

Concordia Theological Monthly



M A R C H • 1 9 5 9

BRIEF STUDIES

STATEMENT ON THE ANTICHRIST *

(Adopted by Joint Committees, October 15, 1958)

NOTE: The fact that this statement is the first to appear after the statement on Scripture issued by the joint committees of the Synods of the Synodical Conference is not to be taken as an indication that this topic was deemed either the most important or the most sharply controversial among those assigned to the committees for study. The committees deemed it desirable (a) to begin by seeking to establish a common approach to Scripture and the problems of the interpretation of Scripture; and (b) to test the agreement reached on Scripture and its interpretation by means of a common fresh approach to one of the topics under controversy. Since the topic of the Antichrist is a relatively limited one, it was chosen as the hermeneutical test case, and the statement on the Antichrist therefore naturally follows that on Scripture.

I

Scripture speaks of many forces and powers which are actively hostile to Christ and His church and uses the term "antichrist" with reference to some of them.

Dan. 11:36-38; Matt. 24:22-25; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-9, 13; 1 John 2:18-22 — compare the whole passage, 18-23; 1 John 4:1-6; 2 John 7; 2 Thess. 2:1-12, compare also 13-17.

These and similar passages reveal to the church that antichristian forces will appear in various recurrent forms until the end of time.

II

Scripture, however, speaks also of a particular personal embodiment of the antichristian power in which the iniquity of false teaching finds its climax. (2 Thess. 2:1-12)

1. Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and by our gathering together unto him, 2. that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the Day of Christ is at hand.

* Note: Like the "Statement on Scripture," published in the previous issue of this journal, this document "is to be submitted to the member synods for final action." The wording of this statement need not be regarded as final and unalterable. The resolution of the Synodical Conference adopting the statement makes provision for a thorough review by the members of the constituent synods. It is, therefore, the hope of the committee which has formulated this document that it be studied by individuals, congregations, and conferences, and that suggested improvements be sent to the officials of our church. — HERBERT J. A. BOUMAN, *Secretary*.

3. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, 4. who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. 5. Remember ye not that when I was yet with you I told you these things? 6. And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. 7. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. 8. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming, 9. even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10. and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. 11. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, 12. that they all might be damned who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

It is with this aspect of the antichristian power that the Lutheran Confessions deal under the term "Antichrist," and we in a reaffirmation of the Lutheran faith are so using the term.

Passages from the Lutheran Confessions dealing with the subject of the Antichrist:

Apology XV 18, 19

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

Apology XXIV 97, 98

Carnal men cannot endure that alone to the sacrifice of Christ the honor is ascribed that it is a propitiation, because they do not understand the righteousness of faith, but ascribe equal honor to the rest of the services and sacrifices. Just as, therefore, in Judah among the godless priests a false opinion concerning sacrifices inhered; just as in Israel, Baalitic services continued, and, nevertheless, a Church of God was there which disapproved of godless services, so Baalitic worship inheres in the domain of the Pope, namely, the abuse of the Mass, which they apply, that by it they may merit for the unrighteous the remission of guilt and punishment. [And yet, as God still kept His Church, i. e., some saints, in Israel and Judah, so God still preserved His Church, i. e., some saints, under the Papacy, so that the Christian Church has not entirely perished.] And it seems that this Baalitic worship will endure as long as the reign of the Pope, until Christ will come to judge, and by the glory of His advent destroy the reign of Antichrist.

Smalcald Articles II ii 25

The invocation of saints is also one of the abuses of Antichrist conflicting with the chief article, and destroys the knowledge of Christ. Neither is it commanded nor counseled, nor has it any example [or testimony] in Scripture, and even though it were a precious thing, as it is not [while, on the contrary, it is a most harmful thing], in Christ we have everything a thousandfold better [and surer, so that we are not in need of calling upon the saints].

Smalcald Articles II iv 10—14

This teaching shows forcefully that the Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against, Christ, because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which, nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God. This is, properly speaking, to exalt himself above all that is called God, as Paul says, 2 Thess. 2, 4. Even the Turks or the Tartars, great enemies of Christians as they are, do not do this, but they allow whoever wishes to believe in Christ, and take bodily tribute and obedience from Christians.

The Pope, however, prohibits this faith, saying that to be saved a person must obey him. This we are unwilling to do, even though on this account we must die in God's name. This all proceeds from the fact that the Pope has wished to be called the supreme head of the Christian Church by divine right. Accordingly he had to make himself equal and superior to Christ, and had to cause himself to be proclaimed the head and then the lord of the Church, and finally of the whole world, and simply God on earth, until he has dared to issue commands even to the angels in heaven. And when we distinguish

the Pope's teaching from, or measure and hold it against, Holy Scripture, it is found [it appears plainly] that the Pope's teaching, where it is best, has been taken from the imperial and heathen law, and treats of political matters and decisions or rights, as the Decretals show; furthermore, it teaches of ceremonies concerning churches, garments, food, persons and [similar] puerile, theatrical and comical things without measure, but in all these things nothing at all of Christ, faith, and the commandments of God. Lastly, it is nothing else than the devil himself, because above and against God he urges [and disseminates] his [papal] falsehoods concerning masses, purgatory, the monastic life, one's own works and [fictitious] divine worship (for this is the very Papacy [upon each of which the Papacy is altogether founded and is standing]), and condemns, murders, and tortures all Christians who do not exalt and honor these abominations [of the Pope] above all things. Therefore, just as little as we can worship the devil himself as Lord and God, we can endure his apostle, the Pope, or Antichrist, in his rule as head or lord. 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.

Cf. also FC SD X 20.

Tractate 39—41

Now, it is manifest that the Roman pontiffs, with their adherents, defend [and practice] godless doctrines and godless services. And the marks [all the vices] of Antichrist plainly agree with the kingdom of the Pope and his adherents. For Paul, 2 Epistle 2, 3, in describing to the Thessalonians Antichrist, calls him *an adversary of Christ, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God*. He speaks therefore of one ruling in the Church, not of heathen kings, and he calls this one the adversary of Christ, because he will devise doctrine conflicting with the Gospel, and will assume to himself divine authority.

Moreover, it is manifest, in the first place, that the Pope rules in the Church, and by the pretext of ecclesiastical authority and of the ministry has established for himself this kingdom. For he assigns as a pretext these words: *I will give to thee the keys*. Secondly, the doctrine of the Pope conflicts in many ways with the Gospel, and [thirdly] the Pope assumes to himself divine authority in a threefold manner. First, because he takes to himself the right to change the doctrine of Christ and services instituted by God, and wants his own doctrine and his own services to be observed as divine; secondly, because he takes to himself the power not only of binding and loosing in this life, but also the jurisdiction over souls after this life; thirdly, because the Pope does not want to be judged by the Church or by

anyone, and puts his own authority ahead of the decision of Councils and the entire Church. But to be unwilling to be judged by the Church or by anyone is to make oneself God. Lastly, these errors so horrible, and this impiety, he defends with the greatest cruelty, and puts to death those dissenting.

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

Tractate 57

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

III

This passage (2 Thess. 2:1-12) promises that God will reveal the "man of sin" and states the tokens, or marks, by means of which God will reveal him to the eyes of faith.

Among these marks are:

1. He "as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:4). He is a religious power demanding religious allegiance, usurping authority in the church, and tyrannizing Christian consciences. (Cf. SA II iv 10-14, as quoted above)
2. He is an embodiment of satanic power. This is manifested
 - a) in the fact that he appears as the one "who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God" (2 Thess. 2:4). He is God's adversary;
 - b) and in the fact that his opposition to God is an opposition of disguise and deceit. He opposes God by usurping the place and name of God (2 Thess. 2:4). The satanic appears, characteristically, in religious form: the "coming" of Antichrist is pitted against the "coming" of Christ, his signs and lying wonders against the miracles of Christ, faith in his lie against faith in the truth of Christ. (2 Thess. 2:9-11)

IV

Therefore on the basis of a renewed study of the pertinent Scriptures we reaffirm the statement of the Lutheran Confessions that "the Pope is the very Antichrist" (cf. Section II), especially since he anathematizes the doctrine of justification by faith alone and sets himself up as the infallible head of the church.

We thereby affirm that we identify this "Antichrist" with the papacy as it is known to us today, which shall, as 2 Thess. 2:8 states, continue to the end of time, whatever form or guise it may take. This neither means nor implies a blanket condemnation of all members of the Roman Catholic Church, for despite all the errors taught in that church the Word of God is still heard there, and that Word is an effectual Word. (Is. 55:10, 11; cf. Ap XXIV 98, cited above under II)

We make this confession in the confidence of faith. The Antichrist cannot deceive us if we remain under the revelation given us in the apostolic Word (2 Thess. 2:13-17), for in God's gracious governance of history the Antichrist can deceive only those who "receive not the love of the truth." (2 Thess. 2:10-12)

And we make this confession in the confidence of hope. The Antichrist shall not destroy us but shall himself be destroyed—"Whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming." (2 Thess. 2:8)

We reject the idea that the fulfillment of this prophecy is to be sought in the workings of any merely secular political power. (2 Thess. 2:4; cf. Tractate 39)

We reject the idea that the teaching that the papacy is the Antichrist rests on a merely human interpretation of history or is an open question. We hold rather that this teaching rests on the revelation of God in Scripture which finds its fulfillment in history. The Holy Spirit reveals this fulfillment to the eyes of faith (cf. *The Abiding Word*, II, 764). Since Scripture teaches that the Antichrist would be revealed (2 Thess. 2:6, 8) and this prophecy has been clearly fulfilled in the history and development of the Roman papacy, it is Scripture which reveals that the papacy is the Antichrist.