

Of the Antichrist

by E. Arnold Sitz

It is the purpose of this paper to show that the Antichrist of Holy Scripture is, and according to the Word of God can be, none other than the Pope. This our Lutheran Confessions and Luther also assert. Holy Writ succinctly avers that the Antichrist will be revealed. Yet the question has been raised, and that within Lutheran circles not only in Europe and elsewhere, but in those within America also, whether our Confessions are right in identifying him as the Pope. Along with this question rises the further one: If a man doubts this article in our Confessions, or leaves the identification of the Antichrist an open question, has he not in respect to this doctrine departed not only from the Lutheran Confessions, but from Scripture as well?

Four chief passages in the New Testament treat of the Antichrist specifically. We find them in I John 2:18–29, I John 4:1–21, II John 7, and II Thessalonians 2:1–12. We omit the Old Testament passages found in Daniel 8 and 11, which evidently also speak of the Antichrist in the “time of the end” and of his judgment. And since we shall see that the recognition of the Antichrist is a matter of revelation, Christ’s description of the Person of the Holy Spirit and of His work in our Lord’s Last Will and Testament, which is published in the Gospel of John, chapters 14, 15, and 16, will prove pertinent to the question at issue.

In I John 2 we run across the appellation “Antichrist.” John writes of “antichrists” and the “Antichrist” in particular. He clearly distinguishes between a category of antichrists and the true Antichrist. I John 2:18 he says, “Even now there have arisen many antichrists.” But then he also adds, “Ye heard that the Antichrist cometh.” He describes those whom he casts into one common tub as such “who went out from us; but they were not of us.” In this category are those who departed from the Christian faith, or who were hypocrites, false prophets, unbelievers who refused to adhere to Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God and Savior. Essentially they are such who deny the deity and atonement of Jesus Christ. These were many in number at John’s time, as he tells us, and they are many in our day as well. Then they were the Judaizers, incipient Gnostics, Nicolaitans, apostates, and plain heathen. Today they turn away in myriad manner and direction: modernist, extreme liberal, Romanist, Mormon, Mason, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and men like Tillich and Bultmann.

But John concentrates his attention on *the* Antichrist, of whom he says “that he cometh.” While the antichrists were already on the scene, the real Antichrist was in the making. He would appear a phenomenon of “the last hour,” so John says. Taking into account what St. Paul has to say about the time of the Antichrist, John’s “last hour” covers the time of the New Testament dispensation, marking him as a continuing *Erscheinung* during New Testament times.

The Antichrist will not be generally recognized. In the course of time, as we shall learn from II Thessalonians, he will be revealed and made known to the children of God by the anointing of the Holy One, that is, the Holy Spirit, of whom Jesus said, “He shall guide you into all truth and shall declare unto you the things that are to come.” Not indeed by special revelation, but by the Word once and for all delivered in Holy Writ to the saints. For Jesus declares, “He shall not speak from himself, but whatsoever things he shall hear, these shall he speak”; i.e., the Holy Spirit will graciously confine Himself to the words of the Father and of Christ, informing the faithful and interpreting Their words (John 16:13). Even as no man can call Jesus Lord excepting by the Holy Ghost, so none will recognize the Antichrist except by the Anointing of the Holy One, “through whom ye know all things” (I John 2:20). Verse 27 adds, “As for you, the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but as *his anointing teacheth you concerning all things*, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him.”¹

As we read on in I John, chapter 2, one hears the objection, “The Pope cannot be the Antichrist because John defines the latter as one ‘who denies the Father and the Son.’” Now it is patent, they say, that the Pope confesses both. But does he? Superficially, yes, but essentially, no. For St. John gives us the reverse of confession and expounds for us what denial of the Father and the Son consists in. He says, “Whosoever denieth

¹ All italicizing of Scripture quotations is that of the author. – Ed.

the Son, the same hath not the Father; he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also.” What true confession compasses John makes clear in the 24th and 25th verses: “As for you, let that abide in you *which ye heard* from the beginning.” This, of course, is nothing other than the Word of God, specifically the Gospel. He continues, “If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye shall also abide in the Son and in the Father.” The emphasis lies on the Word. So confessing the Son is not simply stating that Jesus is the Son of God—the devil also believes that and trembles. It means abiding in the words of the Father and the Son. Now any one who has so much as scanned the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, or is but superficially acquainted with a few of the papal encyclicals, chapters, and distinctions must be shocked at the brazen departure from the fundamentals of the Word of God concerning salvation together with the curses hurled at such who cling to the Word of God and of Christ.

It must be evident to every one that runs and reads that whoever, like the Pope, teaches salvation by relying to a high degree on one’s own effort, declares that good works augment justification and earn the grace of God; that the deficit in good works must be burned out in purgatory; that the atonement of Christ is at best but partial and insufficient; that none can be saved who is not a member of the Roman Catholic Church, the *ecclesia sola salvifica*; that salvation depends on acknowledging the Pope as the vicar of Christ; that the Pope alone possesses the keys to the kingdom of heaven; that he is supreme on earth both in the spiritual and political spheres; that he is infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra*; that no one dare judge him; that his power extends into the heavens; and that all the world must kiss his feet and cry, “Papa!” all this does not confess the Father and the Son.

Who dare deny that these things are a departing from the Word of God in every direction and thus denying the Christ? And to climax it all the Pope in the *Tridentinum* curses with his *anathema sit* every one that teaches and believes with Holy Scripture that we are saved by grace through faith, not of ourselves, but as the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory. Such a one certainly denies the Christ and all His complete work of salvation and guts the Gospel. Whoever denies the Gospel dishonors Christ and has neither the Son nor the Father. For “He that hath not the Son hath not the Father; and he that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father that sent him.” No figure in the history of the Church, nor of the world, has so consistently denied Christ and His work of salvation, blasphemed the Father and particularly the Holy Ghost. For he who refuses the testimony of the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ and His work of completed salvation and curses those who do believe His testimony, he calls it a lie and the Holy Spirit a liar. Note carefully the positive in verse 24, namely, that it is only in the Gospel—in “that which ye have heard”—that we possess the Father and the Son. By his denial of the work of God and of His Christ the Pope has neither the Father nor the Son. He is the Antichrist.

We are warned by St. John (I John 4:1ff.) not to believe every spirit. Many a spirit is not of God, is a false prophet. Of false prophets Jesus tells us that they come in sheep’s clothing, or with pious phrase and even the Word of God. But inwardly, in what they actually teach, they are ravening wolves that destroy souls. Chief of these false prophets is the Antichrist. And here again we have a telling characteristic. For no religious manifestoes pack more unctuous phrase and quote so much Scripture, rather misquote it, as is the case with the Pope’s. While he sits on his throne, or as in the case of this present Vatican Council II, permits himself as the self-proclaimed vicar of Christ to be carried about on his portable throne, he is the very opposite of the humble Jesus; yet he always denotes himself to be “the servant of servants.”

Now St. John remarks 4:3 that the *spirit* of the Antichrist, of whom they had heard that he cometh, *was already then in the world*. That is, the spirit of legalism, of speculation, of logical definition, and of philosophy was making itself patent in the Church. It is noteworthy to mark how the free Gospel found expression in the cordial confession of the Apostles’ Creed; how the Nicene Creed turns toward definition—and leaves out a very important element at that, for it never mentions the death of Jesus; and how the Athanasian Creed indulges itself in stark definition with very audible legal overtones. The spirit of the Antichrist so early begins to show itself as present and working; but it is personified in the Antichrist himself, the Pope and the Papacy.

John portrays the Antichrist as being the opposite of the true Christian and the true prophet. He writes, “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” Only by the Holy Ghost does any man confess that Jesus has come into the flesh, that is, that the eternal Son of

God became a man to be the God-man Savior of the world. On the other hand he declares, "Every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God." Now we know what John means when he speaks of confessing Jesus. He includes everything Holy Writ has revealed about the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, and that which belongs to salvation by faith in Him. He directly states that to deny the Christ and His Word and His salvation reflects not only the spirit of the Antichrist, but is the very teaching of the Antichrist himself. And we know that the Antichrist is not of God, neither is his doctrine or spirit.

Again we hear the remonstrance, and that by Lutherans that the Pope does confess that Jesus Christ is come into the flesh. Therefore, it is said, he cannot be the Antichrist. Let's flip the coin over and ask, "Must we believe that the Pope is of God?" For if he confesses that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, then John says he is of God. But is he of God? This tyrant in the temple of God, sitting within the pale of the Christian Church, this usurper who flings about him with nothing but curses against anyone that does not agree with him in every respect? This prince of false prophets blasphemes the work of Christ as being inadequate and unfinished business contrary to the cry of Christ upon the cross, "It is finished!" Who decrees that the finishing touches, nay the punishing consummation, of salvation must be supplied by the drudgery of our own good works? Who turns the blessed Gospel into a caricature of even the unholy *opinio legis*? Who turns sinners back upon their own sin by auricular confession only to take away any assurance of forgiveness, plaguing them with refined uncertainty? Who swamps them with rules, regulations, traditions, and invented sins and binds them to his priests and to his own person by the confessional? Who externalizes religion and sucks them dry with interminable masses, martyring them with penances? Offends them with arbitrary dispensations, almost exclusively for money; points them away from Christ to Mary and to the impotent saints, to mention but a few of the innumerable blasphemies he has been guilty of? These have been added from the time of the manifest beginnings of the Papacy in the sixth century, to which he adds as time rolls on. Just lately he formulated the doctrine of the assumption of Mary, that is, her ascension into heaven without a shred or thread of evidence except that it was in the "shrine of his heart." And in the offing the smoke is already visible of the fire that will make of Mary the coredemptrix of her Son: that is, she will be placed alongside of Jesus Christ as redeeming with Him the world. If this "be of God," give us less of it. Such an adversary of God's Word cannot be of God.

The Antichrist, that is the Pope, declares his way to heaven to be the only one. In this he diametrically contradicts the Word of God. For "there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we *must* be saved." A highly significant and exclusive word, this word "must." Yet the Pope has lifted this word also out of Scripture, stolen it, so to speak, and appropriated it to his way of salvation. For he asserts that only by and through him can a man be saved. "*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.*" Outside the Roman Catholic Church there is no salvation. And the Pope is the undisputed head of that church. He contradicts the teaching of I John 4:13-15. Hence he is the Antichrist.

Pope Antichrist speaks the language of natural religion in legal terms. These are the terms that the natural man and the world in their legalism understand. Hence the world pays attention to the Pope in his role as Antichrist, and it will do so increasingly, as verse 5 indicates. "They are of the world; therefore speak they as of the world; and the world heareth them." How true that was of the Middle Ages, sometimes called the Dark Ages! How increasingly true it is of our day! When I was in prep school any pronouncement of the Pope was usually hid away in the back pages of the newspaper in a short paragraph. Today scarcely a week passes, often hardly a day, in which his doings and sayings are not found on the front page. Whenever Hollywood wants to introduce a religious note, the father of lies sees to it that a monk or a nun is led before the camera. If therefore we have eyes to see, we shall have become aware how tremendously the Pope's prestige has increased in the last few decades. Note how John XXIII was touted in all the world; how Pope Paul's journey to Jerusalem was broadcast in detailed piety by television; how the Vatican Council is being aired. And this accords with what Revelation says in the 13th chapter verse 3 and following. For Satan draws on his tremendous experience, knowledge, and power to lead the Pope so that he makes few mistakes. Yes, even his mistakes seem in the end to serve his purpose. It shows a ridiculous lack of historical judgment to hear Lutherans rejoice over what they call the Pope's mistakes and prognosticate his loss of prestige. With the lone exception of the deep wound he received in the Reformation, as Scripture foretold, even when the Pope has apparently suffered damage and

seemed weak, he has gained in the long run. When I was still in college the Pope counted 300,000,000 followers; today he claims more than 500,000,000! In the United States in the same period of time the number of Roman Catholics has increased from 14,000,000 to 34,000,000. If the Antichrist and his hierarchy and followers speak as of the world and are heard by the world, the converse is also true, as the Lord Himself has said, namely that whosoever sticks to the Word of God will be heard only by those who believe the Gospel; the others will disdain and reject it, lending their ears to error; and when they get really serious, to the Antichrist. And as only believers by the act of the Holy Spirit recognize Jesus as the Christ, so will they by the same Holy Spirit recognize the Antichrist, the Pope.

John gives us a further mark by which the Holy Spirit portrays to us the Antichrist. He writes, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and every one that loveth him that begat loveth also him that is begotten of him.” But the Pope hates, curses out, and persecutes all those who do not obey him. Quite manifestly he does not believe that Jesus is the Christ or he would love all Christians, as John asserts. He would particularly love those Protestants whose faith flows in the channel marked by *sola scriptura, sola gratia, and sola fide*. He would rejoice over finding faith such as John exalts in chapter 5:1. But the Pope anathematizes just that faith of which John exultingly declares, “It is the victory that overcometh the world.”

St. John leaves no one in doubt as to the way of salvation. He carefully points it out in I John 5:9–13. It is by faith in Jesus Christ alone, the denial of the Pope notwithstanding. John’s knowledge comes from the Son of God, who is the true Wisdom of God, God Himself. The Pope knows this, but deliberately turns away from the plain Word of God. Verse 20. God underscores everywhere that our knowledge of the truth—be it of Christ, or of Antichrist—comes by revelation from God to faith, as we shall be assured more explicitly when we come to a study of II Thessalonians 2:1–12. We shall pass over II John 7, for it reiterates generally what we have already gleaned from I John 4; only that John adds the *opprobrium* to the Antichrist, the Pope, saying that he is a deceiver, a deceptive liar, a conscious and deliberate perverter of the truth of the Gospel. And by the way, Vatican II will never change a single iota of the doctrine of Romanism. All it will do is to make a few piddling changes in ritual, clothing, and social problems. But the *Tridentinum* will remain inviolate in its canons and decrees, that is, in doctrine. H.G. Schroeder, O.P., writes of the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, “In them the council proclaimed to the world the doctrines that were committed to the church on the day of Pentecost ... the straight road ... along which she will continue to travel till the day of judgment.”

In the II Thessalonians passage a number of things should be noted. II Thessalonians 2:1–12. First, that the Antichrist sits in the temple of God; secondly, that the passage three times underlines that the Antichrist will be revealed, an element that has far too generally been overlooked despite its triple pronouncement; thirdly, that his coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders and with all deceit of unrighteousness; and finally that he will endure to the end of time and will be destroyed by the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming.

We take up each of these points in order.

1. St. Paul writes that the man of sin, the son of perdition, the lawless one opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or that is worshiped. Since Jesus Christ is God blessed forever (Rom. 9:5), St. Paul is therefore here speaking of the Antichrist, as all theologians worthy of the name have recognized. For the Pope identifies himself with the Antichrist in that he sets himself forth as God, claiming to speak as the vicar of Christ in the name of God, calling upon all the world to hear him and obey his command. If the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, hear ye him,” the Pope changes it into, “Hear me and heed me at your eternal peril. For as the Vicar of Christ I speak with divine authority; and you must pay heed or your refusal is *lèse majesté* against Christ and me.”

The Pope claims jurisdiction over *all churches*, all Christians, in the world by reason of God’s appointment, so he asserts, of Peter as the Primate of the Apostles and therefore the first Pope. He makes this assertion upon a false interpretation of Matthew 16. Then he quickly adds by way of tricky and swift sleight of hand the declaration that he, the Pope, is the successor of St. Peter, a claim that 500,000,000 Roman Catholics live by, the Orthodox Church, and sad to say, too many milk and water Protestants seem to be readying to swallow. Mark the eagerness with which even Lutheran ‘official observers’ crowd into the Vatican Council

basilica together with the hopeful and glowing reports some of them are capable of concerning the sessions. Luther reports that the exaltation of the Pope to jurisdiction over the Christian Church was furthered by the Emperor Phocas (the murderer of his predecessor on the throne, Mauritius, and a bloody fellow) who first called the Pope “Papa” and declared he had the rule over all churches—this at the time of Gregory the Great. The petitions of the bishops and churches supported this trend. No religious leader of any stripe has made so wide a claim. None can be bishop, priest, or minister throughout the whole world, so he cries, except by authority of the Pope. Truly he claims to sit as God in the temple of God.

Hear what this man of sin sitting in the temple of God, claiming infallibility, has the blasphemous brass to trumpet in his Chapter called “Si Papa,” *Distinctio 40: Wenn ein Papst sein selbst und brüderlicher Seligkeit vergessen erfunden, wird, untüchtig und lass in seinen Werken und das Beste zu lehren schweigend, welches ihm und allen desto schädlicher ist und gleichwohl unzählige Seelen mit grossen Haufen in die Hölle führete, die sammt ihm grosse Pein ewiglich leiden müssten: solche Sünde unterstehe sich kein lebendiger Mensch zu strafen; denn er ist aller Richter und von niemand zu richten, er werde denn im Glauben irre gefunden, sondern die ganze Christenheit bittet desto heftiger für seinen Stand, so viel sie merkt, dass ihre Seligkeit, nächst Gott, an seiner Wohlfahrt gelegen ist. Luther, St. Louis XVII 1043.*

(“Should a Pope be found so forgetful of self and the salvation of his brothers, unfit und neglectful in his works and burying in silence the very best doctrine, a matter that for him and all others would be highly damaging, and which nevertheless would thrust uncounted souls in great masses, together with himself, down to the devil in hell, who with him would have to suffer great torture eternally: yet let no living human undertake to castigate him; for he is judge of all and to be judged by none, except he be found erring in faith; but let all Christendom pray the more fervently for his status in the degree to which it is cognizant of the fact that Christendom’s salvation next to God depends from the Pope’s welfare.”)

There you have it from the Pope’s own mouth. The whole world’s salvation, next to God, depends upon the Pope. Believe him, follow him, obey him, or be damned. Moreover, he places himself beyond all criticism and admonishment alongside Almighty God. He sits in God’s place, on God’s throne, in the temple of the visible Church. Moreover, he also reaches into the beyond and claims control of, and supervises the distribution of, the merits of Christ and the saints. He has his hand on the hot door handle of purgatory. What with this *distinctio* quoted above—and it is far from isolated, indeed, it is the distilling of a whole set of decrees of the Pope—how silly of the millennialists of our time to have tried to recognize the Antichrist in Mussolini, Hitler, or Stalin! But is it not also bordering on the ridiculous for a Lutheran to imagine the possibility of any other being the Antichrist but him whom God has revealed and our Confessions publish: the Pope?

Who can deny that the Pope sits in the Church, the temple of God? Who can deny that he uses and misuses the Word of God? Who dare deny that the world pays attention when the Pope broadcasts to it? Who dare negate that the nations and governments of the world bow to the Vatican and its master, sending ministers, envoys, representatives, and ambassadors to it, as even our nation did a few years ago? And did not our late President and before that a Vice President of the United States pay a state visit to the Pope? What nation in the entire world would not leap at the chance to have access to the files of the Jesuit College of Propaganda, beyond doubt the most complete record of nations and of individuals in existence? Where can an organization be found in all the world so compact, *so aus einem Guss*, so profoundly experienced, so autocratically ruled, and so aggressive and self-assertive, so successful in its diplomacy, so effective in infiltrating each new movement in the world and so victorious over what is against it, and so devoid of mistake in opposing that which rises against it in the political, sociological, and naturalistic religious field? An organization so diabolically accomplished in enslaving the conscience of the peoples in fear of its laws and traditions and curses? And what countermeasures can be taken against this enslavement of conscience? We hear of the touted ecumenical movement, the supreme hope of the age. A bankrupt movement before it ever got off the launching pad, judged from the angle of conscience of the Protestant Church! For if it is in any wise successful in bringing about a modicum of ecumenicity, it will be to the advantage of the Roman Catholic Church and the Antichrist. Only the Word of God can strike the chains of the Antichrist off the conscience. The sad thing, nay, the saddest phenomenon of all heaving up and drunkenly weaving about in its own “scholarship” is Protestant deviation from the Gospel of

Jesus Christ, intellectualist bubbles ready to burst with conceit. And that includes not only such renegade “Lutherans” like Bultmann, but increasing numbers of top-story Lutherans here in America and those who trail along with them. How can these, who are casting away the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, cope with the Antichrist, to say nothing of the Lutherans of cassock and clerical collar who wallow in Romanizing ritualism? Our only hope lies in returning to Scripture as the inspired and inerrant Word of God.

It would take us too far away from our purpose to show that the Pope also claims to be the ruler of the kingdoms of the earth.

2. The second fundamental contribution to the understanding of the doctrine of the Antichrist that II Thessalonians makes is that the Antichrist will be *revealed*. This is doubtless for our present discussion the most important point of all. No less than three times does this short passage declare that the Antichrist will be *revealed*. This fact should give us pause. It says, “The man of sin *will be revealed*, the son of perdition.” And again, “And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may *be revealed* in his own season.” And finally in Verse 8 we read, “And then 2 the lawless one.” So then Scripture is emphatic in asserting that it is a matter of revelation – but by whom? By God, of course, from whom all revelation comes from heaven, and without whom there is nothing called revelation. Quite specifically it is the work of the Third Person in God, the Holy Spirit. For John in I John 2:20 proclaims, “Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things.” And Jesus Himself says that it is the Holy Spirit that teaches us all things and guides us into all truth. The Holy Spirit is the Revelator through the Word of God. To whom does He reveal? To faith, that is, to the believer. And the “all things” includes the Antichrist, of whom we should know nothing except through the Holy Ghost. Now it is asserted three times in the short paragraph taken from II Thessalonians that the Antichrist will be revealed. The emphasis lies altogether on revelation. When therefore it is claimed that recognition of the Antichrist merely rests on historical judgment, that is nothing other than shifting from divine revelation to fallible human judgment; shunting from God to man; dropping from the sure Word of God to shaky human speculation. On the score of revelation confer: I John 2:27; Romans 1:17; Matthew 11:25–27; Matthew 16:17; I Corinthians 2, *et alia*. Note particularly as to “historical judgment” what Jesus tells Peter in Matthew 16, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.” Study also the portrayal of the Person and work of the Holy Ghost given by Jesus in His Last Will and Testament recorded in the Gospel of John, chapters 14, 15, and 16. Fasten your attention closely on 14:16, 18, 26; 15:26; 16:7–15. You will note that Scripture throughout puts the accent on God, on revelation, and on faith, all of which delineate the initiative, activity, and action of God, for even faith, as we have heard above and as it is affirmed in I Corinthians 12:3, is a gift of the Holy Ghost. “No man can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Ghost.”

What has just been said reflects the Lutheran approach of *sol Deo gloria*. The “historical judgment” approach, on the other hand, shifts the emphasis to man’s initiative and activity, a Reformed trait that has been the bane of the Reformed branch of Protestantism and which has contributed and largely brought on the liberalism, modernism, and well-nigh the destruction of that branch in the visible church. Appalling indeed it is for those concerned in our circles to see how that very shift is showing itself increasingly in Lutheran churches in America by the gates of intellectualism, conceited ‘scholarship,’ top-story ‘theologians,’ Johnny-come-lately aping of European theological thinkers, all of whom are but fallible sinners; in which direction even the once staid Missouri Synod is being sucked. And let Us not be high-minded; for it is natural for man, even for an Abraham, to trend away from God and His Word and drift into “that which seemeth right unto a man.” “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” In other words, let us in our Synod heed St. Paul’s admonition, “I say to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to each man a measure of faith.” St. Paul reduces it in his letter to Titus to the four principles, “Sound doctrine; sound faith; sound speech; and sober mindedness.”

From that which has been cited above from Holy Writ it must be plain to every child of God that the doctrine of the Antichrist is a matter of revelation from God to faith and not a subject of human, historical judgment. Hence Dr. Francis Pieper bluntly states, *Es ist keine historische Frage*. Luther has an interesting comment on this point. In his preface to the Englishman Barnes’ “History of the Popes” he writes that he was

glad that *posteriore* these historical works supported that which he “had been taught and had learned from his *Lehrmeister*, St. Paul and Daniel, that the Pope is the adversary of God, i.e., the Antichrist.” Just as in our day many archeological finds support the narrative of Scripture, not that Scripture, which cannot be broken, needs the support. Confer the classic example of the single reference in all literature, historical and otherwise, to Sargon, the great Assyrian king, in Isaiah 20, until almost within the century in the excavations at Khorsabad, a suburb of Nineveh, the complete library of Sargon was discovered.

As to Luther’s remarks cited above: we do well to put ourselves into Luther’s shoes and times. Nothing could have been more radical to the thinking of his times than that the most revered, worshiped, feared, obeyed, and religious man of his time, the vicar of Christ, should be revealed as the man of sin and the very Antichrist! It came by the revelation of God in His Bible and so the Pope was recognized as the Antichrist. And he is a greater menace to the Church than any other, than the diabolical Communist and the sensual Mohammedan, for he sits as an angel of light in the very temple of God.

3. The third declaration of importance our Thessalonian passage makes concerning the Antichrist is that his coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders and with all deceit of unrighteousness. Satan, the prime and most powerful adversary of Christ, the fallen archangel Lucifer, manifests his working through the Antichrist, his best agent. What power the Pope wields! We have seen that he holds sway over 500,000,000 souls and influences many more millions. With what power he commanded kings, nations, and hierarchies in the Middle Ages! The emperors of Germany, the powerful Frederick Barbarossa and Henry IV had to bow to the Pope. John of England surrendered his kingdom to the Pope and received it back as a fief from the Pope’s legate. We all know the story of Henry’s standing barefoot in the snow at Canossa, begging for three days for the Pope’s absolution. Spain and Portugal asked the Pope to divide the Western Hemisphere between them, and he did.

Think of the signs, wonders, and deceits of the mass, purgatory, religious orders, invocation of the saints, miracles, some genuine as at Lourdes, more of them frauds, empty prayers for the dead, Mariolatry, degeneration of the Lord’s Supper, inventions of pilgrimages, indulgences, papal dispensations against heavy payments of money (several years ago an actress married three times and divorced received dispensation from Pope Pius XII to marry a movie producer four times married with a history of divorce, this by the subterfuge that their former marriages were improper and so Papa annulled them; as Luther said, *Geld ist’s gar!*); traditions covering meat and drink, vestments, tonsures, celibacy, ceremonies, etc., etc.: who can catalog them? The capstone is salvation by free will and good works. And who is the sponsor and perpetrator of all this religious mumbo-jumbo? The son of perdition that sitteth in the temple of God: *Il Papa*. He is and remains the Antichrist.

4. Finally, the Thessalonian passage tells us that the Antichrist is a continuing personage, already on his way to appear at the time of the Apostles and remaining till Jesus Himself in His coming shall destroy him with the breath of His mouth, verse 9: this is, Christ’s manifestation of Himself in glory and majesty on the Last Day. How can any Lutheran in view of this statement of Scripture then say that “for the time being we recognize the Pope as the present Antichrist, but we contemplate the possibility that another will arise in the time of the end who will be the real Antichrist after all”? Or is it contemplated to eliminate the Thessalonian passage as relating to something and somebody other than the Antichrist? That would be to maintain that the Antichrist is a single individual appearing but once and in that one person on the scene of history. But how can such a proposition be reconciled to the plain statement of II Thessalonians 2 that the Antichrist stays hidden for a long period of time, the mystery already working in the time of the Apostles; that, after a time of restraint, he will be manifest; and that he will persist until he be destroyed by the breath of the Lord Jesus at His coming? As Luther also declared against Ambrosius Catharinus: *Der Papst und sein Reich werden also, so elendiglich sie sich davor fürchten, nicht durch Laien zerstört werden, (denn sie sind dieser milden Strafe unwert), sondern aufbehalten für die Zukunft Christi, dessen allergrößte Feind sie sind; denn also muss untergehen, wer gegen alles sich erhebt mit dem Geiste des Satans, auf dass der Geist den Geist töte und die Wahrheit den Trug offenbar mache; denn Lüge offenbar machen heisst sie zerstören.*

Increasingly as touted ‘theological scholarship’ turns to higher critical ‘exegesis,’ all sorts of vagaries begin to creep in. But the most ominous direction of all proves to be speculative arrogance and the flat failure to

take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, that is, to His Word. For there comes much unctuous palaver being squeezed out these days by ‘theologians’ stemming from “the Christ within” that slaps Christ in the face by its disregard, disdain, and deviation from His Word. For Jesus commands, “Search the Scriptures.” And again He says, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth.”

How indeed are those Lutheran pastors and professors who refuse to believe that the Pope is the Antichrist going to explain their subscription to the Lutheran Confessions, seeing that the Confessions directly state that the Pope is the “very Antichrist,” *der rechte Antichrist*, Triglot, page 528? In the *Smalcald Articles*, Part II, Art. IV we read, “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... This is properly speaking to exalt himself above all that is called God, as Paul says II Thessalonians 2:4.” See also paragraphs 12, 13, 14, and 16. And again it is stated, “Just as little as we can endure the devil himself as Lord and God, so little can we endure his apostle, the Pope, or Antichrist, in his rule as head or lord.” We refer you quite particularly to the appendix to the *Smalcald Articles* entitled, *De Potestate et Primatu Papae*, for the Lutheran position on the Pope and the Antichrist. Check also on the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*.

To quote Luther fully on the Pope being the Antichrist would require a complete volume. His position is well known to those who read him. He gave his conviction, his anger, and his invective free rein in what is one of his most vehement pamphlets, *Das Papstum zu Rom vom Teufel gestiftet*. Very instructive is his statement found in his *Passionale* under the woodcuts printed in the St. Louis Edition of his Works, pages 238–241: *Des Antichrists Reich ist gänzlich in äusserlichem Wesen*. Luther also quotes the assertion of Pope Nicolaus to the effect that the Pope and Roman Catholic Church constitute the supreme authority on earth and in the kingdom of God.

Luther sums it up for us VIII, 682: *Also haben wir’s durch der Apostel Schrift, dass wir können sagen, was zukünftig ist in der Kirche, wie sie uns zuvor gegeben und gesagt, sonderlich von dem letzten Regiment des Ende-Christis, nämlich des Papsttums, und wie dasselbe fallen muss mit seinen Greueln, Messen, Möncherei und falschem Gottesdienst ... und also die Christenheit dennoch soll bleiben, bis so lange Christus in seiner herrlichen Zukunft plötzlich daher kommen wird.*

With our Confessions we hold on the authority and revelation of Scripture, *Papam esse Antichristum*.