

Dr. Deindoerfer, 1904: "Luther and our old dogmaticians held the opinion that the 'great apostasy' (prophesied in 2 Thess. 2 and Rev. 13-17) had reached its complete development in the Roman papacy and that the Pope, who is at the head of the Roman Church and claims to be the visible vicegerent of Christ, was the prophesied Antichrist. This opinion (Urteil) has also found expression in the Confessions of our church.... Yet, in modern times many Lutheran preachers and Christians entertain *doubt and uncertainty* on the question, whether we already had and have the prophesied '*great apostasy*' in the *papacy* and the '*great Antichrist*' in the *Roman Pope* and, therefore, need not expect a more complete fulfillment of the respective prophecies. They think, that so many details of these prophecies, *especially the worst and most terrible ones*, cannot be shown to be present in the papacy and the Pope.... In the Roman papacy our (Iowa) Synod sees an abominable apostasy from true Christianity and is willing to combat it earnestly; but it desires to let it still be an 'Open Question'; may not the *final and complete* fulfillment of that which the Scripture has prophesied concerning the Antichrist, *still be in the future*? Those who have drawn the conviction from Scripture that the *final* fulfillment of these prophecies is *still to be expected*, shall be accorded ~~the same~~ freedom of opinion in the church as those who hold the conviction that these prophecies already have been fulfilled in the Roman papacy.... The point in question is, after all, only a *human application* of the Biblical doctrine concerning the Antichrist and his actions, which *must be distinguished* from the Biblical doctrine itself." (Lehre und Wehre, 1904, p. 489.490.)

If a person is so constituted that his mind is very imaginative, and if such a person first invents for himself a speculative and phantastic future, contrary to Scriptural revelations about the future, and if he then, afterwards, turns to Scripture in order to find there possible proofs for the speculations, then he will, of course, be sorely disappointed. Such a person may feel inclined to complain that the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, solidly based on Scripture, draw a picture of the future which is incomplete,

because certain *needed traits are missing* in that picture in order to agree with his own speculations. However, such wailing will not at all impress any sober-minded Christian who firmly believes and is satisfied that all the revelations that God intended to give to men, also concerning future things, are stated completely and definitely in His Word. And, especially, concerning the prophesied Antichrist we know that his complete picture is found in plain and clear language in 2 Thess. 2: 3-12, the special *Biblical seat* of this doctrine. And, therefore, we know that all that can be learned concerning the Antichrist from the highly figurative language in Daniel and Revelation of John must be in essential agreement with 2 Thess. 2. If any supposed knowledge concerning the Antichrist (supposedly derived from Daniel and the Revelation of John) is in disagreement with his picture, as drawn in 2 Thess. 2, then we unhesitatingly reject it as mere human phantasy.

In various places, Holy Scripture speaks also of *many other* antichrists as the *Great Antichrist*. To them belong all teachers and leaders among men, within or without the church, who reject and deny Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. To them belong also all who hate, curse and persecute His name, His Gospel, His followers, and His true visible church. Therefore, Mohammed and his successors rightly have been called the "Antichrist" *outside* of the church. But the "Great Antichrist" *within* the church, prophesied in 2 Thess. 2:3-12, is clearly distinguished from these "many antichrists" in 1 John 2:18. Solely he, the "Great Antichrist," tries to take Christ's place on earth; and by his doctrine, his rule, and his example he also causes the Great Apostasy (or falling away) from Christ. And this apostasy is more universal and more horrible than any other that could be imagined, because it has the outward show of a greatly shining piety. This Great Antichrist within the Church, who overshadows all others, even the greatest of the "many antichrists," we *recognize*, according to 2 Thess. 2: 3-12, *in the Pope*. The very essence of the papacy is a falling away from Christ. The Pope claims to be the visible vicegerent of Christ; he uses the name of Christ and all kinds of religious signs and ceremonies, and, nevertheless, he falsifies and suppresses the Gospel

of Christ's free grace and substitutes for it his own way of salvation by good works and human merits.

We have, of course, no objection when the "Open Question" Lutherans acknowledge the *antichristian* character of the Pope and of the papacy, that is as far as this assertion goes, but we find it not sufficient to be in full agreement with the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. We teach, according to Scripture and with our Confessions, that the Pope is the "Great Antichrist" and that the papacy is the "Great Apostasy" which had to arise and develop within the visible church, both of which will remain until the Last Day.

Besides, we find their expectation of another kind of Antichrist, as the real one, inconsistent with what they admit concerning the Pope and the papacy. That Antichrist, for whom they wait, is expected to be a Mighty-one of this world, a political ruler who for a short time will bring all nations under his brutal and cruel power, who will tolerate and encourage all kinds of godlessness and immorality, who will, especially, persecute Christ in everything that belongs to Him and is named after Him, and who will possibly establish a new and outspoken antichristian religion. His rule is usually imagined to be like unto the reign of terror during the revolution in France or like the present rule of the Soviets in Russia, only worse. In short, their Antichrist is supposed to arise and to act as an *undisguised* creature of Satan, who, in conquering the world, will almost succeed in destroying the kingdom of Christ among men. Otherwise, Dr. Deindoerfer, as one of the spokesmen of his synod, could hardly have stated, that "so many details of these prophecies (of their Antichrist), especially, the *worst and most terrible ones*, cannot be shown to be present in the papacy and the Pope." It is quite natural that such as expect a political Antichrist at the end of time should look upon the present widely spread lack of religion in so-called Christian lands as the "Great Apostasy" rather than upon the really more terrible and horrible blasphemous fake-religion of the Pope. We do not deny that the present lack of religion also has been prophesied (Luke 18:8; Matth. 24:37-39),

but we deny that this is the "Great Apostasy" prophesied in 2 Thess. 2:3-12, because the characteristic marks enumerated in both places clearly distinguish them both.

In contradicting the Scripture and the Confessions that the Pope really is the prophesied Antichrist, our opponents state various objections. First, that this doctrine is, after all, only a human application to the prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:3-12 from history, which must be distinguished from the statements expressed in this text. That would be a valid objection, if the prophesied marks and the historical character of the Pope and the papacy were not in such perfect harmony as they are. To deny this, is sheer nonsense. Full historic fulfillment of any definite scriptural prophecy must, undoubtedly, be accepted as a valid doctrinal proof also. The *required* traits of the Antichrist which our opponents *miss* in the Pope-Antichrist are *not prophesied* in 2 Thess. 2, nor elsewhere in Scripture. Similarly as the "Open Question" Lutherans argue at this point, the Jews

of old might have argued even as they did *against* the Lord Jesus Christ, as the promised Messiah: We cannot deny that the prophecies of the Messiah are fulfilled in Jesus; *still, we miss some traits in Him, which, we think, ought to be required in the Messiah* (victory over the Romans and the establishing of a worldly kingdom), and for that reason we will wait for another Messiah, who suits us better. Likewise, because the prophesied and revealed Pope-Antichrist *does not measure up to their dreams*, our opponents ignore the Pope-Antichrist and prefer to wait for one that might possibly better suit their fancies. Secondly, they say that 2 Thess. 2 points to an individual and not to a collective person, and, therefore, it cannot mean the Pope as a collective person. What is the difference between an individual and a collective person? Both are used differently: What is said of an individual applies only to him and to no one else, but what is said of a collective person applies to all persons who one after another fill the same position. One speaks collectively of the Jewish highpriest, King David's line, ~~the German emperor~~, the president of the U. S., the Pope, etc., or their successors, without mentioning their personal name. Scripture often speaks also

of individuals as individuals without giving their names, e.g., 1 King 13, iff. of an unnamed man of God. And it is exceptional in Scripture that individual names are twice foretold in prophecies, 1 Kings 13:23; and Isaiah 44:28; 45:1. But all the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament speak of the Messiah as an individual without ever giving Him the name of Jesus. But 2 Thess. 2:3-12 clearly speaks of a collective person, because the mystery of iniquity was already active at the time of the Apostles, and it was soon to be revealed in a personal point, the Great Antichrist, who was to continue until Christ's return for judgment. No individual, but only a collective person can live and be active through more than one generation; therefore, the Antichrist must be a collective person, because only such a one can continue unto the Last Day. Thirdly, they mention that the Pope confesses faith in the Holy Trinity and the God-Man Jesus Christ, and many other Bible truths; therefore, he cannot be called "antichristian." The Pope does, indeed, outwardly confess these chief articles of Christian doctrine, but at the same time he nullifies them again by the strong delusions which he forces upon his followers. He confesses the divine Trinity, but cultivates idolatry by the adoration of Mary, and a host of other saints. He admits that the Lord Jesus Christ is the God-Man and the Savior, but at the same time he rejects Him as Mediator and puts the saints and the priests in His place. He teaches the atonement through the sole vicarious satisfaction of Jesus Christ, but at the same time supplants Christ's own sacrifice with the many fictitious sacrifices of his mass, the marketable merits of human saints and the personal good works of penance-doers. Above all, the Pope anathematizes (or utterly curses and condemns) the real heart of the soul-saving Gospel, the sweet doctrine of justification or forgiveness of sins by grace alone through faith, without human good works or merits. (Council of Trent, Sess. VI, Cans. 11. 12. 20.)

Considering all this, one feels almost assured

that no one within the church of the Antichrist could be saved, but, nevertheless, Jesus Christ remains Lord and Savior also within the realm of the Antichrist. The Lord still gathers out of the papacy some of His elect into His real invisible Church through the saving power of His Gospel, deeply veiled as the Gospel is within the Catholic Church.