

Antichrist: The Reformed Doctrine

By Malcolm H. Watts

"Antichrist" comes from a Greek word, "Antichristos". The Greek prefix "anti" has a two-fold meaning: the first is "against", the second is "instead of", and perhaps these two should be combined, suggesting someone who opposes Christ by putting himself in Christ's place. Historically, the Protestant doctrine has been that the Papacy is the "Antichrist" because the Pope of Rome is Christ's enemy and also his pretended substitute (hence his claim to the title "Vicar of Christ", or "Vice-Christ", which means someone who arrogantly assumes the place or position of Christ).

Martin Luther (1483-1546): "The Pope is (and I cannot believe otherwise) the

veritable Antichrist" (Luther's Works [Concordia] vol. 40, p. 232).

"The papacy is truly the kingdom of Babylon and of the very Antichrist. For who is 'the man of sin' and 'the son of perdition' [2 Thess 2:3] but he who with his doctrines and laws increases the sins and perdition of souls in the church, while sitting in the church as if he were God? [2:4]. All this the papal tyranny hath fulfilled, and more than fulfilled, these many centuries." (Works, vol. 36, p. 72)

John Calvin (1509-1564): "To some we seem slanderers and railers when we call the Roman pontiff 'Antichrist'. But those who think so do not realize they are accusing Paul of intemperate language, after whom we speak, indeed so speak from his very lips. And lest anyone object

that we wickedly twist Paul's words (which apply to another) against the Roman pontiff, I shall briefly show what these cannot be understood otherwise than of the papacy..." (Institutes, Book 4, Ch. 7, sect.25)

"Paul does not speak of one individual, but of a kingdom, that was to be taken possession by Satan, that he might set up a seat of abomination in the midst of God's temple - which we see accomplished in popery." (Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 21, on 2 Thessalonians 2:3)

John Knox (1514-1572): [To Dean John Annand] "As for your Roman Church, as it is now corrupted, and the authority thereof, wherein stands the hope of your victory, I no more doubt that is the synagogue of Satan, and the head thereof, called the Pope, to be that 'man of sin', of whom the apostle speaks, than that I doubt that Jesus Christ suffered by the procurement of the visible church of Jerusalem." (Knox's Works, vol. 1, p.189)

William Tyndale (1492-1536):
"Kings...were not ordained to fight one against another, or to rise against the emperor to defend the false authority of the pope, that very antichrist... They (the Romanists)...have set up that great idol, the whore of Babylon, antichrist of Rome, whom they call Pope; and have conspired against all commonwealths, and have made them a several Kingdom, wherein it is lawful, unpunished, to work all

abomination." (Tyndale's Works, vol. 1, The Obedience of a Christian Man, pp. 185, 191)

Hugh Latimer (1470-1555): "In this we learn to know antichrist, which doth elevate himself in the church, and judgeth at his pleasure before the time. His canonizations, and judging of men before the Lord's judgment, be a manifest token of antichrist." (Sermons, pp. 148,149)

Nicholas Ridley (1500-1555): "I cannot but with St. Gregory, a bishop of Rome also, confess that the bishop of that place [Rome] is the very true Antichrist." (Works of Bishop Ridley, p 263)

John Hooper (1495-1555): "It is a foul and detestable arrogancy, that these ungodly bishops of Rome, attribute unto themselves to the the heads of Christ's church, the more to be lamented. He that considereth their life, and conferreth (compareth) it with the scripture, will judge by the authority thereof, that they were not for these many years worthy to be accounted any members of God's church, but the members of the devil and the first begotten of antichrist." (Early Writings, pp. 22, 23)

John Bradford (1520-1555): "I will not grant the antichrist of Rome to be Christ's vicar-general and supreme head of his church here and everywhere upon earth, by God's ordinance" (Writings of Bradford, vol. 1, 441,442)

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556): "As for the pope, I refuse him as Christ's enemy, and antichrist, with all his false doctrine." (Acts and Monuments of John Foxe, vol. 8, p. 88)

Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603): "Whatsoever cometh from the pope, which is antichrist, cometh first from the devil." (A Reply to an Answer made of Dr. Whitgift, quoted in Works of Archbishop Whitgift, vol. 3, p. 399)

Matthew Poole (1624-1679): "May we not say to the pope concerning antichrist, Art thou he, etc.? I will speak boldly, either there is no antichrist, or the bishop of Rome is he." (Commentary, on 2 Thessalonians 2:4)

Matthew Henry (1662-1714): "The antichrist here mentioned is some usurper of God's authority in the Christian Church, who claims divine honours; and to whom can this better apply than to the bishops of Rome, to whom the most blasphemous titles have been given?" (Commentary, on 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12)

Thomas Manton (1620-1677): "The first use (when applying the teaching of 2 Thessalonians 2) is to give us a clear discovery of where to find Antichrist; every tittle of this is fulfilled in the bishop of Rome." (Manton's Complete Works, vol. 3, p. 44)

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892): "It is the bounden duty of every Christian

to pray against Antichrist, and as to what Antichrist is no sane person ought to raise a question. If it be not the Popery in the Church of Rome and in the Church of England, there is nothing in the world that can be called by that name...Popery anywhere, whether it be Anglican or Romish, is contrary to Christ's gospel, and is the Antichrist, and we ought to pray against it. It should be the daily prayer of every believer that Antichrist might be hurled like a millstone into the flood and sink to rise no more." (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 12, sermon 717, p. 592)

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647): "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." (Ch. XXV, sect. VI)