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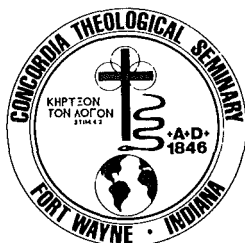
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Antichrist in the Early Church

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Lutheran Confessional statements concerning Antichrist are based upon a very limited selection of Biblical material. Only three passages from the Bible are adduced in contexts which speak of Antichrist or the Papacy as Antichrist: Matthew 7:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4; Daniel 11:36-38. Of these three only 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and Daniel 11:36-38 recur with any regularity or are used in a substantive way. The reason for this narrow Biblical basis is evident. The Confessions especially apply the idea of Antichrist to the papacy and perceive the papacy to be Antichrist (1) in its claim to be a "supreme outward monarchy" in which the pope has unlimited power in both church and world and (2) in what Melancthon calls "a new worship of God" whereby the papacy has instituted human rites as the necessary instruments by which one becomes just before God. Self-exaltation to virtual divine status and the institution of false worship were traditional elements in the depiction of Antichrist, and 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and Daniel 11:36-38 had long been biblical warrant for these two elements in the picture of Antichrist. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that nowhere do the Confessions adduce John's epistles, where alone in the New Testament the term "antichrist" is used, nor do they adduce the book of Revelation, which was throughout the church's history a principal source for discussions concerning Antichrist.

This rather sparse use of Scripture by the Confessions is in contrast to patristic discussions of Antichrist, which employ in a more or less regular way a broader selection of Biblical material. This is, no doubt, largely due to the fact that the Fathers spoke of Antichrist primarily as that eschatological end-time figure who would immediately precede Christ's return. That is, patristic literature presents a composite and complex figure of Antichrist because he is a significant part of the Fathers' general eschatological expectation and only secondarily a figure which has application to contemporary circumstances. John of Damascus makes explicit a distinction which is implicit throughout the patristic period. He writes: "Everyone who does not confess that the Son of God is God come in flesh and that he who is perfect God also became perfect man while remaining God is antichrist. Nevertheless, in a peculiar and special way is that one called Antichrist who comes at the consummation of the age" (*Exp. fidei* IV. 26). This distinction which John of Damascus makes is probably also the way to regard I John 2:18, which speaks of the Antichrist who "comes" or "is coming" and the many antichrists which are now

in the world. In any case, the distinction between the Antichrist whose coming immediately precedes the end of all things and contemporary, one might say preliminary and partial, representatives of Antichrist is commonplace in the Fathers.

When the Fathers apply the figure of Antichrist to contemporary persons, usually John's epistles and 2 Thessalonians 2 are employed, although along with the Pauline passage elements of the prophecy of Daniel are also in mind. In keeping with the specific interest of John's epistles, which call "antichrists" those who deny that Christ came in the flesh (I John 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 7), the Fathers employ John's epistles only when referring to heretics as antichrists. Within an extended comment on 2 Thessalonians 1-2, Tertullian refers to "John the apostle who says that antichrists have already come forth into the world, forerunners [*praecursores*] of the spirit of antichrist, denying that Christ has come in the flesh and dissolving Jesus" (*Adv. Marc.* 5.16.4; see I John 2:18; 4:3 v. 1.). Here, of course, Tertullian has especially Marcion and his disciples in mind as antichrist. John of Damascus, in the passage quoted above, alludes to I John 2:22 and 4:3 and 2 John 7 when referring to the Christological heresies of his day. For him it would appear Nestorians and Monophysites are the antichrists of his day.

Cyril of Jerusalem is very conscious of the fact that the church of his day, full of inner strife and heresy, was living in the last days. For him the "apostasy" of which Paul speaks (2 Thess. 2:3) has already begun in the Sabellian and Arian heresies, for through them many are falling away from the true faith. These heretics are "forerunners" of the Antichrist (*Cat.* 15.9; Athanasius had also called the Arians *prodromoi* of the Antichrist [*Or. c. Arian* I.1]). Similarly, Cyril believes that the signs of the end spoken of by Christ in the Synoptic Gospels are being fulfilled in his day. Christ's promise that "many will come in my name saying, 'I am the Christ'" (Matt. 24:5), has already happened "in part" in the heretics Simon Magus and Menander and will continue to happen in heretics "after us" (*Cat.* 15.5). The war between Rome and Persia over Mesopotamia is a fulfillment of the prophecy that wars, uprisings, and pestilence shall characterize the last days (*Cat.* 15. 6). And that in the last days there will be mutual hatred and betrayal and the waning of love is for Cyril amply demonstrated in the strife between bishop and bishop and laity against laity (*Cat.* 15.7).

Paul's statement that the "mystery of lawlessness is already at work" (2 Thess. 2:7) not infrequently led to attempts to identify the mystery. Theodoret of Cyrus identifies the mystery with the heresies which cause many to fall from the truth, although he acknowledges that some

believe the mystery to be Nero, who was a worker of impiety (*In 2 Thess.* 2:7). Ambrosiaster, a fourth-century commentator, is one who believed that the "mystery of lawlessness" was the line of persecuting emperors: "the mystery of lawlessness began with Nero and [continued] unto Diocletian and most recently unto Julian" (*Comm. in 2 Thess.* 2:7). Also John Chrysostom interpreted Paul's "mystery of lawlessness" to mean Nero who "as it were is a type of the Antichrist, for he even wished to be regarded as God" (*In 2 Thess.* 2, Hom. 4).

More specific crises within the church could also call forth contemporary applications of the Antichrist figure. On at least two occasions Cyprian of Carthage uses 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11 against those who had lapsed in times of persecution and did not wish to submit to the penance of the church. Such people are perishing and have received from God a working of error so that they may believe that which is false (*De lapsis* 33; *Ep.* 59.13). Similarly, the protocol of the Council of Carthage (256) tells us that Bishop Secundinus of Carpis called those who did not rebaptize heretics "offshoots of Antichrist" (*suboles Antichristi*; Mansi, 1.955f.).

All of the above examples have in common the application of the Antichrist figure to contemporary persons whom the Fathers believed were in active conflict against the truth of Christ and his church. In none of them, however, is there an exhaustive identification of the contemporary opponents of Christ with the Antichrist. They are "precursors" of the Antichrist or "types" of the Antichrist, but they are not *the* Antichrist in the sense of being the very appearance of the great eschatological opponent of God who shall appear immediately before the second advent of Christ. For the Fathers, the Antichrist was a figure of Christian expectation but a figure whose coming was largely indeterminate and vague. A common view among the Fathers was that the "restrainer" mentioned by Paul (2 Thess. 2: 6,7), whose presence hinders the appearance of "the lawless one," was the Roman Empire (e.g., Tertullian). This view was based upon an exegesis of Daniel 7, which contains the vision of the four beasts which represent four kingdoms whose rise and fall precede the coming of One like the son of man. According to a common patristic understanding, the fourth beast was the Roman Empire, and until the Roman Empire dissolved into ten smaller kingdoms, represented by the ten horns, the "little horn" or Antichrist could not appear, nor, of course, could the second coming of Christ. Given this theory of history, heretics and persecuting emperors could only be "forerunners" of that Antichrist who would come at the end of the age. But as the fall of the Roman Empire was not foreseen and was not indeed an object of hope, so also the coming of the Antichrist was regarded

as a future event, expected but not finally determinable.

Although the Fathers tended to be quite vague in their predictions concerning the time of the Antichrist's appearing, they could nonetheless depict with considerable detail the figure and activity of the Antichrist. Indeed, the Apocalypse of Elijah (c. 150-275 A.D.) can describe the physical appearance of the "son of lawlessness" with gruesome precision (3:15-18):

He is a . . . of a skinny-legged young lad, having a tuft of gray hair at the front of his bald head. His eyebrows will reach to his ears. There is a leprous bare spot on the front of his hands. He will transform himself in the presence of those who see him. He will become a young child. He will become old. He will transform himself in every sign. But the signs of his head will not be able to change. Therein you will know that he is the son of lawlessness.

But who would the Antichrist be? What would be his nature, his origin, his work? Patristic answers to these questions involved considerable variation and sometimes complexity. This variation, it seems to me, is due primarily to the fact that early Christian notions of Antichrist derive from two principal sources: (1) traditional depictions of opponents of God and His people mediated through such Biblical texts as Daniel, Ezekiel 28:2 and 36-38, Isaiah 14:13-14, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12, and John's Revelation, and (2) a more specifically Christian image of the Antichrist as the opponent of Jesus, the Christ of God. In the first case, the Antichrist is a secular figure from paganism who arrogantly elevates himself to divine status and to enforce his false claims to deity speaks blasphemy against the true God, desecrates the true worship of God (usually by defiling the temple), substitutes false worship, and persecutes the people of God who remain steadfast. In the second case, the Antichrist is a "false Christ," usually coming from within Judaism, who mimics the words and deeds of Jesus in order to deceive the Jews and even the Christians concerning the true identity of the Messiah. Here too there are often signs and wonders, understood as satanic counterfeits of Jesus' miracles; there is false messianic activity, such as the rebuilding of the temple; and there is, of course, misdirected worship of the false Christ. Let us look at both of these views of Antichrist in a little more detail.

The idea of Antichrist as a pagan tyrant who haughtily arrogates to himself divine honor and worship finds its prototypes in Old Testament texts in which kings hostile to Israel are depicted. Despite the well-known attempt of Hermann Gunkel and, to a lesser extent, Wilhelm Bousset and R. H. Charles to locate the origin of the Antichrist idea in ancient Near-Eastern myth, it seems to me more plausible to see Antichrist, like many other elements of Old Testament escha-

tology, as given in the nature of Israel as the chosen people of God. Given Israel's belief that it was the chosen people of God to whom the promise of the Holy Land had been given, any king or people who withstood or prevented the fulfilment of that promise would necessarily be understood as an opponent of God and for that reason arrogantly in competition with God for honor and worship. Israel's history, therefore, provided the content and the form for the picture of Antichrist. Hence, already in the classical prophets characteristics of the traditional Antichrist figure are found in pagan kings. Of the king of Babylon Isaiah writes (14:13-14):

You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High."

Ezekiel speaks in a similar way of the king of Tyre (28:2; cf. vv. 6,9):

Because your heart is proud and you have said, "I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas," yet you are but a man, and no god, though you consider yourself as wise as a god . . . therefore, I will bring strangers upon you."

This feature of self-glorification and exaltation is most significantly described in the various visions of Daniel: the "little horn" of Daniel 7 "speaks words against the Most High" (7:25); the "little horn" of Daniel 8, who is a "king of bold countenance" (8:23), magnifies himself "even up to the Prince of the host" (8:11) and "rises up against the Prince of princes" (8:25); and in Daniel 11 there is a usurper king who "shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god," who shall "give no heed to the gods of his fathers or to the one beloved by women . . . , for he shall magnify himself above all" (11:36-37). This tradition of the haughty tyrant finds its New Testament deposit in Paul's description of the man of lawlessness as one who "opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship" and who "proclaims himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:4) and in the Revelation description of the beast from the sea which has a mouth uttering blasphemy and whose image is worshipped (13:1-18). On the basis of this Biblical foundation the false claim to be God (or Christ) became a common traditional feature in patristic depictions of Antichrist (Irenaeus, Lactantius, Ambrosiaster, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, Theodoret, John of Damascus).

Whether or not one believes that the Danielic visions refer to the Hellenistic king, Antiochus Epiphanes (as most modern commentators do), there is no doubt that the pretensions of deity of that notorious king and later of the Roman emperors added experiential impetus to this element of the Antichrist idea. Perhaps this feature of the An-

tichrist belief helps explain that most strange fact that in both Jewish and Christian literature the expectation of an end-time opponent of God became mingled with the belief that a resurrected Nero, *Nero redivivus*, would arise and make a final assault upon the world. The pagan writers Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.8f.) and Suetonius (*Nero* 57) report of this belief among the populace of their day, and they give three instances in which impostors actually attempted to claim imperial authority under the name of Nero. This legend of *Nero redivivus* is used especially by the Jewish author of the fifth Sibylline Oracle in his description of the eschatological havoc that shall befall Rome (5.104-110, 137-178, 361-385). The legend becomes part of the discussion of Antichrist in a number of Christian authors who believe that *Nero redivivus* will be part of the chaos of the last days or the very Antichrist himself. Jerome affirms that many in his day believed the legend (*Comm. in Dan.* 11.29), although he, along with Lactantius (*De morte pers* 2.8) and Augustine (*Civ. Dei* 20.19), rejects the view. However, the Christian writer, Commodian, held to the legend and perhaps identified the Antichrist with *Nero redivivus* (*Carm. apol.* 823-838, 869-890). Victorinus of Pettau and St. Martin of Tours in their own idiosyncratic ways combined the Nero legend with other traditions concerning Antichrist. Victorinus joined the Nero legend with the expectation of an Antichrist from the Jews. According to him, Nero will return as a Jew, become a vindicator of the Law, demanding that all submit to circumcision, and will erect a golden image in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (*Comm. in Apoc.* 13). Martin of Tours believed that Nero would arise along with the Antichrist, Nero seizing the western part of the empire, where he would induce idolatry, and the Antichrist seizing the Eastern portion, where he would restore Jerusalem and its temple and there establish his capital (Sulpicius Severus, *Dial.* II.14).

As we indicated above, the tyrant who claims divine dignity for himself is often depicted as one who also desecrates true worship and substitutes idolatry in its place. Also here the visions of Daniel are fundamental. The "little horn" of Daniel 7 assumes the right "to change the times and the law" (7:25); the "little horn" of Daniel 8 takes away the continual burnt offering and overthrows the sanctuary (8:11); the wicked king of Daniel 11 profanes the temple, removes the continual burnt offering, and sets up the abomination which makes desolate (11:31). The historical experiences of the Jews again reinforced this picture of the great opponent of God. We learn from the account of I Maccabees how horrified and revolted the Jews were by the policy of Antiochus Epiphanes, who defiled the sanctuary of Jerusalem by setting an altar of Zeus Olympius, the abomination of desola-

tion, upon the altar of burnt offering (I Macc. 1:20-54). It is usually assumed by scholars that the Psalms of Solomon refer to the Roman general, Pompey, when they speak of "the sinner" whose soldiers desecrate the altar in front of the temple (Ps. Sol. 2:2). Furthermore, the threat of the Roman emperor, Gaius Caligula, to erect his own image in the temple at Jerusalem caused civil unrest among the Jews, who saw in this intent the typical behavior of the tyrant who opposes God. No doubt Paul had in mind the Danielic visions, and perhaps also these relatively recent temple desecrations when he asserted that the man of lawlessness would "take his seat in the temple of God" (2 Thess. 2:4).

Paul's statement is used in the Treatise by Melancthon to demonstrate that the Antichrist is "one who rules in the church" and is not a king of nations (Treatise, 39). Only rarely, however, did the Fathers' exegesis of 2 Thessalonians 2:4 lead them to the opinion that by "temple of God" Paul had the church in mind. John Chrysostom believes it refers to "not the temple in Jerusalem but churches everywhere" (*In 2 Thess. 2:4, Hom. 3*). Theodoret follows Chrysostom in this opinion. Augustine is uncertain about the meaning but reports that some believe "temple of God" refers to the Antichrist together with all those who belong to him. The Antichrist then would take his seat not "in" the temple but "as" the temple, proclaiming himself to be the temple of God, that is, the church (*Civ. Dei* 20.19).

However, by far the majority opinion of the Fathers understands Paul's reference to the temple of God to mean the temple of Jerusalem. And since that temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., not infrequently patristic writers will mention that the Antichrist will rebuild the temple. For example, Hippolytus speaks of the Antichrist raising up a temple of stone in Jerusalem (*De Anti. 6*; cf. *Ps-Hipp., De consumm. 20*). The Greek *Apocalypse of Daniel* states that the Antichrist shall "dwell in the temple which had been raised to the ground," and similar statements are made by Martin of Tours, Ephrem Syrus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Lactantius, Pelagius, and Andrew of Caesarea. This opinion continued into the early medieval commentators. For example, Adso of Montier-en-Der, writing around 950, states that the Antichrist "shall build the destroyed temple, which Solomon had built for God, and restore it to its [former] state." A contemporary of Adso's, Haimo of Auxerre, commenting on 2 Thessalonians 2:4, writes similarly: "And they shall rebuild the temple that the Romans had destroyed, and he shall seat himself there."

This view that the Antichrist shall sit in the temple of Jerusalem leads to a consideration of the second principal depiction of Antichrist to which we earlier referred, namely, to the view that the Antichrist

is a "false Christ," a sort of pseudo-Messiah from the Jews sent to deceive the Jews, and if possible Christians, concerning the true identity of the Christ. Characteristic of this Antichrist is not direct, overt attack upon God and his people, as was true of the arrogant tyrant in Daniel's visions, but the deceptive claim to be the Christ of God based upon messianic signs and wonders in perverse imitation of Jesus' miracles and works. This view of the Antichrist seems to me to be a specifically Christian development of the Antichrist idea and may even explain the term "antichrist," which may mean, not only "against Christ," but also "in the place of Christ." In any case, in literature other than Christian I can find no evidence of the idea that the endtime opponent of God will mimic God's Anointed One. One can find, of course, false prophets in the Old Testament and in the intertestamental literature, and these false prophets do present a kind of false counterpoint to the true prophet. Indeed, false prophets often work signs and wonders, as do true prophets, and the effecting of signs and wonders is a traditional feature of the Antichrist. Yet, although the figure of the false prophet is early connected with an Antichrist figure (Rev. 13:1-18), it is not sufficient to provide background for the figure of Antichrist as a messianic pretender.

It may be that the theme of imitation of Christ by the Antichrist occurs already in the two principal New Testament Antichrist passages, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 and Revelation 13:1-18. As Christ has a parousia (2 Thess. 2:1,8), so also the lawless one has a parousia (2 Thess. 2:9). The "power and signs and wonders" of the lawless one (2 Thess. 2:9) is perhaps a parody of the "mighty acts and wonders and signs" of Jesus to which Peter refers in Acts 2:22. The contrast between salvation and destruction and between truth and falsehood (2 Thess. 2:10-12) may also point to the imitation motif. There are clear parodies of Christ and His work, however, in Revelation's vision of the beast from the sea. Most important is the notice that one of the heads of the beast had a mortal wound which was healed (Rev. 13:3). While some scholars believe this refers to the legend of *Nero redivivus*, it can more plausibly be understood as a parody of Christ's death and resurrection. Similarly, the beast from the earth which exercises the authority of the first beast has two horns "like a lamb" (Rev. 13:11), a probable parody of the slain Lamb who sits on the throne of heaven (Rev. 5:6; 21:22-23). The fire from heaven (Rev. 13:13) likewise seems to parody true prophecy (remember Revelation is an explicitly prophetic book) and to parody Pentecost. If the motif of antichristic parody of Christ is, in fact, present in Revelation 13, it may even help explain the troublesome number 666 (Rev. 13:18). Since seven is the number of completion, a triple six would

be "penultimacy intensified." We know, on the other hand, that early Christians reckoned the number of Jesus name to be 888 (Sib. Or. 1.326-330). Now eight was the number of eschatological fulfilment, as we know, for example, from the early Christian worship practices which regarded Sunday as the eighth day; 888 would, therefore, signify Jesus as the utter fulfilment of all things.

However, whether or not the imitation idea exists in these New Testament texts, it is implied in the widely held patristic view that the Antichrist would be a Jewish pseudo-Messiah who performs works like the rebuilding of the temple. Thus, for example, Cyril of Jerusalem says that the Antichrist will come to the Jews as Christ and will desire to be worshipped by the Jews. In order better to deceive them, he will say that he is one from the tribe of David who is going to build the temple which Solomon had erected (*Cat.* 15.15). The idea of parody is more extensively worked out in the *Apocalypse of Elijah* (c. 150-275). Here the author gives a listing of the wonders of "the son of lawlessness," and they are clearly patterned after the miracles of Jesus (3:5-13; for the last point, cf. Cyril Jer. *Cat.* 15.14):

But the son of lawlessness will begin to stand again in the holy place.

He will say to the sun, "Fall," and it will fall.

He will say, "Shine," and it will do it.

He will say, "Darken," and it will do it.

He will say to the moon, "Become bloody," and it will do it.

He will go forth with them from the sky.

He will walk upon the sea and the rivers as upon dry land.

He will cause the lame to walk.

He will cause the deaf to hear.

He will cause the dumb to speak.

He will cause the blind to see.

The lepers he will cleanse.

The ill he will heal.

The demons he will cast out.

He will multiply his signs and his wonders in the presence of everyone. He will do the works which the Christ did, except for raising the dead alone. In this you will know that he is the son of lawlessness, because he is unable to give life.

However, nowhere is the idea of the Antichrist's parody of Christ more fully developed than in Hippolytus' treatise, *Concerning Christ and the Antichrist*, and in the pseudo-Hippolytan work, *Concerning the Consummation of the World*. A full quotation of *De Antichristo* 6 will make clear Hippolytus' view:

For the deceiver seeks to liken himself in all things to the Son of God. Christ is a lion, so Antichrist is also a lion; Christ is a king, so Antichrist is a king. The Savior was manifested as a lamb; so he too, in like manner, will appear as a lamb, though within he is a wolf. The Savior came into the world in the circumcision, and he will come in the same manner. The Lord sent apostles among all the nations, and he in like manner will send false apostles. The Savior gathered together the sheep that were scattered abroad, and he in like manner will bring together a people that is scattered abroad. The Lord gave a seal to those who believed on Him, and he will give one in like manner. The Savior appeared in the form of man, and he too will come in the form of a man. The Savior raised up and showed his holy flesh like a temple, and he will raise a temple of stone in Jerusalem.

Pseudo-Hippolytus adds to these contrasts two more: as Christ is king of things heavenly and things earthly, the Antichrist will be king upon earth; as Christ arose from among the Hebrews, so will the Antichrist spring from among the Jews (*De consumm.* 20).

The belief that the Antichrist shall come from the Jews and for the deception of the Jews is sometimes derived from John 5:43, where Jesus, speaking to the Jews, says, "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive." This refers to the Antichrist, says Irenaeus, and he is here called an "other" (*allos*) because he is alienated from the Lord (*Adv. Haer.* 5.25.4; cf. Ambrosiaster, Theodoret, John of Damascus). Irenaeus also applies the story of the unjust judge in Luke 18 to the coming of the Antichrist and his acceptance by the Jews. The widow is the earthly Jerusalem, who in her forgetfulness of God goes for her vindication to the Antichrist, who in the parable is the judge who neither fears God nor regards man (Luke 18:1-8; *Adv. Haer.* 5.25.4).

Perhaps the most interesting variant in the pseudo-messianic view of the Antichrist is that which expects the Antichrist to come forth from the tribe of Dan. In a number of Old Testament texts Dan is a problem. According to Leviticus 24:10-11, a man whose mother was from Dan blasphemed God and was stoned for it. The Book of Judges speaks of the tribe of Dan as "seeking for itself an inheritance to dwell in" (18:1) and tells of the idolatry of Dan (18:30-31). Finally, in I Kings 12 Dan is one of the two locations where King Jeroboam erected a calf of gold. Dan, it appears, was an especially idolatrous people. However, it is especially through a midrashic combination of Genesis 49:16-17 and Deuteronomy 33:22 that the connection between Dan and Antichrist is derived. In both of these chapters there is a listing

of blessings and prophecies concerning the twelve tribes of Israel, and thus they invite this kind of combination. In Genesis 49 there is the important messianic reference to Judah from whom the scepter of Israel shall not depart, and in this context Judah is called "a lion's whelp" (49:9). In the same chapter Dan is called "a serpent in the way, a viper by the path" (49:17). In typical midrashic fashion, Hippolytus relates this reference to Dan as serpent to the serpent of Genesis 3: "What then is meant by the serpent but Antichrist (the deceiver from the beginning), that deceiver who is mentioned in Genesis who deceived Eve and bruised the heel of Adam" (*De Anti.* 14). Furthermore, the fact that in Deuteronomy 33:22 Dan is called "a lion's whelp" as Judah was in Genesis 49:17 indicated the kind of satanic parody of Christ that we discussed above: as Christ is a lion's whelp, so will the Antichrist appear as a lion's whelp (see *De Anti.* 6). In this matter the Fathers seem to be following, albeit adapting, a Jewish tradition which finds good expression in the *Testament of Dan* 5:4-5:

I know that in the last days you shall depart from the Lord, And you shall provoke Levi unto anger, and fight against Judah; But you shall not prevail against them, for an angel of the Lord shall guide them both;

For by them shall Israel stand.

And whensoever you depart from the Lord, you shall walk in all evil and work the abominations of the Gentiles, going a-whoring after women of the lawless ones, while with all wickedness the spirits of wickedness work in you.

Irenaeus bases his view that the Antichrist will come from Dan on Jeremiah 8:16 alone: "The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan; at the sound of the neighing of their stallions the whole land quakes." While the prophet no doubt intended by this merely to indicate the geographical direction from which a Gentile invader would come, Irenaeus, probably under the influence of the tradition we are discussing, understood this passage to mean the genealogical origin of Antichrist (*Adv. Haer.* 5.30.2). Hippolytus uses Jeremiah 8:16 along with Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 as well as a prophecy from an unknown prophet, or perhaps from an unknown apocryphal book (*De Anti.* 15).

This belief in Dan as the tribe from which the Antichrist would come pervades the full chronological breadth of patristic exegesis. It is represented for example by Ambrose, Theodoret, Prosper of Aquitaine, Gregory the Great, Primasius of Hadrumetum, Anastasius Sinaita. Since the tribe of Dan was on occasion located in Babylon,

sometimes the Fathers expected the Antichrist to come from the East. Thus Andrew of Caesarea writes: "It is probable also that the Antichrist shall come from the eastern parts of the land of Persia, where is the tribe of Dan of the Hebrew race" (*Comm. in Apoc.* 6.12; cf. Jerome, *Comm. in Dan.* 11.37).

With virtual unanimity the patristic authors believe the Antichrist of the endtime will be a man. While the Antichrist will come from the earth, whether as tyrant or pseudo-messiah, Christ will come only from heaven with glory and with His angels (Cyril Jer., *Cat.* 15.10). Perhaps the language of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 was determinative: "the man of lawlessness." Yet, although a writer like John of Damascus explicitly rejects the notion that the Antichrist will really be Satan incarnate, that view does find its few representatives in the patristic literature. The *Testament of Hezekiah* (c. 100) speaks vaguely of Beliar descending "in the likeness of a man, a lawless king, the slayer of his mother" (4:2 of Asc. Isa.). More definite is Ambrosiaster, the fourth-century commentator: "For he [the Antichrist] shall imitate God, and so as the Son of God demonstrated His divinity, having been born a man and having done signs and mighty acts, so also Satan shall appear in a man (*homine*) in order that he might by his mighty deeds of falsehood show himself to be God" (*Comm. in 2 Thess.*). Firmicus Maternus is explicit: "the Devil is the Antichrist himself" (*De errore profanarum religionum*). Unique is the view of Pseudo-Hippolytus, who asserts that the Antichrist, who apparently is the Devil, will appear docetically as man (*De consumm.* 22):

Since the Savior of the world, with the purpose of saving the race of men, was born of the pure and virgin Mary and in the form of the flesh trod the enemy under foot in the exercise of the power of His own proper divinity; in the same manner also will the accuser come forth from an impure woman upon the earth, but shall be born of a virgin in deception. For our God sojourned with us in the flesh, after that very flesh of ours which He made for Adam and all Adam's posterity, yet without sin. But the accuser, though he take up the flesh, will do it only in appearance. . . . And it is my opinion that he will assume [this] imaginary substance of flesh as an instrument.

This summary of major themes represented in patristic views of Antichrist in no way exhausts the variety and complexity of patristic views concerning the Antichrist. Most important is the fact, as it seems to me, that while the Fathers do apply the Antichrist idea to contemporary persons and parties (heretics, persecutors, schismatics), the figure of the Antichrist in his fullness remains a distinctly future, eschatological reality. Although most often conceived as a man, he is

larger than life, a prodigious figure who greatly exceeds the boundaries of the usual evil man. For John Chrysostom he will be "a certain man who receives all the energy of" Satan (*In 2 Thess. 2, Hom. 3*). According to Theodoret, Satan shall choose a man capable of receiving all of Satan's power (*In 2 Thess. 2*). Jerome tells us that the Antichrist shall be one "from men in whom the whole of Satan shall dwell bodily" ("unum de hominibus in quo totus satanas habitaturus est corporaliter," *Comm. in Dan. II.7.8*). But it is Irenaeus who best sums the matter up. The Antichrist is the great and complete opposite of Christ, and as Christ, the incarnated Word of God, is, as the new Adam, Head of the redeemed race of men and recapitulates in His own person the whole history of the human race from its beginning to its appointed end, so also the Antichrist sums up and recapitulates in himself all satanic apostasy (*Adv. Haer. 5.25.1*). For Irenaeus 666 is the number of the Antichrist because he sums up "the whole of that apostasy which has taken place during six thousand years" (5.28.2). And, after giving his own particular understanding of 666, Irenaeus says that 666, the number of Antichrist, "indicates the recapitulations of that apostasy taken in its full extent, which occurred at the beginning, during the intermediate periods, and which shall take place at the end" (5.30.1).

The calculation of the Fathers that the end would come quickly upon the demise of the Roman Empire has proved erroneous. But it was this prodigy of the end that the Fathers expected and awaited. This may explain the repeated exhortations to constant faith and moral rigor, the patristic echo of the dominical warning: "See to it that no one deceive you" (Matt. 24:4).