

“The Pope is the Very Antichrist”

A Necessary Conviction of the 21st Century Christian

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“The papacy is the very Antichrist!” Martin Luther had no doubts. The Lutheran fathers had no doubts. Confessional Lutherans since the Reformation have held this conviction. In this day and age, can Christians still say that? This paper will address this question, giving testimony from the Scriptures and from history. It will illustrate not only why Christians in the 21st Century can still make this confession, but also why they need to confess it clearly.

I. What the Prophet and Apostles Proclaimed

If a Christian wants answers about a doctrine of the Bible, the first place he should look for his answers is God’s Word. Scripture interprets Scripture. In the Bible, the Lord has revealed all that we need to know on this side of eternity for salvation and life. Where God speaks a Christian listens. We listen with humility knowing that we are neither to add to His Word nor subtract from it (cf. Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19). This truth stands no matter what doctrine a Christian is studying. Go back to the Bible.

Why is it critical to know what the Lord has declared about the Antichrist? Frankly, the Lord has revealed the doctrine concerning the Antichrist for the good of His children not to confuse or frustrate them. An earthly father trains his children to look both ways for traffic before crossing the street because he wants his children to be safe from danger. So our Heavenly Father warns His children about the dangers in this world, even His enemy, the Antichrist. Therefore, this paper will start with what the Lord says through His messengers recognizing that the Lord wants to warn us in clear terms about this enemy, the Antichrist. He had one enemy in mind in specific when He addresses believers on this doctrine.

In the Bible, God talks of enemies of His people, the saints, in various ways. He uses Old Testament nations to represent all ungodly adversaries, as the nation of Edom is so used in the prophets. God did not bring His revelation of the Antichrist only to the New Testament believers. He also revealed it to His people in the time of the prophets. The prophet Daniel had many visions. Some were for the days soon to come, and some were of times in the distant future. He was given visions of the fall of the Babylonian Empire to the Medes and Persians. He also saw the Greek conquests and the rise of the Roman Empire and the offspring of that empire, the Antichrist. He records this in his terrifying, fourth vision of the beasts:

After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully. As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were

opened. Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.) (Dan 7:7-12)

Then an angel from the Lord interprets the vision for the prophet Daniel.

He gave me this explanation: ‘The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time. But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him. (Dan 7:23-27 NIV)

Note the message of the angel. There are five distinctions made about the Antichrist made here: 1) he comes from the last beast, Rome; 2) he will speak contrary to and blasphemously against the Lord; 3) he will attack believers; 4) he will try to change set times and laws; and 5) believers will fall under his false rule for the “time, times and half a time”, that is until the Ancient of Days returns for judgment. Keep these marks of the Antichrist in mind, for they will surface later in the New Testament.

In a subsequent vision Daniel sees the “abomination that causes desolation,” when Antiochus Epiphanes would desecrate the Lord’s temple in Jerusalem in 168 B.C. The Lord then uses Antiochus as a type of the Antichrist. Just as prophecy concerning Solomon find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ (cf. 2 Sam. 7:11-16; Matt. 22:42), so prophecy concerning Antiochus elevates above him and points to the Antichrist. Daniel records,

The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him. He will make them rulers over many people and will distribute the land at a price. (Dan. 11:36-39 NIV)

The prophet again shows signs of what the Antichrist will look like: 1) he exalts himself; 2) he blasphemes the Lord; 3) his reign will endure for a given time; 4) he will usurp worldly thrones. This prophecy finds more clarification in the New Testament, when the apostles warn Christians.

Would the believers have understood this doctrine from these visions? By God’s grace, the Lord would make it even clearer in the time of the Apostles, 600 years later. Consider the context of the next reference in the Bible, 2 Thessalonians 2. The apostle Paul was writing to a

church where he had done the ground work. Paul had been with the Thessalonians believers for three Sabbaths (Acts 17:1-2), which means maybe three to four weeks. He started in the synagogue reasoning from the Scriptures. “During that brief period of instruction he had told the Thessalonians about the Antichrist. In other words, this subject was included in what might be called Paul’s ‘basic course in Christianity for new converts’”¹ Christians have recognized the words of the Apostle Paul’s depiction of the Church’s foe in his second letter to the Thessalonians where he reviews his lesson on the Antichrist. Examine the Bible’s clearest portrait of the Lord’s great enemy:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

(2 Thessalonians 2:1-10 NIV)

Professor Kuske draws directly from this chapter and summarizes Paul’s nine points in this chapter concerning the Antichrist and the apostasy:

- 1) The falling away from the truth of salvation would be accompanied by the revelation of the Antichrist, the man of sin.
- 2) The Antichrist would exalt himself so that he would become the equal of God in the hearts of man.
- 3) The opposition to Christ was already at work when Paul wrote these words, but God was holding it back from working openly.
- 4) Eventually God would let it work openly, and this would result in the Antichrist being clearly revealed as an opponent of God.
- 5) With his Word Jesus would overthrow the power of the Antichrist.
- 6) At his second coming Jesus would completely destroy the Antichrist.
- 7) The Antichrist would be successful in bringing about the apostasy, because Satan would support him with miracles to mislead many.

¹ Professor Wilbert Gawrisch, “Lecture IV: Antichrists and Antichrist” Eschatological Prophecies and Current Misinterpretations: Five Lectures on the End-Times. (Reprint from Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, vol. 85, #2. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989: 55-72) 60.

- 8) Satan would also use his power to lead the Antichrist's followers to join the man of sin in denying the truth of salvation.
- 9) Because of their denial of the truth, God would harden the Antichrist's followers in the delusion that they were on the way to salvation when really they were perishing.²

It is noteworthy that Paul's basic Bible instruction class included the doctrine of the Antichrist, whom Paul calls the "man of lawlessness". Paul did not consider it a light or a trivial doctrine. It was important and significant. Without recognizing the enemy rising within its midst, the Church was going to succumb to the Antichrist and be lead away from the Lord!

Recognizing the enemy was important even to the early Christians. To show the importance, the Lord warned His children one last time. There is one more witness, which the Lord sent His people, the Apostle John. Through him, Christians receive the official title, "Antichrist," for the man of lawlessness. Christians also receive another meaningful vision to assure believers that the Lord is with His children even during the tyranny of the Antichrist.

Almost forty years after the Apostle Paul's letter, the apostle John marked a distinction between the Antichrist and other antichristian powers in his epistles. It is here where portrait of God's enemies gets his historical name Antichrist.

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. (1 John 2:18-22 NIV)

This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (1 John 4:2-3 NIV)

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John 1:7 NIV)

How can we know that the Antichrist to whom John refers is the same as the man of lawlessness? Compare the marks of the man of lawlessness given by Paul with John's marks of the Antichrist, summarized:

He has the spirit that does not confess Jesus; he denies the Father and the Son; and he is a deceiver. Of this Antichrist it is said that he both is coming and that he has already in the world. In other words, he represented a power which was even then in existence, but was also in the process of coming, and the most distinguishing feature of his character is given as the denial of the Father and of the Son, specifically Jesus."³

Understand that the Apostle was writing to the believers in Asia Minor, where the Apostle Paul had carried out much of his ministry. When John wrote, "Dear children, this is the

² David P. Kuske, Thessalonians. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1984) 90.

³ P.E. Kretzmann, The Pope is the very Antichrist. pamphlet pp. 424-435. (unknown publisher and unknown date) 426.

last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming,” he was evoking the careful instruction that Paul and the other evangelists had given them on the Antichrist. Also, John was not dwelling on the doctrine of the Antichrist, but using that doctrine to help the Christians see the antichristian powers at work, which were not the Antichrist.

John does address the Antichrist. He does so more fully in the book of Revelation. As in Daniel, the Lord shows his children the future through a vision. In chapter thirteen, the Lord gives the Church a vision of two beasts that are working for Satan. The first, the beast out of the sea has the markings of secular powers which attack the church. The second beast is described in this way:

Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like the Lamb, but he spoke like the dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666. (Revelation 13:11-18, NIV; underlined translation changed)

The symbolism in the vision compliments the other passages of Scripture that refer to the Antichrist. In verse eleven, the NIV chose to translate, “like a lamb... like a dragon” since the original text does not have an article. However, a better translation is listed above, as Professor Becker explains,

Both the word “lamb” and “dragon” are anarthrous, that is, they have no article... The absence of the article in Greek does not always call for an indefinite article in English (Greek has no indefinite article). The absence of the article sometimes indicates that a word is being treated as a proper name. It would be possible to view the absence of the article here in this way, especially because in Revelation the word “lamb” is always a name for Jesus and the word “dragon” is always a name for the devil.⁴

This enemy sets himself up to be like Christ, if not Christ himself. Yet his message is not from Christ. He speaks like the devil. His destruction of the saints is even worse than secular persecution for “false doctrine robs men of life in a far higher sense than the murderous persecutions carried on by the beast from the sea. Persecution may deprive God’s children of physical life but false doctrine robs men of spiritual and eternal life.”⁵

II. What Faithful Theologians Have Maintained

How have Christians throughout the ages determined about this prophesied Antichrist? As the apostasy began to take hold, certain theologians weak in their understanding of what the

⁴ Professor Siegbert Becker, Revelation: The Distant Triumph Song. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1985) 205-206.

⁵ Becker, 209.

Bible actually said misapplied the doctrine. When the doctrine of justification was perverted, the gospel scarce could shed light on subsequent teachings of the Bible. The church was not completely without whispers of the truth however. Theodore Letis recounts, “While the medieval view reflected the early patristic varieties of Antichrist, either as a demonic influenced Jewish false prophet or a despotic secular tyrant, there was also a clear line of those identifying Antichrist as a pope.”⁶ Luther was not the first to recognize the Pope as the Antichrist. Notably two forerunners of the Reformation, John Wycliffe and John Huss, had emphatically pointed to the Roman pontiff when speaking of the Antichrist. “The major difference between the forerunners of the Reformation and the reformers themselves was that for the former, it was the immorality of the pope that primarily qualified him as the Antichrist, while for the reformers it was primarily his teaching that revealed his true nature.”⁷

The Lord did however choose Luther to give the “most definitive historical and exegetical arguments to this end.”⁸ The Reformers recognized the marks of the Antichrist prophesied in the Bible finding an exact match in the papacy. Reading through the Lutheran confessions, one can detect no hesitancy to apply Scripture to history and proclaim that the Antichrist has been revealed. In 1531, the issue was not the lifestyle of the papacy but the denial that one is justified by grace alone through faith, as is apparent in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession,

Thus the Papacy also will be a part of the kingdom of Antichrist if it thus defends human services as justifying. For the honor is taken away from Christ when they teach that we are not justified gratuitously by faith, for Christ’s sake, but by such services; especially when they teach that such services are not only useful for justification, but are also necessary...⁹

In 1537, the Smalcald Articles no longer left it an open question. Without hesitancy, the reformers wrote against the papacy as the Antichrist because of its doctrine,

This teaching (that the pope is the head of the Church) shows forcefully that the Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which, nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God.

This is, properly speaking to exalt himself above all that is called God as Paul says, 2 Thes. 2, 4. Even the Turks or the Tartars, great enemies of Christians as they are, do not do this, but they allow whoever wishes to believe in Christ, and take bodily tribute and obedience from Christians.

The Pope, however, prohibits this faith, saying that to be saved a person must obey him. This we are unwilling to do, even though on this account we must die in God’s name.

This all proceeds from the fact that the Pope has wished to be called the supreme head of the Christian Church by divine right. Accordingly he had to make himself equal and superior to Christ, and had to cause himself to be proclaimed the head and then the lord of the Church, and

⁶ Theodore P. Letis A Brief Sketch of the Protestant View of the Antichrist. i-xxii. (introduction to “Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil” by Martin Luther. Reprint from Fort Wayne, Indiana.) ii.

⁷ Letis, iii- iv.

⁸ Letis, i.

⁹ F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau, eds., Apology of the Augsburg Confession, art. XV, par. 18, Concordia Triglotta. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1921) 319.

finally of the whole world, and simply God on earth, until he has dared to issue commands even to the angels in heaven.

And when we distinguish the Pope's teaching from, or measure and hold it against, Holy Scripture, it is found [it appears plainly] that the Pope's teaching, where it is best, has been taken from the imperial and heathen law and treats of political matters and decisions or rights, as the Decretals show; furthermore, it teaches of ceremonies concerning churches, garments, food, persons and [similar] puerile, theatrical and comical things without measure, but in all these things nothing at all of Christ, faith, and the commandments of God. Lastly, it is nothing else than the devil himself, because above and against God he urges [and disseminates] his [papal] falsehoods concerning masses, purgatory, the monastic life, one's own works and [fictitious] divine worship (for this is the very Papacy [upon each of which the Papacy is altogether founded and is standing]), and condemns, murders and tortures all Christians who do not exalt and honor these abominations [of the Pope] above all things. Therefore, just as little as we can worship the devil himself as Lord and God, we can endure his apostle, the Pope, or Antichrist, in his rule as head or lord. For to lie and to kill, and to destroy body and soul eternally, that is wherein his papal government really consists, as I have very clearly shown in many books.¹⁰

Consistently, the reformers denied that the Pope was part of Christendom. They call him an enemy of the Church, but not just any enemy. In the treatise, *Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, they saw in the papacy the fulfillment of what the prophets and apostles had proclaimed about the archenemy of the Church, the Antichrist,

Now, it is manifest that the Roman pontiffs, with their adherents, defend [and practice] godless doctrines and godless services. And the marks [all the vices] of Antichrist plainly agree with the kingdom of the Pope and his adherents. For Paul, in describing Antichrist to the Thessalonians, calls him 2 Thess. 2, 3: an adversary of Christ, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God. He speaks therefore of one ruling in the Church, not of heathen kings, and he calls this one the adversary of Christ, because he will devise doctrine conflicting with the Gospel, and will assume to himself divine authority.¹¹

Even to the end of his life Luther stuck to his guns that the papacy was the very Antichrist. In 1545, the year before his death, Luther wrote one last treatise against the papacy, entitled, *Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil*. He made clear that his writing against the papacy was not a personal vendetta. It was a clear confession of faith concerning what the Scriptures said. In humility he wrote a lasting testimony which the faithful Lutheran reformers clung to wholeheartedly,

No man can believe what an abomination the papacy is. A Christian does not have to be of low intelligence, either, to recognize it. God himself must deride him in the hellish fire, and our Lord Christ, St. Paul says in II Thessalonians 2[:8], "will slay him with the

¹⁰ F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau, eds., *Smalcald Articles*, part II, article IV, *Concordia Triglotta*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1921) 475.

¹¹ F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau, eds., *Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, par. 39, *Concordia Triglotta*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1921) 515.

breath of his mouth and destroy him by his glorious coming.” I only deride, with my weak derision, so that those who now live and those who will come after us should know what I have thought of the pope, the damned Antichrist, and so that whoever wishes to be a Christian may be warned against such an abomination.¹²

By God’s grace, the subsequent generations followed Luther’s lead and looked into what the Bible had to say about the Antichrist. Faithful teachers passed on the teaching drawn from scripture in an ordered form, called dogmatics. These teachers, or dogmaticians, reaffirmed again and again that the Lord had revealed the papacy as the Antichrist. Dogmaticians like Baier, Walther and Hoenecke, consistently pointed to the marks of the Antichrist in Scripture and found fulfillment only in the papacy. In defense of this faith-borne judgment, Professor Francis Pieper, a confessional Missouri Synod dogmatician, formulated this statement,

Does the doctrine that the Pope is the Antichrist belong to the “fundamental articles” of the Christian faith? It certainly does not, for a person is a Christian solely through his knowledge of Christ and not his knowledge of Antichrist... But every teacher in the Christian Church who is familiar with the historical phenomenon called the Papacy and still does not recognize in this Papacy the Antichrist prophesied in 2 Thessalonians 2 is weak in Christian Theology.¹³

In this way, the Lord has graciously preserved a doctrine that has been denied by many today, among whom are many who claim to be Lutheran. Confessional Lutherans today still hold unwavering that the papacy has been and will continue to be the great Antichrist of which Scripture warns. Pastor W. F. Schink gave an essay in 1957 that upheld the doctrine of the Antichrist, in which he stated, “A Lutheran preacher should know, believe, and teach this article or frankly confess that he no longer subscribes to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.”

Without a doubt, Professor Gawrisch wrote in a 1974 essay, “That the pope is the very Antichrist,” as we confess with Luther in the Smalcald Articles, is no mere historical judgment. Neither is it an open question. It is an article of faith. As the works which Jesus performed served to identify him as the promised Christ (Mt. 11”2-5) so the works and words of the papacy serve to identify it as the expected Antichrist.¹⁴

In 1997, the Committee on Inter-Church Relations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod upheld this doctrine one hundred percent,

Therefore on the basis of a renewed study of the pertinent Scriptures we reaffirm the statement of the Lutheran Confessions, that “the Pope is the very Antichrist”, especially since he anathematizes the doctrine of the justification by faith alone and sets himself up as the infallible head of the Church...We make this confession in the confidence of faith... We reject the idea that the teaching that the Papacy is the Antichrist rests on a merely human interpretation of history or is an open question. We hold rather that this teaching rests on the revelation of God in Scripture which finds its fulfillment in history. The Holy

¹² Martin Luther, *Against the Roman Papacy, an Institution of the Devil*. Trans. Eric W. Gritsch. (Reprint from Fort Wayne, Indiana. 1987) 273-274.

¹³ Dr. Francis Pieper, *The Antichrist*. Christian Dogmatics. Trans. Dr. Theodore Engelder. vol. 3. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950) 469.

¹⁴ Gawrisch, 62.

Spirit reveals this fulfillment to the eyes of faith. Since Scripture teaches that the Antichrist would be revealed and gives the marks by which the Antichrist is to be recognized (2 Th 2:6,8), and since the prophecy has been clearly fulfilled in the history and development of the Roman Papacy, it is Scripture which reveals that the Papacy is the Antichrist.¹⁵

A legacy of proclaim the truth of this doctrine has been revealed by the Lord from Luther's time until the present day to those who in faith sought the answers which Scripture itself gave. Now the question is what will the next generation do with this doctrine?

III. What We Must Believe and Declare

There are many Lutherans today that are embarrassed that the Lutheran heritage proclaims the papacy to be the Antichrist. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has actually sought to bridge the gap between Lutheranism and Catholicism with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. This action really should not be surprising considering how they deny Scripture's inerrancy and authority. The danger of the Antichrist is very real in their midst. For wherever the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith is not defended against the work-righteousness of Rome, Christians are not giving a clear testimony of the gospel. The leaders in this attempt for union have forsaken their first love. The members are left only to wonder what has changed. Suffice it to say, Rome's doctrine has not changed.

There are many other Lutherans who simply have never had thorough training in what Scripture says about the Antichrist. They may know that Luther called the Pope the Antichrist and perhaps dismiss Luther as being over-dramatic. But they have not looked for the answer themselves in Scripture. They too are in danger. They have not grappled with this doctrine which Scripture lays out. The warning was significant then. It is significant now. The Antichrist is dangerous. The Lutheran forefathers wrote that all Christians should wrestle with what Scripture says about the Antichrist,

This being the case, all Christians ought to beware of becoming partakers of the godless doctrine, blasphemies, and unjust cruelty of the Pope. On this account they ought to desert and execrate the Pope with his adherents as the kingdom of Antichrist; just as Christ has commanded, Matt. 7, 15: Beware of false prophets. And Paul commands that godless teachers should be avoided and execrated as cursed, Gal. 1, 8; Titus 3, 10. And he says, 2 Cor. 6, 14: Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what communion hath light with darkness?¹⁶

Anytime that the doctrine of justification is scandalized, the very basis of Christian faith is blurred. The gift of salvation is made a debt. The blood of Christ is trampled underfoot. Christian witness necessitates understanding what really is at stake. Christian faith is really standing up for no matter the earthly cost.

When justification is lost, salvation is lost. The Antichrist is deadly because he removes from his followers the only way of salvation, justification by grace alone, through faith. The warning of the Lutheran reformers still rings true, "the doctrine of the Pope conflicts in many

¹⁵ Commission on Inter-church Relations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Doctrinal Statement of the WELS. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997) 22-23 .

¹⁶ Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, par. 41, 517.

ways with the Gospel.”¹⁷ The gospel brings spiritual and eternal life. The Pope brings spiritual and eternal death. The Holy Spirit makes people sons of God through the gospel. The doctrines of the pope make people twice as much a son of hell (cf. Mt. 23:15).

The Papacy is the Antichrist! This must be every Christian’s proclamation, today too. Certainly, they do not need to believe it for salvation. But where the Word of God has spoken, Christians cannot remain silent. The consequences would be devastating.

Pastor Schink exhorted,

If we value the saving doctrine of the vicarious atonement through the blood of Jesus Christ, the God-man, in these latter days of the world, we shall do well to keep the facts concerning the Antichrist well in mind, so that we may give heed to the Prayer of Luther: “O God, fill us with hatred of the papacy”, the hatred being indeed not against him as an individual, but against him as the representative of the system of Romanism, as the collective head of an organization of such a pernicious nature that he, and he alone, is rightly called the Antichrist.¹⁸

Conclusion: The main message of the Bible is clear: Christ is the Savior. The Lord charges believers, “Only hold on to what you have until I come.” (Rev 2:25 NIV) The Lord also warns believers about the dangers that threaten faith, including the Antichrist, so that they might watch out for Satan’s pitfalls. The teaching of Scripture concerning the Antichrist, like all doctrines of Scripture, is a matter of faith. The Christian in whom the Spirit works acceptance of this truth will be equipped to fend off the Satanic lies of the Antichrist and will not fall into his snare (2 Thes. 2:8-10). May the Lord equip each of His saints in this century with a humble heart to accept the true doctrine that Papacy is the very Antichrist.

“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb...

“Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” (Rev. 7)

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¹⁷ Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope, par. 40, 515-517.

¹⁸ Schink, 602.

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