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A Brief Exegesis of 2 Thess. 2: 1-12 with Guideline for the Application of the Prophecy Contained Therein

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THE two different quotations from two different scholars at the beginning of this article show very clearly, each in its own way, the spirit and the frame of mind with which the problem of Antichrist should be studied. The first is from an article on Antichrist in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. [The doctrine that the Pope was the Antichrist] came to be more and more only learned pedantry, and the belief no longer possessed the power of forming history. With this last phase the interest in the legend entirely disappeared, and it [the legend of Antichrist] was now to be found only among the lower classes of the Christian community, among sects, eccentric individuals, and fanatics. (Bousset.)

The second is from Paul Althaus, *Die letzten Dinge* (p. 285):

Die Erkenntnis des Antichristen muss immer Aktualität haben, nicht nur in dem Sinne, dass sie auf die Gegenwart gerichtet ist, sondern auch insofern, als sie nicht theoretische Geschichtsbetrachtung des *homo otiosus*, einer *ecclesia otiosa*, sein kann, sondern nur praktisches, existentielles Bekenntnis zu einem der Kirche jetzt aufgezwungenen unbedingten Gegensatze, einem von ihr jetzt geforderten unbedingten Kampfe. Die Erkenntnis des Antichristen hat immer Todesernst; alles andere Reden vom Antichristen ist müßiges und verantwortungsloses Spiel, mag es sich noch so

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fromm und bibeltreu geben. . . . Wir können den Satz der Reformation, dass Rom der Antichrist sei, nur dann aufnehmen, wenn der Kampf mit Rom für uns heute den Ernst und die Aktualität hat wie für Luther, wenn an dieser Front die Entscheidung zwischen Glaube und Unglaube, Gehorsam und Ungehorsam gegen die Wahrheit des Evangeliums, von uns gefordert ist; wenn wir "Rom" als unsere Versuchung, als ständig drohende Möglichkeit unseres eigenen "protestantischen" Kirchentums erkennen.

Both Bousset and Althaus are right. The problem of Antichrist *has* become for the great part of Christendom a curious idea, perhaps a matter of purely historical interest; for others, a piece of the fantastic history of the final days. The Church as a whole does not live by it, nor is it affected by it. The whole question of Antichrist can be a matter of fruitful study and discussion only if it is taken seriously; not only because a union of two church bodies somehow or other depends on it, but because it is seriously taken in the Word of God; in short, only if we are as much haters and enemies of Antichrist as we are friends and children of God. For Antichrist is Christ's great adversary. He is *Gegensatz* and *Ersatz*, opponent of and substitute for Christ, and demands for himself what belongs alone to our Lord.

A. WHAT DOES 2 THESS. 2:1-12 SAY?

Strangely enough, there is no great disagreement among commentators concerning the general scope and contents of this famous prophetic utterance of St. Paul, however much they may argue about minor points. For the trend of Paul's thought and the language he uses are clear enough. Interpreters are quite generally agreed on the purpose of the letter in which the prophecy is found, on the character of the Man of Sin and his manner of working, on the period when he is active, and on his identity with the Antichrist of the Apostle St. John.

Context

The Second Letter to the Thessalonians was written for the sake of the prophecy we are dealing with and for the sake of the exhortation of the following chapter to honest work. Both purposes are closely connected with each other and with the latter portion

of the First Letter written to the Thessalonians. Particular interest concerning the second advent of Christ existed in the congregation. According to vv. 2 and 3 of our chapter, there was apparently a rumor abroad in the congregation, claiming prophetic origin or even Paul's own authority, to the effect that the "Day of the Lord was already there" and that He must be looked for immediately. St. Paul denounces this report as a deception and states the reasons, partly recalled from his oral teaching, why such a speedy consummation is impossible. In short, Paul's argument is: The Day of the Lord will not come until the Man of Sin has been revealed in all his opposition to Christ. On the basis of this instruction those Thessalonians who had even ceased working and pushed off the concerns of this life are exhorted to return to their work and the disciplined life.

The immediate context, the introduction to the prophecy proper, is found in vv. 1-3 a. The translation of Moffatt is in a number of instances much better than that of the AV. "With regard to the arrival of the Lord Jesus" is much closer to the Greek ὑπέρο than "by the coming of. . . ." The translation of the AV, "that the Day of Christ is at hand," is actually misleading. The Greek: ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστιχεν is different from that of Rom. 13:12: ἡ ἡμέρα ἤγγικεν, although the English gives no indication of it. Ἐνίστημι in the perfect regularly means what is present, cf. "things present and things to come," Rom. 8:38, and the similar phrase in 1 Cor. 3:22. All passages where the perfect of this verb is used are regularly translated in the AV by "present." The point where the Thessalonians erred was not that they believed the day of the Lord to be near, which was also the teaching of St. Paul, but that they believed it to be here already. Just how they imagined that fact we cannot know today. In the Greek it is plain that Paul marks that view as an error by the use of ὡς before ὅτι: "giving out that," "to the effect that." Of course, the following sentence of v. 3 a makes the statement still more emphatic: "Let nobody delude you into this belief, whatever he may say" (Moffatt).

The Character of the Man of Sin

The Apostle's description of the Man of Sin begins with an ellipsis. After ὅτι we must supply in thought something like "the

Day will not be here," or, "the Lord will not come," words easily supplied from the immediately preceding sentences, for the matter of deception, stated in v. 2b, is in everybody's mind. The appearance of the Man of Sin is closely linked with ἀποστασία. The "apostasy" takes place *with* or *before* the appearance of the Man of Sin. It is not quite clear which, but the likelihood is that it precedes that appearance, since vv. 10-12 describe the coming of the Man of Sin as a divine punishment upon those who did not love the truth. This last statement already implies that the apostasy is not political, but religious; not revolt, but falling-away. In that sense apostasy is used already in the LXX (backsliding of Manasseh, Ahaz; also Joshua 22:16-22; Is. 31:1). In the New Testament the only place where the noun is used apart from our present passage is Acts 21:21, where Paul is charged with preaching apostasy from Moses. In Luke 8:13 we have a clear passage where the verb ἀφίσταμαι is used of religious falling-away, "which for a while believe and in time of temptation fall away." Justin has the phrase ὁ τῆς ἀποστασίας ἄνθρωπος (*Dial.* 110, 2), which is a clear indication that the word was understood religiously at that time. In Kittel's *Wörterbuch zum N.T.* the connection of the apostasy and the Man of Sin is given as follows: "The ἀποσταταί and the appearance of the Man of Sin are to be differentiated, but only in such a way that the falling-away makes possible the power of the Man of Sin, while this power in turn makes greater the ἀποστασία." This idea is already expressed by Justin.

The fearful personality is described in three epithets: (a) ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας (b) ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας (c) ὁ ἀντιζήμενος . . . σέβασμα. (a) The man in whom lawlessness is embodied, *in quem recapitulatur sex milium annorum omnis apostasia et iniustitia et dolus* (Irenaeus); "the incarnate sin, wherein the entire nature of sin is concentrated, incorporated, culminates" (Riggenbach in Lange's commentary). (b) The second epithet will be mentioned later under the heading: The Period when Antichrist Is Active. (c) The third epithet consists of two participles affixed to one article. Two possibilities exist as to the grammar of this phrase, and the various translations show this fact. Thus Moffatt: "the adversary who vaunts himself above and against every so-called god or object of worship" (the "above" and "against"

is an attempt to do justice to the two prepositions ὑπέρ and ἐπί). Goodspeed: "the adversary of every being that is called god or an object of worship, and so overbearing toward them as to . . ." The point is: Is ἀντικείμενος to be joined with ἐπὶ πάντα λεγόμενον θεὸν . . . σέβασμα, or is it to be taken as an independent participle, making with the article an independent noun or noun idea? The article with ἀντικείμενος is found elsewhere as a substantive with a recognized and complete sense of its own: 1 Cor. 16:9; 1 Tim. 5:14. I favor Moffatt's translation whereby St. Paul's ἀντικείμενος becomes St. John's ἀντίχριστος. If this is the meaning of St. Paul, the two verbs apply to two different objects: the "opposing himself" only to Christ, the "exalting himself" to every so-called god or object of worship. "Every so-called god" (cp. 1 Cor. 8:5) is the entire pantheon of mankind. According to St. Paul, the opposing one raises himself above Him who is truly God and all those who are supposed to be gods, including every conceivable object of religious reverence. The σεβάσματα of Acts 17:23 (the only other place where the word is used in the New Testament) embraces the religious monuments and emblems of Athens generally: shrines, altars, images, and the like. There is another explanation of the ἐπὶ phrase, i. e., that the Antichrist — to give the Man of Sin the more usual designation — raises himself above all worldly rule and sovereignty, even the highest. According to this interpretation, "the so-called god" is connected with John 10:34f. and Psalm 82, with rulers as *dei nuncupativi*, while σέβασμα is linked with a common term for the Roman Emperor, σεβαστός. But this interpretation overlooks the close connection with the following "so that," etc. It would be strange to write: Antichrist exalts himself above the highest human law and authority to such an extent that he sits in the temple of God, claiming that he is God himself. But with the former interpretation the connection is simple, clear, logical: He exalts himself above all that is called god and every object of veneration, so that he himself sits in the temple of God as God, claiming divine honors.

The third epithet just discussed leads into a result clause, beginning with ὥστε. This infinitive phrase contains the disputed term τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ. The translation of Moffatt strikes the meaning of Paul very well as far as the verse as a whole goes: "actually

seating himself in the temple of God with the proclamation that he himself is God." I do not think it can be successfully denied that "the temple of God" is the Christian Church. The only other meaning that could come into consideration is "the Temple at Jerusalem." A heathen temple is quite impossible, for St. Paul could never have described a heathen temple as the temple of God. In Paul's terminology temple of God, with or without article, is always the Christian congregation, the Church (1 Cor. 3:16f.; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21). The use of ναός in Revelation has no bearing on our text. Apart from Paul and the Revelation we find that this word is used twice of heathen temples (Acts 17:24; and 19:24), of the Temple at Jerusalem, of Christ's body, John 2:19-21. It is difficult to see why Paul in our text uses the idea of the temple of God. That St. Paul could not have referred to the Jerusalem Temple is obvious. Findlay (in Cambridge Greek Testament) summarizes the arguments: "(1) 1 Thess. 2:16 shows Paul's belief that national Judaism was near its end; (2) The Lord had prophesied the speedy destruction of the Jewish Temple, which could no longer be viewed properly as the 'temple of God'; (3) Like 'the churches of God' (1 Thess. 2:14), the 'Israel of God' (Gal. 6:17), 'the saints' and similar terms (Phil. 3:3), the presumption is that in Pauline dialect the 'temple of God' belonged stately to the new kingdom of God and had its foundation in Jesus Christ. There is, it is true, nothing directly in the text which would identify the temple of God with the Church, but we must remember that we have an incomplete context and that the paragraph throughout is allusive to previous teaching (v. 5). And so the doctrine that the Christian community constitutes the veritable shrine of God on earth may have been as familiar to the Thessalonians as it certainly was a few years later to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3)." To this we shall add that the intentional paralleling of Christ and His diabolical counterpart is a further argument for the interpretation that the temple of God is equivalent to the Church. Luenemann in Meyer's commentary makes his whole case for the temple of God as the Temple at Jerusalem depend upon καθίσαι, a word so definite in its meaning, so he claims, that it forces the understanding of "temple" in its proper sense. A study of καθίζω shows that, apart from its use

in a purely neutral sense, i. e., sitting, as on a chair, couch, seaside, mountain, this word is often used as a sign of special honor. So God and the gods are often spoken of as sitting; likewise rulers, judges, teachers. The Son of Man sits on His throne at the right hand of God; James and John want the honorable seat, Matt. 21:21; in Revelation the Lord Jesus promises the victors in Laodicea that they will sit with Him on His throne. This use of "sitting" is undoubtedly that of our passage. The Antichrist *sits* in the temple of God as its ruler, its god, its glory.

To complete Paul's picture of the character of Antichrist in vv. 3 and 4 we must consider that throughout this passage there is a deliberate attempt to bring the "opposing one" into as sharp a contrast to Christ as possible. He is Christ's hellish counterpart, *Gegensatz* and *Ersatz*. Like Christ and His Gospel he is revealed (Gal. 1:16, etc.). There is a mystery of the Antichrist as there is of Christ, cf. especially 1 Tim. 3:16. In vv. 8 and 9 the fact is stressed that each has a *παρουσία*. Antichrist can point to "power, signs, wonders," the same terms used frequently for the mighty works of Jesus. There is a claim to divinity, a false one in the case of Antichrist, v. 4, a true one in the case of Christ, John 5:18; 10:33. Finally there is the parallel of the relation of the Father and the Son, Eph. 1:20, compared with the relation of Satan and Antichrist, 2 Thess. 2:9. There is, as it were, a whole Antichristology as a counterpart of Christology.

In vv. 9 and 10 we have a further characterization of the Antichrist. He has a "coming," "power," "signs," like Christ. But one brief word stamps these as fundamentally different: *ψεῦδος*. This may mean either a deception of the senses by empty delusions without reality, lying signs and wonders, in that they are not really so at all, but merely pass as such and are falsely taken as such; or real miracles misleading men to a false belief in them as performed by divine power (*ψεῦδος* should be understood with each of the co-ordinated words). The second of the two alternatives is to be preferred. "The Bible throughout treats sorcery in a more serious way than as if it were empty legerdemain" (Riggenbach). The predicate is extended further by "with all deception of unrighteousness," active and concrete deceit, not deceivableness nor

deceitfulness but "the deceit which unrighteousness is wont to employ."

To sum up: St. Paul describes one here who is the direct diabolical counterpart of Christ, His great adversary, in whom Satan is at work as God was at work in Christ. He exalts himself above every god, true and false, and every object of veneration; and gives himself out as being God Himself, and all this within the New Testament temple, the Christian Church. Lies and deceit and ungodliness mark his activity, in the service of which he puts all the power, all the superhuman works which his hellish lord, Satan, gives him to perform.

The Period During Which Antichrist Is Active

In relating the history of Antichrist, St. Paul stresses three things (1) the beginnings of Antichrist are to be found already at the time of the Apostle; (2) for the time some force is keeping back his appearance; (3) Christ will put an end to him when He comes again. Τὸ γὰρ μυστήριον ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται τῆς ἀνομίας. The "mystery of lawlessness" refers to him of whom the whole paragraph treats. This is put beyond all possible doubt by the references back (ἀνομία goes back to ἁμαρτία) and the references forward (ἄνομος in v. 8, and ἐνεργεῖται recurs in v. 9). Vv. 6 and 8 are closely related and plainly deal with the same thing. The former verse states that the Thessalonians know what is preventing Antichrist from being revealed before his proper time, while the latter states that Antichrist cannot be revealed until he who prevents is removed. And in between the two verses we have the short statement of v. 7: "the mystery of iniquity is already at work." This is plainly a short explanatory comment (γάρ) showing why such a thing as a κατέχων, a restraining force, is necessary at all. It (he) is necessary because the "mystery of iniquity" is already energetic. The translation of Moffatt gives the obvious meaning of the words of vv. 6-8: "Do you not remember I used to tell you this when I was with you? Well, you can recall now what it is that restrains him from being revealed before his appointed time. For the secret force of lawlessness is at work already; only it cannot be revealed till he who at present restrains it is removed. Then shall the Lawless One be revealed. . . ."

The change from the personal words describing Antichrist to the impersonal "the mystery of lawlessness" is very noticeable. And it is paralleled by the hesitation between personal and impersonal in the description of the restrainer, now τὸ κατέχων, now ὁ κατέχων. The comment of Findlay is good: "While the restrainer and the object of restraint are each expressed in both personal and impersonal form, it is noticeable that the former appears as primarily impersonal, while the latter is predominantly personal; the writers contemplate the power of the lawlessness in its ultimate manifestation as embodied in a supreme human antagonist of Christ; whereas the restraint delaying Antichrist's appearance appears to be conceived as an influence of principle, which at the same time may be personally represented." The choice of the neuter τὸ μυστήριον is very fitting for the time Paul has in mind, the period before Antichrist's revelation, the time when the forces of lawlessness, soon to bloom so monstrously in the Antichrist, when wind and weather are favorable, are still kept in the bud by the winter of restraint. The word, too, is well chosen. This word does not describe what is hard or strange to understand, nor something secret, reserved, like the mysteries of Greek paganism or esoteric systems. It denotes what is in its nature above man's reason and therefore known only when God chooses to reveal it. "So monstrous and enormous are the possibilities of sin in humanity that with all we know of its working the character of the Man of Lawlessness remains incomprehensible beforehand" (Findlay).

The statements concerning the κατέχων are the darkest in the whole passage. The Thessalonians must have known well what Paul has in mind, for v. 5 shows that Paul had spoken to them often about this topic, and this passage is but a short reminder of his former teaching. No better explanation has been advanced than that the check was the law itself, *Staat und Gesetz* (J. Dorner). The masculine variation on the neuter theme fits nicely with the ruling Caesar, the embodiment of the law.

Verse 8 in a doubly forceful parallel phrase states that the Antichrist will be destroyed by Christ at His coming. There is no warrant for the claim that "slay" and "destroy" him refer to two different events, one before the Lord's second coming (Reformation?) and the second at His *parousia*. The phrase "spirit of His

mouth” probably does not refer to the Word of God, but states that a mere breath of the Lord is sufficient to overthrow His diabolical rival. Because of his certain and complete destruction Antichrist is “the son of perdition.”

So the *termini* of Antichrist are given in vv. 5-8. They are the time of the Apostle and the *parousia* of the Lord. The text gives no clue as to the length of time between these two *termini*, whether one lifetime or a hundred; and a solution of this problem depends on the Biblical understanding of the “last days” and the phrase “the Day of the Lord is at hand.”

The Subjects of Antichrist

Although sitting in the temple of God and showing forth his pomp and wonders before all worshipers, the Antichrist succeeds in deceiving only those who are on the way to perdition, the dative being *dativus incommodi*. The fatal power Antichrist has over them is due, according to v. 10, to the fact that they on their part did not receive the love of the truth, the Christian Gospel and not truth in general; and due further to the fact that God in punitive righteousness brings upon them the working of error, a judicial infatuation, leading on to judgment and condemnation.

B. GUIDING LINES FOR THE APPLICATION OF THE PROPHECY

The guiding lines for the one who applies this prophecy seem to me to be the following:

- a) The Antichrist is a religious something, arising in the Church and active in the Church;
- b) The prophecy of Paul must be considered in its place in the whole history of the Antichrist idea in the Scripture;
- c) The time element of the prophecy must be understood from the view of New Testament eschatology.

The first of these follows from the exegesis of “temple of God” and the obvious parallel St. Paul draws between Christ and Antichrist. This statement has not been so obvious to others, but it cannot be successfully denied. The text is too clear for that. St. Paul is not describing someone who could be identified with Nero, or Napoleon, or Hitler, or Stalin, or any of the tyrants who have strutted on the earth’s stage. No mere political personage, no matter

how antireligious or anti-Christian in his make-up and activity, can really figure as Antichrist, as *Gegensatz* and *Ersatz* for Christ.

The second guiding line is to be found in the fact that this prophecy does not stand alone in the Scripture; it is not unprepared, a sudden mushroom growth in Paul's mind. The historical line runs from Daniel's prophecy, through Christ's warnings to Paul, and thence to John at the close of the century. In Revelation we find all the features of Paul's prophecy; Satan behind Antichrist, 12:9; 13:1f.; blasphemous utterances against God, 13:5-8; 14:11; lying signs, 13:13f.; 16:14; destruction, 17:8. In the Epistles of St. John the fitting and comprehensive word ἀντίχριστος meets us. In John's Letters the Antichrist is plainly a religious phenomenon. This is evident from 1 John 2:18ff.; 4:32; 2 John 7, and from the fact that St. John describes Antichrist as the one (the many) who denies the essential Christology, e. g., 1 John 2:23.

But in another way John's statements of Antichrist complicate the teaching of Scripture. John never speaks of Antichrist by himself, so to speak, but always links him at once with many antichrists. The figure of one person tends to disappear in a crowd of Antichristian teachers. I point particularly to the following peculiarities of John's language. In the first passage, 1 John 2:22f., the difficulty is not great. St. John says: "You have heard that Antichrist is coming, and there are many here already." The singular and the plural are kept separate. But in 1 John 4:3, after the contrast between the one who confesses the Son and the one who denies the Son (note the generalizing πᾶν πνεῦμα ὃ), we have the statement "this is [the spirit] of Antichrist." The term "many" is resolved into the singular, τοῦτο. Similarly, in 2 John 7, the plural masculine is immediately resolved into the singular masculine: many false teachers have gone out, who do not confess that Jesus Christ has come into the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the Antichrist. John sees the one behind or in the many, not — as is often claimed — the many Antichristian teachers as way preparers for the one Antichrist. In the words of Althaus St. John means, "in ihnen ist der endzeitliche Antichrist gegenwärtig."

Summing up, an historical survey of the Antichrist idea in the New Testament writings underlines the fact that Antichrist is in the Church, arising in it and exercising his destructive energy in it.

At the same time it gives prominence, as St. Paul does not, to a plurality of Antichristian personalities. It marks as specific Antichristian error the denial of the Son, more specially, that Jesus Christ has come into the flesh.

The third directive for one who would apply the prophecy of St. Paul is the New Testament view of the end. A rapid glance at four new New Testament terms will help to orient ourselves quickly: (1) ἔσχατος is used in several variations to describe the "last times." The end began with the appearance of Jesus (Heb. 1:2; 1 Peter 1:20). The time of the first Christians is the last time (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; James 5:3; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 John 2:18). The eyes of Christians are turned to what is still more final: the last plagues, the last enemy, the last trump (Rev. 15:1; 21:9; 1 Cor. 15:26, 52), to what is completely final and last when there comes on the Last Day, in the last time, the resurrection of the dead, Judgment, salvation (John 6:39f., 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48; 1 Peter 1:5).

(2) ἔρχεται: Beside the many places where Christ's first coming is referred to, His coming to men, men's coming to Him, and the coming of the Paraclete, this word is very frequently used of the second coming of Christ, a sudden one anticipated by the coming of false prophets. So also Judgment is coming, decisive days are coming, Antichrist is coming. (Rev. 2:5, 16; 22:20; 22:17, 20.)

(3) ἡ ἡμέρα: the Day because of its tremendous importance; the "Day of the Lord," because He is Ruler and Controller of that day; the Day of Judgment and wrath as well as the Day of Redemption, because that Day bears the double character of glory for Christ and His own and of doom and shame for those who have rejected Him.

(4) ἤγγικεν: Phil. 4:5: The Lord is at hand, cp. also Heb. 10:25; James 5:8; 1 Peter 4:7; Rev. 1:3; 10:22; Rom. 13:11.

The Church is in the last days; it is the congregation of the last days. Hence the coming of the Lord may be expected by the Church at any time, within the lifetime of any Christian of the New Testament Church. One of the most instructive examples of this awareness of the end is to be seen in the instruction St. Paul gives his readers at Thessalonica concerning the resurrection, how

the living at the coming of Christ will not get ahead of those asleep, but how the dead in Christ will rise first, etc.—how in all this he speaks as though the startling happenings would actually be experienced by the Thessalonians themselves.

This view of the New Testament concerning the last things is of cardinal importance for the application of the Antichrist passages. For one thing, Antichrist is not something to be expected at the very last end moment of a long period of history. The last times are now; Christ is to be expected now by the ever-watchful congregation; and so Antichrist is here now, is in the world already, and the Church is to know it. Antichrist accompanies the Church throughout the New Testament period. The mystery of iniquity was active at the time of St. Paul, and the "Lawless One" will be destroyed by our Lord in His *parousia*. St. John states still more plainly that Antichrist is an ever-present enemy of the Church. 1 John 2:18: "Children, it is the last hour, and as ye have heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have come; whence we know that it is the last hour." Prof. Edmund Schlink states very aptly:

Man wird darum sorgfältig abzuwägen haben, inwieweit diese zeitgeschichtlichen Aussagen über den Antichrist als Dogma oder als Paradigma zu verstehen sind—als Paradigma, das würde heißen, als vorbildliches Ernstnehmen der Weisung des Herrn, in der jeweiligen Gegenwart nach dem Vorzeichen des Endes auszuschaun. In diesem Falle würde den Aussagen über das Wesen des Antichristen in höherem Masse eine verpflichtende Bedeutung zukommen als den Urteilen über den Papst als Antichristen. Man wird jedenfalls sagen müssen, dass die Kirche den Bekenntnisschriften untreu wird, wenn sie nur auf den Papst als den Antichrist blickt, anstatt immer wieder von neuem in steter Wachsamkeit nach den Zeichen des Antichristen in der jeweiligen Gegenwart Ausschau zu halten. (*Die Theologie der Bekenntnisschriften*, 2d ed., p. 380.)

This view of the last things, in a second way, affects the application of our prophecy. Each generation in the Church, because it is the Church of the last times, must be on the *qui vive* for the Antichrist and is to identify him. From a strictly New Testament eschatological point of view there is really no continuous history, but, so to speak, a number of isolated points, each of which is lit

up with the radiance of the Last Day and informed with hopeful expectation for it. What was Antichrist to the Church at one or the other of these points does not have to be Antichrist for other points. The Church at each of these points must say: "This is Antichrist; him Christ will destroy with the spirit of His mouth." So St. John saw Antichrist present at his time, identified him with the Gnostics, as is most likely, but that Gnosticism ceased to be a danger for the Church. The judgment at each of these points is strictly a judgment for that point, for that point is to the Church at that point the last times. The Church at any point cannot know what will happen; it lives and acts and judges, and must so live and act and judge, as if nothing will intervene between it and the Last Day. It is only when looking back that we can talk of a continuity in the period of the last times known to us, and may be able to see an historical connection between earlier days and the present, and so be able to adopt as our own a judgment of earlier days. But we do so in such a case, not because it was a judgment of earlier times, but because it is a true judgment for us. In a case like this a judgment of earlier days cannot be normative for future generations in the very nature of the case, because the men of the earlier generation: St. John, Luther, etc., know that they were speaking for their own time, and that time was for them the last time!

A final hint as to application. The text (texts) are not clear enough for us to state definitely that we must expect one person, a number of persons, or a number reaching their peak or culmination in one person. This is the strait to which we are reduced chiefly because of the terminology of St. John. But even in St. Paul we have the "mystery of iniquity" alongside the "Lawless One"; and we must not overlook the fact that in the Thessalonian prophecy much of the language is couched in the figures of conventional apocalyptic, so that it becomes a hazardous thing to press too far the masculine singulars with which the ἀντιχρίμενος is described.

C. THE LUTHERAN TEACHING OF ANTICHRIST IN THE LIGHT OF THE PROPHECY AND THE GUIDING LINES OUTLINED

1. The view that the Pope is the very Antichrist has strong foundation in prophecy and history. The following points as made

in statements at present before the intersynodical committees* are particularly striking:

- a) The Pope has anathematized the Gospel of the sinner's justification by faith alone;
- b) The Pope has introduced into the Church the cult of human beings;
- c) The Pope has made himself the vicar of Christ, claiming infallibility for his arbitrary definitions in matters of faith and morals, even if they are contrary to Scripture, claiming also absolute rule over the Church and the obedience of all mankind.

2. Difficulties which this view has to meet are chiefly two in number:

- a) Does the Pope deny the Son, more particularly, that the Son has come into the flesh? Is the usual explanation, that the Pope through the anathematization of the doctrine of justification by faith virtually denies Christ's coming into the flesh — does this explanation do justice to the words of St. John?
- b) Do the claims of the Roman pontiffs actually amount to an exalting of themselves over everything that is called God and is worshiped?

3. We hear with gratitude the voice of the Church of previous generations, especially that of the Lutheran Church in its Confessions, a voice raised in warning against the Antichristian abominations of the Papacy. However, we also recognize the fact that to make the identification Pope-Antichrist today is to make an essentially new judgment. We make this identification today because we see the essential marks of Antichrist most clearly in the Papacy, in fact, they are more marked now than at the time of the Reformation, 1854, 1870, 1950! At the same time, following St. John, we are alert against all Antichristian influences without and within the Church, also within our own denomination.

4. Since we are in the last days and the Lord is to be expected

* The author refers to the two Lutheran Australian synods, the one in fellowship with the American Lutheran Church and the other with The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod.

at any time, we make no statement as to what the future will bring in the way of development of Antichrist and Antichristian energy.

5. We realize that to make the identification we do involves us in a frightfully earnest responsibility. We make it in the spirit of Luther, so described by Pfarrer Ittameier, *Neue kirchl. Zeitschrift*, 1893, p. 315:

Nicht ein Gehäufte von Schmähungen haben wir in seinen Aussprüchen vom Papst als dem Antichrist, sondern ein System, ein wohldurchdachtes Ganzes, das . . . mit heiligem Ernst, inniger Liebe zur Kirche, hoher Verehrung des Wortes . . . sich aufbaut.

Only those informed with the same spirit have the right to pass the Lutheran judgment. To make this judgment in any less earnest spirit is to be guilty of mere and gross insult.

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