

The Doctrine of the Antichrist

by Max Lehninger

The Church Fathers

From the earliest times the history of the Christian Church is replete with accounts of the attempts of the church fathers to interpret the *locus classicus* for the doctrine of the antichrist 2 Thes 2. They all without fail identified the “man of sin” of whom Paul speaks in this passage with the antichrist mentioned by John in his first epistle (2:18). But scanning the writings of the first centuries of the Christian Era for an answer to the question, who he is, we run into a veritable gamut of differing opinions, from Irenaeus to Augustine in the Occident, from Origen to Theodoret in the Orient. Some hold that Nero or another Roman emperor is the prophesied antichrist, some that a future world conqueror is meant; others claim he will be an outstanding errorist who will arise within the Church. Origen and his followers are inclined to think of antichrist as being an immaterial quantity, the spiritual power of darkness intensified to the highest potency.

The Medieval Church

In the Middle Ages, after the ascendancy of the papacy to its unprecedented power over state and church alike, the Waldensians (founder Peter Waldo about AD 1170), having suffered cruel persecutions at the hand of the hierarchy, identified Rome with the Babylon of the Apocalypse and the pope with antichrist. John Wyclif (•1384), an eminent scholar of the university of Oxford and fervent English patriot, openly spoke against the papal antichrist. He also wrote the antipapal tract “*De Christo et suo adversario Antichristo.*” He had supporters not only in his native England but also on the Continent. Still we may well say that up to the time of Luther’s reformation there was no full recognition of the “mystery of iniquity,” personified in the pope, for no one since the days of St. Paul had a full grasp and understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ until God in His own good time raised up Martin Luther.

Luther

That Luther had been a devout and zealous member of the Church of his day is a well-known fact. When he was troubled by the deep conviction of his sinfulness, when he was groaning under the wrath of a righteous God and the expectation of eternal damnation, he made faithful use of all the means his Church offered him to work out his own salvation. Seeking peace for the anguish of his soul he forsook his studies at the university and the congenial company of his friends to become a monk. Such a step of self-denial he had been taught by the Church to consider the surest way to escape the wrath to

come. As he himself afterwards tells us, he did the most menial work in the monastery and castigated himself in every conceivable manner. But all in vain! He was a true son of the Church who meekly obeyed its precepts and in all sincerity revered the pope in Rome as the Holy Father of all Christendom, the head of the Church and the vicar of Christ here on earth.

All this was changed when through his diligent study of the written Word of God he came to a true knowledge of the Gospel of Christ, when God through the Gospel opened his eyes to the blessed truth that not our own, but a foreign, i.e. Christ's, righteousness justifies us in the sight of God. From now on he took his stand on the Scriptures as the sole norm and guide for the faith and life of a Christian. He now proclaimed in the pulpit and lecture hall as well as in writings the justification and forgiveness of sins by the free grace of God for Christ's sake through faith alone. No good works, be they enjoined by Moses or by the Church, can save, but faith alone which apprehends the salvation Christ has wrought through His atoning blood, shed on Calvary. Christ is the only and all-sufficient mediator between God and man; we need no other, neither priest, bishop nor pope. When he was peremptorily ordered to recant, he refused. He could not yield and would not, for his conscience was bound by God's Word. For this his uncompromising stand he encountered the implacable enmity of the pope and his cohorts. The controversy was finally brought to a culmination by the excommunication of Luther from the Church which the pope executed through a bull. Thus the pope revealed himself as the sworn enemy of Christ and His blessed Gospel. And from that time on Luther held steadfastly to the conviction that the pope is the very antichrist, and never wavered from this position to his end. One glance into the index of his writings gives ample proof of this. The references to the pope as the antichrist in his works cover two full pages of the St. Louis edition.¹⁾ .

¹ "Darum hat sich der Antichrist schlechterdings wider und über Gott erhoben und sich an Christi Statt gesetzt, die Gnade weggeworfen und den Glauben verleugnet. Denn er hat so gelehrt: Der Glaube nützt nichts, wenn er nicht Werke hat; und durch diese falsche Meinung hat er die Wohltat Christi gänzlich verfinstert und vertilgt und an die Stelle der Gnade Christi und seines Reiches hat er die Lehre von den Werken und ein Reich der Zeremonien aufgerichtet, und es mit lauter Narrenwerk befestigt, und so die ganze Welt von Christo, der doch allein im Gewissen wirken und herrschen sollte, hinweggerissen und mit Gewalt in die Hölle gestoßen." (IX, 243)

"...Dieses sind Widerchristen stückweise, die Christo nur in gewissen Stücken zuwider sind, dergleichen die Schwärmer sind. Ein anderer ist wider den ganzen Christum, und dieser ist das Haupt von allen, dergleichen das Papstum ist. Denn der Hauptartikel christlicher Lehre ist dieser, daß Christus unsere Gerechtigkeit sei. Wer nun diesen angreift, der nimmt uns den ganzen Christum, und ist der wahre Widerchrist; die übrigen tun ihm dazu Vorschub. Einer, der Ketzerei wider die Person Christi anrichtet, ist nicht ein so großer Ketzler, als der Ketzerei wider das Verdienst Christi stiftet.

"Es gibt zweierlei Arten von Gerechtigkeit, meine Gerechtigkeit und Christi Gerechtigkeit. Das Evangelium predigt, daß wir in die Gerechtigkeit Christi sollen gesetzt, und von unserer Gerechtigkeit in die Gerechtigkeit Christi versetzt werden. Also spricht Paulus: 'Wir werden ohne Verdienst gerechtaus seiner Gnade durch die Erlösung, so durch Jesum geschehen ist' (Röm 3:24). 'Christus ist uns von Gott gemacht zur Weisheit, zur Gerechtigkeit, zur Heiligung, und zur Erlösung' (1 Kor 1:30). Aber der Papst hat neue Lebensarten angeordnet, durch welche man die Gerechtigkeit vor Gott zuwege bringen soll, nämlich die eigenen Genugtuungen. Wenn der Papst dieses lehrte, unsere Gerechtigkeit sei nichts, und die Gerechtigkeit Christi sei es allein, durch welche wir gerecht würden, so sagte er ebenso viel, als: Darum ist die Messe nichts; folglich hat das Klosterleben und die eigenen Genugtuungen keine Nutzen; und also würde das ganze Reich des Papstes umgekehrt. Sie sprechen zwar, das Verdienst Christi mache uns selig, aber sie

The Lutheran Confessions

Of course, to be a good Lutheran it is not necessary to agree with every view Luther has held, to consider all his exegetical and historical statements as binding. But it is quite a different matter when we hold views which are contrary to, or out of harmony with, a doctrine set forth explicitly in one or more of the generally accepted public confessional writings of the Lutheran Church. Should such be the case, then we cannot very well lay claim to the name of an orthodox Lutheran. At the time of their induction into the ministry our pastors and professors have solemnly avowed that they are in full agreement with the teachings of the Lutheran Confessions, that they subscribe to them as being a faithful rendition and a correct interpretation of the doctrines of the Word of God. Can we extend the hand of fellowship to, and enter into fraternal relations with, a man who in spite of this public avowal not merely holds but also publicly proclaims convictions diverging from the tenets of our Church? Who demands for himself the right to his divergent views and, their dissemination, irrespective of his oath of office? Who is not willing to relinquish his office into which his Church has called him, although he is out of harmony with the doctrine of that Church? Decidedly not. But could we not at least grant tolerance to such men as hold and teach views in so-called non-fundamental doctrines, e. g. the doctrine of the antichrist, which are contrary to and at variance with our Confessions?. To do so would either be a denial of the perspicuity of the Word of God or an admission on our part that the Lutheran Confessions

mischen die eigene Gerechtigkeit mit ein. Das heißt wahrhaftig Christum verwerfen, ja, Christum vertilgen, und ‘den Sohn Gottes für Spott halten’ (Heb 6:6). (IX, 1435 s.)

“Darum hat sich der Papst erhoben über Gott und sich an Gottes Statt gesetzt, auf daß er an Gottes Statt angebetet und ihm gedienet, und das Wort Gottes und der rechte Gottesdienst abgetan und unterdrückt werde.

“Denn siehe an seine Dekrete und Canones, so wirst du finden, daß die Übertretungen der Satzungen des Papstes viel ernster gestraft werden denn die Übertretungen der göttlichen Gebote; ja, den Herrn Christum, den man allein anbeten und ehren soll, tritt er mit Füßen und lästert ihn, will aber, daß man seine Lehre annehme und ehre, will gefürchtet sein, und will, daß man dem glauben und trauen soll, das er lehrt. Solches heißt ja, meine ich, sich setzen über den verkündigten und geehrten Gott. Darum wird er billig genannt der Antichrist...

“Ich meine ja, solches heiße sich erheben über Gott und sitzen im Tempel Gottes; nicht zwar im Himmel, darin der unoffenbarte und verborgene Gott in seinem göttlichen Wesen wohnt, sondern an der Stätte Gottes, des verkündigten, der sich im Worte lehren und offenbaren läßt, und an der Stätte Gottes, dem man dient.

“...und daß ich es kurz sage, er hat Christum ganz und gar begraben, und die Gerechtigkeit zugeeignet seinen Menschensatzungen und solchen Gottesdiensten, die er ohne und wider Gottes Wort erdacht und aufgesetzt hat. Das heißt ja, meine ich, sich erheben über alles, das Gott genannt wird.” (I, 1062 s.)

are not fully consonant with the Scriptures in all matters of doctrine. Hence, our answer to this last as well as to the first question must be a decided no.²

One word before we proceed: Let him who confounds *non-fundamental* with *non-Scriptural* take note that his definition of this term is not that of the universally recognized orthodox teachers of our Church, that he introduces a *novum* which can only confuse the issue. Let him be warned that he is indicting the confessions of the Lutheran Church as “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Ma 15:9) and therefore falling under the verdict of Christ in the same passage: “In vain they do worship Me”. No, we cannot, must not champion the cause of such as arrogate to themselves under the guise of academic freedom the right to spread in the pulpit and lecture hall or through the religious press opinions which run counter to the *doctrina publica* of our Church.

That the Lutheran Confessions call the pope the antichrist and prove this assertion in many places and in diverse ways is so apparent that there is no room for argument on this point. We quote from the Triglot Concordia.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession:

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 Article VII, when 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. (Article XV 319, 18.19)

² “ So gewiß wir nach der Schrift das Papsttum für den Antichrist halten, so gewiß diese Lehre auch ein Teil unsers Bekenntnisses ist, so gewiß ist doch richtig, was Quenstedt sagt: *Non autem dicimus, quaestionem hanc de antichristo esse talem, cujus decisio omnibus christianis ad salutem scitu sit necessaria, vel ignoratio per se damnabilis.* Und in der Darlegung des *status controversiae* äußert er sich über die Wichtigkeit dieser Lehre dahin: *Non est quaestio de fundamentali aliquo articulo fidei, cujus ignoratio vel negatio damnat, sed de articulo fidei non fundamentali.* Es ist aber im Auge zu behalten, daß die Begriffe ‘fundamental’ und ‘nicht fundamental’ sich auf die Seligkeit und nicht auf die kirchliche Gemeinschaft beziehen. Wir sprechen dem, der diesen Artikel nicht glaubt, die Seligkeit nicht ab, wohl aber die lutherische Kirchengemeinschaft.” (Hoenecke, *Ev. Luth. Dogmatik*, Bd. IV. S. 222f)

Therefore this law concerning perpetual celibacy is peculiar to this new pontifical despotism. Nor is it without reason. For Daniel 11, 37 ascribes to the kingdom of Antichrist this mark, namely, the contempt of women. (Article XXIII 371, 25; also cf. 319, 18)

The Smalcald Articles:

This, teaching 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 2 Thess. 2:4. (Part II, Article IV, p. 475, 10.13)

Now it is manifest that the Roman pontiffs, with their adherents, defend (and practice) 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, 2 Thess 2:3, in describing to the Thessalonians Antichrist, calls him an adversary of Christ, 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. 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. (*Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, p. 515, 39)

This being the case, all Christians ought to beware of becoming partakers of the godless doctrine, blasphemies, and unjust cruelties of the Pope. On this account they ought to desert and execrate the Pope with his adherents as the kingdom of Antichrist, just as Christ has commanded, Ma 7:15: Beware of false prophets. And Paul commands that godless teachers should be avoided and execrated as cursed, Gal. 1: 8; Tit 3:10. And 2 Cor 6:14 he says: Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what communion has light with darkness? (*Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, p. 517, 41)

Therefore, even though the bishop of Rome had the primacy by divine right, yet since he defends godless services and doctrine conflicting .with the Gospel, obedience is not due him; yea, it is necessary to resist him as Antichrist. The errors of the Pope are manifest and not trifling. (*Of the Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops*, p. 521, 57)

Formula of Concord:

And in the article of the Papacy the Smalcald Articles say (p. 475) : 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. For to lie and to kill and to destroy body and soul eternally, that is wherein his papal government really consists. (Sol. Decl. X *Of Church Rites*, p. 1059, 20)

The Scriptures

The *sedes doctrinae* for the doctrine of the Antichrist is 2 Thes 2. The term *antichrist* does not occur in this passage at all. The apostle John alone of all the writers of the New Testament employs it, and he speaks of the one Antichrist as well as of many antichrists, 1 John 2:18,22, also 4:3 and 2 John 7. From him this term which he coined is evidently borrowed to designate the personage Paul pictures in our Thessalonian passage because of its eminent aptness for summing up in one word the characteristics ascribed to him by Paul. A glance into the history of New Testament exegesis proves that the Church from its earliest time understood under the Antichrist him of whom the apostle speaks in 2 Thes 2. But while this is undoubtedly true the question concerning us now is whether, on the basis of this passage, we are not only justified but rather whether we are constrained to believe that the pope is the Antichrist.

We read (v. 3): “Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day (of Christ) shall not come, except there come a falling away first (ἡ ἀποστασία), and that man of sin (ὁ ἀνθρώπος τῆς ἀνομίας) be revealed, the son of perdition (ὁ υἱός τῆς ἀπωλείας).” The apostasy from whom or from what? The apostle has no thought here of a political defection. In the whole passage no mention is made of politics or purely sociological matters. His thoughts rather dwell on things which belong to the sphere of religion. The context admits of but one answer, the apostle means the falling away from Christ and His Gospel (1:8).³ The papacy condemns, execrates, anathematizes in the strongest terms any one that believes a man is justified before God by grace for Christ’s sake through faith alone without the deeds of the law. Of that the annals of the Church give ample proof and the Council of Trent (1545-1563), whose canons and decrees are the authorized confession of the faith and discipline of the Roman Catholic Church, shall give witness to the truth of our statement. We quote (Trident., sess. VI, can. 11.12.20): “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 the 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 favour of God; let him be anathema. – If any one saith, that justifying faith

³ Was der Antichrist vertritt, sind “kräftige Irrtümer,” ‘Lüge,’ und die dem Antichrist anhangen, haben die Liebe zur ‘Wahrheit,’ das ist, zur christlichen Wahrheit, nicht angenommen und gehen ewig verloren, vs. 10-12. Auch Lünemann, der sonst den ganzen Abschnitt mißversteht, sagt in bezug auf die ἀποστασία richtig: ‘Nicht Abtrünnigkeit im politischen Sinne, sondern einzig und allein religiöse Antrünnigkeit, das heißt, Abfall von Gott und der wahren Religion, kann mit der ἀποστασία gemeint worden sein. Zu dieser Annahme zwingt, 1. was im unmittelbaren, inneren Zusammenhang mit der Apostasie von dem ἀνθρώπος τῆς ἀνομίας ausgesagt wird, 2. Die Charakteristik der ἀποστασία Vs. 3 durch ἀνομία Vs. 7, und 3. Der konstante biblische Sprachgebrauch. Vgl. Act. 21:21; 1 Tim 4:1. Als unstatthaft ist hiernach auch die Ansicht zu verwerfen, daß an eine Mischung von religiösem und politischem Abfall zu denken sei.” (F. Pieper, *Christ. Dogmatik*, Bd. III, S. 528)

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. – If any one saith, that the man who is justified and, how perfect soever, is not bound to observe the commandments of God and 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.”

Of the doctrine of justification Luther – and with him agree all truly evangelical Christians – says: it is the one article, *qui solos ecclesiam Dei gignit, nutrit, aedificat, servat, defendit; ac sine eo ecclesia Dei non Potest una hora subsistere*” (St. L. XIV, 168). What the air is for the physical life, that is the doctrine of justification through faith without a man's own works for the spiritual life, as F. Pieper puts it (Christl. Dogm. III, 530). Is any greater apostasy conceivable than this falling away (ἀποστασία) from the Christian religion?⁴

In Paul's time this apostasy was still hidden. He speaks of it as the mystery of lawlessness (τό μυστήριον τῆς ἀνομίας) in verse 7, but the lawless one (ὁ ἄνομος) shall be brought out from behind the veil, shall be revealed (v. 8). Something is now, i.e., at the time Paul writes, holding it down. What that is the Thessalonian Christians knew; the apostle reminds them that he had told them about it (verses 6, 7). But then already the mystery of the lawlessness was at work (ἐνεργεῖται). Since Luther's reformation this mystery stands uncovered, revealed (ἀποκαλύφτεσθαι) before the eyes of the Christians. It is the pope of Rome. He is the man of the lawlessness kat' exochen. Everything God in His mercy has laid down in His Word to save a sin-ridden world he has overthrown or abrogated. There is no commandment in the decalogue he has not perverted. For the worship of the triune God in spirit and in truth he has substituted his idolatrous ceremonies. By his authority man is taught to call upon Mary and the so-called saints in his hour of need. The sinner is to look for intercession with God to sinful men like himself whom the pope has canonized after their death, while the Scriptures say: “There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,” 1 Tim. 2:5. The preaching of the Word has been almost entirely abandoned in favor of the performance and observation of certain rites. The Lord's Supper has been mutilated. The error of the transubstantiation of the elements into the body and blood of Christ, which the priest can work at will by the magic of his blessing, has given rise to the abomination of the mass, the offering of the unbloody sacrifice of Christ for the living and the dead. In the stead of the Gospel of free grace stands the “gospel” of work righteousness which leads man to seek his salvation by doing works prescribed by the Church. Verily, the pope is the man of the lawlessness of whom Paul speaks. And as such he is the son of the perdition. Not perdition in a general sense, but the perdition beside which there is no other, the eternal perdition, damnation in the everlasting torment of hell.

⁴ “The fact that this apostasy will occur in the Christian is beyond question; otherwise it would not be an ‘apostacy.’ The man of the lawlessness will be its head. Yet some have thought of a Jewish apostacy, the Jewish national rejection of Christ, and also of the Jewish political apostacy from imperial Rome. Others think of a general moral falling away from such standards of morality as existed in the pagan world, or of an anarchical apostacy from the established governments of the world. None of these interpretations will do.” (Lenski, 2 *Thess.*, p. 416)

“Paulus, der den Antichrist beschreibt, deutet klar genug an, daß derselbe in dem Abfall, nämlich von Gottes Wort, hervortrete, also aus der Kirche hervorgeht. Ausdrücklich bezeugt dies auch Johannes (Vs. 19).” Cf. 1. Joh 2:19. (Hoeneke, *Ev. Luth. Dogm.*, IV, S. 219.)

A graphic picture, indeed, Paul paints for us of Antichrist! The prince of darkness his father, the perdition his mother, this man of lawlessness is himself lost and; as an instrument of perdition, he leads those who entrust themselves to his guidance to their doom. He is not Satan himself, as some think, but is a human being, as the text plainly states.⁵ His presence (ἡ παρουσία αὐτοῦ) is according to Satan's operation (κατ' ἐνέργειαν τοῦ σατανᾶ, v. 9) in all power and lie-signs and lie-wonders,⁶ which on the surface have all the earmarks of being wrought with the help of the omnipotent God. We are forewarned not to fall into his snares, for, the apostle continues, his presence is, furthermore, with all deceit of unrighteousness (ἐν πάσῃ ἀπάτῃ ἀδικίας, v. 10). "This is the possessive genitive: alle Täuschungskünste, wie sie der Ungerechte ersinnt (B. – p. 26), all the different kinds of deceptions which unrighteousness employs" (Lenski, 2 Thess., p. 437).

He is the one "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" (v. 4).

The pope sets himself up as the authoritative interpreter of the Word of God. His decrees in matters of faith and worship must be obeyed, for he alone has the keys and, therefore, the power to absolve and condemn. Cf. Luther in the Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article IV. What is the temple in which he is sitting? Surely, Paul, speaking by the inspiration of God, does not mean the sanctuary (ὁ ναός) in Jerusalem, the imminent fall of which Christ had so clearly predicted, Matth. 23:38; 24:2; Luke 19:44. For this temple in our passage is to endure until Judgment Day. Evidently no sanctuary of wood or stone, built by the hand of man, is here meant, but the holy Christian Church, the spiritual temple of the Lord, in whom the believers by means of the Word and the Sacraments "are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit," Eph. 2:19-22. Cf. 1 Cor. 3:16; 1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:20. Here Antichrist sits, has established himself. There is where we must look for him. After his revelation by the hand of God he shall be found in the same place where all the children of God are found, in the midst of the Christian Church. The pope claims the rule over all Christendom. He usurps for himself the divine prerogative to sit in judgment over everybody and everything. He is the source of all wisdom and all knowledge. He is the judge over all, but he must not be judged by anyone. Not even the Word of God out of the mouth of any other human being can judge him. Rather does he judge the Word of God, since he alone is able to determine what the meaning and intent of the Scriptures are. God speaks through him who is Christ's vicar on this earth, and through him alone. And when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* he is infallible.⁷

⁵ Der Antichrist ist nicht Satan selbst, auch nicht eine Personifikation desselben, sondern ein Mensch (2 Thess 2:8), dessen Kommen nach der Wirkung Satans geschieht (2 Thess 2:9). Der Antichrist wird also deutlich vom Satan, dem Urheber, als dessen Werk unterschieden. Doch ist dieser Mensch nicht ein Geschöpf Satans und heißt nicht Mensch der Sünde, als er in der Sünde seinen Ursprung hätte, sondern als Mensch ist er Geschöpf Gottes." (Hoeneke, *Dogm.* IV, S. 219 f.)

⁶ Mit Recht weist Luther darauf hin, daß sich die Gewalt, welche das Papsttum ausübt, nur aus diabolischer Wirkung erkläre. Es ist nicht bloß wider Gottes Wort, sondern auch wider alle Vernunft. Niemand liebt es; selbst die eigenen Anhänger lieben es nicht; aber alles fürchtet sich, betrogen und gefangen gehalten durch den Schein der Frömmigkeit und durch die Zeichen und Wunder der Lüge." (F. Pieper, *Dogm.* III S. 531.)

⁷ Das Sitzen des Antichrists im Tempel ist Bezeichnung des antichristlichen Reichs als eines festen, ferner Bezeichnung der Herrschaft des Antichrists als einer über die Herzen und Gewissen der Christen, denn das Sitzen im Tempel als Gott und das Sichüberheben über alles, was Gott und

Before the Lord's day would come, this man of the lawlessness had to be revealed (v. 3). At Paul's time the mystery of lawlessness was already at work. However, something was holding it down (τὸ κατέχον); and only after he that now was holding it down (ho *katechōn arti*) had gotten out of the way would Antichrist be revealed (v. 6, 7). What the terms τὸ κατέχον and ὁ κατεχὼν mean his Thessalonian readers knew, for the apostle had told them when he was with them (v. 5). We do not know, and all speculation on our part is idle. Neither Jesus in his eschatological discourses nor any one of the Biblical writers throw light on the subject. Hence we do best to be content in the conviction the Lord would have disclosed to us what and who has withheld (held down), if it would be necessary for us to know. Not until he that is holding it down shall get out of the middle (ἐκ μέσου γένηται) shall the time come when Jesus shall consume him with the spirit of his mouth (ἀνελεῖ) and shall destroy him (καταργήσει) with the brightness of his coming (v. 8) (ἀναιρέω – put out of the way, kill, slay; καταργέω – put an end to, do away with, annul, abolish.) With the breath of His mouth, His Word, the Lord will kill Antichrist. A powerful serpent (Gen 3), even when its head is crushed, is still dangerous in its death-struggle. Through Luther's reformation the Lord has dealt Antichrist the death blow: Nevertheless, he still needs watching lest he do harm to the unwary. But on that great day,

Gottesdienst heißt (nämlich was noch Gottes Offenbarung mit Recht so heißt), ist Anmaßung der geistlichen Herrschaft über Herzen und Gewissen durch falsche Lehre unter Beseitigung der rechten Lehre. Der Antichrist ist also keine Weltmacht, nicht grobes, wüstes Anstürmen gegen alles Christliche mit äußerlicher Gewalt, sondern ein Herrschen über die Gewissen und Herzen der Christen unter dem Schein des Gottesdienstes und Christentums." (Hoenecke, *Dogm.* IV, S. 220 f.)

“Zum andern ist das Papsttum nicht außerhalb, sondern innerhalb der christlichen Kirche, weil es viele Glieder der Kirche unter sich hat, vor allen Dingen die getauften Kinder, sodann auch Erwachsene, die trotz der verführerischen Umgebung durch das gelegentlich laut werdende Evangelium allein auf Christi Verdienst vertrauen. Ferner: Daß der Papst niemand untertan, sondern der Oberste in Kirche und Welt sein will, ist eine allgemein bekannte Tatsache. Trotzdem er den einzigen Weg zur Seligkeit verflucht und abtut, behauptet er doch, daß nur die Menschen selig werden können, die sich ihm unterwerfen. Er ändert Gottes Wort und Gebote nach seinem Belieben, er will alle richten, aber von niemand gerichtet werden, ja er nimmt ausdrücklich die Unfehlbarkeit für sich in Anspruch.” (F. Pieper, *Dogm.* III S. 530 f.)

“Im Papsttum findet sich Zug für Zug wieder, was die Heilige Schrift vom Antichrist aussagt. Hier findet sich nicht nur Abfall und falsche Lehre im allgemeinen, sondern Erhebung des Menschen in den Tempel Gottes an Gottes Statt (man denke nur an die beiden neuesten Dogmen: *immaculata conceptio* und Infallibilität); hier tritt menschliche Autorität an die Stelle der Heiligen Schrift, menschliche Gerechtigkeit an die Stelle der Gerechtigkeit Jesu Christi; hier werden menschliche Gebote über Gottes Gesetz erhoben; hier werden Schriftstellen, die auf Christum gehen (z.B. Jes 28:16; Ps 72:11; Mt 28:18; Apok 5:5), auf einen Menschen, den Papst, angewendet; ja hier maß sich ein Mensch die höchste Gewalt nicht bloß auf Erden, sondern durch Ablaß, Kanonisation Verstorbenen, Transubstantion und dergleichen auch im Himmel an; hier behauptet ein Mensch *jure divino* rechtmäßiger und alleiniger Inhaber aller geistlichen und weltlichen Gewalt auf Erden zu sein, so daß er aus eigener untrüglicher Machtvollkommenheit nicht bloß Gottesdienste ordnen und Glaubenssätze verkündigen, sondern sogar die Seligkeit vom Glauben an seine göttliche Autorität abhängig machen will; hier findet sich Verachtung der göttlichen Eheordnung (Zölibat); hier findet sich Trachten nach der Weltherrschaft, Buhlen mit der Weltmacht, Ausnutzung der Weltmacht für egoistische Zwecke, Benutzung unheiliger Mittel angeblich zu heiligem Zwecke; hier finden sich Ströme vergossenen Märtyrerblutes; hier finden sich lügnerische Zeichen und Wunder (man denke nur an Luise Lateau, Lourdes und Marpingen, an die wundertätigen Marien- und Heiligenbilder usw.) usw., usw. Das alles sind so charakteristische Züge, daß wir nicht umhinkönnen zu sagen: Der Papst ist der Antichrist.” (Philippi. *Lehre vom Antichrist*, S. 67)

when He shall appear in His glory, at His epiphany (ἐπιφάνεια) on Judgment Day He will abolish, do away with Antichrist utterly.

In our passage God Himself through Paul paints a picture for all to behold. All that do not wilfully blind their own eyes can recognize Antichrist. This description fits only one in all the history of the world: The pope or rather the papacy, the succession of popes. Though one follows the other through the centuries the papacy, the system or institution which every single pope represents, remains the same throughout the ages.

Modern theologians, among them many bearing the name Lutheran, do not agree with Luther and our Confessions in the statement that the pope is the Antichrist described in 2 Thess 2 : “*Haec doctrina praeclare ostendit, papam esse ipsunt verum. Antichristum.*” Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article IV (p. 475, 10). We note a few of their objections. The pope cannot be the Antichrist, for

- a) the apostasy, the falling away must come first – ergo! What greater apostasy is conceivable, what could deserve being called “the apostasy” in the absolute sense of the word more than the fact that the pope rejects the Gospel *in toto* by anathematizing the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, the doctrine of justification, that a man is saved by faith in the merits of Christ?
- b) The Antichrist is a single person, not a plurality, according to the Scriptures. Hence the papacy, the succession of one pope after the other, cannot be the expected Antichrist. J. Andreas Quenstedt, •1688, aptly disposes of this objection by saying: *Antichristum certam et unicam personam fore, scriptura nullibi dicit...Scriptura enim saepe singularem numerum pro plurali ponit, sic Joh. 4:37 allos. – alius est, qui seminat, et alius, qui metet, non unus, sed multi intelliguntur.* (Hoenecke, *Dogm.* IV, p. 224.)
- c) The question of the pope – in our or at any other time (jeweilig) – being Antichrist must be considered a purely historical one. Hence, it is said, whether the pope is the Antichrist is something which cannot receive an absolutely indisputable answer, cannot be answered with certitude of faith. But do not these objectors suffer under a self-delusion? In effect they state, the Bible does not say in so many words that the pope is the Antichrist. That is undoubtedly true. But if that is a good argument, where do we end? What, ex. g., of another truism: The Bible does not mention the lodge by name as a sinful institution, ergo - -? Are we ready to draw the obvious conclusion? The Old Testament nowhere states the Messiah would appear in Jesus of Nazareth. That was an. “historical” question for the people of His day. Even , as they, comparing Old Testament Scripture with the words and works of Jesus, came to acknowledge, and thus to trust in, Jesus as the Christ of God, so must we likewise, on the, basis of Scripture and from the words and works of the pope, recognize that in the papacy with its self-perpetuating succession the Antichrist stands revealed before our eyes. However much the popes may differ one from another as individuals, as incumbents of their office they all claim to be the head of the Church with power of sovereignty over all men in secular and spiritual matters. They, one and all, approve of the resolutions and decrees of the Council of Trent, condemning the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ and its confessors.

In conclusion we reiterate with a conviction based on the clear and unmistakable words of Holy Writ Luther's dictum:

“Haec doctrina praeclare ostendit, papam esse ipsum verum Antichristum.”