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The Pope Is the Antichrist –Historical Judgment or Scriptural Truth?

“This teaching forcefully shows that the Pope is the very Antichrist.”¹ Compare this statement of our Lutheran Confessions with the following comment of the Concordia Self-Study Bible: “Lutheran tradition sees the papacy as the ‘man of lawlessness.’ But this tradition must remain a historical judgment, not a scriptural truth. Paul’s ‘letters contain some things that are hard to understand.’”² Then, consider Hendricksen’s opinion: “To call the pope the Antichrist is contrary to all sound exegesis,” and he calls it, “a rather unkind judgment.”³

Is the Lutheran Church being uncharitable by declaring that the pope is the Antichrist? Or is it indeed a Scriptural truth based on sound exegesis? Is 2 Thessalonians 2 one of those “hard things to understand,” so that the best we can say is that we Lutherans have a tradition based on a historical judgement that the pope is the Antichrist? Or is it an article of faith which we, with Luther, are unwilling to yield; and for which we, with Luther, are willing to die?⁴ The Lutheran way to answer these questions is to let the Holy Spirit speak for himself through an exegesis of 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12.

By way of briefly establishing context, we know from Acts 17 that Paul stayed in Thessalonica for about three weeks. From the start, the Thessalonian Christians endured severe persecution (1 Th 3:4; 2 Th 1:4). It must have seemed to them as if the return of Christ was imminent. So they had some concerns and misunderstandings about the end times (1 Th 4:13-

¹ Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article IV, 10, *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 475.

² Hoerber, Robert G. Ed. *Concordia Self-Study Bible NIV*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), p. 1843.

³ Hendricksen, William. *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of I and II Thessalonians*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Printing Company, 1984), p. 175.

⁴ Cf. Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article XV, 3.

5:11, 2 Th 1:11-2:16). In fact, a rumor reached them, saying that the day of the Lord had already come, and that they missed it! This gave Paul the opportunity not only to rebuke the heresy of these false prophets, but also to speak about *the* heresy of *the* false prophet, namely, the Antichrist.

3 - Μὴ τις υἱαὶ ἐπαθῆσθε κατα μὴδενα τρόπον. οἷ ἐάν μὴ ἐδῶχη(ἀ)ποστασία πρῶτον καὶ ἀποκαλυφθῆ(ἀ)ρῶποι θῆ- ἀνομία, οὐ(ὡς) θῆ- ἀπὼλειά, ,

Paul urges the believers not to let someone deceive (ἐπαθῆσθε) them in any way. Paul uses the same word for the devil's deceiving of Eve (2 Cor 11:3, 1 Tim 2: 14). All deceptive teaching is satanic in origin, including this heresy about the Lord having already returned.

Then Paul tells the Thessalonians why they can be sure that the day of the Lord had not yet come. First (πρῶτον), two things had to happen: For one thing, the apostasy had to come (ἐάν μὴ ἐδῶχη(ἀ)ποστασία). Note that the verb is aorist. Paul writes a prophetic fact: The definite, well-known ἀποστασία would come. The word, ἀποστασία, is the act of "rising up in open defiance of authority, with the presumed intention to...act in complete opposition to its demands."⁵ In short, it is the great, spiritual rebellion. It is a rebellion against God and his truth (2:10). The only way to oppose the rebellion is by standing firm and holding to the truth (2:15).⁶

Now Paul, with a simple connective καί, joins the great apostasy to another thing which would have to take place before the day of the Lord. He says that the man of sin, the son of destruction has to be revealed (ἀποκαλυφθῆ(ἀ)ρῶποι θῆ- ἀνομία, οὐ(ὡς) θῆ- ἀπὼλειά). Because the καί joins the two phrases, and in view of verses 10-12, it is correct to say that "the falling away from faith will prepare the way for the man of sin."⁷ Note again that

⁵ Louw-Nida. p. 39.34.

⁶ NB: The only other time the word, ἀποστασία, is used in the New Testament is in a spiritual sense in Ac 21:21.

⁷ Schink, W. F. Our Great Heritage III. *The Scriptural Doctrine of the Antichrist*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), p. 571.

Paul uses the aorist, expressing as prophetic fact that ο(αἰρωποῖ τῆς ἀνομίας, ο(υἱοῦ τῆς ἀπολείας would be an unveiled, or revealed.

In view of the fact that “Sin is lawlessness,” (1 Jn 3:4), the sense is not changed whether we use ο(αἰρωποῖ τῆς ἀνομίας or ἀμαρτίας. The fact is that ἀμαρτίας is just as early, but more widespread,⁸ so the preferred translation is “the definite, well known man entirely characterized by sin.” As the man of τῆς ἀμαρτίας, he totally misses the mark; he commits the definite, well-known sin of sins, mentioned by Paul in verse 4.

In context, we know from verses 6-8 that ο(αἰρωποῖ τῆς ἀμαρτίας had his beginnings already in Paul’s day, and that he will be around until judgment day. No individual man can literally match this description. But it is common in Scripture for the article to be used generically, to specify a class of people. In 2 Tim 3:17, Paul says that the Scripture was given so that ο(του θεου ἀειρωποῖ may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. It is in the same sense that Paul speaks about ο(αἰρωποῖ τῆς ἀμαρτίας.

Then Paul also refers to this man of sin with a semitic phrase, “the son thoroughly characterized by destruction,” ο(υἱοῦ τῆς ἀπολείας). This definite, well known ἀπολείας carries both the idea of destroying or causing the destruction of persons.⁹ Perhaps the best way to understand this phrase is to consider the only other man in the New Testament called ο(υἱοῦ τῆς ἀπολείας, namely, Judas Iscariot (Jn 17:12). Judas was visibly in Christ’s church. He gave the appearance of loving his master. But he was actually Christ’s enemy.

4 – ο(ἀντικείμενοι καὶ ὑπεραιρόμενοι ἐπιπαντα λεγόμενοι θεοῦ ἡσέβασμα, ὡς τε αὐτὸν εἶδόν τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ εἰσαὶ ἀποδεκνῦντα εἰ αὐτὸν ὅτι ἐστὶν θεοῦ.

⁸ Tertullian used ἀμαρτίας as early as the 200s, and it is found in all the major families of texts, whereas ἀνομίας is almost exclusively an Egyptian variant.

⁹ Louw-Nida, 39.34.

¹⁰ Louw-Nida, 39.1; BAGD p. 74.

Now Paul describes the man of sin with two present participles, which characterize him in an ongoing fashion. First, the man of sin is the one who continuously opposes, or who is the exact opposite of God (ἀντικείμενος).¹⁰ Second, the man of sin acts as one who is “proud and rises up against”¹¹ everything that is called God (ὑπεραιρόμενος ἐπιπαντα ἰεγομένον θεόν). He keeps on seizing a superior position over every object of reverent awe, including the family, state, and the law¹² (σεβασμα). Because of these two participles, we are justified in equating the man of sin with another of his names: the *Antichrist*. He is the one who is so proud that he is opposed to, yes, is the opposite of God and his Son.

The actual result (ἔκτε) of the man of sin’s opposition embraces the other part of the Greek preposition ἀντι, that is, “in the place of.” The result of his rebellion is that he sits in the temple of God (αὐτὸν εἶδόν τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καί σαι). In other words, he takes God’s place. Again, note the prophetic aorist fact of the infinitive. The man of sin sits *into* the temple of God. While εἶδόν and εἶδῃ have lost some of their distinction in Koine Greek, we can’t get around that εἶδόν. His rebellion is truly an invasion of Christ’s church.

But even worse than that, he invades God’s ναόν, his holy of holies, his very dwelling place. As Paul said to the Athenians, God does not live in temples (ναοίς) built by hands (Ac 17:24). God’s ναός is his people (1 Cor 3:16, 6:19, 2 Cor 6:16). Christ dwells in our hearts through faith, so that we might know how much he loves us (Eph 3:14-19). It is this dwelling place of God where the man of sin seeks to reign. In place of Christ’s love, the man of sin puts his terrors smiting the conscience. Paul describes the man of sin with one more present participle. He is one who proclaims, or prattles about himself, that he is God (ἀποδεικνύμενος αὐτὸν ὡς εἶναι θεόν). Certainly, the man of sin is the *Anti-God*, and the *AntiChrist*.

¹¹ Louw-Nida 39.39.

5 – Οὐ μνημονεύετε οὐκ εἶδι ἠὲ πρὸς ταῦτα ταῦτα ἐλέγον ὑμῖν;

This verse is significant in view of the fact that Paul was only with the Thessalonians for three weeks or so. But during that short time, he was talking (ἐλέγον) to them about the man of sin. One can sense the astonishment in his voice; he can't believe that the Thessalonians had forgotten about what he said. Obviously this was something important for the Thessalonians to know and believe.

6 – καὶ νῦν τοῦ κατεκόν οἰστέ εἰς τὸ ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἐσθου-καίρῳ

Note that Paul is using the present tense, οἰστέ, strengthened by νῦν. The Thessalonians now know that some thing (τοῦ κατεκόν, neuter) is holding down the man of sin, or restraining him. But what is this thing? Remember, Paul is speaking in a spiritual context. Since he will later encourage the Thessalonians to stand firm against the man of sin by clinging to the truth of the apostolic teaching, (2 Th 2:15), we can say that the Word of God was holding back the man of sin from being revealed at that time. Furthermore, Christ describes his believers as those who κατεκούςιν, who retain or hold back in their hearts the Word of God.¹³ This is what keeps the man of sin from pushing Christ out of the temple of their hearts.

This restraining force of God's Word would restrain the man of sin εἰς τὸ ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἐσθου-καίρῳ. Note again the prophetic aorist fact – the man of sin would be revealed. This is the first of two times that Paul says the man of sin would be revealed (ἀποκαλυφθῆναι). Up until the appropriate time (καίρῳ), the Antichrist is being restrained from coming out full-blown. But Paul says that at his own appropriate time (ἐν τῷ ἐσθου-καίρῳ), the man of sin will be revealed. The question here is, to whom does the ἐσθου-καίρῳ refer? Since it is Christ who controls all things for the sake of his church, we can say that it will

¹² TDNT VII, p. 173-174

¹³ Cf. Kuske, David. *Thessalonians*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1989), p. 93.

be in accordance with Christ's time and purpose. And what would be that appropriate time for the man of sin to come out into the open? In view of what Paul says in 2:10-11, we can say that once the believers' love for the Word was no longer being retained, that's when the man of sin would no longer be restrained.

7 – to_gar_musth~~rion~~ hon e~~o~~ergeitai thj- a~~n~~omi~~a~~j : monon o(katekwn a~~e~~ti e~~o~~j e~~o~~ me~~sou~~ gehhtai.

Now Paul explains how the man of sin would be revealed. He says that the man of sin has his own to_musth~~rion~~, his own mystery. While Christ has the mystery of godliness (to_thj- eu~~s~~ebeia~~j~~ musth~~rion~~),¹⁴ the man of sin's mystery is described as a "complete disregard for the law or regulations of a society,"¹⁵ (thj- a~~n~~omi~~a~~j). In this spiritual context, the man of sin would have a complete disregard for the norm, the instruction of Christ through his apostles and prophets. But this mystery is already effectively working (hon e~~o~~ergeitai). Since all heresies have as their source a disregard for the *norma normans*, we can say that any and all heresies are connected to the musth~~rion~~ thj- a~~n~~omi~~a~~j. That is how the man of sin's mystery of lawlessness was already at work in Paul's day, as his own polemics in Galatians, for instance, prove.

As the church's cling to the restraining thing (to_katekon) decreased, and as the apostate mystery of lawlessness took a firmer grip on the hearts of believers, the way was indeed prepared for the man of sin to be revealed (2:3). At his own time (2:6), the one holding back (o(katekwn) the man of sin would eventually "become from the middle," or as we would say, "get out of the way," (e~~o~~me~~sou~~ gehhtai). Again, note the prophetic aorist fact of the matter. The thing holding back the man of sin was the Word, and the Word is Christ's. As the one who rules all things for the sake of his church, Christ was the one restraining the man of sin.

¹⁴ Cf. 1 Tim 3:16

¹⁵ Louw-Nida, 28.77.

8 – kai tote apokalufhsetai o (anomos, o) (kurios) hosou anel ei=tw pneumati tou stomatoj au)ou kai katarghsei th| e|pifaneia| th| parousiaj au)ou.

“And then,” Paul says, after Christ “gets out of the way” of him who is absolutely without regard for the norm of God’s Word (o (anomos)), it is then when he will be revealed (apokalufhsetai). This is the second time Paul says the man of sin will be revealed. In view of the content of this verse, it is correct to say that this is a verse of comfort for believers. So perhaps we could best translate apokalufhsetai as “exposed” or “unmasked.” Note that this clause simply describes some future event, which, from Paul’s perspective, would happen after the man of sin comes out into the open (2:7). But then, Paul describes the man of sin with a relative clause, which foretells the final destruction of the man of sin. So when will the man of sin be exposed? Grammatically, it must happen between his coming into the open and his final destruction.

Paul further describes the man of sin as someone to whom two things will happen. First, the real Lord, the Lord Jesus, will destroy him by means of the breath of his mouth (anel ei=tw pneumati tou stomatoj au)ou). The verb, anel ei=, means, “to destroy, with the possible implication of something being used up, consumed.”¹⁶ Consistently, the Scriptures refer to what comes out of Christ’s mouth as being his Word, (Is 11:4, 55:11, Rev 1:16). “The Lord will not go to war against the antichrist with great armament, he will merely blow his breath upon this lawless one – that will blast him. The Word is poison to the antichrist.”¹⁷ By the proclaiming of the eternal Gospel, Christ will declare his own *anathema sit* on the man of sin. It must be remembered, as Lenski points out,¹⁸ that the two events of the relative clause in verse 8 are

¹⁶ Louw-Nida, 20.47.

¹⁷ Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), p. 431.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 432

written from the prophetic perspective, and simply joined by a kai. The interval between ἀνελθῆναι and καταργησεῖ is uncertain.

But Paul then describes the other thing that will happen to the man of sin. Christ will completely condemn the man of sin to inactivity, and remove him entirely from the sphere of activity¹⁹ (καταργησεῖ). He will do this by the glorious appearing of his second coming (τῆ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ). After this ultimate destruction on the last day, the man of sin will no longer be able to work his Satanic skill, his destroying work (2:3). Christ himself describes his glorious παρουσία in Matthew 24:27-31.

9 – οὗτος ἰσχυρὸς ἐστὶν ὁ καταργησιὶς τοῦ σατανᾶ ἐν παντί δυνάμει καὶ σημείοις καὶ τέρασις γυνώσκουσιν

The antecedent of οὗτος is clearly ὁ ἀνόμος, the subject of verse nine. That lawless one, that one entirely without any regard for the norm of God's Word also would have a παρουσία, a coming. But his coming is in a straight line with the effective working of Satan, the adversary (κατὰ ἐπιφανείᾳ τοῦ σατανᾶ). Given the unholy relationship between Satan and his bride, the man of sin, the Antichrist would be able to appear accompanied by all kinds of power, and with signs and wonders characterized by lying (ἐν παντί δυνάμει καὶ σημείοις καὶ τέρασις γυνώσκουσιν).

Satan is indeed powerful. He throws all his energy into promoting the man of sin. So he uses his limited, but superhuman power in such a way that the man of sin may have signs and wonders. True signs are such acts, through which God shows himself to be God.²⁰ So the signs of the man of sin are signs through which the man of sin *shows himself* to be the Antichrist. True wonders are meant to be something that cause attention-grabbing wonderment, so that people

¹⁹ TDNT vol. I, p 452.

²⁰ Hoenecke, W. *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 1943, vol. 40:3, p. 185.

will listen to God's truth, his Gospel. So the wonders of the man of sin are meant to be attention-grabbing wonderment, so that people will listen to the devil's lies against the Gospel.

10 – kai εἰς παῖθαπαθῆ ἀδικίαῖς τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις, ἀνακρίθη τῆν ἀγάπην τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἐδέξαντο εἰς τὸ σωθῆναι αὐτοῦς .

The parousia of the man of sin has one more devastating characteristic. He comes also entirely within the sphere of every kind of deceitfulness characterized by unrighteousness (παῖθαπαθῆ ἀδικίαῖς). The genitive modifying ἀπαθῆ is ἀδικίαῖς. Because of the dik in the midst of the word, this word has the idea of the direct opposite of what God declares as right. Every deceit uttered by the man of sin is thoroughly characterized by contradicting what God has declared as right. To put it simply, if God declares something to be right and true, the Antichrist says that it is wrong and evil. And if God declares something to be wrong and evil, the Antichrist says that it is right and true. If God calls something black, the man of sin would say that it is white, and vice versa. Then, because he has declared himself to be God (2:4), the man of sin would condemn all those who trust God and say that it is black. Unfortunately, οὐκ εἰς τῆς ἀπολλυθείας, the son of destruction is working to spread his deceptive, faith destroying influence on those who are being destroyed, or perhaps even those who are destroying themselves (τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις).

Then Paul goes on to state why the Antichrist is able to bring people with him into destruction. ἀνακρίθη equals “‘because,’ in the sense of ‘in return for these things,’ i.e. the things involved in the power, in the signs and wonders, and in the deception of unrighteousness.”²¹ The reason why they are being amazed and deceived by the signs and wonders of the man of sin, and the reason why they are perishing is that they did not receive the love of the truth (τῆν ἀγάπην τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἐδέξαντο). Notice again the simple, aorist fact of the matter. Paul already

said in 2:3 says that the *apostasia* would come first and actually prepare the way for the man of sin. All this is the fault of people who were baptized, who even heard the Gospel. This Gospel is the truth, yes, the very power of God for the salvation for everyone who believes. God gave them the truth so that they might be saved (*eið to swqhñai autouj*).

11 – kai`dia_touto pemppei autouij o(qeoj ebergeian pl anhj eið to_pisteusai autouj tw|yeudei,

The grammar of this verse is most important. Paul says that because of this refusal to accept the love of the truth (*dia_touto*), God himself continuously sends (*pemppei*) to them a most terrifying judgment. He sends them an effective working which leads to “wandering from the path of truth,”²² (*ebergeian pl anhj*). Just as God uses sin to punish sin, so God uses error to punish error. He originally sent them the truth *eið to swqhñai autouj*, so that they might be saved, because that is his antecedent will for them. Now he sends them error, *eið to pisteusai autouj tw|yeudei*, so that they would believe the definite, well know, perhaps even ultimate lie (*tw|yeudei*) of the man of sin. This is God’s consequent will for them. The very thing intended to save them, now takes on an entirely different and foreign purpose, expressed in the next verse:

12 – isa kriqwsin pantej oi(mh_pisteusantej th(a) hqeia|a) | a_euðokhsantej th|adikia|

Note the aorist tenses throughout this verse. These are cold, hard facts. There are people who would be exposed to the truth through baptism and through the spoken message of the Gospel. But they are all people who would not believe the truth (*oi(mh_pisteusantej th(a) hqeia|a)*). In strong contrast (*a) | a)*, the fact is that these same people actually were pleased by, or delighted in the well-known, definite, perhaps even ultimate thing that God had declared to be absolutely wrong and wicked (*euðokhsantej th|adikia|*).

²¹ Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), p. 438.

All such people, characterized by those two things that are the opposite of faith, have to face one more fact. God's own purpose in their believing the lie is that they might be judged (iBa kriqwsin). And we already know what their judgment will be. They have followed o(a@rwpoj thj a(nartiaj instead of Christ. They have shared in the sin of o(ui@j thj a)pwleiaj . In this life already, they are those who are perishing, oi a)pol lumenoi. As for those who did not believe (a)disth@antej), Christ says they will be condemned (katakriqhsontai) (Mk 16:16).

Here is a brief summary of the marks of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12:

1. He will rise in connection with the great, spiritual apostasy
2. Then the man of sin, the son of destruction will be revealed
 - the term "man" must refer to a class of people, considering his beginning and end
 - he will cause great spiritual destruction
 - he will, like Judas, give the appearance of being in the church, but will betray Christ
3. He will be the complete opposite of God; thus the man of sin is the Antichrist
4. He will proudly rise up over against God and over every institution God has established
5. The result of this self-aggrandizement will be that:
 - the man of sin will rule in the hearts of people as an invader, taking Christ's place
 - he will prattle about himself, that he is God
6. He will be allowed to be revealed in God's own time
 - something restrained him in Paul's day: the believers' retaining of the Word of God
 - the mystery, the teaching of the Antichrist was already at work in Paul's day
 - Christ, who had been restraining the Antichrist, would get out of his way, so to speak
7. Eventually, the Antichrist would be exposed
 - initially blasted by the breath of Jesus' mouth, the Word of God
 - ultimately put out of commission when Christ comes again
8. The Antichrist would be a working tool of the devil
 - the Antichrist would have at his disposal the power of the devil
 - having signs, by which he can be recognized
 - having wonders, by which he can grab people's attention
 - with complete disregard for what God declares as right, the Antichrist would be engulfed in error
9. God sends the effective working of the deceit
 - as the divine judgment of hardening on those who rejected the saving truth
 - this hardening results in the fact that those who rejected the truth also believe the lie
10. The end of the Antichrist's followers will mirror their leader's end
 - they too will be judged because they did not believe
 - they were actually pleased by the wicked declarations of their leader

²² BAGD, p. 665.

These marks are the Holy Spirit's answer to our original questions. First, is the Lutheran Church being uncharitable in identify and publicly declaring that the pope is the very Antichrist? Sound exegesis shows that the pope identifies himself as the Antichrist by his false signs and wonders, by his spiritual destroying of souls, and by his contradiction and anathematizing of what God declares to be right. Furthermore, some doctrines of Scripture seem uncharitable to those who do not cling to the full truth of God's Word; for instance, the doctrine of fellowship. Just because something seems unkind doesn't mean that we compromise the truth.

Second, is 2 Thessalonians 2 one of those chapters which are among the "hard things to understand" in Paul's writings? Perhaps one might think that this chapter belongs to the "hard things to understand," merely because it is prophecy. But that would be a logical fallacy, because then the prophecies of the Old Testament would also necessarily have to be hard to understand. On the contrary, for instance, Herod's advisors knew that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Mt 2:6). When Christ rose from the dead, he showed the apostles how everything written about him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms had been fulfilled by him (Lk 24:44). So it is with this Scriptural, clear prophecy of Paul in 2 Thessalonians. He lays out the doctrine of the Antichrist, and in so doing, gives us the marks of the Antichrist, so that, in faith, we may look for him, and then avoid him like the plague. Yes, the same Antichrist Paul predicted, is the same Antichrist we see sitting in Rome today.

Third, when the Lutheran Church identifies the papacy as the Antichrist, is she merely establishing a Lutheran tradition based on a historical judgment? To say that identifying the papacy as the Antichrist is merely a historical judgment means that one must use his reason to come up with this historical identification. But honestly, reason would come up with quite the opposite conclusion, for even the most sanctified reason still is infected with the *opinio legis*.

Therefore reason loves the role which the pope wants to give him in salvation. Furthermore, nothing is more reasonable than the Catholic system of justification. Papist justification makes much more sense than the Scriptural doctrine – that God died for the sins of the world, and offers forgiveness of sins free for nothing. Reason buys into the pope's claims that the Catholic Church is the oldest church, and therefore the correct one. Reason sees that the biggest church on earth is the Roman church, and so makes the inference that the pope's church must be the correct church. Reason is dazzled by the miracles, signs, and wonders which accompany the Antichrist. Reason is appalled that God would be so uncharitable as to harden and punish the followers of the Antichrist. Reason even questions why Christ would ever allow the Antichrist to rise in the first place.

On the other hand, reason looks at how pitifully small the orthodox Lutheran church is, and concludes that it must be the wrong church. Reason says that it is unkind to call the pope the Antichrist. Reason says that the Lutheran church isn't even five hundred years old, so it must be something new. Reason points to the divisions in Lutheranism, and compares that to the so-called union under the Roman pontiff. In short, the rational historical judgment would be that the pope is who he claims to be, and that the Lutherans are wrong.

On the other hand, only faith, clinging to Christ, can truly look at these Scriptural marks of the Antichrist, and then be appalled when the pope matches the description Paul gives. Let's briefly consider some of the points presented above. Only faith can see how the pope truly is the man of sin and the son of destruction, as he commits the ultimate sin by anathematizing the cardinal doctrine of justification.²³ Only faith is horrified when the pope raises himself above God and every institution that God has established by claiming that he is the way the truth and

²³ Cf. Council of Trent, Session VI, Canon 11, as quoted by J. P. Meyer in our Senior Dogmatics Notes on p. 167

the life.²⁴ Only faith cringes when the pope says that everyone must be subject to him, not to Christ, in order to be saved.²⁵ Only faith sees the terrors smiting the consciences of those who believe the pope's lies concerning millions of years in purgatory. Only faith finds a connection between the mystery of the Antichrist already at work in the Galatian heresy,²⁶ and in the full-blown ranting and raving of the pope at Trent.²⁷ Only faith trusts in Christ as the one who rules over all things for the sake of the Church, even when he allows the Antichrist to rise. Only faith sees how Christ crippled the pope by the breath of his mouth through the preaching of the eternal Gospel during the Reformation. Only faith sees *how the Antichrist reveals himself* by his signs and wonders of bleeding statues, bleeding hosts, apparitions of Mary throughout the world, and a host of other miracles in connection with saints and relics. Only faith would turn to the Word, and not to these deceptive miracles. Only faith sees how the pope acts with complete disregard for what God declares to be right, as he forbids people from being certain of their salvation – yes, damns that certainty as a sin. Only faith can see that God is still loving, even when he judges and condemns those who follow the pope's lies. Only faith finally can rejoice over the destruction of this horrible institution.

In short, faith needs to make no historical judgment of any kind, for it is God's sure and certain Word that teaches faith the truth about the Antichrist. Even in these days of papal ecumenicalism, faith is not fooled. Faith sees the pope as the Antichrist, no matter how good he makes himself seem in our days. Yes, Lutherans identify the pope as the Antichrist, because the Scriptures tell us that the pope is the very Antichrist.

²⁴ Cf. the quotation of Pious IX, as quoted by W. F. Schink. *Our Great Heritage III*. p. 589.

²⁵ Cf. the decree of Boniface VIII, as quoted by J. P. Meyer in the *Senior Dogmatics Notes* p. 168

²⁶ Cf. Galatians 5:4

²⁷ Cf. Council of Trent, Session VI, Canon 9, as quoted by J. P. Meyer in *Papam Esse Ipsum Verum Antichristum*. *Theologisches Quartalschrift*, April, 1943, p. 102.

Therefore, it is faith – not reason based on a historical judgment, not mere Lutheran tradition – but faith which, on the basis of God’s Word, cries out with Luther:

*Erhalt uns, Herr, bei deinem Wort
und steur des Papsts und Türken Mord,
die Jesum Christum, deinen Sohn,
wollen stürzen von deinem Thron.*²⁸

Lord, preserve us with your Word,
and curb the murdering of the Pope and Turks,
who want to topple Jesus Christ, your Son,
from your throne.

²⁸ Hymn 233, stanza 1, in *Evangelisches Lutherisches Gesangbuch* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1960). English translation is by the author.