

The Pope is the Antichrist? or !

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[A paper prepared for the 21 March 1988, meeting of the WELS Metro-South Pastoral Conference at St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Cudahy, WI]

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I am stuffing the decrees of the popes for my (Leipzig) debate, and (in your ear I speak it) I know not whether the pope is the Antichrist himself or his apostle, so very miserably does he, in these decretals, corrupt and crucify Christ, that is, the truth. I am terribly pained that the people of Christ should be deceived like this under the guise of laws and the Christian name....

I am so deeply disturbed that I almost cease doubting that the pope is the real Antichrist whom, according to popular opinion, the world is expecting, so greatly all he lives, does, speaks, and ordains agrees with this view

If the pope will not recall and condemn this bull (of 1520) and also punish its espousers, Doctor Eck and his associates, then no one should doubt that the pope is the enemy of God, the persecutor of Christ, the destroyer of Christendom, and the true Antichrist. For to date no one has ever heard anyone condemn the publicly confessed Christian faith as does this infernal, confounded bull. Luther¹

A. A letter and introductory comments on the subject.

14 September 1987

Dear Rev. Schulz:

Since I moved into this area several months ago I've been attending your services because your church is the closest to my apartment on 102nd St. I'm a May graduate of Valparaiso University and have been a Lutheran all my life. My family belongs to an LCA church in a Chicago suburb and my grandfather for years has been a very active layman in the Missouri Synod.

In your sermon yesterday you said something that I never heard before. You called the Pope the Antichrist. I was shocked. Up until yesterday, I enjoyed your services and sermons, although I couldn't understand why you don't permit non-members like myself to receive Holy Communion.

I doubt that I'll be coming to your church in the future. Isn't there enough hatred and name-calling in the world today without ministers like you defaming other denominations and slandering peace-loving leaders like the Pope?

I think you should be ashamed of yourself. How can you call yourself a Christian when you say such terrible things about someone who is preaching God's Word just as you claim to be doing?

I majored in psychology at Valpo and learned that people who have to run down others to build up themselves and their organization feel very inferior and insecure. I pity you!

Sincerely yours,

Ms. Liberella Chilstrom-Marty

You guessed it! The above letter is fiction, a product of the fevered mind of this paranoid, ultra-conservative Lutheran parish pastor. However, the letter, while fictitious, has a sound factual foundation and can serve as an introduction to this subject which was assigned to me by Pastor Wayne Meier on 3 October 1987.

It is a fact that on Sunday, 13 September 1987, I did identify the Pope, who at that time was triumphantly touring the USA, as the Antichrist in a sermon based on the ILCW Series A Gospel for that Sunday - a divinely-ordained, coincidence, perhaps? - Matthew 16:13-20, the "you are Peter" section of Scripture, part of which is prominently emblazoned inside the dome of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

It is also a fact that, both in our Sunday bulletin and in the sermon on 9/13/87 I read and printed the following quotation from a sermon preached by Martin Luther on the same text 465 years earlier, A.D. 1522:

The pope is the archblasphemer of God in that he applies to himself the noble passage which is spoken of Christ alone. He wants to be the rock, and the church should rest on him. It is as Christ has said of Himself (Matt.24:5): "Many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." The pope is certainly doing this. He certainly claims to be Christ, although he does not want the actual name; for he does not say: I am Christ. That would be too blunt, and the deception might be detected. But he does want the character, the office, that belongs to Christ atone. Therefore we must see to it that we stay with the simple meaning, namely, that Christ is the Foundation on which the church is to stand. Luther²

At the time of the Pope's visit in September 1987 Archbishop John May of St. Louis, president of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Conference, predictably pronounced the Pope's pilgrimage to this country a success, even before it began, because it would enable American Catholics to "dust cobwebs off their Catholic identity and to renew their religious commitments."

It is my hope that this paper, interspersed as it is with quotations from Martin Luther in which he eloquently expressed his Bible-based convictions about the Pope, will enable both my brother pastors in Metro-South, the members of Woodlawn Lutheran Church, and myself to dust off, if necessary, cobwebs from our orthodox Lutheran identity and to renew our commitment to the Lutheran Confessions which state that the Pope is the Antichrist.

One antichrist fights against the person of Christ, another against the humanity, a third against the divinity of Christ. These are antichrists in part, as are the enthusiasts. Another is against the entire Christ, and he is the head of all, as is the papacy. For the head of Christian doctrine is that Christ is our Righteousness. He who attacks this article robs us of the entire Christ and is the true Antichrist, while the others offer him assistance.

...St. Paul calls Antichrist the man of sin and the son of perdition, because through his own law and teaching he will turn all the world from God and thereby prevent God and the world from coming together. In this way he will be a master of all sin and perdition; and yet at the same time

he will cloak himself in the name and semblance of Christ; call himself Sanctissimus and Vicarius Dei and Caput Ecclesiae (Most Holy One; Vicar of God, Head of the Church) and persecute all who do not obey him by accepting his claims. All this is only too evident in the conduct of the pope...If the pope did not have so large a following and outward show of sanctity, he could never be the Antichrist. He must necessarily have the outward show and the following of all the bishops, priests, monks, universities, princes, and mighty men. However, one thing God will not let him cover up, and there the ears of the ass stick out: he pays no attention to God's Word, he does not preach it, being satisfied that people preach his teaching. By this song one recognizes what sort of bird he is. As the beast that John saw in the revelation (13:11), which had two horns like a lamb but a voice like a dragon, so the papal hosts look like Christians but preach like the devil. Luther³

In early January 1988 our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod sent out to every WELS pastor, teacher and congregation copies of the revised (1987) Constitution and Bylaws of the WELS. Both in the WELS Constitution and in the corresponding Constitution for the Districts it is stated in Article II, Section 2, under the heading, Confession of Faith: "The synod (district) also accepts the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church embodied (contained) in the Book of Concord of 1580, not insofar as (quatenus), but because (quia) they are a correct presentation and exposition of the pure doctrine of the word of God."

In one of those confessions, the Smalcald Articles, Dr. Martin Luther declared

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...Therefore, just as little as we 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, as I have very clearly shown in many books.⁴

Strong words! Talk about polemics! The above is a sample of Luther at his polemical best, or worst, depending upon one's point of view. I applaud his words and wholeheartedly agree with him, but it's no secret that many pastors and professors who claim to be Lutheran have for decades distanced themselves from such anti-papal broadsides by the great reformer and make no bones about rejecting that confessional identification of the Pope as the Antichrist. Luther's position is obviously an embarrassment to liberal or so-called moderate Lutheranism.

WELS clergy and laity, however, will agree with Luther because of our *quia* subscription to the confessions. In the 10/1/87 Northwestern Lutheran, the editor of our WELS official magazine stated that "taking seriously the Lutheran confessions" is "a hallmark of the WELS." Although leaders of the new liberal 5.3 million member Evangelical Lutheran Church in America also would claim to take seriously the Lutheran confessions, they would surely show their true "quatenus," i.e. "insofar as" colors on the subject of the Papacy as Antichrist. Indeed, the thoroughly orthodox and historic Lutheran doctrine that the Pope is the Antichrist is a classic example of just how seriously we in the WELS take confessions like Luther's Smalcald Articles, even when the vast majority of visible Christian denominations dismiss that teaching as medieval prejudice or polemical excess to be taken today with several shakers of salt.

B. From the 13th to the 19th centuries there was a solid Protestant consensus on the subject.

Luther, of course, was not the only Christian scholar and leader to identify the Pope as the Antichrist. Ralph Woodrow, in his valuable little paperback book, "Great Prophecies of the Bible," published in 1971 by the Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, Inc. P.O. Box 194, Riverside, California, 92502, in several chapters on the topic of the Antichrist, makes a powerful case for the teaching that the Pope fits all the Biblical

criteria. Woodrow quotes more than 35 Christian teachers listed below, from the 13th to the 19th century, who were convinced that the Pope or Papacy, is Antichrist:

Eberhard II, archbishop of Salzburg, 1200-1246, did not look forward to the coming of an unidentified individual antichrist. Instead, he looked back over the centuries since Rome's dismemberment and saw in the historical Papacy, as a system or succession, the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Antichrist. He was excommunicated by the Pope and died under the ban in 1246.

Michael of Cesena was one of the learned men on a list in John Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" who between 1331-1360 contended against the false claims of the pope. Michael declared the Pope "to be Antichrist, and the church of Rome to be the whore of Babylon, drunk with the blood of saints."

A century before Luther, John Wyclif, the noted English reformer, in his book, "The Mirror of Antichrist" referred repeatedly to the Pope as Antichrist. Lord Cobham, one of hundreds of thousands of Lollards" who sprang from the ministry of Wyclif, said of the pope: "I know him by the Scriptures to be the great antichrist, the son of perdition."

Walter Brute, an associate of Wyclif, in 1391 was accused of claiming that "the Pope is Antichrist and a seducer of the people."

Sir John Oldcastle, (1360-1417) was suspended in chains and slowly burned to death for speaking of the Pope in these words: "I know him by the Scriptures to be the great Antichrist, the Son of perdition...Rome is the very nest of Antichrist, and out of that nest come all the disciples of him."

The writings of John Huss (1369-1415), influenced by Wyclif, labeled the Pope as the Antichrist of which the Scriptures had warned. He constantly referred to Antichrist as the enemy of the church - not as a Jew, a pagan, or a Turk - but as a false confessor of the name of Christ. His uncompromising stand against the Antichrist of Bible prophecy led to his being burned to death.

Andreas Osiander and Nicolas Von Amsdorf, contemporaries and colleagues of Luther, also were convinced that "the pope is the real, true Antichrist and not the vicar of Christ."

Even Philip Melancthon, the close associate of Luther who often has been faulted for his mild and compromising approach to doctrinal controversy, said: "Since it is certain that the pontiffs and the monks have forbidden marriage (cf. I Tim. 4:1-3), it is most manifest, and true without any doubt, that the Roman Pontiff, with his whole order and kingdom, is very Antichrist...Likewise in 2 Thess. 2, Paul clearly says that the man of sin will rule in the church exalting himself above the worship of God."

Other religious leaders who identified the Pope as Antichrist and mentioned by Ralph Woodrow in his book:

John Calvin (1509-1564), French reformer; John Knox (1505-1572) Scottish reformer; John Napier (1550-1617) Scottish mathematician and Protestant adherent; Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531) Swiss reformer; Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575); Theodor Bibliander (1504-1564) Swiss Bible scholar and translator; Alfonsus Conradus - in a 1560 commentary on Revelation insisted that Antichrist had already been revealed in the Papacy; William Tyndale (1484-1536) English Bible translator and martyr; Nicholas Ridley (1500-1555) English martyr who just before his execution spoke of Rome as "The seat of Satan; and the bishop of the same; that maintaineth the abominations thereof, is antichrist himself indeed." Ridley's friend, John Bradford (1510-1555) also was martyred for his refusal to acknowledge the antichrist of Rome to be Christ's vicar-general and supreme head of the Catholic and universal church. He died at the stake for maintaining that the Papacy "undoubtedly (is) that great Antichrist, of whom the apostles do so much admonish us."

John Hopper (1495-1555) another victim of England's "Bloody" Mary, also was burned at the stake for his resistance to the "wicked papistical religion of the bishop of Rome."

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) died in the flames as he testified: "...as for the Pope, I refuse him as Christ's enemy and antichrist, with all his false doctrine."

Hugh Latimer (1490-1555); Thomas Becon (1511-1567), William Fluke (1538-1589) and John Jewel (1522-1571) also were involved in the 16th century English Reformation movement and made no bones about describing the Pope as the Antichrist, as did the preacher, Edwin Sandys (1519-1588) twenty-two of whose sermons have been preserved to our day. In his sermon on Isaiah 55:1 - "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to

the waters...come ye, buy...without money and without price," he contrasted the Lord's invitation with that of the Papal Antichrist who requires money for his blessings:

He that sitteth in the temple of God, and termeth himself Christ's vicar, doth in like sort offer unto the people bread, water, wine, milk, pardon of sins, grace, mercy, and eternal life; but not freely: he is a merchant, he giveth nothing, and that is nothing which he selleth...his holy water cannot wash away the spots...his blasphemous masses do not appease, but provoke God's wrath...his rotten relics cannot comfort you...by his Latin service ye cannot be edified, or made wiser. Yet this trumpery they sell for money, and upon this trash they cause silly men to waste their substance...Thus you see a manifest difference between Christ and Antichrist.

Ralph Woodrow also reminds us that the translators appointed by King James were motivated to issue the 1611 King James Version of the Bible at least in part to give "such a blow to that man of sin as will not be healed." King James (1566-1625) himself was certain that the Papacy was the Antichrist and Mystery of Iniquity. A century later Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), best known for his research in connection with the laws of gravitation, also was a long-time student of Bible prophecy. In his "Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John," published 6 years after his death, he linked the little horn of Daniel 7 with the Papacy. Newton also made the following observation which fits the present globe-trotting Roman pontiff to a T: "...this church (Roman Catholic) claims the universal Bishoprick: With his mouth he gives laws to kings and nations as an Oracle; and pretends to Infallibility (the doctrine of papal infallibility was officially established by Vatican Council in July 1870), and that his dictates are binding to the whole world; which is to be a Prophet in the highest degree."

Ralph Woodrow claims that Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752), foremost post-Reformation theologian in Wurttemberg, "early became convinced that the Pope was the predicted Antichrist and that he strongly influenced John Wesley (1703-1791)'s conviction that the prophecies regarding the Antichrist, the man of sin, had found fulfillment in the "Romish Papacy." The Lutheran Cyclopaedia, however, points out that Bengel also taught chiliasm and predicted that the millenium would begin in 1836.

In his four volume "The Prophetic Faith of the Fathers" Leroy Froom, quoted by Ralph Woodrow, observes:

We have seen the remarkable unanimity of belief of Reformation leaders in every land that the Antichrist of prophecy is not to be a single individual - some sort of superman - who will wrack and well-nigh wreck the world just before the second advent of Christ. Instead, they found that it was a vast system of apostasy, or rather, an imposing counterfeit of truth which had developed within the jurisdiction of that divinely appointed custodian of truth; the Christian church.

In various Protestant confessions, in addition to the Smalcald Articles, the identification of the Pope as Antichrist is commonplace. The Westminster Confession of Faith, in Chapter 25, Section 6, stated what was once the orthodox belief of the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church that "There is no other Head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ, nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof, but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and Son of Perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God." Similar declarations were made in the Morland Confession of 1508 and 1535 of the Waldensian Brethren, the Swiss Helvetic Confession of 1536, the Savoy Declaration of the Congregational Church, the Baptist Confession of 1689 and the Philadelphia Confession of Faith. In 1612 Andreas Helwig of Berlin issued his book, "Roman Antichrist," which linked the number 666 with the Papal designation, "Vicarius Felii Dei."

In 1680 churches in New England drew up a confession which identified Jesus Christ as the head of the church and not the Pope of Rome who is indeed Antichrist and Son of Perdition. That was the commonly accepted position of the American churches in the 17th and 18th centuries. Early American clergy such as the Puritan, John Cotton (1584-1652), Rhode Island Baptist Roger Williams (1603-1683), the Congregational

theologian Cotton Mather (1663-1728) agreed with a learned minister from Rhode Island, Samuel Lee (1625-1691) who said "It is agreed among all maintainers of the Evangelical Church that the Roman Pontiff is Antichrist."

Woodrow tells of Samuel Cooper (1725-1783) who, while delivering a series of lectures at Harvard, said: "If Antichrist is not to be found in the chair of St. Peter, he is no where to be found." Similarly, Jonathan Edwards, (1703-1758), famous revivalist and third president of Princeton, identified the "Pope and his clergy" as the power prophesied in 2 Thess. 2, Daniel 7 and Rev. 13 and 17. Can you imagine someone lecturing at Harvard and Princeton today with the teaching of the Pope as Antichrist. Such a message probably would be as warmly welcomed by the student bodies in 1988 as CIA recruiters or neo-Nazis calling for the painting of Swastikas on synagogues. If Milwaukee alderman Michael McGee were in our midst today he surely would blow his whistle on what I have to say about the Pope. After all, there are limits to free speech.⁵

Summing up the evidence offered in the previous paragraphs, Ralph Woodrow observes:

Looking down through the centuries, there are certain names that stand out in Christian history such as John Wyclif, John Huss, Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Huldreich Zwingli, William Tyndale, Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, John Foxe, Edwin Sandys, John Calvin, John Knox, King James, Isaac Newton, Thomas Newton, John Wesley. None of these men believed that Christ would return in two phases - the rapture and then later the revelation. None of these men believed the church would be taken out before the appearance of Antichrist. To the contrary, they understood that the church would suffer at the hands of Antichrist and that the career of the man of sin would be ended by the coming of Christ at the end of the age.⁶

No one has so subtly, so astutely, fulfilled the characteristics of the antichrist as has the pope...The spirit of the pope is the subtlest of them all: he acknowledges the coming of Christ, retains apostolic words, and apostolic sinners...For form's sake he has kept everything, but in reality he has taken everything away. This calls for art and cunning: to pollute everything while maintaining the best of appearances, to say that Christ died for us and at the same time to teach that we render satisfaction.

I do not consider Mohammed the Antichrist. His teaching is too obviously false, and his is a discernible black devil who is able to deceive neither faith nor reason and is a heathen, who persecutes Christendom from without, as the Romans and other heathen have done. For how can he possibly deceive a Christian who rejects the Holy Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testament, considers of no account Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Office of the Keys, or the forgiveness of sins, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, marriage, and teaches nothing but murder and immorality?

But the pope in our midst is the real Antichrist. His is the exalted, subtle, fine, polished devil, who sits in the midst of Christendom and allows the Holy Scripture, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the keys, the Catechism, and marriage to remain. As St. Paul says: He sits (that is, rules) in the temple of God (2 Thess. 2: 4), that is, in the Church of Christendom, in the midst of the people who are baptized and have the Lord's Supper, the keys, the Holy Scripture, and God's Word. And yet he rules in such masterly fashion that he at the same time elevates his decretals, his "Koran," his human teaching, above the Word of God, so that Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the keys, the Gospel, and Christ Himself no longer do the Christians any good; for those over whom he rules are obliged to believe that they are saved through their own works...

Then, too, Mohammed boasts that he perform no miracle. But Christ and Paul predict that the Antichrist will sit in the temple of God, will declare himself to be God, and will perform many false signs and wonders (Matt 24:15, 2 Thess. 2: 4). If you desire to know what these wonders are, then read the legends of the saints, the monks, the pilgrims, the masses, and the like. You will then clearly see what false signs are like.

These two regimes, that of the pope and that of the Turk, are no doubt the true Antichrist, against whom Daniel, Christ, Paul, John and other apostles have warned. Luther⁷

C. Orthodox Lutheran statements on the subject outside the WELS A.D. 1870 - Present.

In the 1975 revised edition of the Lutheran Cyclopedia, p . 807, issued by the Concordia Publishing House, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811-1887) is described as follows: "Though criticized at times for his polemics, Walther is often described as the most prominent Lutheran theologian of the U.S." Perhaps my own predilection for powerful, Bible-based polemics can be traced to my admiration for Walther, especially after I devoured his classic series of lectures on "Law and Gospel." I find it ironic that Walther met with Iowa Synod representatives, the descendants of most of them undoubtedly now firmly lodged in the new ultra-liberal ELCA, in Milwaukee in November 1867 to discuss whether issues like confessional subscription, millennialism and the doctrine of the antichrist should be considered "open" questions. Six score years later those issues are still alive, but it appears that a steadily dwindling number of professing Christians, as well as very few Lutherans, uphold the doctrine of the Papacy as Antichrist. The vast majority of Lutherans, it's safe to say, have never even heard of this teaching.

But Walther faced a similar situation. More than a century ago, on 21 November 1884 to be exact, the veteran 73 year old seminary professor and former Missouri Synod president lamented in an evening lecture to the Concordia Seminary student body in St. Louis:

...the majority...of those who claim to be Lutherans refuse to believe that the Pope is the Antichrist and the Papacy the antichristian power. With the entire Church of the Reformation and in accord with the confessions of this Church the orthodox American Lutheran Church of our time still in full earnest maintains the position that the Pope is the Antichrist. But that is, at best, regarded as an odd fancy of narrow-minded men, who refuse to keep step with the times. If you ask why this is so, I answer that it is chiefly because people no longer know what constitutes the Antichrist and the antichristian dominion...People see the rule of Antichrist in pantheism, materialism, atheism, socialism, nihilism, anarchism, and other horrible isms to which the modern age has fallen heir...The chief reason is that people fail to consider what it means when the Pope claims to be the vicegerent of Christ on earth and the visible head of the entire Christian Church. In order to be this, he must of course, profess many Christian doctrines. He has to put on a mask, otherwise Antichrist could not possibly exist in the midst of the Christian Church....When the Pope apparently fights for Christ and the Christian Church, he fights for himself and his dominion. But the point of supreme importance is this: Passing by those societies which deny the Triune God and which are outside of the pale of the Christian Church, I find that the Pope is the only one in the entire Christian Church who is an outspoken enemy of the free grace of God in Christ, an enemy of the Gospel under the guise of the Christian religion and aping its institutions.⁸

Referring to those decrees in the Council of Trent which anathematize the Bible's teaching of salvation by free grace alone through God-given faith in Christ alone without the deeds of the Law, Walther insisted: "Unless you are utterly blind and know nothing of the Christian religion, I believe that a plainer proof that the Pope is the Antichrist cannot be offered you."⁹

The man who was led by the Lord to take up and wear Walther's mantle in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is one of my religious heroes. That man who exerted even greater influence than Walther on my dogmatic mindset was Franz August Otto Pieper (1852-1931) . Like Walther, Pieper also spent most of his ministry as a Concordia Seminary professor in St. Louis, with several terms of service also as the seminary president and Missouri Synod president from 1899-1911. The Lutheran Cyclopedia (p. 621) offers the following thumbnail summary of Pieper's ministry: "F.A.O. Pieper's most outstanding theological contributions

were in the field of dogmatics; he presented doctrines in such a way as to appeal not only to the mind but also to the heart; the doctrines of grace and inspiration received special attention. His exceptional abilities were brought into play also as preaches and synodical president."

In his monumental 3-volume *Christian Dogmatics* in the section, "The Public Ministry," Pieper devotes about 6-1/2 pages to the subject: "The Antichrist" and 45 elsewhere in that dogmatic masterpiece he identifies the Pope as the Antichrist dozens of times. Consider the following Pieper pronouncements on this subject:

The most flagrant encroachment on the kingly office of Christ is perpetrated by the Papacy (the Antichrist...2 Thess. 2:4.)...¹⁰ the church of the Pope does more than merely deny the Christian doctrine of justification. She curses the doctrine, and her entire church work is aimed at destroying the Christian doctrine of justification and setting in its place pagan work-righteousness. This action and the further fact that the Church of the Pope sets itself up as the true church and covers its wicked work with the mask of great sanctity proves beyond doubt that the Papacy is the Antichrist described in 2 Thessalonians 2.

...Since the Christian Church lives and has its being in the Christian doctrine of justification, the Papacy, incorporated under the name of Christ, is the greatest spiritual murder agency in existence...(and) is the negation of Christianity.

...There can be no greater enemy of the Church of God than the Papacy...this very doctrine (justification) the Pope not only tries to root out of the hearts of the Christians by seducing them through his false worship to trust in their own works and in the works of the saints, but he expressly curses it. Yes, the Pope pronounces the curse against all who believe that they are justified and saved by grace alone, for Christ's sake.

Tell me this, could there by any means be a greater enemy of the Church than the Pope? Can anything worse befall the Church than being robbed of the doctrine of justification, by which alone she lives and exists? When the enemy takes my earthly life, he can do me no greater harm in earthly matters. And when the Pope has taken away the spiritual life of the Church by robbing her of the doctrine of justification, the climax of harm has been reached. - People have identified Nero and men of his kind with the Antichrist. Others have found the Antichrist in the unbelievers. Nor it is true that Nero and similar men have butchered the Christians in the cruelest manner. But in the midst of these persecutions the Christians could joyfully sing: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," and the blood of the martyrs has become the seed of the Church. But the Papacy has been engaged for a thousand years in murdering millions spiritually, over whom it had gained control on the pretense of saving their souls. What folly, to speak of Napoleon III or, as has been done recently, of Boulanger as the Antichrist! It is likewise true that the open unbelievers are raging enemies of Christ. But the Christians know what to think of declared unbelievers. These do not deceive the Christians. - What, then, may be the reason that men are today disinclined to recognize the Pope as the Antichrist? Whence this strange and deplorable phenomenon that nearly all recent "believing" theologians search about for the Antichrist while he is performing his work in the Church right before their eyes, his soul-destroying activity as plain as day? The trouble is that they have no living knowledge of the doctrine of justification and of the importance of this doctrine for the Church. From my own experience I must confess that I was vitally convinced that the Pope is the Antichrist only after I realized, on the one hand, what the doctrine of justification is and how much it means to the Church, and, on the other hand, that the real essence of the Papacy consists in denying and cursing the doctrine of justification and in binding men's consciences to itself by its sham of piety and its claim to be the only saving Church.¹¹

Pieper also insisted that "...by placing his word as authority beside the Word of God and *eo ipso* above God's Word, the Pope demonstrates that he is the Antichrist...the Papacy is the *confluxus* of all heresies and abominations to be found in the Church and the world."¹²

Already in Pieper's day identifying the Pope as the Antichrist was the rare exception among church leaders rather than the rule it should be. Pieper stated as follows in connection with that sad situation, which remains true today:

One cannot blame the Papists for denying from their standpoint the *papam esse ipsum verum antichristum*" (the Pope is the very Antichrist). But the nearly unanimous denial also on the part of modern Protestant theologians, including Lutherans, that the Pope is the Antichrist...stems from their opposition to the *sola gratia* and their 'liberal' attitude toward Scripture (rejection of Verbal Inspiration). Because of this false position they do not see (1) what an outrage the renunciation and anathematizing of the doctrine of justification is, (2) what a heinous offense the Pope is committing by suppressing the authority of the Word of God, and thus of Christ, and supplanting it with his own authority, and that under the cloak of Christ's name and with a great show of sanctity."¹³

Much confusion has resulted from the conviction that the teaching of the Papacy as Antichrist is a so-called non-fundamental doctrine. Especially liberal Lutherans, who shy away from an uncompromising subscription to the Lutheran Confessions and who are clearly embarrassed by and resentful of this litmus test of orthodox Lutheranism, would like to believe that non-fundamental is the same as an adiaphoron (something neither commanded nor forbidden in the Bible) or that this teaching can be safely deposited and forgotten in a bottomless bag labeled "open questions." Consider Pieper's position on that point:

Does the doctrine that the Pope is the Antichrist belong to the 'fundamental articles' of the Christian faith? It certainly does not, for a person is a Christian solely through his knowledge of Christ and not his knowledge of the Antichrist. Before and after the unveiling of the Antichrist there have been many sincere Christians who have not recognized the Pope as the Antichrist. But every teacher (not layperson? R.J.S.) 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 2 Thessalonians 2 is weak in Christian theology.¹⁴

I must confess that Pieper's position on the previous point does not completely satisfy me. I hesitate to accuse Pieper of pussy footing on this issue, especially since his credentials for engaging in God-pleasing Bible-based polemics are as much in place in the history of American Lutheranism as Walther's. Yet I wonder if Pieper would agree that anyone, with reasonable intelligence, whether he be a layperson, pastor or theological professor, who after perusing and digesting the avalanche of evidence we're laying out in this paper, would deny that the Pope is the Antichrist, could hardly be still considered a "sincere" Christian and would deserve more of a denunciation than merely being labeled "weak" in Christian theology. Are the Hal Lindseys and Jimmy Swaggarts who deny this doctrine only "weak" in Christian theology or are they, as I believe, extremely dangerous false prophets whose millennial delusions about the Antichrist are deceiving millions of "sincere" Christians who watch their films and TV programs and read their books?

Wisconsin Synod pastors are very familiar with Richard Charles Henry Lenski (1864-1936), a contemporary of F. Pieper. His commentary on the New Testament is still widely used for sermon preparation. In his commentary on 2 Thessalonians Lenski stated:

...it is plain what the Antichrist would do, he would seat himself in the church like a pagan god and show himself off that he is God. He does not say that God and Christ are no longer God, that this 'sanctuary' is no longer theirs, but that he, this man, has the right to sit there as a divine

being. Anti-Christianity can go no further, the history of the church during these hundreds of years presents only *one* phenomenon of this type, the papacy.¹⁵

Lenski also declared that

All that Paul says (in 2 Thess. 2) agrees with the papacy and Romanism down to the present day...As the papacy emerged and the Romish system developed, the Antichrist's parousia and revelation occurred. During nineteen centuries no greater apostasy has ever appeared in the visible church. Nor *can* a still greater one appear. The climax has been reached in the papal system. What causes some to deny that the pope is the Antichrist is the fact that they have not themselves experienced that justification by faith alone is the soul and center of all that is true Christianity. All other true doctrines have their roots in this one.¹⁶

Lenski then proceeded to quote from the Smalcald Articles in which Luther identified the Pope as the Antichrist and from the Roman Catholic Council of Trent decree which pronounced a curse on the justification by faith alone basic Bible teaching. Lenski also included in his 2 Thessalonians commentary the statement of Franz Pieper which I cited above concerning Pieper's coming to the conviction that the Pope is the Antichrist.¹⁷

Lenski also took issue with Luther who for a time made statements about a double Antichrist, statements which will appear in this paper at the end of this section. Lenski was convinced that "Paul's prophecy does not point to a double Antichrist, one being Oriental (Turkish), the other Occidental (papal)."¹⁸ Would the steadily rising influence and power of Moslem leaders like those in Iran, among the Palestinian Liberation Organization and in other Arab territories give modern support to Luther's idea about a double Antichrist? On that question I would side with Lenski who also said: "I look for no superpope at the end, for no pope who shall wield supreme secular power over the world's states and governments."¹⁹

Not only WELS pastors, professors and Christian teachers, but also a sizeable lumber of laypeople as well, are familiar with a major work of Dr. Paul Edward Kretzmann (1883-1965): His four-volume Popular Commentary of the Bible has been a reliable voice of orthodox, confessional Lutheranism for almost 70 years. In his :to comments on 2 Thessalonians 2 Kretzmann wrote:

In the Church, in the midst of Christendom, in the midst of the baptized Christians, Antichrist had the audacity to place his throne. For he presumes to be the representative of God on earth and to be endued with divine power and authority. There can be, no doubt that this prophecy finds its fulfillment in the Roman papacy, as a special article below will show. The insistence of the Roman See upon the tradition of the Church, its prohibition of Bible reading, its doctrines of the immaculate conception of Mary, of transubstantiation, of the sacrifice of the mass, of indulgences, of the veneration of saints, of purgatory, of the infallibility of the Pope; etc., the entire system of doctrine, in fact, with all its ramifications, mark the Pope of Rome as the Antichrist in the narrow or specific sense of the Word.²⁰

The special article which Kretzmann referred to offers quotations from Luther and the Lutheran Confessions which identify the Pope of Rome as the Antichrist. Some may maintain that Kretzmann's comment about Rome's prohibition of Bible reading does not apply in the 1980s or in the post-Vatican II era. It is true, and very gratifying, that Bible reading has increased among Roman Catholics in the past score years; however, that encouraging development has been largely offset by Rome's missive stance toward liberal Bible interpretations, such as theistic evolution, negative higher criticism, and leftist liberation theology.

Theodore Hoyer (1883-1963) surely is not as well-known, in our circles as Walther, Pieper, Lenski or Kretzmann, but that long-time Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod professor (1927-1963) made an excellent contribution to the 1947 Concordia Publishing House's "The Abiding Word." His 57 page doctrinal essay on "The Papacy" in Volume 40 II, pps. 709-766, includes the following declarations:

...a religious teacher, a pastor, who knows the Pope's teaching and practice and yet does not recognize him as the Antichrist is a poor theologian ("schwach in den Theologie," Pieper). And it is very difficult to see how such pastors can rightly perform their duty of warning the souls committed to their care against the abominations and the seduction of the Papacy if they themselves have not recognized the Papacy, as the Antichrist. It is greatly to be feared that they are losing the firm conviction of the contrast between faith and works, between grace and merit, between Lutheranism and Papism. The Church of the Reformation confessed this article with one consent. A pastor who does not see the mystery of iniquity in the Roman Papacy surely has little knowledge of the history of the Church of the meaning of the Reformation, and a poor conception of Luther's doctrine.²¹

Hoyer also asserted in the conclusion of his article on "The Papacy":

Despite the fact, therefore, that this is not a fundamental article of faith, that 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. Scripture points us to that need, describing Antichrist as very dangerous, crafty; destructive, as one who will appropriate vast power and seduce great numbers of men. Scripture pronounces a curse on all who allow the Antichrist to seduce them, Rev:14:9ff. According to Scripture the revelation of Antichrist and the Reformation of the Church are connected; hence he who denies that the Papacy is the Antichrist must doubt whether the Lutheran Reformation is the prophesied work of God. Antichrist must be revealed before the end of the world; if the Papacy is not the Antichrist, the end cannot yet be impending. 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 to Christians; it helps to prove the truth of the Scriptures; and it is a great example to strengthen our confidence in the truth of the Savior's promise that the gates of hell shall never prevail against the Church. Finally, 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. And we as a Lutheran Synod cannot tolerate on the part of our teachers and preachers open attacks on this article.

God has greatly blessed us, the Church of the Reformation, by revealing to us this great enemy of true Christianity who for so many centuries has worked havoc in Christ's Church on earth. At the same time He has placed a great responsibility on us. On us particularly devolves the duty to testify against this iniquity and to warn others lest they fall a prey to it. Let us not go to sleep on this job as others did and so give Antichrist another chance to gain power and slay the sheep of Jesus Christ. Let us insistently, in season and out of season, by word of mouth and by the printed word, in church, in school, privately, by radio, preach the pure Gospel of the Savior; that is the best, the only antidote against Antichrist's poison.²²

In the "Concordia: Self-Study Commentary, An Authoritative, In-Home .Resource for Students of the Bible," put out by the Concordia Publishing House in 1971, I came across a reference to this subject that was most disappointing, to say the least. In his comments on 2 Thessalonians 2, Martin H. Franzmann (1907-1976), a former WELS professor at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin; wrote as follows:

Just wherein Paul saw the first workings of the mystery of lawlessness we cannot say; perhaps it was the deification of the Roman emperor as it had manifested itself in Caligula (A. D. 37-41). Nor do we know just what or whom he had in mind when he spoke of a restraint and a restrainer: perhaps it was the benign power of Roman law and order which made seas and roads safe for the bearers of the Gospel and permitted the Word of the Lord to "speed on and triumph" (3:1). Nor do we know how far he was permitted to look into the future toward the final historical manifestation of the mystery of lawlessness and its judgment. Paul wrote, prophetically, to sober men's hope and to alert men to the realities of the history in which they lie. The men of the Lutheran Reformation responded responsibly to that alert when they looked upon the papacy and saw there the marks of the man of lawlessness. A responsible church is called on to do in this our day what they did, with faith and fears, in their.

Should we describe Franzmann's comments above as a "responsible response" to that section of Scripture? Surely Franzmann's doubts about this doctrine are obvious. From the world of athletics I think of someone not being able to carry another man's athletic supporter or jockstrap, a somewhat crude way of describing someone's inferiority to another person. That's how I feel when I venture to find fault with Martin Franzmann's interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2. Who am I to criticize that brilliant exegete and New Testament scholar? But perhaps Franzmann was the kind of person Franz Pieper had in mind when he wrote about sincere Christian teachers whose weakness in theology would be exposed by their failure to clearly identify the Pope as the Antichrist. It may be that the brevity of expression demanded by a single volume commentary of the Bible prevented Franzmann from making the positive identification of the Pope as he Antichrist in accord with our Lutheran Confessions. I don't believe, however, that Walther, Pieper or the good Doctor Luther himself could have passed by 2 Thessalonians 2 with nothing more than the insipid, mealy-mouthed words put down by Martin Franzmann.

In the December 1965 "Lutheran Layman" publication, reprinted in Herman Otter's "A Christian Handbook on Vital Issues" (1973), there is an article (p. 603) with the provocative title: "Dr. Behnken Expresses Lutheran View on Papacy as Antichrist." The article tells of an exchange of correspondence between the late president of the Missouri Synod, John W. Behnken, and a Father Ginder, editor of "Our Sunday Visitor," a Roman Catholic periodical. In response to a request for clarification on the Lutheran position concerning the papacy as the antichrist, Behnken wrote a letter to Father Ginder in which he quoted the Smalcald Articles position on the Pope cited above and the Missouri Synod's *Brief Statement* which identifies the Pope as the Antichrist because "he anathematizes the very heart of the Gospel of Christ, that is, the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins by grace alone, for Christ's sake alone, through faith alone, without any merit: or worthiness in man (Romans 3:20-28; Galatians 2:16 he recognizes only those as members of the Christian Church who bow to his authority."

However, in my opinion, Behnken blunted his testimony as the Missouri Synod spokesman with a favorable reference to the compromising Common Confession, XII, 2: "Among the signs of our Lord's approaching return for Judgment, the distinguishing features of the Anti-Christ, as portrayed in the Holy Scriptures, are still (sic): 3 clearly discernible in the Roman Papacy, the climax of all human usurpation's of Christ's authority in the Church."

That little word "still" in the preceding statement is like a siren shrieking sell-out for the sake of outward union with the American Lutheran Church. "Still" surely suggests the possibility that sometime in the future prior to our Lord's return, someone other than the Pope may appear displaying the distinguishing features of the Antichrist.

There's another troubling quotation in Behnken's letter to Father Ginder. He also quoted from Theodore Hoyer's essay on the Papacy in the "Abiding Word," Vol. II; p. 764:

Knowledge of this article (Pope is the Antichrist) is not needed to plant and keep saving faith in the heart. A Christian may know Christ as His Savior and be saved by Him even though he does

rat recognize the anti-Christ in the Papacy. It is not an article on which saving faith rests, with which Christianity stands or falls. Denial of it is not, therefore, in itself alone divisive of church fellowship.

I find it unfortunate that Behnken chose the above statement from Hoyer's otherwise solid article on the Papacy to use in his literary encounter with Father Ginder. Could not Father Ginder conclude that his refusal to recognize his leader as the Antichrist had absolutely nothing to do with his own salvation? Surely Hoyer and Pieper and others who stress the non-fundamental nature of this article had in mind unsophisticated people who never had an opportunity to know or recognize the Pope as the Antichrist due to limited exposure to the Scriptures,; not learned theologians like Father Ginder who understood very well the Bible foundation of the article, but nevertheless stubbornly refused to believe it. The dogmatic designation, non-fundamental, surely was never intended to condone or excuse brazen defiance toward clear, simple and basic Biblical truth.

In this section of the paper we've quoted several prominent Missouri Synod theologians from the 19th and 20th centuries. We'll close out this section with a brief, but very significant, comment from the "Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version," Robert G. Hoerber, General Editor, put out in 1986 by the Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis. In its notes on 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4 this publication (p. 1843) says that "Lutheran tradition sees the papacy as the 'man of lawlessness.' But this tradition must remain a historical judgment, not a scriptural truth. Paul's letters contain some things that are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16)."

Do I detect a not so subtle distancing in that comment from the solid declarations of the Brief Statement, Dr. F. Pieper, Dr. Walther, etc.? Can you imagine Dr. Luther's reaction to this wimpy stand by self-styled orthodox and conservative Lutherans near the final decade of the 20th century? Surely such a comment on 2. Thess. 2 does not represent the precious heritage of solid, and, yes, polemical confessional Lutheranism. To say that :tie doctrine of the Pope as Antichrist belongs among the "things" written by Paul "that are hard to understand" would provoke scorn from Luther. He would surely contend that it's much, much easier for us in 1988, with all that's happened in history over the past four centuries, to understand that the Pope is the Antichrist - no ifs, ands, or buts about it. Luther, I'm sure, would be very surprised to learn from latter-day Lutheran scholars of the late 20th century, even those in the supposedly conservative Missouri Synod, that his many declarations that the Pope is the Antichrist, including those he included in the Smalcald Articles, can now be dismissed as a dubious historical judgment based on so-called Lutheran tradition rather than simple, straightforward Scriptural truth.

I am entirely of the opinion that the papacy is the Antichrist. But if anyone wants to add the Turk, then the pope, is the spirit of Antichrist, and the Turk is the flesh of Antichrist. They help each other in their murderous work. The latter slaughters bodily and by the sword, the former spiritually and by doctrine.

The Antichrist is at once the pope and the Turk because a human being is made up of body and soul. The spirit of Antichrist is the pope, the flesh of Antichrist is the Turk; for the former devastates the church spiritually, the latter bodily. But just as in the times of the apostles the church remained the victor over against the sanctimoniousness of the Jews and the power of the Romans, so she does today over against the hypocrisy of the Turk.

To the man who believes that the sins of all the world are laid upon this Lamb, the pope and the Turk must be the Antichrist. Luther²³

D. WELS statements on the subject in recent years.

My awareness of this doctrine was greatly increased by an eight page booklet on the subject of the Antichrist issued by the Conference of Presidents in 1954 as booklet #9 in a series entitled "continuing in His Word," which set forth the doctrinal position of our Synod over against the deteriorating doctrinal stance of the Missouri Synod.

Over the years I have seen no evidence in our synod of any retreat from this doctrine such as has occurred in so many other, even Lutheran; denominations. For example, in the mid-1970s, after a decade of dialogue between Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians a joint statement was issued in which the liberal Lutheran's stated that it could be conceivable for Protestants to recognize a reformed papacy. In response to that position Prof. Wilbert R. Gawrisch wrote in the July 1975 issue 10 of the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly:

In our view the hope for a substantial reform of the papacy is totally inconceivable. To expect such a change is to ignore Paul's prophecy in 2 Thessalonians 2 that the Antichrist will continue his antichristian activities until Christ destroys him with the brightness of His coming....The only way that these dialogues may be serving, to promote the ecumenically minded participants' goal of unity is through the gradual erosion of what remains of the Lutherans' Lutheranism and their eventual capitulation to Romanism.

In the 18 February 1979 issue of the Northwestern Lutheran I penned an editorial, "The Pope IS The Antichrist!" which was triggered by what the following paragraph from that editorial explains:

In stark contrast to Luther's Scriptural position stated in the Smalcald Articles, some modern-day theologians who claim the name of Luther have abandoned the belief that the pope is the Antichrist. In the interests of Lutheran-Catholic unionism they (the U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Ministries) have recommended to their churches: "That they officially declare that the Lutheran commitment to the Confessions does not involve the assertion that the pope or the papacy in our day is the anti-Christ. In this way our churches would publicly affirm that anti-papal polemics should be replaced by an attitude of respect and love."²⁴

That editorial caused a mild stir in other Lutheran publications. The 12 March 1979 issue of Missouri in Perspective, a liberal Lutheran publication, gave a very fair and factual summary of the editorial under the headline: "WELS Disagrees with Most U.S. Lutherans, Believes the Pope Is The Antichrist." But Richard John Neuhaus, in the 30 March 1979 Forum Letter responded with predictable liberal scorn: "...last month the Wisconsin Synod asserted that nothing has changed in 450 years and Lutherans must still insist that the pope is the antichrist. Fortunately, the great majority of Lutherans do not subscribe to the rather dull heresy that the Holy Spirit has gone out of the business of leading Christ's Church toward express unity in the truth."

Dr. Martin Luther was called many scurrilous names, including heretic, by his adversaries, but he certainly could never be described as dull. If the eloquent Neuhaus chooses to label and dismiss this thoroughly Lutheran doctrine that the Pope is the Antichrist as dull heresy, so be it. He's dead wrong. Indeed, his own credentials as an ecumenical heretic are impeccable and his effort at scathing sarcasm in the above quotation proves that there's nothing at all dull about this doctrine. The many Luther quotations included in this paper are anything but dull.

E. G. Behm's "The Papacy Evaluated" 2nd edition revised,(1st edition, 1946)from the Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, 1962, states that "Luther was very definite in his claim that the Pope is the Antichrist. The Lutheran Church confesses in the Smalcald Articles; Article 4, that the Pope is the very Antichrist. That is still the official stand of the true, confessional Lutheran Church" (p .144).

When I read Behm's 168 pg. paperback book, and its earlier first edition, I found it not at all dull or boring, but rather a fascinating, albeit frightening expose, of antichristian papal doctrines. Consider, for example, Behm's comments about the curses which the Council of Trent (1545-1563) pronounced on various basic Bible truths, especially the Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ Jesus: "The Antichrist now was revealed for all time, and without the possibility of retreat...It was too late! The Antichrist had lost his opportunity to turn and become 'Pro'-Christ. That Man of Sin now had to continue to sit in the temple of God and insist on the prerogatives of God. This is the institution of the Papacy" (pps. 145, 146).

In our Wisconsin Synod over the past four or five decades, there have been several essays and articles appearing, at least one in every decade, which have reviewed this doctrine as follows: Max Lehninger's "The Doctrine of the Antichrist" in the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Jan. 1941; W. Schink's "The Scriptural Doctrine of the Antichrist" in the Jan. - Apr. 1958 W.L.Q. and E. Arnold Sitz' "Of the Antichrist" in the Jan. 1965 W.L.Q..

Of more recent vintage are two papers which are available through our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library: P.L. Sullivan's 1972 "The Antichrist - A Brief Bible Study and Guide" (Essay File #311, c.2) and Mark A. Jeske's "An Exegesis of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10 - The Rise and Fall of the Man of Lawlessness" (Essay-File #402, c.2) delivered to the Milwaukee Metro-North Pastoral Conference, 11 May 1981.

Still, more recently, I am pleased to report, commentaries published by our Northwestern Publishing House have taken a solid Scriptural and truly confessional Lutheran stance on this issue. In the 1984 "Thessalonians" commentary in the N.P.H.'s "The People's Bible" series Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Prof. David P. Kuske states in connection with 2 Thess. 2:1-3 - "This prophecy is fulfilled in the line of men who have served and will serve in the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church" (p. 89). He then lays out nine points to keep in mind about the Antichrist, which could also be described as identifying finger prints, all pointing to the Pope as Antichrist. Kuske quotes Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) who made the following proclamation which still stands as the papacy's official position: "It is altogether necessary to salvation for every human being to be subject to the Roman, Pontiff" (p. 92), a blasphemous and brazen contradiction of Acts 4:12 - "Salvation is found in no one else (Jesus Christ of Nazareth), for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Kuske also stresses the timelessness of this truth and the fact that its non-fundamental label is not to be construed as non-essential, insisting that:

This prophecy was not just written by Paul for the Thessalonians. God led the Apostle to record it for our instruction, too. Paul considered it an essential doctrine for every Christian, even for those new to the faith. So should we. It is an urgent warning to avoid the error of self-righteousness, which causes Christians to fall from their salvation (p. 100).

Also in the N.P.H. "People's Bible" series Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Professor John C. Jeske's commentary on Daniel shows the connection between Daniel 11 and 2 Thessalonians 2, contending that both prophecies, both by Daniel and the Apostle Paul, were fulfilled with the appearance of the papacy. Jeske explains, (p. 212-213) that

The closing ten verses of chapter 11 (Daniel) no longer, point to Antiochus Epiphanes, but are an Old Testament prediction of God's archenemy, of whom Antiochus was a type. St. Paul gives us the key to the correct interpretation of this passage in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, where he gives us a description of the Antichrist which is remarkably similar to Daniel's: "He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped." "He will say unheard of things" (Dn. 11:36), literally "things which cause astonishment" because they are so blasphemous. The Roman Catholic papacy robs God of his supreme glory by attacking the very heart of the gospel, the teaching that the sinner is saved only by faith in God's offer of mercy in Christ Jesus. There is no greater blasphemy than to attack this central teaching of the Scripture. The appearance of the Antichrist and his blasphemous work is part of the foreordained plan of God. This is the judgment on the sins of people who "refused to love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

In his comments on Daniel 11:37—"He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all," Prof. Jeske shows how the papacy fits that divinely inspired description by Daniel:

The Antichrist will exalt himself above God not only by attacking what God has said, but also by claiming to be the only divinely authorized spokesman for God. A further mark of identification is that he will “show no regard...for the one desired by women.” The papacy's low opinion of marital love is illustrated by the statement of Pope John Paul II: “Those who choose matrimony do well, and those who choose virginity or voluntary abstinence do better.” By forbidding its clergy to marry and by teaching its laity that remaining unmarried is a holier state than being married, the Antichrist shows a low opinion of the mutual love of man and woman. By contrast God shows how highly he esteems marital love when in his Word he compares it to the love Christ has for his bride, the church.

The sainted Dr. Siegbert W. Becker, also a Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professor, repeatedly reaffirms the orthodox confessional Lutheran doctrine that the Pope is the Antichrist in his excellent 1985 NPH commentary, "Revelation – The Distant Triumph Song." Commenting on Revelation 13:11-18 Becker eloquently expresses his conviction that the lamb-like, two-horned beast coming out of the earth is best understood as the papacy:

There can be no doubt in the mind of the interpreter that the lamblike beast in the vision is a great enemy of the church. While the beast from the sea was obviously a fearsome and dangerous foe of God's people, the beast from the earth at first glance appears to be completely harmless. It actually takes on the appearance of Christ, or at the very least, (if one insists on translating, "a lamb") of one of Christ's followers.

Orthodox Lutheran commentators have generally seen in this beast from the earth a representation of the great Antichrist and, in harmony with the Lutheran confessions, have identified him with the pope of Rome. While the identification of the Antichrist rests primarily on what the Apostle Paul teaches concerning "the man of sin" in 2 Thessalonians 2, there are still some things said here that help to undergird the confessional Lutheran doctrine which says that “papam esse ipsum verum antichristum” (the pope is himself the true Antichrist), (S.A.:II; iv, 10).

It is significant that the Greek preposition (anti) in Koine usage almost always has the meaning “instead of” and not “against.” When the New Testament, therefore, uses the name “Antichrist,” the common understanding would be that he is a “substitute” Christ, and not just someone who is against Christ. With this in mind, it is doubly significant that the appearance of this beast is lamblike, that is, having the appearance of Christ. In this connection we may be reminded that when the pope visited America a few years ago a number of people were reported in the newspapers to have said that when they met the pope they felt that they were in the very presence of Christ. One of the canonized saints of the Roman Church, Catherine of Siena, called the Pope "Jesus Christ on earth." There are those who argue that the pope cannot be the Antichrist today because modern popes are such Christlike men. This verse affords us a powerful antidote to the temptation in that argument. The popes who have been outwardly wicked and depraved are in the minority. Most of them have appeared to be “Lamblike.”

But the destructive nature of this beast becomes evident in he says. His speech is dragonlike, that is, the message he proclaims is the devil's message. What that message is in its essence becomes clear from the first words spoken by the devil in Eden. On the surface that message does not appear to be depraved. Satan at times appears as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). After all, he did not urge Adam and Eve to commit adultery or murder. But he did deny the clear of God and urged Eve to seek her happiness, her “salvation,” as it were, in what she could do for herself rather than in all the good things which God had done and supplied for her and her husband. The basic doctrine of the devil is the message of salvation by works. In the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent the Roman church official condemns and consigns to hell anyone

who teaches that men are justified by faith alone and that good works are not necessary for salvation. It has, by that very act, adopted the message of the dragon from hell as its official position and, in effect, has officially declared the clear teaching of Scripture to be untrue. Through the official theology of the Roman Church the devil still tells men that they will not perish if they do the deeds suggested by the church. Many of these deeds sound deceptively biblical. The Roman Church recommends contrition, faith, prayers and, fastings as meritorious deeds by which we earn forgiveness and salvation.

But while Rome and the papacy deserve to be identified with this lamblike beast from the earth we should not forget that modern Protestantism has in large measure adopted the dragon's message. Salvation through human effort, to a greater or lesser degree, is a common theme in current Protestant thought. As a result, men seek their salvation not in the grace of God and the merits of Christ apprehended by faith alone but in their own efforts, conversion experiences, and the like. Thus much of Protestantism, though it appears to be "lamblike," has also begun to deliver a dragonlike message. This beast is referred to in all later chapters as "the false prophet." The beast thus sets himself up as a substitute Christ. The Old Testament prophets had spoken of the coming Savior as a great prophet, and this theme recurs again and again in the New Testament. His message proclaims salvation by grace without works. All those who turn the gospel into a new law and turn even faith and contrition into good works that men must perform as conditions of forgiveness are offering a substitute prophetic message, and not the gospel of Christ. The message still, to many, seems Christlike because it uses all the right words. But it really robs Christ of his glory by ascribing a certain amount of the credit for our salvation to our own works. And no one in the church does that with greater skill than the pope of Rome. While Lenski, Poellot, Little, and other commentators therefore may be justified in saying that the beast from the earth represents "antichristian propaganda," yet they may also be faulted for not seeing the close connection between this verse and the verdict of the Smalcald Articles that "the pope is himself the true Antichrist." Still, in a broader sense, we may say that this beast also represents all doctrine which undermines the gospel and serves the devil's purposes.

Each generation of Christians will have to grapple with heresy where it arises. So in our time we recognize the dragon's voice in humanism, evolutionism, pentecostalism, Mormonism, Russelism, Armstrongism, and other modern heresies - all of which are the more dangerous because the men who promote them appear to be lamblike. The false teachers still maintain a wardrobe of sheep's clothing.

This beast is a far grater threat to the church than the open enemy represented by the first beast, for false doctrine robs men of life in a far higher sense than the murderous persecutions carried on by the beast from the sea. Persecution may deprive God's children of physical life but false doctrine robs men of spiritual and eternal life.

Also on p. 210 of his commentary Becker drives home the truth that the Pope is the beastly Antichrist revealed to St. John in Revelation:

With its curse on the biblical doctrine of salvation by grace without works the papacy blasphemes the sufficiency of the one sacrifice by which all those who are sanctified have been forever perfected (He. 10:14). By anathematizing as heretics those who teach the biblical doctrine it also slanders the church. The papacy will also endure to the end of time, for the Lord will not destroy that great "man of sin" until the brightness of his coming (2 Th. 2:8).

In connection with the number 666 in Rv. 13:18 and the speculation that that number could symbolize the Greek word for "Latin" according to a type of calculation known as gematria, Becker states that

...the great ecclesiastical Antichrist is the papacy, whose official language to this day is Latin, even if the mass in our time is celebrated in the vernacular. Since the time of the Reformation and the Council of Trent, when the pope was clearly revealed as the Antichrist, we have even more reason to approve of this (666 as a symbol of the Latin pope) as a probable solution than (the ancient Christian church father) Irenaeus did who said that it was safer to wait for the fulfillment of the prophecy. (p .213)

In his comments on Rv. 17:9 – "...the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits....," Becker again maintains that "this is an obvious reference to Rome, 'the city of seven hills.' The embodiment of the apostate church is to be looked for especially in Rome. This verse lends another piece of biblical evidence to support the assertion of the Lutheran confessions that the pope in Rome is the great Antichrist" (pps. 264, 265). Also in connection with Rv. 17:18 - "The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." Becker declares that Rome is surely that "great city" and that

Rome would remain the center of enmity against the true church of God. In the church of Rome, which officially damned the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith at the Council of Trent, the apostasy of the church reached its fullest development. The Lutheran Confessions unequivocally identify the papacy of Rome as the great Antichrist. This is at least a partial fulfillment of the prophecies of (Rv.) chapter 17 (p. 268).

Remain with God as He has revealed Himself to us. The Antichrist; that is, the pope at Rome, exalts himself above Him, as the Turk also does. But he is more truly the beast, because he is outside the church and openly persecutes Christ. The Antichrist, however, sits in the temple of God. Therefore, properly speaking, dialectically defined, the Antichrist is one who is sitting in the church, where the visible signs of God are to be seen. On these he tramples and makes up new signs.

The pope is properly called the Antichrist, who sits in the temple and church of God and extols himself above what is called God and the worship of God. The Turk is not the Antichrist; for he is not in the church of God but is an evil beast. However, the pope sits in the holy church and arrogates unto himself the worship which is to be given to God alone. The Antichrist is no one outside the church of God.

We are convinced that the papacy is the seat of the true and real Antichrist...So far as I personally am concerned, I confess to owing the pope no other obedience than that which I owe the very Antichrist.

...the pope is the very Antichrist. He exalts himself above Christ and opposes Him, because he will not allow Christians to be saved without his power, which nevertheless is nothing and is neither ordained nor commanded by God...the pope will not permit faith; but he says that in order to be saved one must obey him. This we will not do. We would rather die in God's name...Just as we cannot worship the devil himself as Lord and God, so we cannot put up with his apostle, the pope, or Antichrist, in his regime as head or lord.²⁵ Luther

E. Contemporary misconceptions of the Antichrist connected with futurism and millennialism.

At considerable length we've given an overview primarily of the orthodox confessional Lutheran position, shared with most of Protestantism until the 19th century, that the pope is the Antichrist. We'll now look at various heterodox teachings about the identity of the antichrist with the sobering admission that in just over a century these heresies have become dominant in most Protestant or so-called evangelical circles and have crowded out the truth, to the extent that even a learned pseudo-Lutheran condescendingly can dismiss this doctrine as a "dull heresy."

Thanks to televangelists like Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, Oral Roberts and presidential aspirant Pat Robertson, along with popular writer Hal Lindsey and the Dallas Seminary's John Walvoord millennialistic fancies have proliferated and have penetrated the consciousness and belief systems of millions of conservative or evangelical Protestants.

An excellent article by Clifford Goldstein in the November-December 1987 issue of *Liberty*, which calls itself a magazine of religious freedom, reprinted on pps. 7 and 8 of the 1/11/88 issue of *Christian News*, offers a helpful summary of late 20th century Protestant views of the Antichrist and shows how they can be traced back to a 16th century Jesuit Catholic; Francisco Ribera.

The article, "The Religious Right and the Destruction of Israel" and also a sub-article by Goldstein, "Futurism's Past," offer the following fascinating information about this increasingly popular false teaching:

Futurism, the belief that the Jews and Israel are at the center of Armageddon, is the dominant theology of evangelical Christianity. And though futurists like to place their roots in the Hebrew prophets and apostles, the origin is really in the Counter-Reformation.

"You must be armed with Scripture," Martin Luther wrote, "so that you can not only call the pope the antichrist but also know how to prove it so clearly that you could die with this conviction and stand against the devil in death."

Reformation headers such as John Calvin, Philipp Melancthon, Heinrich Bullinger, Nicholas Ridley, and others, agreed.

"The Reformers in all lands had been unanimous," wrote historian LeRoy Edwin Froom, "in applying most of the prophecies of antichrist to the papacy...In fact, it was this united Protestant stand on the papacy that became the spring of their reformatory action. It was this clear understanding of the prophetic symbols that led them to protest against Rome with such extraordinary courage and effectiveness....These positions were, moreover, shared by hundreds of thousands, and were adopted by both rulers and people. Under their influence, whole nations abjured allegiance to the bishop of Rome. It was clearly a crisis of major proportions (for Roman Catholicism)."

Jesuit scholarship came to Rome's rescue. In 1590 a Spanish Jesuit named Francisco Ribera published a 500-page commentary on the Apocalypse (Book of Revelation). Instead of the antichrist being the papacy, Ribera claimed that antichrist would be an individual who would appear in the last days and bring a three-and-a-half-year period of tribulation that would center on the Jews and Palestine.

"The futurist school, founded by the Jesuit Ribera," wrote Catholic writer G.S. Hitchcock, "looks for antichrist...at the end of the Christian dispensation."

For three centuries Ribera's theology - amended, polished and expanded by other Catholics - was the genuinely Catholic system of prophetic interpretation. It made no headway with Protestants - who refuted it in numerous publications - until the nineteenth century, when it finally penetrated Protestantism, especially in England, where it was incorporated into a more complex theology called dispensationalism. Today millions of evangelical Christians, including Oral Roberts, Billy Graham, and Pat Robertson, accept some form of Ribera's Counter-Reformation theology, whether or not they realize its origin.

Yet not all Protestants of various denominations accept futurism. "The futurist uses the Bible as a crystal ball to make sensational prognostications about the future," says theologian and author Samuele Bacchiocchi. "But their predictions are based on literal interpretations of texts that don't warrant such a literal rendition. All one has to do is look at some of their predictions, especially Hal Lindsey's, to see how wrong many of them have been...."

Despite its suspect beginnings and theology, futurism reigns over much of evangelical protestantism. Most futurists - with their maps of impending Middle East wars in one hand, and

their Hal Lindsey books in the other - see themselves on the cutting edge of last-day events. In reality they are following the non-biblical vision of a Jesuit who died almost four centuries ago.

Goldstein's article offers the following quotations from prominent millennialists concerning the antichrist: "Think of it: at least 200 million soldiers from the Orient, with millions more from the forces of the West headed by the antichrist of the Revived Roman Empire...will be gathered in the area of Israel, especially around Jerusalem." (from Hal Lindsey who also predicts that "There will be 144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams turned loose at once.") Goldstein quotes from the Jerry Falwell-edited Liberty Bible Commentary (New York: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1983): "Two thirds of Israel's population will die as a result of the wrath vented against them by the antichrist."

Goldstein also includes a number of Jimmy Swaggart statements about the Antichrist, such as: "With his (the antichrist's) millions of men recruited from Russia and China, plus the Revived Roman Empire, he will come down to cover the nation of Israel like a cloud of locusts....The antichrist will amass his armies...The hated Jews will be now put to death...he can take out his venom and hatred upon those who brought the Messiah into this world - the Jews...It will be a time of such horror that it beggars description.

The antichrist will fling his armies against all Israel, but especially against Jerusalem. It will be door-to-door fighting, house-to-house confrontation, and the city will be leveled. The Jews will have their backs to the wall. The Bible says that half the city will fall. It speaks of women being ravished and raped...This is what Adolf Eichmann, Adolf Hitler and Himmler could not bring to pass.

Speaking of Swaggart, on 6 November 1987 I heard and saw him say on his TV program that the Antichrist would come from Babylon to make a non-aggression pact with Israel and then would break it in the middle of the Great Tribulation period.

A final quotation from Clifford Goldstein's article under the paragraph heading - "Antichrist's Final Solution":

The personage behind this slaughter of the Jews is the antichrist. Speculation abounds concerning his identity. In 1970 Hal Lindsey saw French newspaper editor Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber as a potential candidate. Everyone from Guru Maharishi and Sun Myung Moon to Henry Kissinger and Ronald Reagan has come under suspicion. Jimmy Swaggart thinks "he will probably be a Syrian Jew."

And as if one antichrist weren't enough, some have predicted that there will be two. (Hal Lindsey insists that) "The Bible indicated that there will actually be *two* antichrists. One will be a European who will rule the political and religious world from Rome. The other antichrist will be a Jew posing as a religious prophet."

No matter who the antichrist is or how many there are, futurists agree on one thing: he wants to destroy the Jews.

"The antichrist is on the verge of realizing his great desire," writes Jimmy Swaggart, envisioning last day events, "the desire of all evil men, past and present - the final solution: total annihilation: every Jew dead."

A 1978 book, *Soon -Coming World - Shaking Events! As Foretold by – God Almighty!* written by one John T. Sharrit of the Christian Missionary Society, P.O. Box 4097, Phoenix, Arizona, 85030 claims to bring about reconciliation between the three prominent millennial beliefs, the Pre-, Mid- and Post-Tribulationists, showing that each one has had its merit and truths. What he writes must be perfectly true because he "even offers a 'love-gift' of \$10,000.00 to the first person proving that his conclusions are wrong (p. 7). His book is loaded with underlinings and exclamation marks to stress his sincerity and decisive authority.

This book has led to my discovering "Schulz' Law" which states that the degree of false doctrine found in any theological book especially those written by millennialists, is directly related to the number of underlinings and exclamation marks used by the author. Sharrit's book is loaded with the latter and, not surprisingly, if you accept Schulz' law, the former too.

At the beginning of chapter 14, "Notes and Review - The 'Antichrist'!" printed in eye-catching, blood-red ink Sharrit states (p. 155):

The Soon-Coming World Ruler! Who Will He Be? The Bible Tells Us! Who is he NOT? As many as has (sic) been proclaimed in the past - he will not be: Mussolini; Hitler; Stalin; Judas Iscariot; The Pope of Rome; a Jew.

He WILL NOT (Schulz' Law could include this addendum - false prophets also love capital letters) be someone who is living today! - as some would have us believe! Let us stick with the Bible! - the Word of God! Many false prophets (including JOHN T. SHARRIT!, -R.J.S.) are in the world today!

He will not be a certain nation, an organization, or a movement, as some teach! He will be a MAN, a 'man of sin'! A super-human man! As Jesus Christ was super-human, so will the Anti-Christ be!"

Sharrit maintains that "The Anti-Christ World Ruler has to be someone who had lived before A.D. 96, - but had died, - and that he will ascend out of the bottomless pit? (p. 114)

Sharrit asks:

Can you not see that the inhabitants of the Earth will be startled! - will be filled with amazement, - when they see this man, that (1) had lived on Earth as Caesar of the Old Roman Empire, and at that time claimed that he was God, (2) had died with a wound of a sword, and (3) has now ascended out of the grave, with all the power that Satan has bestowed upon him? (p. 115)

Sharrit pinpoints the identity of the Antichrist as follows:

Here is a STARTLING TRUTH in the Encyclopedia in the Public Library concerning Nero. The early Christians for the first 300 years after Christ, believed and taught that in the 'last days' that CAESAR NERO would ascend up out of the bottomless pit, and that he would be the Anti-Christ World Ruler of the last days, and that he would make war on the last generation of Christians, just before the Coming of Christ for the rapture of the Church!" (p. 127)

"Satan in the Sanctuary," a 1973 Moody Press - Chicago book by Thomas S. McCall and Zola Levitt with a Foreword by the Dallas Seminary's John F. Walvoord and a favorable reference by the authors in the Preface to Hal Lindsey's "The Late, Great Planet Earth" offers the following picture of the Antichrist:

He may be alive today.

We have seen that the third Jerusalem Temple, the Tribulation Temple (that's the main topic of this 120-page book which includes this warning: "Don't wait for the Temple site events to convince you. Remember that the rapture may come at any moment...It would be a shame to miss the rapture and be here for the rest of the unhappy ending...the agonies to come." p. 116) will be on stake for the final act of God's drama about the earth. Now let's look at the villain of the piece. He does his fatal work in the Temple, and he brings the world total destruction.

He is a political leader of great acumen - virtually a sorcerer. He is engaging and appealing. He captures the loyalty of what is left of the world after the rapture, and he becomes a kind of

inverse messiah. The world trusts him with its problems, and he certainly succeeds in putting it out of its misery.

He is an egomaniac to make Hitler, Napoleon, and all the Caesars fade into soft-spoken modesty. He steadily gathers power and influence through his public relations man, the False Prophet, and he finally proclaims himself - not king nor president nor world ruler - but God Almighty (p. 89).

McCall and Levitt add other details about the Antichrist as they envision him:

...unbelievers...will have to deal with the Antichrist and his system of world domination. The believers will be gone via the rapture...before his appearance.

Perhaps God's people will watch the world events as the Antichrist dominates, but they will be watching from heaven, not earth. The best seat for this particular play is in the balcony.

...the Antichrist is European - from out of a revived Roman Empire (p. 90).

We might say that the Antichrist will have some Middle Eastern background and will rise in power on the European political scene.

He might even be alive today.

...The Tribulation Temple, which the Antichrist will desecrate, is in the offing (p. 92)

He is a man of tremendous energy and action; a diplomat and a peacemaker, a messiah and a field marshal.

...By amassing military power and politically expedient relationships throughout the world, he will guarantee the peace - at a price. His solution for the Middle East situation will work brilliantly, for a time - three and one-half years, to be precise...(p. 94).

He will establish a world economy wherein every person will have to participate. Revelation 13:16-18 reveals that every citizen will bear a mark on either his right hand or his forehead; it will be the number 666. Without this mysterious mark no individual will be permitted to buy or sell anything...

All this mess will bring on Armageddon.

Now back to the Tribulation Temple, built and being used for worship on its designated site in Jerusalem. It will become a prime target for the Antichrist.

What better setting for the headquarters of his own religion?

The Jews will have put up with the Antichrist until he gets around to the Temple. They will have been thankful for his handling of their political situation, and they will render him such allegiance as doesn't interfere with their normal worship of God.

But they'll draw the line when he enters the Temple.

The Antichrist will do this in a reckless way. He will already have virtual control of the world.

Like many a tyrant before him, he will begin to resent the independence and private worship of the Jews. Something about Jewish worship has always disturbed dictators.

He will have a throne placed in the sanctuary of the Jewish Temple, and he will sit on it and declare himself to be God Almighty.

That's it for the Jews.

And the Temple. And everything else.

The Jews will not tolerate this desecration. They will arm and fight.

And the Antichrist will regard this as his chance to finish them off. Another tyrant with another solution to the Jewish problem!

The Antichrist will gather a tremendous army...the mobilization of a virtual world army...he assembles the vast might of 'the kings...of the world,' and he gathers them together in that quiet, level plain called Armageddon.

Among the personalities attending that great battle is Jesus Christ.

But not the meek and mild Jesus as he is so often characterized. This time the Lord comes for battle...

It's no contest. Revelation contains no scenes of scenes of lengthy battle. The Antichrist bit off more than he could chew.

We have seen the doom of the Antichrist and his assistant. "These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone," John reports (Rev. 19:20).

And that's the end of the brief career of the man who declared himself God. (pps. 95-97).

The 22 February 1988 issue of "Christian News" (p. 16) has a photographically reproduced tract put out by the Gospel Tract Society, Inc., P.O. Box ,1118, Independence, MO. 64051, which. contains the following reference to the Antichrist:

...there is no precedent for the tremendous increase of the buzzard population, and for the first possibility in history of a 200 million man army crossing a dry river bed at the Euphrates, or for the Nile to dry up! The scoffers would like to ignore the nine nation European Common Market...which has only one more nation to add to make it fit into the ten nation resurrection of the Old Roman Empire predicted for these last days. It is to be the source of the coming anti-christ's armies which will lock horns with those Red Armies coming over the Euphrates and up from East Africa! Things are fast shaping up in Spain for that country to be the missing piece in this jig-saw puzzle.

The buzzards or vultures mentioned above are supposedly multiplying mysteriously at three times the normal rate in northern Israel to feast on human flesh in the valley of Armageddon after the millennialists' big battle. Have you heard that the cuckoo bird population is steadily increasing in the skies over the Gospel Tract Society in Independence, MO. and that a flock of formerly extinct dodos are also drifting in that direction?

Almost as absurd as the buzzard business of the Gospel Tract Society on the subject of the Antichrist is the statement made in the Essay 31, 1987 issue of "Verdict," formerly "Present Truth." An excerpt from that publication, reprinted in the 14 December 1987 (p.3) "Christian News" makes the following mind-boggling declaration: "In light of the gospel of Jesus and of history itself, we can conclude that Christianity is the Antichrist...even the highest and best expression of the Christian religion is Christian Judaism - Galatianism. Christianity has become the Antichrist."

I have no idea what "Verdict" is driving at with the preceding outrageous statement, but I've included it in this paper as an example of how far afield theologians wander on the subject of the Antichrist after rejecting the historic orthodox confessional Lutheran (and until a century or so ago, Protestant) position that the Pope is the Antichrist.

Into this vacuum, with truth absent, ready to rush in with a multitude of millennialistic errors are not only false prophets like Lindsey, Robertson, Swaggart et al., but even Hollywood has sought to horn in on the topic of the Antichrist to make a buck.

On 20 January 1988, on WVTM, Wisconsin's Super Station on Channel 18, I spent 2 hours, from 8-10 p.m., watching the movie, "Omen III, The Final Conflict" (1981). The two protagonists in this film are Damien Thorn (played by Sam Neill) and Father DeCarlo (played by Rosanno Brazzi). The brilliant 32-year-old Thorn, the head of the world's largest corporation specializing in soy beans and atomic energy, is compared with J.F.K. of Camelot and is described as a 20th century Alexander the Great. His dynamic, charismatic personality has propelled him to the chairmanship of the United Nations Youth Council and to be U.S. ambassador to Great Britain. He also has the birthmark of the devil, the number 666, on his scalp, hidden under his handsome head

of hair. He is the Antichrist who sees his mission in life to destroy the Christ who is scheduled to return to earth as a baby sometime between midnight and 6 a.m. on 24 March 19(?). He and his mesmerized followers, including an Anglican priest who stabs a baby he's supposed to baptize because it was born within the crucial 6 hour period, are determined to slay the Nazarene.

Only the heroic, self-sacrificing, Roman Catholic Father De Carlo (was this fantastic, far-fetched piece of fiction dreamed up by Pope John Paul himself or by one of his cardinals or archbishops to sow more confusion about the Antichrist's identity?) stands between the Damien Antichrist's evil plots and the imminent return of the Messiah to usher in the millenium. The Padre's mission is to ensure the safety of Jesus' Second Coming. He and his colleagues, known the Seven Knives of Megiddo, make their plans at a monastery, in Subiaco, Italy and set out from there to prevent Damien Thorn, the Antichrist and Son of Satan, from doing away with a new-born (again) Son of God.

We learn that, unlike Christianity's Ten Commandments, the Antichrist makes just one demand: "Love me, worship me and die for me." He extols the purity of evil and the pleasure of pain and makes impassioned speeches like the following: "O Satan, I will avenge thy (Antichrist must use King James language) torment, by destroying the Christ forever."

To make a long and absurd story short, Antichrist's love interest, TV interviewer Ms. Reynolds, stabs him at the end of the film when his sinister identity finally dawns on her. But in his death throes, this disciple, of the devil defiantly declares: "Nazarene, you have won nothing!", thereby leaving the door open for Antichrist's miraculous return from the grave and the possibility (still unfulfilled, as far as I know) for another Tinseltown box office blockbuster: "Omen IV, The Really Final Conflict."

Never should we heed those who apply this and similar passages of the prophets to a single person only. They do not know that the prophets have the habit of signifying an entire body of rulers by one person. Therefore these people falsely apply the term "Antichrist," whom Paul calls "that man of sin" and "the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2:3), to a single person, whereas Paul wants us to understand that the Antichrist is the entire body and horde of godless men and all their successive rulers. Thus, in Dan. 8:20-22, the ram signifies the rulers of Persia and the goat the rulers of Greece.

The Antichrist has positively risen against and over God and has set himself into the place of Christ, has discarded grace and denied faith. For he has taught thus: Faith does no good if it does not have works. By this false notion he has utterly obscured and destroyed the benefit of Christ, and in the place of grace, Christ, and His kingdom he has established the doctrine of works and a kingdom of ceremonies. And he has confirmed it with mere tomfoolery and thus has torn the whole world from Christ - who, after all, should work and reign alone in the conscience - and has forcibly pushed conscience into hell.

As Scripture testifies (2 Thess. 2: 4), the Antichrist does not sit in a stable full of demons, not in a pigsty or amidst a mob of unbelievers, but in the noblest and most sacred place, the temple of God.

One is not obliged to expect any other Antichrist. To have a worse regime on earth, one that kills more souls than does that of the pope, is impossible; of its extortion of bodily goods I shall say nothing. Therefore we must by all means cry and pray to (God against this archrascal among all God's enemies until Christ comes to redeem us from him. The pope is the really guilty one. Let every Christian say amen! Luther²⁶

F. In the aftermath of Vatican II, is Luther's position on the Antichrist still tenable?

I wholeheartedly agree with the following three paragraphs which first appeared in "The Publishers' Preface" of E. G. Behm's "The Papacy Evaluated," 2nd edition revised, 1962, by Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, WI:

Throughout the four centuries since the reformation, Lutherans for the most part have borne vigorous testimony against the errors of Roman Catholicism. Bred to the doctrine of salvation "by grace alone, by faith alone, through the Scripture alone," they have always recognized that the teaching of the Roman Church is an assault on the very heart of Christianity.

Today we must sadly note that exceptions to this statement are found in wide areas of Lutheranism. Some have relaxed the counter-attack; some have given it up entirely. The reason is that many have lost "Luther's word and doctrine pure." Then Lutherans no longer see Roman Catholicism in all its frightful significance. Then, too, they find alluring the promise of the ecumenical movement that not only all Protestants will be united, but also all Protestants and Roman Catholics. Under such circumstances the testimony becomes soft and blurred, or it fades away into silence. It is not considered good taste to speak forthrightly, on pulpit and platform or in public print, against the doctrines and practices of the antichrist. In 1961 a large Lutheran publishing House canceled its plan to come out with a book on Roman Catholicism which had been in preparation for a number of years. It did so for the published reason that the time was not right for it, since Lutheran leaders were engaging in dialogues (discussions) with Catholic churchmen. It would not do to spoil the atmosphere for these talks!

But the danger coming from Rome is as great as ever. We cannot meet this danger, however, merely by preaching an annual Reformation sermon, by holding Roman Catholics up for ridicule, or by relying on an inherited bias against them. We must preach, teach, and exhort tirelessly. To do that effectively, we must ourselves have studied in detail the soul-destroying doctrines of Catholicism.

A quarter century has passed since the above observations were made and as the ecumenical movement lumbers forward like a relentless glacier crushing more and more outposts of orthodox confessional Christianity along its path; the truth of these statements ought to be increasingly obvious to all of us in the WELS. But how many of us pastors in the WELS "preach, teach and exhort tirelessly" over against "the soul-destroying doctrines of Catholicism"? How many "annual Reformation sermon(s)" dare to nail down the truth stated in this paper that the Pope of Rome without question is the Antichrist?

The spirit of our times shies away from anti-papal polemics. Our people in the pews are dismayed and angered when some teaching of the Antichrist is excoriated from the pulpit always, it seems to them, on the Sundays when their Roman Catholic friends, relatives or even spouses have been persuaded to come to church with them.

We're tempted to adopt the mind-set and methodology of popular clerics like Robert Schuller. He contends that the weekly worship hour always must be upbeat and cheerful. Never will a discouraging or denunciatory word be heard from his Crystal Cathedral pulpit. This prosperous pupil of Norman Vincent Peale's power of positive thinking philosophy also wholeheartedly agrees with the lyrics of the old familiar tune: "you gotta accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative." Schuller maintains that he still teaches traditional Reformed Protestant theology in various classes and Bible study sessions offered by his church, but he insists that the pulpit is a place where the preacher's primary purpose must always be to stimulate warm fuzziest and positive thinking.

If we must confess that it's been years ago that we used our pulpits to identify the Pope as the Antichrist, aren't we in danger of permitting spineless Schullerism to worm its way into our philosophy of preaching? Surely we will not drag in this doctrine from out in left field, but when we expound on the numerous texts which highlight the heart and care of our Lutheran Christian faith: salvation by God's free grace through God-given faith in Christ Jesus without the deeds of the Law, it would not be out of place for us, like Ezekiel (chapter 33), the watchman for the house of Israel, to point out to our people that powerful man in Rome who with his predecessors continues to pronounce an unambiguous curse on that teaching which is the touchstone of the Gospel.

Last year, on 13 September 1987, when the ILCW series Gospel turned out to be St. Matthew 16:13-20, I felt conscience-bound not only to preach on that text, but to pinpoint the Pope as the Antichrist in the sermon, even though the initial stages and canvassing in connection with the GO-'87 evangelism effort offered a convenient excuse to select another text. Of course, I'm not suggesting that my brother pastors in the WELS who made a different decision are thereby branded as Robert Schuller clones. This paper offers my convictions, suggestions and admonitions without implying that my way is the only God-pleasing way of communicating this key teaching to our people. In the discussion of my paper I hope to hear how other pastors handle this "hot potato" portion of Christian doctrine.

I've discovered that even the controversy-loving public press apparently is not eager to publicize the fact that there still are some denominations that hold to this doctrine. As most of you know, I have sent in dozens of letters to the editor and longer opinion pieces to the Milwaukee Journal off and on for some twenty years. Some preachers like to bowl and/or golf, some like to hunt and/or fish, some like to garden or putter around the house as a jack-of-all-trades. Yours truly doesn't particularly enjoy any of the above; but in addition to reading and watching TV sports, I do get the itch now and then to put in my two cents worth on issues of current interest in the Journal.

I keep doing it even though I'm well aware that I'm opening myself up to ridicule from my enemies and some razzing from my friends. I won't deny that I also keep doing it for the thrill of seeing one's thoughts and ideas, usually including some references to our Lutheran Christian faith, printed in a medium that may be read by hundreds of thousands of people. I keep doing it for the same reason I accepted the assignment to write this paper. Even though it has some of the characteristics of a busman's holiday, this preacher still enjoys working with words, and ideas and sharing them with other people - and the more people who read and discuss what I write, the better.

Not all the letters and opinions I submit to the journal are published. My acceptance average, I guess, may be between 80% - 90%. In 1987 I went 0 for 3, dragging down the average. I mention those rejections because each of them contained a reference to the historic, orthodox, confessional Lutheran conviction that the Pope is the Antichrist. Two of the opinions, I thought, were especially timely. They pointed out the radical departure of the ELCA from historic Lutheranism right about the time Milwaukee business leaders were hoping to convince the new church to make its national headquarters in Brewtown. The third rejected opinion piece coincided with the Pope's somewhat less than totally triumphant tour of the U.S.A. in September 1987.

Why did the Journal not print those opinions? They were as well - or as badly - written as others which were accepted. In fact, I spent much more time honing those pieces because they cried out for expression than others which were published even though I dashed them off in less than an hour. I suspect that the Journal editor who read over those opinions may have turned his thumbs down due to the perceived outrageousness or weird kookiness connected with the public's reaction to the Pope is the Antichrist doctrine.

I've often wondered how Luther would react to the state of the church in the late 1980s. The quotations from Luther's works interspersed throughout this paper prove that his views about the Pope as the Antichrist underwent some gradual change and growth with the passage of time. Contemporary liberal Lutheran theologians, unwilling to admit how they've blasphemously abandoned the basic Biblical tenets of historic Lutheranism, surely would contend that Luther, if he were faced with the Roman Catholic Papacy of 1988, would pull in his horns and recant what he wrote so long ago in the Smalcald Articles and in many other works.

However, I'm convinced that Luther would be, first flabbergasted, and then furious at contemporary Lutherans who refuse to face the facts, who fail to recognize the overwhelming pile of evidence pointing to the Pope as the Antichrist.

"How blind can you people be?" Luther surely would ask. "You Christians in 1988 have proof positive, much more than I possessed back in the 16th century to make it clear to you, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the Pope is the Antichrist" Luther would say.

Luther, after all, knew nothing of the Council of Trent's condemnations which pronounced a curse on the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ Jesus without the deeds of the Law.

Although Luther already recognized the evils of Mariolatry in his time, he knew nothing about the alleged appearances of Mary at Guadalupe, Mexico; Lourdes, France; Fatima, Portugal and many other places, the most recent in the Yugoslavian mountain village of Medugorje, where beginning on 24 June 1981; first two; and later six young people said they had seen Mary, had spoken with her, had been guided by Mary through heaven, hell and purgatory, and were even allowed to hold the infant Jesus (did they just come from seeing the movie, "Omen III, the Final Verdict"?). An estimated 6 million to 7 million people already have made pilgrimages there, drawn by reports that Mary has been making daily appearances to the six young people for nearly 7 years.²⁷

It's true that the papal seal of approval has not yet been placed on the Medugorje miracles. A pontifical jury (impartial of course, and unconcerned about the flood of money flowing in from millions of pilgrim-tourists) of Yugoslavian bishops appointed by Pope John Paul II has not yet made or announced their decision, which may be years away. It's possible that the mass hysteria at Medugorje may receive the same rejection that the Shrine of Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin was tendered. However, this Mariolatrous present pope seems unlikely to discourage any activities which promote the idea that Mary is dispatching all sorts of secret messages to the world at her special shrines. How can the highest-ranking American Lutheran bishop, the ELCA's Chilstrom, make a deferential pilgrimage to Rome to curry the favor of the man who does nothing to discourage, but even actively promotes, such antichristian idolatry and pitiable superstition, all so insulting to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Would Luther's conviction about the Pope as the Antichrist have been hardened or softened by several blasphemous heresies that were pronounced centuries after his death, such as papal infallibility (1870), the immaculate conception of Mary (1854) and the assumption of Mary into heaven (1950)? The answer, I believe, is obvious.

Would Luther be inclined to take back his denunciations of the Pope by the results from the Vatican II (1962-1965) Council? Surely Luther the Bible translator could be pleased that more and more rank and file Roman Catholics can better understand their church services today due to Vatican II and can read the Bible on their own. But he would not be pleased, although probably not very surprised, that recent 20th century popes have told idolatrous heathen like the Moslems that he and they worship the same god, finding common ground with them on the doctrine of salvation by good works, either entirely or in part.

In Luther's day, I'm sure, relatively few people had ever seen a pope in person or possibly even his picture. Now, as a result of the explosion of media technology, the Pope surely is the best known, and most readily recognized celebrity on the global tags, even dwarfing U.S. presidents or Soviet Communist Party heads. Heavyweight champion Mohammed Ali enjoyed world-wide #1 attention for a time, but punchdrunk pugilists don't have the permanent clout and staying power popes possess, especially after their legs give out and advancing age sends a shadow over their popularity. John Lennon once crowed that the Beatles were better known than Jesus Christ. The present peripatetic pope is too clever to make such a crass, crude boast about himself, but he would have a point if he chose to do so. His successor will have a tough time surpassing this pope's record for kissing airport tarmacs.

Surely the Antichrist (Pope John Paul II) and his mentor and master, Satan, must be delighted that the doctrine we've looked at in this paper is totally unknown to multitudes of nominal (and possibly genuine) Christians both within and outside the Roman Catholic Church. How sad that even when people do hear about this doctrine, they are conditioned and programmed in this broad-minded, permissive and tolerant society of ours, to put the declaration that the pope is the Antichrist in the same category with the hateful rantings of white-supremacist new-Nazis and KKKers.

Since so few Christians beyond Bob Jones University and the tiny Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod hold to the position that the Pope is the Antichrist, it's obvious that we have a huge continuing education task ahead of us in connection with this teaching in our schools and churches. There will always be the risk of hurting peoples' feelings when we teach and preach this tough truth, but a church body which by God's grace is still confessional Lutheran, in fact as well as in name, must find tactful ways to tell both our own members and

outsiders who seek and desire straight answers about our doctrines, that the Pope is the Antichrist! No question(?) about it.

We want you to know, good reader, that we wrote this preface in order to inform the world that we are not the first to declare the papacy to be the kingdom of Antichrist, since for so many years before us so many and such great men (whose number is large and whose memory is eternal) have undertaken to express the same thing so clearly and plainly.

This is how the rule of the Roman Antichrist made headway: soon, even in the times of the apostles, people began to rely on their works for salvation; then the church was beautified (as they call it) by certain ceremonies; finally the Roman pontiff gathered all these together and suppressing Christian liberty turned them into laws so very rigid that it is now an incomparably greater sin to offend against his ceremonies and laws than against the precepts of God.

You should know that the pope is the real, true, final Antichrist, of whom the entire Scripture speaks, whom the Lord is beginning to consume with the spirit of His mouth and will very soon destroy and slay with the brightness of His coming, for which we are waiting.

He is the real, head Antichrist, whom, God witting, our Lord Christ will very shortly thrust into the abyss of hell by His advent. Amen. Luther²⁸

The End

Endnotes

¹ Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), I, p. 29, quotation #81, 82 and 83

² *Ibid.*, II pps. 1070, 1071 #3412

³ *Ibid.*, I, pps. 30, 31, #84 and 86

⁴ Martin Luther, *The Smalcald Articles*, from the Triglot Concordia (Minneapolis: The Mott Press, 1955), Part II, Article IV, p. 475.

⁵ Ralph Woodrow, *Great Prophecies of the Bible* (P.O. Box 124, Riverside, California 92502: Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, Inc., 1971), excerpts from pps. 182 -195.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48

⁷ Plass, op. cit. I. pps. 31, 32, #87, 88 and 89.

⁸ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1928) tr. W.H.T. Dau from the 1897 German edition, pps. 67, 69.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74

¹⁰ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1950), II, p. 392.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, pps. 552-555

¹² *Ibid.*, III, pps. 66, 67

¹³ *Ibid.*, III, pps. 467, 468

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, III, p. 469

¹⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1946) p. 415.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 434

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pps. 434, 435

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pps. 435, 436

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 436

²⁰ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1923), *The New Testament II*, p. 362. In the above quotation Kretzman refers to a special article on the Antichrist which appears on pps. 364, 365 of this volume.

²¹ Theodore Hoyer, "The Papacy" in *The Abiding Word* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), II, pps. 764, 765.

²² *Ibid.*, pps. 765, 766.

²³ Plass, op. cit., p. 33, #90, 91 and 92.

²⁴ The quotation in my editorial was taken from the December/Christmas 1978 issue of *The Milwaukee Lutheran*, p. 13.

²⁵ Plass, op. cit., pps. 33, 34, #93, 94, 95 and 96.

²⁶ Plass, op. cit., pps. 34, 35, #97, 98, 99, 100

²⁷ Details about Mariolatry at Medugorje from a Sunday, 17 January 1988 article by religion reporter Marie Rohde in the *Milwaukee Journal*.

²⁸ Plass, op. cit., pps. 36, 37, #101, 102, 103 and 104.

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Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the following who gave valuable assistance in the preparation of this paper:

Mrs. Lois Leikam, Woodlawn Ev. Lutheran Church-School secretary, who typed the manuscript and duplicated the finished copies.

Pastor Arthur Clement of Sun Prairie, WI., who kindly sent several dozen books from his personal library for research purposes.

Professor Starla Siegmann, librarian at Wisconsin Lutheran College, who was very supportive of this project.

Professor Martin Westerhaus and his staff at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, who provided books and answered several questions on issues raised in this paper.