city and the sanctuary and that he will cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease (9:26, 27). Likewise our passage reminds us of the eschatological discourse of Christ in which He speaks of the “abomination of desolation” (and this refers to the rage of the Antichrist) saying that it would stand in the Holy Place.

Finally, the Apostle adds that Antichrist will show “himself that he is God,” setting forth, demonstrating, that he is God. Not only does he seat himself in the Temple of God, usurping that place as though he had a claim to it, but he actually claims divine authority, dignity, for himself and on that account demands the reverence that is due to God alone. That to which Christ alone has a claim, this infamous person claims for himself. He is not content to call himself God by mere words: by means of signs and lying wonders, which many will believe, he seeks to prove himself to be God. It is indeed a horrible, repulsive picture which the Apostle paints, and we will have to note carefully and keep in mind all its details in order to recognize the person placed before our view.

It is significant that present participles are used throughout this verse: *antikeimenos*, *hyperairōmenos*, *apodeiknynta*, indicating the enduring nature of the phenomenon, and that the temple of God referred to is evidently not one built of wood or stone, but a spiritual structure, as frequently in the New Testament.

V. 5: “Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?” This reminding question contains a mild rebuke for the Thessalonians. Since the Apostle had told them of these things while he was present with them and told them more than once (*elegōn*, the imperfect tense is employed), they should not have permitted themselves to be misled.

V. 6: “And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.” The Day of the Lord has not yet appeared, for the Antichrist has not yet been revealed; and the man of sin, whom Paul has just portrayed, will be recognized only after he has been revealed; but that which withholds him and keeps him from being revealed you now know already. What withholds now you know. Paul’s readers knew that there existed an agency delaying the appearance of the Antichrist, retarding his manifestation, preventing him from boldly rearing his head. They knew also the nature of this agency. Hence the Apostle does not repeat what he has already told them but speaks merely of “what withholdeth,” *to katechon*, and later, v. 7, of him “who now letteth,” *ho katechōn*. Etymologically the meaning of the words is clear. They denote “that which” or “one who suppresses or holds back.” This certainly does not mean “that which prevents me from expressing myself freely” as some commentators have thought. That would militate against the context, since Paul actually does express himself freely and since he did not fear men. Nor can the meaning be “that which prevents the *parousia* of Christ.” That likewise would disagree with the context; for in this passage not the return of Christ is being discussed, but the manifestation of the Antichrist. Furthermore, *katechein* never denotes to keep back something which comes from without, but to prevent or retard the free and full development of some plan or idea originating within one’s self or carried in one’s mind. Cp Rom. 1:18: *Apokalyptetai gar orgē Theou ap’ ouranou epi pasan asebeian kai adikian anthrōpōn tōn tēn alētheian en adikia katechontōn*. Revealed is the wrath of God from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Luke 4:42: *kateichon auton tou mē poreuesthai ap’ autōn*: “and stayed him, that he should not depart from them.” The people sought to stop Jesus from carrying out His plan stated in v. 43, to preach the kingdom of God in other cities, too. This interpretation of the word—to retard or prevent the free and full development of some plan or idea—is also demanded by the purpose stated: “that he might be revealed in his time.” The appearance of the Antichrist (for with “he” no one else than the Antichrist can be meant in view of the context) is being held by some force which is known to Paul’s readers and retarded for a purpose, “that he might be revealed in his time.” The *ho katechōn* is clearly not an individual person, but a representative of a

power *to katechon*, whose activity extended over some time. The appearance of the Antichrist shall not be a matter of chance nor a matter of his own choice, but he shall appear at such a time as God shall set, a time assigned and permitted to him by God, not earlier, not now already, but in his time (*en tō autou kairō*). This force is the same force as referred to in v. 7, “he who letteth.” The neuter (*to katechon*) stresses the principle, the force; the masculine (*ho katechōn*) emphasizes the person, the one who will direct that force. —Here again the Antichrist is placed parallel with Christ by the use of the term “revealed.” And Christ came at His time, in the fullness of time, and as He will come again in the time designated by the Father, so also the caricature of Christ, the Antichrist, will appear at his appointed time. *Kairos* denotes a point in time.

V. 7: “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way.” The Antichrist is active already now, but in secret; he can come out into the open only after that force which now holds him back is put aside. Paul, note, does not say: “The Antichrist doth work,” but very significantly, “The mystery of iniquity doth already work.” The entire emphasis rests on the word “mystery”: in the Greek text it is placed at the beginning and separated from the word which modifies it, “iniquity.” What is to be emphasized is that the iniquity as yet does its work only in secret since it is still being suppressed. The “mystery” of sin, described in the foregoing, is already present; more than that, it is already active and working vigorously, effectively (*energeitai*), but it has not yet been revealed; it is still hiding and keeps under cover; it is a “mystery.” But it is a mystery of “iniquity,” a mystery consisting of godlessness, or possessing godlessness. “Iniquity” (*anomia*) means literally “lawlessness,” I John 3:4, which includes godlessness, breaking of all divine commandments and bowing to no one’s will. Already Daniel had thus portrayed the Antichrist: “The king shall do according to his will,” 11:36. The word “iniquity” corresponds to the term “falling away,” v. 3. There the falling away reaches its climax in “that Wicked one,” v. 8.—Here again the Antichrist is placed parallel with Christ. As there is a “mystery of godliness,” I Tim. 3:16, so there also is a mystery of godlessness. As there are “deep things of God,” I Cor. 2:10, so there are also “depths of Satan,” Rev. 2:24. This mystery will become exposed, the godlessness will be revealed, the “Wicked one” will come to light and will be plainly recognized as soon as he “who now letteth” be taken out of the way. The *katechōn*, he who now letteth, must be essentially the same agency referred to in v. 6 by the term *to katechon*, “what withholdeth.”

V. 8: “And then shall the Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.” The Antichrist will come to light then, when “he who letteth” will have been removed. He will then really become manifest, the mystery which hitherto has remained concealed will be unveiled. A new name is given to the Antichrist, “that Wicked,” *ho anomos*, the lawless, the ruthless one. This designation is occasioned by the expression used in the previous verse, “the mystery of iniquity,” of lawlessness, “doth already work.” When revealed, the godlessness will appear in full growth, in one head, in one person, in the Antichrist. The entire context clearly proves that none other than the man of sin and the son of perdition is meant with “that Wicked” one. He is indeed a lawless one because he sets aside the Law of God; he does away with divine authority and establishes an autocracy, a dictatorship, in the fullest sense of the term. He is not an atheist, not an anarchist, but an antichrist. While Christ as the righteous servant of the Lord was obedient to the will of the Father unto death, so His opposite sets aside the divine will, stands there as a lawless one, a revolutionist who makes himself God; he is not a pseudo-Christ, a false Christ, but an antichrist. The Lord shall consume him with the spirit of His mouth and shall destroy (him) in the brightness of His coming. In the style of the Old Testament prophets the apostle foretells in vigorous, glowing language, in a well-balanced parallelism the fate of the foe of Christianity. The first member of the parallelism is a quotation from Isa. 11:4: “With the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.” “The Wicked” does not refer to the ungodly in general, the singular is to designate the one great archenemy of God and Christ so frequently referred to by the prophets and in the Psalms, the Antichrist. What does “the spirit,” “the breath,” *to pneuma* of His mouth mean, wherewith Christ shall consume the Antichrist? Ordinarily this expression is referred to the might and irresistible power of Christ. In order to slay the Antichrist, the Lord does not even have to utter a word, much less move His hand. The breath of the mouth of Christ is His Word according to Isa. 34:16, the breath being thought of as the bearer of the Word. By means of His Word Christ will remove the Antichrist, will consume him. At His coming Christ will do away with him, overthrow him, annihilate him, destroy him, will

cast him into a lake of fire burning with brimstone, Rev. 19:20. Eternal damnation will be the fate of the Antichrist. Daniel wrote of this, 9:26: “The end thereof shall be with a flood,” in the deluge, in the universal judgment of the world, and v. 27: “That determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”

Vv. 9 and 10: “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” Here there is seen most particularly the glaring contrast between Antichrist and Christ, the one is Christ, the other Antichrist. To both, indeed, a coming, a *parousia*, is frequently ascribed. But Antichrist’s *parousia* shall precede that of the Lord, and shall come to an end through the very return of Christ.

The manner in which the “Wicked” one will become established explains why he will have such a great following and be capable of bringing about such extensive falling away. His coming, writes Paul, “is after the working of Satan,” must come about through the activity of Satan. While the heavenly Father bringeth the first-begotten into the world, Hebrews 1:6; 10:5, it is Satan who causes the “Wicked” one to arise; of course, with divine permission. Since the coming of the Antichrist is the work of Satan, it is accompanied by all manner of “signs and lying wonders.” The expressions are multiplied in order to give a vivid description of the matter: “power,” “signs,” “lying wonders.” The terms differ slightly in their meaning. “Power,” *dynamis*, describes the signs according to their source, the power producing them; “signs,” *sēmeia*, designates the “miracles” according to their significance. They indicate and reveal the importance and authority of him who performs them; and “wonders,” *terata*, describes the signs with their effect upon others; they arouse amazement, fear, and trembling. Scripture uses these terms frequently in connection with Christ and His apostles. In Acts 2:22, Peter calls Jesus “a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs.” According to Heb. 2:4 God corroborated the preaching of the Apostles “with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles.” And in II Cor. 12:12 Paul declares: “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.”

In our Thessalonians passage the Apostle describes the caricature of Christ’s miracles: Satan gives unto Antichrist and unto his apostles power to perform signs and wonders, even as the Father has given Christ the authority to perform miracles, and as Christ has granted this authority to His disciples. In Antichrist we find the fulfillment of the word of Christ, Matth. 24:24: “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders.” The Book of Revelation, 13:2, 13, 14, tells us that the dragon gave great power unto the seven-headed beast, that “he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth” by means of those miracles which he had power to do. However, there is a vast difference between the miracles of Christ and those of the Antichrist. Christ’s miracles were true miracles, miracles of truth, as He Himself is the Truth. The miracles of the Antichrist, on the other hand, are “lying signs and wonders.” The Apostle does not mean to say that all the miracles of the “Wicked” one are lying deceptions without reality, fraudulent mystifications, coarse swindles, trickery, or the result of illusions and hallucinations. That may be true in innumerable cases, yet it cannot be denied, and the Apostle does not mean to dispute the fact, that many of the strange feats performed can neither be classed as outright frauds nor be explained according to the known laws of nature. Yet, even granted that many of Antichrist’s miracles are unexplainable, are supernatural, they are nevertheless lying signs and wonders. The Antichrist boasts that they are divine miracles, performed by divine power, proving him to be the divinely appointed ruler of the Church; while in truth he does not perform even one miracle by the authority and in the power of God, but by the satanic power of the Prince of Darkness. “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light,” and his tool, the Antichrist, as a minister of righteousness, II Cor. 11:14, 16. His miracles proceed from falsehood, since they deceive and mislead men into misbelief, as is evident from vv. 10–12. It cannot be otherwise. The devil is the father of lies, and when he speaks and works lies, he speaks and works his own. Lying is essential to his being. The coming of the Antichrist will be “with all deceivableness of unrighteousness.” The activities of the Antichrist have the appearance of righteousness; nevertheless they are full of unrighteousness and therefore deceive the people. Since deception, lying, and trickery are some of the characteristic marks of unrighteousness and wickedness, he, the “Wicked” one, makes full use of these foul means in order to rob men of their salvation.

Fortunately, this power does not extend over all people; the frightful activity of the Antichrist is not irresistible; only they “that perish” become its victims, only they who ultimately go to eternal perdition. Their terrible fate is self-invited. They receive not the love of the truth. They have well deserved their fate. It is visited upon them as a reward, *anth’ hōn*, “because.” Paul does not say, “They did not receive the truth,” but rather, “they did not receive the love of the truth.” In the former case it would have been conceivable that they had esteemed the truth, but because of some fatal deception had not come to a living knowledge of the truth and therefore had not accepted it. But no, they did not receive the knowledge of the truth; they did not even have the desire for the truth; they hardened themselves against it. They did not want to know anything of the truth of Christianity. They did not want to know the Gospel. And this their guilt appears all the greater when we remember the purpose for which the truth was offered to them, the marvelous blessing it had in store for them. This truth was to rescue and save them. God’s intention and objective was their everlasting salvation. With careless indifference they neglected the great salvation prepared for them. Indifferently they did neglect it, and as a punishment for their neglect they fall victims to the wiles of the Antichrist.

Vv. 11 and 12: “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” Because those who perish did not receive the love of the truth, God sends them a “strong delusion.” Literally the meaning is: He sends them a power or working of error. The error is already at hand, but at the time of the Antichrist, when sin and deception will manifest their full force in the man of sin, the error will do its deadly work. GOD will send these strong delusions. We cannot get away from this meaning of the word; we must accept it in its full significance, we dare not weaken it by understanding it to mean that all this comes to people by divine sufferance. The text does not say that God permits error to come, but it says that He sends it. God punishes the wicked by means of the wicked. Deliberate and persistent contempt for the truth brings with it divine punishment in the form of strong delusions sent by God. God does that in order that they who do not wish to believe the truth will believe a lie. That is God’s intention in carrying out His judgment. He punishes sin by means of a greater sin. They shall believe a lie, *tō pseudei*, not merely error, *tē planē*, but a lie, a falsehood, consciously and purposely spoken in enmity of God. Lying is the direct opposite of the truth. And, if truth, the whole, complete Christian truth, is the truth of the Gospel, as we have seen, then “the lie” is not merely some single lie, but the whole and complete power of satanic perversion of all truth. It is the anti-Gospel, corresponding to him who is the father of lies and whose tool and prophet is the Antichrist.

All this will come to pass at God’s direction for the ultimate purpose that “they might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” That is God’s ultimate intention when He sends “strong delusion.” God has decreed a final decision, a mighty, terrible judgment. In that judgment all who have not believed the truth of Christianity “will be damned,” all without exception. The translation of the KJV, “they will be damned,” says exactly what the Apostle meant to express with the word *krinesthai* which here, as frequently, is used in the sense of *katakrinesthai* (Heb. 13:4, where it is stated that God will judge, *krinein*, whoremongers and adulterers).—The cause of their damnation is unbelief. He that believes not will be damned. They had no love for the truth. The reason they did not love the truth was that it demanded righteousness of them. Instead, they had pleasure in unrighteousness, in godlessness, in the “lie.” For that reason they will finally be overtaken by the judgment that will be visited upon unrighteousness, upon the lie, upon unbelief. —What Paul here teaches does not furnish Biblical basis for the error of Calvinism, but forms the foundation for the correct Lutheran distinction between the antecedent and the consequent will of God. The antecedent will of God is ready to condemn only after man refuses to believe. For that reason the Apostle definitely declares not that God sends the “delusion” but that He sends the power, the ability, and energy to produce delusion. Let us summarize the points given in the passages from John’s epistles and those contained in II Thess. 2:

The Antichrist is not any particular individual, but a representative person, or a power represented by a person or in a person. He was in the process of coming, or development, as early as the middle of the first century, when the mystery of lawlessness was already at work. He is not an outside person or power, but arose in the midst of the Church, in the temple of God. The revelation of his lawlessness was hindered by a power headed by a restraining person. After the removal of this hindering influence the Antichrist came out openly

with his claims and was also revealed in his true nature. He was exposed before the world, but continued his activity as the son of perdition. He claims divine prerogatives for himself, vaunting himself and raising himself above constituted authorities. His doctrine is, in the last analysis, a denial of the Father and the Son as revealed in both their persons and their work in the Holy Scriptures. He presumes to direct every object and every form of worship. He operates with lying wonders, that is, such as are based upon lies and intended to spread lies. He is constantly deceiving people who give credence to his false claims. He will not be destroyed until the Lord's great *parousia*.

We ask at once: To which historical phenomenon must we apply this description. We answer without any hesitation, on the basis of the evidence which can easily be adduced, that the passages explained above apply to the Pope of Rome. Before we do so, however, we consider various interpretations of the passages discussed, doing so in the next part of our essay.

III. Four Interpretations

The first view is the one held by the Church Fathers as it appears in the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Augustine, Theodoret, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Hippolytus (who, by the way, wrote a dissertation *De Anti-Christo*), Lactantius, Origen, Ephraem the Syrian. There is essential agreement among them in that a personal Antichrist will appear before the return of Christ; in him all the characteristics will appear that are mentioned in the section under discussion. Some of them think chiefly of a temporal ruler, others of an arch-heretic and false prophet. They are agreed that the Antichrist is still in the future and that he is an individual. Still, Augustine already notes a collective interpretation, that the term Antichrist refers not only to the godless prince, but includes the whole number of his adherents, the body of which he is the head. Already prior to that time the legend about Nero had originated, that Nero, the bitter enemy and bloodthirsty persecutor of the Christians, had not died, but had only withdrawn to reappear in the course of time as the Antichrist.

A second view is that held during the Reformation era, the development of which began as early as the eleventh century. According to this view that Antichrist prophesied in Scripture is a collective person, the term designating the Papacy. This was the view already of the Waldensians, the Wycliffites and Hussites, of Savonarola and of Geiler von Kaisersberg. Wyclif wrote a tract *De Christo et Adversario Suo Antichristo*, in which on the basis of manifest and generally known facts he proves the Pope to be the Antichrist. Only a short time before his death he cried out: "Up! Let us fight against this Antichrist." Luther sponsored, vindicated, and defended this interpretation. Chiefly through his Smalcald Articles the doctrine that the Pope is the real Antichrist has found a place in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. Similarly Melancthon expresses himself in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession.¹ All Lutheran theologians of the 16th and the 17th century follow Luther's footsteps. All regard the Pope, and not some specific Pope but the Papacy as an institution, to be the man of sin and the son of perdition. Bengel writes: "*non modo individuum aliquem hominem, sed seriem aut successionem hominum in eodem gradu et nomine constitutorum*" (not merely some one individual person, but a series or succession of men occupying the same position and bearing the same name). The same interpretation concerning the Papacy is found among the leaders of the Reformed Church, Zwingli, Calvin, Beza, and others. Even several rationalists have shared that interpretation, and also a number of modern exegetes accept the concepts as collective, although they do not apply them to the Papacy. Nitzsch, who thinks of atheism, as it will in the course of time be publicly acknowledged as an authoritative power; Schneckenburger who remarks: "The Antichrist is Paul's way of personifying wickedness."

The third interpretation is the historical or rationalistic view. According to this opinion the words are to be understood historically as referring to an individual in the past. In that individual the words of Paul may have been fulfilled or not fulfilled. In the latter case, it is claimed, Paul was simply mistaken. —There is, however, a wide difference of opinion as to the identity of that individual. Rationalists have understood the man of sin to be one of the Roman Caesars. Hugo Grotius, Spitta, and J. Weiss thought of Caligula, who commanded that a

¹ Art. XV, § 18. Conc. Trigl., p. 319.

colossal statue of himself be erected in the temple at Jerusalem. Wettstein thought of Titus, who caused sacrifices to be brought into the Temple. Nero has been particularly favored by many interpreters as the “man of sin” of II Thess. 2. Others, as Hilgenfeld and Pfleiderer, suggest an ancient heretic; Hammond thought directly of Simon the sorcerer and the gnostics, whose leader he is supposed to have been; Clericus named the leader of the rioting Jews, Simon the son of Gioras, of whose depravity Josephus tells. This great diversity of opinion in itself proves the fallacy of the historical view. This interpretation overlooks altogether that, according to the specific words of the text, Antichrist will be seated in the temple of God, in the Church, “not in a pigsty,” as Luther on one occasion remarks sarcastically. Communism, Naziism, etc., are not seated in the Church, and Modernism does not perform miracles, but rather denies the possibility of miracles.

The fourth interpretation is that of the Chiliastic interpreters. These interpreters find antichristian features in the apostasy beginning in apostolic times and continuing to our day, also more or less in the Papacy. This falling away is to culminate towards the end of the world in a particularly wicked enemy of God, the great Antichrist. Chiliastic interpreters for the most part assume the Antichrist to be an earthly ruler. Hofmann speaks of an “Antiochus redivivus,” Olshausen thought of an incarnation of Satan. When Napoleon I appeared, many believed him to be the Antichrist. In times of great excitement, as for example in times of world wars, when many will turn to the Bible, especially to the apocalyptic chapters and books in the hope of finding there a foundation for their hopes and fears, almost every person of prominence is identified as the Antichrist. Which of these interpretations is the correct one, which of them agrees best with the text and history? If only we will note carefully every word, all uncertainty as to their meaning disappears.

The Antichrist cannot be an individual, since the first traces of his activity date back to apostolic times, II Thess. 2:7, and he will continue until the return of Christ. Romanism is a system personified in its head, who is thus a representative person. We do not single out any particular individual, although some Popes were in their own persons more representative of the system than others. Every new Pope simply inherits the system and is the exponent of the system, quite frequently also its spokesman. St. Paul describes the whole movement led by the Antichrist as *apostasia* falling away; and since the whole context speaks of religious matters, it cannot be a political or social defection or secession; nor can it be a mixed movement, partly religious, partly political. This is also indicated by the close connection of this “falling away” with “the man of sin” and the “son of perdition.” He presents “strong delusions,” “a lie”; those who followed him have not received the love of the truth and will be damned; the “falling away” is characterized as iniquity. It is not *a* falling away, but *the* falling away, a special apostasy, not a falling away from single doctrines, but from the essence of all Christian doctrine, from Christ Himself. The essence of Christian doctrine is the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ without works. This doctrine that man is saved without his own works, through faith in Christ, is the only doctrine by which a man can be saved. Whoever attacks this faith of Christians threatens their life. Whoever threatens and attacks this faith, harms the Church most.

This doctrine the Papacy, represented by the Pope, officially condemns. Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Session VI, Canon 11: “If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favor of God; let him be anathema.” Canon 12: “If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake; or that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.”—Canon 20: “If any one saith, that the man who is justified and how perfect soever, is not bound to observe the commandments of God and of the Church, but only to believe, as if indeed the Gospel were a bare and absolute promise of eternal life, without the condition of observing the commandments; let him be anathema” (Waterworth’s translation). That is the very heart of the Papacy: denial of justification by faith. The whole machinery of the Papacy is organized against this doctrine.

There is a host of doctrines promulgated by the Pope which by no stretch of imagination can ever be brought into harmony with this cardinal doctrine. For instance, indulgences, penances, fasts, prayers, alms, pilgrimages, works of supererogation, purgatory, the Mass. Nor do they ever pretend that they can be harmonized; they want to have nothing to do with justification by faith. The whole edifice of the Papacy falls if

justification by faith is admitted. Luther to them remains the arch-heretic because he taught justification by faith alone. There can be no greater apostasy from the true Christian religion than that of which the Papacy is guilty. There are other false teachings in Rome. Popes have gone astray from God's Word in other respects; in that they do not differ from others. Like the Sodomites, Popes have lived in the most abominable vices; but others have done that also. That is not the essence of the Papacy. The heart of the Papacy is denial of justification by faith. As surely as the Christian Church is composed of people who by the operation of the Holy Ghost believe that they have a gracious God without their own works, for Christ's sake alone, so surely the Pope under the name of Christ bans and anathematizes the Christian Church, and is constantly active in destroying it, when, for instance, children who under his rule by Baptism have become members of the Christian Church are led away from the Savior and taught to put their trust in their own works. To take the faith in the Savior out of the heart of Christians, that is attacking their true life, their spiritual and eternal life. And that the Papacy does. The Papacy does not carry on this murder of Christians openly but under the semblance of Christianity and holiness. Luring the nations into its fold by the claim of being the only saving Church, it leads all who answer the call, not to trust in Christ as the only Savior, but on the way of works, and so to perdition. Rome is the Antichrist, under the pretense of taking people to heaven constantly leading untold numbers to hell.

A part of this apostasy will be, according to I John 2:22; 4:3, that Antichrist denies that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus is come into the flesh. The Pope indeed calls Jesus the Christ, but he robs Jesus of that which makes Him the Christ, that His merits alone have earned for us forgiveness of all sin, life and salvation. The Pope does not deny the fact of Jesus' incarnation, but he denies the purpose for which He came into the flesh, to be the sole Mediator between God and man. The Pope nullifies the merits of Christ by teaching that we must at least in part work out our own salvation by our works; that we must cancel the punishment for our sins by fasts, prayers, alms, and other works, or that we must have the works of supererogation done by saints put to our credit; that the Mass is an ever repeated sacrifice for sin.

We properly apply to the Pope the titles St. Paul gives to the Antichrist: the man of sin, the son of perdition; not because of his personal wickedness, but because he originates sin and makes others sin and leads them to perdition. He robs men of the Gospel. Where that is removed, there remains nothing but sin and perdition. He abrogates and changes divine laws by decrees and dispensations; what can result but sin when people follow his edicts? With his own laws and ordinances, which are legion, to which he binds consciences and threatens curse and damnation to all who transgress them, he makes sin where there is no real sin, disturbing and confusing consciences, leading them to idolatry in the Mass and the veneration of saints and relics, and to other sins. Thus he is a murderer of souls; but a murderer of bodies of God's children as well; the Pope has shed more blood than all the Roman emperors. Is it not blasphemy of the worst kind to deny that Christ "by one offering hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" and to teach that in the Mass His body must daily be offered anew for the sins of the living and the dead? And is not the Pope therefore a blasphemer?

The Antichrist, according to Dan. 11:37ff., will not regard the God of his fathers; a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honor. And the Pope establishes a new worship, a new way of serving God. The Romish doctrine of good works is a false service of God, and that in two ways: (1) because people are taught to do good works to win God's favor, and (2) because things which God has not commanded are called good works. There is the veneration of saints, angels, relics, pictures, and images; there is the Mass, which since the Middle Ages occupies the center of Roman worship, and for which there is not a scintilla of foundation in the Bible; there are pilgrimages and vigils and all the host of things in Romish cultus; there is the whole system of monasticism. Of the Antichrist Paul states II Thess. 2:4, he "sitteth in the temple of God." The temple of God is the Christian Church, the communion of saints. Antichrist therefore cannot be a secular ruler. And since despite his apostasy Antichrist remains in the Church, establishes his throne there, and rules there, his apostasy cannot be a separation from the communion of the Church, but an apostasy from the faith of the Church. Jesus refers to this when in Matt. 24:15 He says that the abomination of desolation stands in the holy place. Where Antichrist is, among baptized Christians, there is the Church. Antichrist cannot be atheism, Communism, etc. In II Peter 3 the Apostle prophesies a great apostasy in which people totally leave the Church, turn their back on the Bible, scoff at faith. But that is not the Antichrist. The apostasy referred to in II Thess. 2 is of a different kind; those

addicted to it remain within the Church, but they depart from the basic teaching of the Church.—The Papacy is not outside of, but within the Church. The apostasy of the Papacy is not external, but internal. Many members of the Church are under the Papacy, chiefly the baptized children; then also many adults, who by the Gospel, which is still occasionally proclaimed, are led to trust solely in the merits of Christ, despite their seducing environment. The Pope has taken the heart out of Christian doctrine and faith; his teaching is contrary to Christ and His Gospel.

The conduct of the Antichrist is clearly depicted II Thess. 2:4: “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.” It is evident to all the world that the Pope will not be subject to anyone, that he claims to be supreme in Church and world. Officially he calls himself the vicar and representative of Christ and God. Furthermore, he appropriates to himself titles which belong only to God, and accepts divine honor and veneration. One Pope says, “It is shown quite clearly that the Pope can neither be bound nor loosed by secular authority; for it is a fact that the Pope was called God by the pious emperor Constantine. It is manifest that God cannot be judged by men.” In his charge against the Waldensians (1520) the papal spokesman Claudius Seisselius said, “In whatever guilty transactions the Pope may be implicated, he is an angel of God, yea, more, he is the successor of the Apostles and the vicar of Christ; aye, I should rather say, he is Christ.” No pope has ever rejected that statement. In a papal encyclical the power is ascribed to the Pope that he can confer authoritative value on the Word of God; for it is there declared that the Old and the New Testaments must be received not because they are in their entirety found in a canonical index but because the holy Pope Innocentius seems to have handed down a decision to this effect. Popes have appropriated power, privileges, and dignities which belong only to God. Pope Johannes Sylva stated that though the divine Law demanded that every matter must be established by three or more witnesses, he could decree otherwise. Pope Azorius claimed the authority to absolve himself from an oath that he had sworn. Pius IX applied Christ’s word “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” to himself.

The Pope claims that only those will be saved who are subject to the Roman Pontiff, though he condemns and abrogates the only way to salvation. In the bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302) Boniface VIII says: “We, moreover, proclaim, declare, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human being to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.” Under political pressure this bull was rescinded by Clement V in the bull *Rex glorie* (1311) but it was reinstated by Leo X in his bull *Pastor Aeternus*, and this was ratified by the Fifth Lateran Council in 1517. This bull was made part of Roman canon law, and it stands today, despite all attempts of the Paulist Fathers and others to slur over these statements in their tracts of information on the Catholic Church.

The Pope changes God’s Word and command as he pleases. Christ in the words of institution says of His Holy Supper, “Drink ye all of it”; the Pope says, “No, not all; only the priest.” Christ said, “Search the Scriptures”; Pope Pius IX *ex cathedra* condemned all Bible Societies as a pest. And that, too, has never been changed and still stands, despite all desperate propaganda efforts today by the Knights of Columbus, in countries where they have dangerous competition, to make people believe that they encourage Bible study. In the lands in which they still have undisputed control they still burn Bibles. And does not the Pope practically set the Bible aside by declaring it dark and beyond the comprehension of all who are not entitled by the Church to explain it? —Christ says by His Apostle, “A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife”; the Pope says, “No, the priest must have no wife.”—Christ says we must confess all our sins to God, to our fellow men only when we have sinned against them. The Pope says we must confess all our sins to a man, to a priest, under pain of not being forgiven.

Paul says, “Let no man judge you in meat or in drink,” Col. 2:16; again Paul declares it the doctrine of seducing spirits and of devils when some who depart from the faith forbid to marry and command to abstain from meat which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving, I Tim. 4:1–3. The Pope commands numerous fasts and declares the unmarried estate of monks and nuns a peculiar sign of holiness. —Christ has given to the entire Church the power of the keys to heaven; the Pope says that the power to bind and to loose is given only to Peter and his successors. Though Paul says, “There is one God and one Mediator between God

and men, the man Christ Jesus,” I Tim. 2:5, the Pope says, “No, you must go to the saints, particularly Mary, to mediate for you if you want to be saved.”—Christ says, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment,” Heb. 9:27. The Pope inserts purgatory between death and the judgment. —Christ in simply innumerable parts of His Word declares that the sinner is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law; by His Apostle, just in connection with this truth, He declares, “Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed,” Gal. 1:8, 9. The Pope and his councils officially and *expressis verbis* condemn that doctrine. Emperor Henry IV, in his renowned controversy with Gregory VII, wrote him: “St. Paul, who said that even an angel from heaven should be accursed who taught any other than the true doctrine, did not make an exception in your favor, to permit you to teach false doctrine.”

The Pope claims supremacy over all secular governments. He demands that as secular governments they acknowledge his authority and stand ready to serve his kingdom. Cf. *Unam Sanctam* by Boniface VIII: “Both the spiritual and the material sword are, therefore, in the power of the Church, the latter indeed to be used for the Church, the former by the Church, the one by the priest, the other by the hand of kings and soldiers, but by the will and sufferance of the priest. It is fitting moreover, that one sword should be under the other and the temporal authority subject to the spiritual power... Hence it is for the spiritual power to establish the earthly power, and judge it if it be not good... Therefore, if the earthly power shall err, it shall be judged by the spiritual power. If the lesser spiritual power err, it shall be judged by the higher. But if the supreme power err, it shall be judged by God alone and not by man... Whoever, therefore, shall resist this power ordained by God, resists the ordinance of God.” In support of all this, Boniface adds Luke 22:38: “And they said, Lord, behold here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough,” and John 18:11: “Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath,” which with little doubt furnishes the ultimate example of peculiar papal exegesis. This claim of the Papacy has been repeated over and over again. Gregory VII proposes the argument: How could it be that he who has the power to open and close heaven should not sit in judgment over all the earth? Innocent III wrote to the patriarch of Constantinople: Christ has conferred on the Popes all earthly world government to rule it. Proof: Peter walked on the sea; the sea means the whole number of nations on earth. Pius IX in 1871 declared that the Popes mean to apply this power over secular governments wherever they can, declaring that the Popes have the right to depose kings, to absolve subjects from their oath of allegiance. This same Pope, in 1868, declared laws passed in Austria, abrogating an earlier concordat with the Pope, together with their application, null and forever void, by virtue of his apostolic authority.

That is a portrait of the Papacy drawn by the Popes themselves. Compare it with II Thess. 2. He sits in the temple of God, claims to be the head of the Church, and excommunicates all who do not acknowledge his supremacy. He claims divine attributes, e.g., infallibility. He claims divine prerogatives: declares he can give dispensations from God’s Law, decree articles of faith, and give new revelations. The Pope establishes a new doctrine, a new service, and teaches a new, his own doctrine, gives rules and ordinances many and various, and binds consciences to keep them. He claims divine authority: makes salvation dependent on the keeping of his ordinances; yes, higher authority than God because he changes Christ’s Word and command as he pleases. He extends his authority beyond the grave and by the indulgences manipulates purgatory; damns and declares saved whom he will, claims to be the supreme Judge who judges all, but is judged by none. Does he not oust God and His Son, on his part, from His dominion? Is he not the one “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”? Nor let anyone tell you that the Pope has changed. The old word of Osiander is still true. He said: “Also the present Pope is and is called Antichrist. The reason why he is this lies not in some personal depravity or wickedness, but in the nature of his office. Now no Pontiff, as such, however upright he has been personally, has failed to declare himself the ecumenical head of the Church or has not approved the condemnatory canons of the Council of Trent, though he may for political reasons abstain for the time being from slaughter and tyranny.”

The prophecy speaks of the root of Antichrist: his “coming is after the working of Satan.” He is not Satan himself, as some have thought, but he is produced by Satan, “with all power and signs and lying

wonders,” or rather, because the attribute “lying” belongs to all three: “with all lying power and signs and wonders.” His kingdom is established and supported by these things which are a part of that realm of lies whose father is the devil. It is evident to the world that the Papacy uses and has used all sorts of lying powers, signs, and wonders. Luther said: “The power which the Papacy exerts can be explained only on the ground of diabolical action. It is not only against the Word of God, but against all reason. Nobody loves it; even its own adherents do not love it; but all fear it, deceived and captured by an illusion of piety and by lying signs and wonders.” St. Paul directly calls celibacy and fasts doctrines of the devil. And the Catholic world to this day is full of plaudits for wonders, healing at shrines, graves, images of saints. That is satanic fraud, or if supernatural things do occur, they are done by satanic powers.

The last item which the Bible reveals in this picture is the time or duration of the Antichrist, especially his beginning and his end. II Thess. 2 Paul does not say, the Antichrist will come; he says, “The mystery of iniquity doth already work.” Even in the days of the Apostle this power is moving, but secretly; there is something that withholdeth, that “letteth,” i.e., that hinders, restrains this power. For a time it is a mystery, but it will be revealed. The time will come when Antichrist will show himself frankly, without camouflage. And then will come his end. Paul says: “Whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth.” That may be a gradual process of uncertain duration. He will be consumed by the Word of God, not by force of arms. Hence, again, Antichrist cannot be a secular power. The Word of God does not fight against secular powers. But this revelation of the Antichrist is a sign of the coming day of Christ. When that man of sin has been revealed and is being consumed by the spirit of the Lord’s mouth, then the day of Christ may come at any time. And on that day, and not before, the Lord will destroy him with the brightness of His coming. The chief marks of the Antichrist in the Papacy began to appear in the days of Christ and the Apostles: the desire to rule in the Church, and false doctrine, especially the denial of justification by faith. The first beginning we see among the disciples of Jesus, who expected Him to establish a mighty empire on earth and, when the Lord was not looking, quarreled about their place in this realm. Not long after the Ascension, John complains about Diotrefes, “Who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them,” III John 9. It is interesting to note that the word John employs here “*philoprōteuōn*” means literally: he who loves the primacy. It is so translated in the Vulgate. And the earliest false teachers, who caused Paul so much trouble, were the Judaistic teachers, who attacked the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and wanted to force Christians back under the obligations of the Law. But at first this lust for power in the Church was hindered, something kept it from unfolding. What? It was the love of the truth. But when better times came for Christians, they went to sleep, and the enemy sowed his tares unhindered; the Papacy developed.

And we have the Papacy and the Pope today; and it is the same today as it was in the days when it was first revealed, in the days of the Reformation. But its unlimited, absolute power over world and Church has been thoroughly broken. Luther has unmasked Pope and Papacy, so that today anyone may know and guard against it. The Pope was discovered and exposed as the Antichrist. That was the turning point in Luther’s work when, preparing for the Leipzig Debate, he came to the conviction that Antichrist sat in Rome and from that seat on the seven hills spread his tentacles over all lands. So this doctrine that the Pope is the Antichrist is most closely connected with the Reformation. It was then and by that work that the Antichrist was revealed. He is not killed, not utterly destroyed. But he is continually being consumed by the Word of our God; he has lost his power except over those who are willing to submit to him. That, also, became evident in the days of the Reformation. Every reform movement before that time was killed by the Pope’s ban and interdict. Why not Luther’s Reformation? Why did not the Pope lay the interdict on Germany or Saxony after he had excommunicated Luther. He threatened it, but by that time Luther had written his “Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation” and his book “On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church.” He had proved to Christian people that the Pope has no power to ban individuals or whole countries and close heaven to them. So he had freed them from the fear of the Pope. And Leo X and Clement VII knew that any attempt to lay the interdict on Germany would meet with contempt and derision. Thus the Pope’s power and tyranny is broken.

But the Papacy remains the same. They, the Romanists, boast of this. When a Pope dies, the Papacy does not die. When the doctor declares that a Pope is dead, an official in the presence of witnesses taps his head

three times with a hammer, calling his name. If there is no response, he announces, “The Pope is surely dead.” But a substitute has already been provided who takes over until a new election has taken place. Then the people are told: “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy; we again have a Pope.” And so it will continue to the end of time. The power of the Papacy, its influence in the world, may at times wax, then wane again. But the Papacy will remain what it is until the Lord by the brightness of His coming makes an end of it.

IV. Lutheran Confessions on the Antichrist

Antichrist, as described by Paul II Thess. 2:4 is that Antichrist who will sit in the temple of God, i.e., he will rule and bear office in the Church. But the Church is not only the fellowship of outward objects and rites, as other governments, but it is originally a fellowship of faith and of the Holy Ghost in hearts.”²

“Now, it is manifest that the same Roman pontiffs, with their adherents, defend (and practise) godless doctrines and godless services. And the marks (all the vices) of Antichrist plainly agree with the kingdom of the Pope and his adherents. For Paul in II Thess. 2:3, in describing Antichrist, calls him an adversary of Christ, 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. He speaks therefore of one ruling in the Church, not of heathen kings, and he calls this one the adversary of Christ, because he will devise doctrine conflicting with the Gospel, and will assume to himself divine authority.”³

The Papacy is a part of Antichrist’s kingdom: “... If the adversaries defend these human services as meriting justification, grace, and the remission of sins, they simply establish the kingdom of Antichrist. For the kingdom of Antichrist is a new service of God, devised by human authority rejecting Christ, just as the kingdom of Mahomet has services and works through which it wishes to be justified before God; nor does it hold that men are gratuitously justified before God by faith, for Christ’s sake. Thus the Papacy also will be a part of the kingdom of Antichrist if it thus defends human services as justifying. For the honor is taken away from Christ when they teach that we are not justified gratuitously by faith, for Christ’s sake, but by such services; especially when they teach that such services are not only useful for justification, but are also necessary, as they hold above in Art. VII, where they condemn us for saying that unto true unity of the Church it is not necessary that rites instituted by men should everywhere be alike. Daniel, 11:38, indicates that new human services will be the very form and constitution of the kingdom of Antichrist. For he says thus: But in his estate shall he honor the god of forces; and a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honor with gold and silver and precious stones.”⁴

The Pope is Antichrist: “This teaching (the supremacy of the Pope) shows forcefully that the Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ, because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which, nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God. This is, properly speaking, to exalt himself above all that is called God, as Paul says II Thess. 2:4. Even the Turks or the Tartars, great enemies of Christians as they are, do not do this, but they allow whoever wishes to believe in Christ, and take bodily tribute and obedience from Christians. The Pope, however, prohibits this faith, saying that to be saved a person must obey him. This we are unwilling to do, even though on this account we must die in God’s name. This all proceeds from the fact that the Pope has wished to be called the supreme head of the Christian Church by divine right. Accordingly he had to make himself equal and superior to Christ, and had to cause himself to be proclaimed the head and then the lord of the Church, and finally of the whole world, and simply God on earth, until he has dared to issue commands even to the angels in heaven. And when we distinguish the Pope’s teaching from, or measure and hold it against, Holy Scripture, it is found that the Pope’s teaching, were it is best, has been taken from the imperial and heathen law, and treats of political matters and decisions or rights, as the Decretals show; furthermore, it teaches of ceremonies and concerning churches, garments, foods, persons and similar puerile, theatrical and comical things without

² Apol. VII and XIII, 4, Trigl., p. 227.

³ Smalc. Arts., “Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope,” paragraph 39, Trigl., p. 515.

⁴ Apol., Art. XV, 18; Trigl., p. 319.

measure, but in all these things nothing at all of Christ, faith, and the commandments of God. Lastly, it is nothing else than the devil himself, because above and against God he urges his falsehoods concerning masses, purgatory, the monastic life, one's own works and divine worship (upon each of which the Papacy is altogether founded and is standing), and condemns, murders, and tortures all Christians who do not exalt and honor these abominations above all things. Therefore, just as little as we can worship the devil himself as Lord and God, we can endure his apostle, the Pope, or Antichrist, in his rule as head or lord."⁵

That the Pope is Antichrist is proved:

1. from prohibition of marriage. "To prohibit marriage, and to burden the divine order of priests with perpetual celibacy, they have had neither authority nor right (they have done it out of malice, without any honest reason), but have acted like antichristian, tyrannical, desperate scoundrels (have performed the work of antichrist, of tyrants and the worst knaves), and have thereby caused all kinds of horrible, abominable, innumerable sins of unchastity (depraved lusts), in which they still wallow. Now, as little as we or they have been given the power to make a woman out of a man or a man out of a woman, or to nullify either sex, so little have they had the power to (sunder and) separate such creatures of God, or to forbid them from living (and cohabiting) honestly in marriage with one another. Therefore we are unwilling to assent to their abominable celibacy, nor will we (even) tolerate it, but we wish to have marriage free as God has instituted (and ordained) it, and we wish neither to rescind nor hinder His work; for Paul says, I Tim. 4:1ff., that this (prohibition of marriage) is a doctrine of devils."⁶

2. from invocation of saints: "The invocation of saints is also one of the abuses of Antichrist conflicting with the chief article, and destroys the knowledge of Christ. Neither is it commanded nor counseled, nor has it any example (or testimony) in Scripture, and even though it were a precious thing, as it is not, in Christ we have everything a thousandfold better (and surer, so that we are not in need of calling upon the saints)."⁷

3. from abuse of Mass: "... we on our part are contending with you who are defending a heresy manifestly conflicting with the prophets, apostles, and holy Fathers, namely, that the Mass justifies *ex opere operato*, that it merits the remission of guilt and punishment even for the unjust, to whom it is applied, if they do not present an obstacle. Of these pernicious errors, which detract from the glory of Christ's passion, and entirely overthrow the doctrine concerning the righteousness of faith, we disapprove.... Just as, therefore in Judah among the godless priests a false opinion concerning sacrifices inhered; just as in Israel, Baalitic services continued, and, nevertheless, a Church of God was there which disapproved of godless services, so Baalitic worship inheres in the domain of the Pope, namely, the abuse of the Mass, which they apply, that by it they may merit for the unrighteous the remission of guilt and punishment.... it seems that this Baalitic worship will endure as long as the reign of the Pope, until Christ will come to judge, and by the glory of His advent destroy the reign of Antichrist."⁸

Duty of Christians to shun Antichrist: "This being the case (the claims of primacy and horrible errors of the Pope) all Christians ought to beware of becoming partakers of the godless doctrine, blasphemies, and unjust cruelty of the Pope. On this account they ought to desert and execrate the Pope with his adherents as the kingdom of Antichrist."⁹

V. Objections to the Doctrine that the Pope is the Antichrist

1. It is objected that the various expressions of II Thess. 2 must necessarily refer to individuals: Man of sin, son of perdition, that Wicked one. But all these expressions may also be understood collectively. The use of the definite article need not mean a single person. It may mean a series of men, a class of people, in fact, it is

5 Smalc. Arts., Part II, Art. IV, 10f.; Trigl., p. 475. Reference to this statement is made in the Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Art. X, Trigl., p. 1059.

6 Smalc. Arts., II, Art. XI, Trigl., p. 499.

7 Smalc. Arts., II, Art. II, paragraph 25; Trigl., p. 469.

8 Apology Art. XXVII, 98; Trigl., p. 417. Foundation of Kingdom of Antichrist, Apology XV, 18, Trigl., p. 515 (quoted above).

9 Smalc. Arts., "Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope," paragraph 41; Trigl., p. 517.

Scripture usage to designate a whole class of people by the definite singular. Dan. 8:23ff. the Prophet speaks of a king, though it is evident that a whole succession of kings are meant. II Tim. 3:17, a direct parallel to “the man of sin,” Paul says: “that the man of God may be perfect.” Matt. 22:21: “Render, therefore, unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” The reference is to the office of Caesar, to all Caesars, to the whole series of Roman emperors or rulers. Gerhard turns the tables completely on papistical exegesis by citing Matt. 16:18 against them. They refer the phrase “on this rock,” which was spoken to Peter, to their whole line of Popes. He reminds them that in their church canons, wherever the term “Pope” occurs, the reference is not to a certain individual, but to any scoundrel who may bear that name at that time. Papists say: If the Pope is the Antichrist, there are 200 Antichrists; we answer: If the Pope is the head of the Church, there are 200 heads, 200 bridegrooms.—The very prophecy II Thess. 2 proves that it must refer to a series of persons. Antichrist, Paul says, will not meet his end till Judgment Day. And yet the iniquity was already there in the days of the Apostles; no single person can live as long as that. Paul bases his portrayal and his expressions on Dan. 7–11. There Daniel first describes Antiochus Epiphanes as a type of Antichrist, and in close connection with this description he adds a prophecy of the Antichrist himself, chap. 12. Borrowing from that analogy, Paul here also speaks of the Antichrist as of one person.

2. A second objection, mentioned by Dr. Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics*, III, 467, is: this teaching (that the Antichrist prophesied in II Thess. 2 stands fully grown before us in the Papacy) does not rest on Scripture, but on history and one, accordingly, cannot be divinely assured of having the right answer. However, this objection is an assertion which the objectors themselves are not able or willing to uphold. Whether in Jesus of Nazareth the promised Christ had appeared was also a “historical” question for the Jews of Jesus’ day. As the Jews, however, could, on the basis of the prophecies and from the words and works of Christ, know with the assurance of faith that in Jesus of Nazareth “the Christ” had appeared, so by comparing the predictions of Scripture with the words and works of the Papacy we can become divinely sure that in the Papacy “the Antichrist” is standing before us, recognizable by all. —Dr. Pieper then quotes “*righteous indignation against the antichristian papacy*,” p. 39f.: “Likewise the Pope must be the Antichrist because everything that the Scripture foretells of the Antichrist fits him and cannot be shown to be true of any other.... We should diligently note this truth and material, that the Roman Pope is the Antichrist, and not regret the time spent in having listened to this truth.”

The Bible does not say: The Pope is the Antichrist. But the Bible does not say in so many words: Christ’s body is present in the Sacrament and is received by the communicants. The Bible does not say in so many words that infants must be baptized. These doctrines are deductions. But Christ Himself makes such deductions: from the fact that God is called the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob He draws the conclusion that these patriarchs must be living. If a deduction is a right deduction, if it is drawn from the Word of God, it is correct, and it stands; there can be no objection to it. It is not a valid objection to say: The statement that the Pope is the Antichrist rests not on Scripture alone, but on Scripture and a historical judgment; therefore it rests partly on human opinion. As stated above, comparing prophecy with words and works of the Papacy, we can with perfect certainty draw the conclusion that the Pope in whom the Papacy is concentrated is the Antichrist. This teaching rests on Scripture, and not on a human opinion, but on the facts of history.

3. Dr. Pieper adduces a third objection: “The Papacy still confesses fundamental articles of the Christian faith, such as the articles of the Trinity and of the theanthropic Person of Christ.” We say: These “fundamental articles” save no man if at the same time he denies and curses the Christian doctrine of justification. Without the article of justification all other doctrines are empty husks. That the Papacy still confesses some ‘fundamental articles’ is part of the external adornment by which it seeks to cover up its apostasy from the Christian doctrine.”

4. Dr. Pieper states: “Some say that there have been several personally honorable, even ‘pious’ Popes.” This objection reveals a lack of Christian judgment. There can be no thought of piety in the case of any Pope, since even “pious” Popes head and direct the machinery that does away with and curses the Christian doctrine of justification, that is, the entire Christian faith. The occasional appearance of an outwardly respectable Pope is

a part of the external trappings which hide the inward, spiritual iniquity of the Antichrist. All the marks enumerated in II Thess. 2 fit all Popes.

The Scriptural doctrine of the Antichrist is well summarized by two recent teachers of the Lutheran Church. Dr. Hoenecke (*Ev. Luth. Dogmatik*, IV, 219ff.) first lists the characteristic features of the Antichrist: originating in the midst of the Church; coming after the working of Satan; described as a collective person; having his throne in the midst of the Church of God; coming forward after the removal of the restraining power,—and then applies these features to the Papacy. He even makes the following sharp remark: “*Wir sprechen dem, der diesen Artikel nicht glaubt, die Seligkeit nicht ab, aber die lutherische Kirchengemeinschaft.*” Dr. F. Pieper speaks in a similar strain, giving as characteristics of the Antichrist: apostasy; sitting in the midst of the Church; pretending that he is God; active by the working of Satan; remaining to the Last Day. This he applies to the system of Romanism headed by the Pope as a representative person, closing with the words: “Every teacher in the Christian Church who is familiar with the historical phenomenon called the Papacy and still does not recognize in this Papacy the Antichrist prophesied in II Thess. 2 is weak in Christian theology.”¹⁰

This teaching that the Papacy is the Antichrist is not a fundamental article of faith. Knowledge of this article is not needed to plant and preserve saving faith in the heart. A Christian may know Christ as his Savior and be saved by Him even though he does not recognize the Antichrist in the Papacy. It is not an article on which saving faith rests, with which Christianity stands or falls. We cannot and do not deny the Christianity of a person who cannot see the truth that the Pope is the Antichrist. Yet it is an important article and should not be side-stepped or slighted. It is clearly revealed in the divine Word; and there is nothing needless and useless in the Bible; God wants us to know about the Antichrist. The teaching of this article is necessary and useful because it is a needed admonition against the leaven of the Papacy which has entered so many Protestant churches. It is a powerful consolation of Christians. It helps to prove the truth of the Bible. This article is clearly expressed in the Lutheran Confessions; whoever denies it does not stand in one faith with his fathers; he is not a confessional Lutheran. A Lutheran preacher should know, believe, and teach this article or frankly confess that he no longer subscribes to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. If we value the saving doctrine of the vicarious atonement through the blood of Jesus Christ, the God-man, in these latter days of the world, we shall do well to keep the facts concerning the Antichrist well in mind, so that we may give heed to the prayer of Luther: “*Impleat vos Deus odio papae,*” the hatred being indeed not directed against him as an individual, but against him as the representative of the system of Romanism, as the collective head of an organization of such a pernicious nature that he, and he alone, is rightly called the Antichrist. “*Papam esse ipsum verum Antichristum.*”

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