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Leading Thoughts on Eschatology in the Epistles to the Thessalonians

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IV

In the two previous articles of this series we have treated the section 2 Thess. 2:3-12, in which Paul points out that, although the day of judgment will come suddenly, it will not come before the great falling away and the Antichrist will have made his appearance, and in which the apostle also describes in greater detail the nature and activities of Antichrist. This section has been the subject of much controversy. Moreover, the very fact that many will not recognize the Antichrist and will be deceived by him is an important factor in the "deceivableness of unrighteousness" and "strong delusion" to which the apostle refers, vv. 9-11. For these reasons we should like to go into this matter more thoroughly. We shall briefly discuss the various interpretations and point out on the basis of history that our Confessions are right in recognizing the Roman Pope as the Antichrist foretold in Scripture, when, for example, the appendix to the Smalcald Articles, "Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope," states: "The marks (all the vices) of the Antichrist plainly agree with the kingdom of the Pope and his adherents," basing that declaration primarily on 2 Thess. 2 (Triglotta, p. 515). Lengthy dissertations and entire books have been written on this section of Scripture, and in commentaries we often find a special excursus in which the various views are recorded and discussed. Eadie devotes forty pages to such an excursus (*A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, pp. 329-370: "The Man of Sin"). Likewise Wohlenberg (*Kommentar zum Neuen Testament . . . herausgegeben von Dr. Theo. Zahn. — Der erste und zweite Thessalonicherbrief ausgelegt von Lic. G. Wohlenberg*, pp. 170-214: *Exkurs zu 2 Thess. 2, 3-8*). The discussion centers chiefly around the

question who the man of sin and the son of perdition is and, linked up with that question, who the "who now letteth" is. It would lead us too far afield to mention and refute all of the views expressed, but the chief ones must be considered. We shall then the more certainly find and establish the correct interpretation. In analyzing the various interpretations we shall make special use of the excellent treatise by the younger Philippi (Ferdinand Philippi, *Die biblische und kirchliche Lehre vom Antichrist*. Guetersloh, 1877).

If we proceed historically, we shall find four distinct interpretations: 1. The interpretation of the Church Fathers; 2. the interpretation of the Reformation era; 3. the historical view; 4. the chiliastic view.

We shall begin with the view held by the Church Fathers as it appears in the writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Chrysostom, Cyrill of Jerusalem, Augustine, Theodoret, Theodore of Mopsvestia, Hippolytus (who wrote a dissertation on *De Anti-Christo*), Lactantius, Origen, Ephraem the Syrian. While they differ greatly in details, there is essential agreement among them in that a personal Antichrist will appear before the return of Christ; in him all the characteristics will appear that are mentioned in the section of Scripture under discussion. Some of them think chiefly of some temporal ruler, others of an archheretic and false Messiah or false prophet. They are agreed that the Antichrist is still in the future and that he is an individual. However, Augustine already takes cognizance of a collective interpretation, that the term Antichrist refers not only to the godless prince, but includes the whole number of his adherents, the body of which he is to be the head. Already prior to that time the well-known legend about Nero had originated, that Nero, the bitter enemy and bloodthirsty persecutor of the Christians, had not died, but had only withdrawn to reappear in the course of time as the Antichrist (*Nero redivivus*.)

A second view is that held during the Reformation era, the development of which began as early as the eleventh century. According to this view the Antichrist prophesied in Scripture is a collective person, the term designating the Papacy. This view is found already among the so-called forerunners of the Reformation, the Waldensians, the Wyclifites and Hussites, also, as it would seem, by the fiery Savonarola of Florence and by the burlesque German popular preacher Geiler von Kaisersberg. Wyclif wrote a tract "*De Christo et Adversario Svo Antichristo*," in which on the basis of manifest and generally known facts he proves the Pope to be the Antichrist. Only a short time before his death he cried out: "Up! let us fight against this Antichrist!" Above all, however, Luther sponsored, vindicated, and defended this interpretation. Chiefly through his Smalcald Articles the doctrine that

the Pope is the *real* Antichrist has found a place in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. Similarly Melancthon expresses himself in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, as is evidenced by the index in anyone of the various editions of the symbolic writings. To my knowledge, all Lutheran theologians of the 16th and 17th centuries without exception follow in Luther's footsteps. This view of the Reformation era is subsequently found in the writings of Bugenhagen, Flacius, Hunnius, Lucas and Andreas Osiander, Balduin, Erasmus Schmid, Quistorp, Calov, Wolf, Spener, Joachim Lange, Bengel, to mention only the leading exegetes of our Church. All regard the Pope, and not some specific Pope but the Papacy as an institution, to be the man of sin and the son of perdition. Bengel writes: "Thesis manet irrefragabilis, id est, evidens et certa." According to this interpretation Paul's description of Antichrist refers not to one individual but to a collective person. Paul portrays "non modo individuum aliquem hominem, sed *seriem* aut *successionem* hominum in eodem gradu et nomine constitutorum." (Not merely some one individual person, but a series or succession of men occupying the same position and bearing the same name.)

This same interpretation concerning the Papacy is found among the leaders of the Reformed Church: Zwingli, Calvin, Beza, and others.

The Westminster Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church states in chap. 25, as quoted in Hovey's *American Commentary on the New Testament*: "There is no other Head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ, nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ and all that is called God" (*Commentary on the Epistles to the Thessalonians* by W. A. Stevens, V, 92).

Even several rationalists, such as Michaelis and Engelhardt, have shared that interpretation, and also a number of modern exegetes accept the concepts as collective, although they do not apply them to the Papacy. We call attention to Nitzsch, who thinks of atheism as it will in the course of time be publicly acknowledged as an authoritative power, Schneckenburger, who remarks: "The Antichrist is Paul's way of personifying wickedness," and Hengstenberg. Otherwise, as far as we know on the basis of printed publications, but very few outside the church bodies affiliated with us still maintain this interpretation of the Reformation era. Noteworthy exceptions are F. A. Philippi in his *Kirchliche Glaubenslehre* and his son Ferdinand in the work referred to above, p. 402. In his comprehensive work, Vol. 6, pp. 148—240, the older Philippi inserted a "Brief Interpretation of Revelation." In it he remarks:

"It will not be superfluous to remind the Lutheran Church of our day of several statements in the symbolic writings in which our fathers with holy zeal and with convincing proof maintained the view that the Pope is the Antichrist." (P. 176.) He then quotes the pertinent passages of the confessional writings. Philippi refers also to Luthardt's statement in his *Doctrine Concerning the Last Things* (p. 125): "Moreover, it is now universally [!] recognized that the apostle (2 Thess. 2:3, 4) speaks not of a group but of an individual person, who will appear in the latter days," and then makes the following comment, "Alas, the handful of antichilastic exegetes no longer counts. They might as well take flight to the primitive forests of America. *Pars maior meliorem vicit*. And yet there is no claim exegetically more arbitrary and unfounded than that 2 Thess. 2:3, 4 can apply only to a concrete, individual person" (p. 181).

And it is noteworthy that also Lenski, the well-known exegete of the American Lutheran Church, maintains this truly Lutheran position. He remarks in his *Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians*: "The great apostasy is Romanism, its head, the papal succession, called 'Antichrist' in 1 John 2:18 in distinction from 'many antichrists,' the lesser antichristian powers. All that Paul says agrees with the Papacy and Romanism down to the present day. . . . As the Papacy emerged and the Romish system developed, the Antichrist's *parousia* and revelation occurred. During nineteen centuries no greater apostasy has ever appeared in the visible Church. Nor can a still greater one appear. In the papal system the climax has been reached." He quotes approvingly Dr. Franz Pieper's *Christliche Dogmatik*, where Pieper says: "From my own experience I must confess that in my own conscience I was not vitally convinced that the Pope is the antichrist until on the one hand I realized what the doctrine of justification is and what its significance is for the Church, and on the other hand that the Papacy has its real essence in denying and cursing the doctrine of justification and by its show of piety and its claim to be the only saving Church binds to itself men's consciences." Finally Lenski states: "Let me venture to state my personal opinion regarding v. 8: the Papacy received its mortal blow by 'the breath of the Lord's mouth' (the Lord's Word) during the Reformation and has shown the effects ever since, without prospect of recovery. Until the time of the Reformation the Papacy ruled practically the entire Church with its fearful deceit; this is not true since that time. The Reformation cast a blight upon the papal rule, a blight that has continued unchecked during the past four hundred years. Who is able to say what the future, prior to the *parousia*, will bring as a further fulfillment of Paul's prophecy? We cannot go beyond

Matt. 24:12 and Luke 18:8. I look for no superpope at the end, for no pope who shall wield supreme secular power over the world's states and governments." (Pp. 443—446.)

The third interpretation may be called the historical or rationalistic view. According to this opinion the words are to be understood historically as referring to an individual in the past. In that individual the words of Paul may have been fulfilled or not fulfilled. In the latter case, so it is claimed, Paul was simply mistaken. There is, however, a wide difference of opinion as to the identity of that individual. Rationalists understood the man of sin to be one of the Roman Caesars. Hugo Grotius, one of the fathers of rationalism, likewise later Spitta and J. Weiss, thought of Caligula, who commanded that a colossal statue of himself be erected in the temple at Jerusalem. Wetstein thought of Titus, who caused sacrifices to be brought to the Temple. Nero has been particularly favored by many interpreters as the "Man of Sin" of 2 Thess. 2; we name only F. C. Baur, the founder of the Tuebingen School, the Catholic Doellinger, and more recent exegetes, such as Weiszsaecker, Holtzmann, Schmiedel. Other modern exegetes, as Hilgenfeld and Pfeleiderer, suggest an ancient heretic; Hammond thought directly of Simon the sorcerer and the gnostics, whose leader he is supposed to have been; Clericus named the leader of the rioting Jews, Simon the son of Gioras, of whose depravity Josephus tells; Whitby regarded the entire Jewish people as the Antichrist; Schoettgen thought of the Pharisees and the rabbis; Harduin surmised the high priest Ananias, who caused Paul to be struck in the mouth. (Acts 23:2.) This great diversity of opinions in itself proves the fallacy of the historical view. This interpretation also overlooks altogether that, according to the specific words of the text, the Antichrist will be seated in the temple of God, in the Church, "not in the hog stable," as Luther on one occasion remarks sarcastically. Communism, Stalinism, Nazism, etc., are not seated in the church, and Modernism does not perform miracles but rather denies the possibility of miracles.

Finally, the fourth, the so-called chiliastic interpretation, needs to be discussed. The chief advocates of that view are Olshausen, v. Hofmann, Luthardt, Baumgarten, v. Gerlach, Thiersch, v. Oettingen, Auberlen, Riggenbach, and others. Here in America this view was formerly defended by members of the Iowa Synod. All of these interpreters find antichristian features in the apostasy beginning in apostolic times and continuing to our day, also more or less in the Papacy. But this falling away will culminate towards the end of the world in a particularly wicked enemy of God, the great Antichrist. Riggenbach writes, "Every historical character has been prepared in a thousandfold manner and appears, when

he appears, as a son of his particular age; and again the trend of the times will gain undisputed mastery only when some man, perceiving clearly the climactic implications of the spirit of the times, boldly gives expression to the ideas fermenting, only half understood, in a thousand minds, and thus impresses upon his age its distinctive mark and seal." (Quoted by Ferd. Philippi in the treatise referred to above, p. 43.) Luthardt says: "The earlier teachers of our Church interpreted this prophecy of the Antichrist as referring to the Pope and the position he has occupied in Christendom. And it must be admitted that the Papacy, despite all the piety of a few individual representatives, is an anti-Christian institution, concerning which it is still too early to say whether it will be overpowered or whether it will grow in influence. Perhaps the latter is the more probable. Even so it is improper to call the Pope the Antichrist. Doing so would be an injustice to the Pope and a departure from the words of the apostle. For it must be granted that the Papacy has retained the essentials of Christian truth and it is possible for adherents and defenders of the same to be saved, even though they are exposed to grave spiritual perils. Moreover, it is now generally [?] acknowledged that the apostle is not speaking of a number of persons but rather of one person to appear at the end of history. It is true that the Popes have frequently assumed names of honor to which only God and Christ are entitled, and thus they have been guilty of blasphemy. Men have called them God and Lord, and statements and prophecies of Scripture have been applied to them that actually apply to Christ, for example, Is. 28:16; Ps. 72:11; Matt. 28:18; Rev. 5:5; but that is still a far cry from the complete usurpation of the place of God and Christ and from the demand to be worshiped as God, both of which are predicated of the Antichrist. No less is it true that the future here foretold has its beginning in the present, in a godless mode of thinking and philosophy of life coupled with a deification of the creature, a tendency which will in ever increasing measure strive with Christianity for ultimate supremacy. But that surely is no more than a preparation for the extreme and final godlessness. The words of the apostle suggest rather than that they actually teach. Although they are clear enough if only we make a thorough study of them, we would rather have them less brief, so that we might be all the more sure of their meaning, also in details. The reason for their brevity is the fact that when Paul had been with the Thessalonians, he had instructed them orally and adequately on that subject. He refers to such oral instruction in v. 5: 'Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?'" (*The Doctrine Concerning the Last Things*, pp. 155, 156.)

Kliefoth says: "The question is: Is the Pope at Rome the

Antichrist? or, to define the question correctly: The question is not whether antichrists are to be found within the Papacy and the Roman Church as such, in its doctrine, in its organization, in its worship, etc.—to that question every Lutheran would have to answer in the affirmative, since every essential error in doctrine is an Antichristian element. Nor is this the question whether any one individual, in the past or in the future, might be the Antichrist, an assertion which has never yet been made. But this is the question, whether in the succession of Roman Popes, whether in the Papacy and its rule over the Roman Church, whether in this institution those manifestations have become, and will continue to become, historical realities which Daniel, chap. 7, designates as the 'little horn,' and 9:26 as the $\text{מַלְאָכִים הַקְּטָנִים}$; which 1 John 2:18 calls 'the Antichrist'; which Paul describes in 2 Thess. 2:3-12; which Rev. 9:11 presents as the 'Απολλύων and 11:7 and 13:1 ff. as the beast out of the abyss, and 19:20 as being thrown into the lake of fire. . . . In spite of what we have said at the beginning of this study, it will not be superfluous to add this concluding remark: when now, for reasons mentioned above, we contest the claim that the Papacy is the Antichrist of prophecy, the other question, a question by itself, whether, and what, and how much of, the Papacy is antichristian, is in no wise touched upon. Whatever our confessional writings and our older dogmatists regarded as antichristian in the Papacy and for that reason rejected, we regard and reject in like manner. Only this is our claim, regardless of how many antichristian features the Papacy reveals, in the light of prophecy, finally another will come who will surpass those antichristian features." (*Christliche Eschatologie*, pp. 217, 224.)

These chiliastic interpreters for the most part suppose the Antichrist to be an earthly ruler. Hofmann speaks of an "*Antiochus redivivus*," Olshausen thought of an incarnation of Satan. When Napoleon I appeared, many believed him to be the Antichrist. Dr. J. A. Seiss of Philadelphia in his day regarded Napoleon III as the Antichrist. In times of great excitement, as for example, in times of world wars, when many will turn to the Scripture, especially to the apocalyptic chapters and books in the hope of finding there a foundation for their hopes and fears, almost every person of prominence is identified as the Antichrist.

Which of these interpretations is the correct one, which of them agrees best with the text and history? If only we will note carefully every word, all uncertainty as to their meaning disappears. The Antichrist cannot be an individual, since the first traces of his activity date back to apostolic times, 2 Thess. 2:7, and he will continue until the return of Christ, v. 8. Thus Calov, the able Lutheran exegete of the 17th century, remarks correctly in his *Biblia*

Illustrata: "durat ille homo peccati usque ad diem extremi iudicii, quod de uno individuo dici nequit." Either the Antichrist is a collective concept or Paul was totally in error or the Epistle is not genuine. It is objected that the various expressions of the text must necessarily refer to individuals: man of sin, son of perdition, that wicked, etc. But all these expressions may also be understood collectively. In Scripture we find a vast array of analogous expressions. We need only to recall the terms occurring again and again in the Psalms: "the righteous one," "the wicked one," "the enemy," "the adversary," or the expression so frequently used by the prophets: "daughter of Zion," or in the dissertations of the Lord: "the hireling," "the wolf." We might compare passages like Matt. 22:21; "Render, therefore, unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Not Julius Caesar, but any government is meant.) Incidentally, this last passage sheds light on the change from the masculine ὁ κατέχων to the neuter τὸ κατέχον (Caesar-government). Cp. also John 19:12; Acts 25:8, 10, 11, 12. Matt. 12:35 might be used for comparison: "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things"; also John 5:43: "I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive"; likewise 2 Tim. 3:17: "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." In these passages the expressions which in most instances are preceded by the definite article do not refer to a specific individual, but are to be understood collectively. We might add that the very section under consideration suggests the collective interpretation by an analogy. We have seen that in 2 Thess. 2:6, 7 the masculine and the neuter, ὁ κατέχων, "he who letteth," and τὸ κατέχον, "what withholdeth," a person and a system, an order, are used interchangeably. All exegetes agree that by both expressions the same thing is meant. Then certainly we are equally justified in accepting as collective concepts the expressions "man of sin," "son of perdition," "who opposeth," and "that wicked," since they are used interchangeably with the abstract neuter, impersonal terms, "falling away," ἀποστασία, and "iniquity," ἀνομία, which evidently designate the same phenomenon. Finally, as we have seen, v. 8 plainly refers to Is. 11:4. The words "Whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming" are but a free rendition of the Old Testament words: the Messiah "shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked." It is plain that the wicked one referred to by Isaiah is not some specific individual, but a collective personality, a generic term; hence this

is the most natural interpretation of Paul's adaptation of the prophetic words to the Antichrist. If, finally, we ask why Paul chose this manner of expressing himself—which has caused so much misunderstanding—that question, too, can be answered. Repeatedly we have seen that Paul bases his portrayal and his expressions on Dan. 7—11. There Daniel first describes Antiochus Epiphanus as a type of the Antichrist, and in close connection with this description he adds a prophecy of the Antichrist himself, chap. 12. Borrowing from that analogy, Paul here also speaks of the Antichrist as of one person.

The fact is that in the Pope and his adherents we find all the earmarks of the Antichrist, all the "*notae antichristi*," as our fathers used to say. We need only think of the claim of the Pope that he has the right to ignore all divine and human authority; of his forbidding the use of the Bible; of his passionate lust for temporal power and authority up to the point of claiming infallibility; of his repeal of divine commandments and the imposition of human commandments (celibacy). He permits what God has forbidden and forbids what God permits. Not only does he take it upon himself to prescribe the manner of divine worship or to formulate articles of faith, but he even makes salvation dependent on accepting his divine authority. We recall his condemnation and anathematizing of the central doctrine of Christianity, justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith. He makes himself God, accepts and demands divine honor and worship, he is an anti-God and Antichrist. Scripture passages which refer to Christ (Is. 28:16; Ps. 72:11; Matt. 28:18; Rev. 5:5) he applies to himself. We recall his tyranny over the Church, the temple of God, his lying wonders in ancient and modern times, his fraud with regard to relics, his stigmatizations (Lourdes, Louise Lateau). Some Popes were charged with sorcery. Although a mere man, the Pope assumes the highest authority, not only on earth, but also in heaven, by indulgences, canonization, transubstantiation, etc. To expatiate on these and other statements in detail and cite historical proof for each one would be a major assignment in itself. Some valuable material is to be found in the recent book of C. B. Gohdes: *Does the Modern Papacy Require a New Evaluation?* One point, however, should be mentioned, namely, that undercurrents presaging the coming of the Antichrist were in evidence already in apostolic times, the "*semina erroris et ambitionis*," particularly with reference to lust for power. We recall Paul's warning to the elders of Ephesus: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock," Acts 20:29; Peter's warning: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by con-

straint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock," 1 Pet. 5:2, 3; and in connection with the latter the testimony of the First Epistle of Clement, dating back as far as the first century (I, 44): "Our apostles recognized through our Lord Jesus Christ that quarrelings would arise over the office of the bishop." A detailed account of the gradual rise and later development of Popery will fully substantiate the truth of Luther's statement in the Smalcald Articles (quoted above): "The marks (all the vices) of the Antichrist plainly agree with the kingdom of the Pope and his adherents."

It will be well to add a few words regarding Luther's position. It is Luther to whom the Church is indebted for the correct appraisal of the Antichrist and his exposure and unmasking. It is very interesting and significant that Luther, as time went on, gradually saw the facts more clearly and expressed himself more definitely, as the following quotations show. As early as December 11, 1518, Luther wrote to a friend, W. Link: "I wish to send you my humble observations that you may judge whether I am right in suspecting that the true Antichrist, as portrayed by Paul, is the one who rules at the court of Rome; that he is today more vicious than the Turk, I believe I am able to prove" (St. Louis Edition, XV:2430). These suspicions soon grew into certainties, but for some time he was reluctant to express himself publicly. Instead, he whispers his thoughts to his confidential friend Spalatin in a letter dated February 13, 1519, in which he writes: "I am also examining the decretal of the Popes in preparation for my debate, and (I am whispering this into your ear) I do not know whether the Pope is not the Antichrist or his apostle, so shamefully (I am telling you the truth) does he pervert Christ and crucify Him in his decretals." (XXIa:156.) In the resolutions for the Leipzig Debate, which he completed August 15, 1519, he goes a step farther when he says: "If the Pope claims the sole authority to interpret Scripture, then he is worse than Lucifer and all heretics." But all the while his utterances are still conditional, and even in the early months of the year 1520 he is still reluctant and uses the hypothetical form: "If the Pope . . . then he is the Antichrist." In February, 1520, when he received the treatise on the spurious donation of Constantine, written by Laurentius Valla, published by Ulrich von Hutten, Luther expressed his reaction to the contents in the following words to Spalatin (XXa:234): "I am in such anguish that almost I do no longer doubt that the Pope is the real Antichrist, whom, according to universal opinion, the world is expecting, so accurately everything that he lives, that he does, that he speaks, that he orders, agrees to this view." A short while later he again

expresses himself with great caution, proving that he did not proceed rashly and without forethought in this whole matter. In replying to the book of Prierias he says: "If this sentiment prevails in Rome and if that is being taught with the knowledge of the Pope and the cardinals (which I hope is not the case), then I must herewith express myself freely and openly that the Antichrist is seated in the temple of God and that he rules in yonder purple-colored Babylon in Rome and that the Roman *curia* is the synagog of Satan." (XXa:184.) Soon thereafter, however, he published the two writings "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate" (X:266) and "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (XIX:4), in which he identifies the Papacy directly, without "ifs" or "buts," as the Antichrist, and in a letter dated August 18, 1520, addressed to the Augustinian Vicar John Lang, he confesses with regard to the first of the two books just mentioned: "Here in Wittenberg we are convinced that the Papacy is the seat of the true and real Antichrist, and we believe that, for the sake of the salvation of souls, we are permitted to take every possible action against his deception and villainy. For myself, I declare that I owe the Pope no other obedience than that which I owe the real Antichrist." (XV:1638, 1639.) For that reason, from that time on, he repeatedly expressed the conviction that Judgment Day would soon occur. His certainty that the Pope was the Antichrist became forever unshakable when the papal bull of excommunication was delivered to him. Then he wrote at once to Spalatin under date of October 11, 1520: "Now I am much freer, since I have finally become certain that the Pope is the Antichrist and has become manifest as the seat of Satan." (XV:2463, 2464.) When in the beginning of November of that same year he issued his reply "Against the Bull of the Antichrist," he gave that treatise the title "*Adversus Execrabilem Antichristi Bullam*" and concluded with the words: "If the Pope will not revoke this bull and condemn it and in addition punish Dr. Eck and his associates, the followers of that bull, no one need doubt that the Pope is God's enemy, the persecutor of Christ, the disturber of Christianity, and the real Antichrist." (XV:1475.)

From that time on the term "Antichrist" for the Pope becomes Luther's slogan. When shortly thereafter the Reformer burned the bull of excommunication and justified that burning in a special publication, "Why the Books of the Pope and His Disciples Have been Burned by Dr. Martin Luther" (XV:1619), no trace of any "ifs" or "buts" appeared, but throughout the entire book this thought was stressed with all clearness: the Pope, not Leo X, not some other Pope, no, the institution, the Papacy in itself is the "abomination and stench to which Christ refers Matt. 24:15 and also St. Paul."

(XV:1627.) In the beginning of the year 1521, therefore, he asks all booksellers and readers of his early books to burn his earlier writings on indulgences since at that time he had not yet known that the Pope was the Antichrist. Luther continued to hold to this conviction to the very last, and to prove that would simply require to copy the passages from Luther's writings. That he calls the Pope the real Antichrist in the Smalcald Articles, twice referring to 2 Thess. 2, is universally known (*Triglotta*, 474, 514). No expression is too strong for him. The Pope is to him more dangerous than the Turk, yes, a very devil in disguise. Accordingly, when in the year 1545, in his publication "Against the Papacy at Rome Instituted by the Devil," he breaks with the Pope, he writes: "Thank God, no good Christian can now believe differently than that the Pope is not and cannot be the head of the Christian Church nor the representative of God or Christ, but that he is the head of the accursed church of the worst knaves on earth, the representative of the devil, an enemy of God, an adversary of Christ and disturber of the Church of Christ, a teacher of all lies, blasphemy, and idolatry; an archthief and robber of churches, of the power of the keys, of all possessions both of the Church and of earthly lords; a murderer of kings, an instigator of all manner of bloodshed, a pander above all dealers in prostitution and immorality, also of that which dare not be mentioned; an Antichrist, a man of sin and son of perdition, a real *Baerwolf* [Werewolf, *λυκάνθρωπος* = manwolf, monster]. Whoever is unwilling to believe it, let him perish with his god, the Pope. As a called teacher and preacher in the Church of Christ, obligated to speak the truth, I have herewith done my part. He that wants to stink let him stink, he that wants to be lost let him be lost; his blood be upon his own head" (XVII:1114).*) *The Lutheran Church Quarterly* (October 1937, p. 414) aptly remarks: "The unbounded rage of *Das Papsttum zu Rom vom Teufel gestiftet* did not arise from any personal hatred or from mere indignation at the attitude of the princes of the Church, but it sprang from the conviction that here was an anti-Christian principle which endangered his [Luther's] own salvation, which would rob him of the certainty of his faith, which attacked his very soul. In every case it was a life question."

*) Luther's writings, we need hardly state, abound in passages in which he uses the term "antichrist" in a wider sense. He says, "The Pope with the Turk" is the Antichrist, "the true Antichrist." He explains this by saying that the Turk, like the Pope, rejects Christ as the Savior. Elsewhere he says that "the Turk is not such an Antichrist as the Pope." No one who has read Luther is unfamiliar with this grouping of the two antichristian powers—nor, let it be added, with his identification of Man of Sin and the Papacy in the specific sense.

And why is the Pope the Antichrist? On what does Luther base that claim in the Smalcald Articles? He recites not a long list of external and historical facts, although occasionally he makes use also of this kind of evidence; nor does he quote chiefly the Revelation of St. John; no, Luther turns to the Gospel and concludes: The Gospel teaches that we are to be saved alone through Christ and by faith. This doctrine the Pope will not tolerate but, posing as Christ's representative, denies salvation to Christians unless they obey his commandments. That is the worst, the most diabolical, the most antichristian and ungodly wickedness of which a man can be capable, to make his commandments the determining factor in man's salvation. That is the greatest blasphemy of Christ and the Gospel; and that is exactly what the Pope does, and for that reason the Pope is the Antichrist and the worst of all of Christ's enemies.

Now to return from this excursus to a final difficulty in 2 Thess. 2:6,7, namely, to the question who is meant by *ὁ κατέχων* or *τὸ κατέχον*. These terms also have been interpreted variously. According to the text they evidently denote a power which can be thought of in the masculine as well as in the neuter. Exegetes have thought of Paul himself with his intercession, or of the college of apostles (Zwingli), or of the office of the ministry as such, or of Christ, the good Shepherd (Hengstenberg), or of the proclamation of the Gospel (Calvin), or of the angels, or of the Christians of that day, or of the spirit of true nationalism, by which the spirit out of the abyss was held back (v. Hofmann and Luthardt), and various other interpretations. It is readily seen that all such views fail to do justice to the text. In our opinion only two interpretations come into serious consideration for a possible choice. The one is the view that divine omnipotence is meant, which orders and regulates everything, which also hinders and holds back, which alone determines the time and the hour for everything in the world and in the Church, which also determines the appearance as well as the end of the Antichrist. This view would explain perfectly the change from the masculine to the neuter. Divine omnipotence is here personified, just as the Antichristian wickedness is personified. This is the interpretation of Philippi and others. But this view also involves a difficulty. What shall we make of the expression in v. 7 "Only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way"? It would indeed be unusual that God's omnipotence should be spoken of in so obscure and indefinite a manner. And may God's omnipotence and God Himself ever be said to be taken out of the way? For that reason we regard the second interpretation as the *more* fitting and correct. *Τὸ κατέχον*, "what withholdeth," is the Roman Empire with its

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organization and administration of justice, ὁ κατέχων, "he who letteth" is the ruler of that empire, the Roman emperor. As long as ancient Rome ruled the world, there was no room in the world for the spiritual-temporal monarchy of the Antichrist. Ancient Rome must first fall before a new Rome could be built on its ruins. Clearly, Rome was to be the city of the Antichrist. That is foretold by Daniel when in chap. 7 he permits the "little horn" to grow forth out of the fourth world power. That is foretold also by the Book of Revelation, when in chaps. 13 and 14 the city of seven hills, Babylon, is spoken of. This view is found already in the early Church, accepted by such men as Tertullian, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and in recent times particularly by De Wette, Schmiedel, and Th. Zahn. The Roman Empire served as a barrier, for a while at least, to the appearance of the Antichrist; thus it was a *bonum naturae*.

Thus we have considered carefully every term used by St. Paul in this remarkable passage and have found in a short historical investigation that Luther and those that follow him have indeed understood and applied the apostle's words properly and correctly. But we intend to add another chapter to this discussion.

L. FURBRINGER

Verbal Inspiration — a Stumbling-Block to the Jews and Foolishness to the Greeks

(Continued)

Before examining three further objections against Verbal Inspiration, it will be well to pause a while and survey the disaster wrought by the contention of the moderns that the Bible contains a lot of (1) errors, (2) immoralities, and (3) trivialities. Amplifying previous remarks on this subject, we would here present a comprehensive view of the frightful consequences of the denial of Verbal Inspiration. The moderns do untold harm (1) to the Church and (2) to themselves.

In the first place, the moderns would rob the Church, and do rob their disciples, of a great part of the Holy Bible. They ask the Church to discard half of it. Thomas Paine figured that the useless and harmful portions of the Bible would amount to at least that much. The moderns accept his figure. The historical and scientific errors, the unethical episodes and teachings, and the trivialities take up much space in the Bible. More than that, they put the historical and secular matters in general in the uninspired section of Holy Scripture. Recall how they account for the "historical mistakes" and the other "blemishes" of the Bible: when the