

LUTHER ON THE POPES AND ISLAM -- by Rev. Prof.-Emeritus Dr. F.N. Lee

Unitarian Jews and Moslems, explains the Trinitarian Luther,⁸⁸ are wrong. "The Jews are condemned. They...say that **Christ has not come**....

"**The Turks** too are condemned. They teach: first, God sent Moses; then, David came and Moses ceased; David lasted until Jesus came.... The teaching of Jesus lasted until the people became wicked. Then, God committed the rule to **Mohammed**....

"**Since Turks and Jews hate Christ**, and persecute His Word -- **they certainly also hate the [true Triune] God [*Elohiym*], Who has created Heaven and Earth**.... There has at all times been one and the same Christ -- a **Christ** Who is in the past, present, and future time. Thus **Revelation (1:8)** says of Him that **He is the One 'Who is and Who was and Who [always is] to come**."

To Luther, just like the Book of Daniel, also John's Book of Revelation is to be interpreted neither preteristically nor futuristically -- but rather **historicistically**. Luther explains in his *Preface to the Revelation of Saint John*⁸⁹ that "this Book...is intended as a revelation of things that are **to happen in the future** [after John's own day], and especially of tribulations and disasters for the **Church**....

"The first and **surest** step toward finding its **interpretation**, is to take from **history** the events and disasters that have come upon the Church before now, and hold them up alongside of all these pictures [given in the book of Revelation].... If, then, the two were to fit and agree with each other -- we could build on that as a sure or at least as an unobjectionable interpretation."

Luther,⁹⁰ before becoming a Protestant, had previously been an Augustinian monk. Luther held the A.D. 400f "Augustine held that [the A.D. 320f Unitarian] **Arius's** punishment in hell becomes greater every day.... **Mohammed** came out of this sect."

Says Luther: "The first...chapters [in the book of Revelation]...have no other purpose than...to show how...congregations arose...and how they are exhorted to abide.... In chapter six, the **future** tribulations begin....

In chapters seven and eight begin the revelations of...all kinds of **heresies**.... Even under heretics, the Church will have good angels [alias good messengers] and the pure Word.... These good angels [or messengers] are the holy Fathers, like...**Athanasius** [the **Anti-Arian** Trinitarian], Hilary, the Nicene Council, *etc.*" And bad 'angels' -- like **Mohammed**!

For after John foresaw the fifth angel sound his trumpet, John recorded: 'I saw a star fall from the sky...and **he opened the bottomless pit**. And there arose a smoke out of the pit.... And out of the smoke, **locusts came upon the Earth**.... Then the sixth angel sounded [his trumpet]. And I heard a voice say..."**Loosen** the four angels which are bound in **the great river Euphrates**!" Then the four angels were unleashed...**to slay the third part of men.**' Revelation 9:1-13f.

Luther explains⁹¹ that "in chapters 9 and 10, the real misery begins." In Revelation 9:1-11 "is **Arius**, the great heretic and his companions who plagued the Church so terribly everywhere" -- and who was the **unitarian** forerunner also of the equally-unitarian **Islam**. In Revelation 9:12-13, "the second woe is...the shameful **Mohammed** with his companions the **Saracens**, who **inflicted a great plague on the Church** -- with their doctrines and with the sword."

In Revelation 10:1f, "**along with this...**, comes...the 'holy' **Papacy** -- with its great spiritual show, **the Mass**." Indeed, in Revelation 11:7, '**the beast** from the 'pit' is, he insists, "**the worldly Pope**."⁹²

In Revelation 12:7-9, continues Luther,⁹³ "the Prince of this war -- called **Michael** -- is and can be none other than our **Lord Jesus Christ**.... Daniel 3:25 [& 12:1f].... Therefore **together with His Church**, Christ must offer resistance and **battle against** the army of the hellish dragon, **the Pope**, **the Turks**...and **the destructive gangs**."

Revelation chapter 13:1-14, describes what Luther calls⁹⁴ "**the papal Empire** and **the imperial Papacy**. Here the Papacy gets the temporal sword also into its power and rules not only with the book ...but also with the sword.... For they boast that the Pope has both the spiritual and the temporal sword in his power.

"Here, then, are the **two beasts**. **The one** is the Empire; the other, **with the two horns**, [is] the **Papacy** -- which has now become a temporal kingdom.... The Pope restored the fallen Roman Empire.... Who can tell how much bloodshed, slaughter, war and misery **the Popes** [plural!] have wrought?"

Luther elaborates⁹⁵ that "**the Kingdom of Antichrist** is...described in the Revelation [13:7] of John where it is said...'it was given unto him to make war with the saints and to overcome them'.... We must...understand this of **the Pope's abominations**....

"**The Pope** is the **last** blaze in the lamp which **will go out**.... **When he is struck with God's Word** -- then **the Pope is turned to a poppy and a frothy flower!**"

In Revelation 13:11, we read that the second Roman beast -- the Church of the Popes -- 'had two horns like a lamb, but he spake like a dragon.' Observes Rev. Dr. Martin Luther in his *Answer to Emser*:⁹⁶ "If **the Pope** had not his **large following** and the outward show of sanctity, he could not be **the Antichrist**.... The donkey's ears stick out. He neglects God's Word, does not preach it, and is satisfied when his own teachings are preached. The bird is recognized by its song. Like the beast John saw in the Apocalypse which had two **horns like a lamb but a voice like a dragon** -- so **the papal** hosts **look like Christians**, but they preach like Satan!"

The **sixteenth-century** Luther then gives a brief survey of the further events **yet** to happen from **his own time onwards** -- as predicted by John in chapters 13 to 20 of Revelation.

Continues Luther:⁹⁷ "Here now the Devil's final wrath gets to work. There, in the east -- the second woe: **Mohammed and the Saracens**. Here, in the west -- **Papacy and Empire**: with the third woe! To these is added...the Turk..., as will follow in chapter 20[:10 cf. 19:20]....

"**The Pope** re-erects the Empire (13:11)... 'His number is six hundred and sixty-six' (13:18). These are **666 years**. Thus long does the worldly Papacy stand."

The first Bishop of Rome who was ever called 'Pope' -- was the A.D. 600 Gregory the Great. **666** A.D. was right after the 664 A.D. Synod of Whitby, which rejected Proto-Protestantism for Papal Romanism -- in the days of the Italian Pope Vitalian (664-79 A.D.). Indeed, the next 666 years noted by Luther, would last till the 1332f Black Death and Wycliffe!

In Revelation 14:6-8, John seems to predict the arrival of the 14th-century **Pre-Reformation** -- to be followed by the 16th-century **Protestant Reformation**. For there he writes: "I saw another angel [or **messenger**] fly in the midst of the sky -- having **the everlasting Gospel**, to **preach** to them who dwell on the Earth and to every nation.... And there followed another angel [or **messenger**], saying: **Babylon, that great city, falls** -- falls **thoroughly!**"

Luther observes: "In [Revelation] chapter 14, **Christ** first begins to **slay His Antichrist** with **the Breath of His Mouth** [or the Spirit of God's Word], as Paul says in Second Thessalonians 2.... The angel [or the **messenger**] with the **Gospel** comes.... The **saints**...stand again around the Lamb, and **preach the truth**" -- as, from A.D. 1330-60f, did **Wycliffe** and his successors like the Lollards John Purvey, Nicholas of Hereford, John Oldcastle, Jerome of Prague and Jan Huss.

"**Huss**," explains Luther, "was saved in his person, for he died in the Lord [Revelation 14:13].... The **harvest shall** come -- and **those who cleave to the Papacy against the Gospel**, shall be **cast out of the City of Christ** [alias the True Church] into **the wine-press of God's wrath** [Revelation 14:18-20]."

God then predicted to John, and told that Apostle to write this down for the Church of all ages: '**All nations shall come and worship.**' But [**first**, faithless] men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the Name of God Who has power over these plagues. But they did not repent to give Him glory!

Continues Luther: "So the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the **seat of the beast** [apparently meaning the **Vatican in Rome**], and his kingdom became full of darkness.... Then the sixth angel poured out his vial upon **the great river Euphrates**. Its water became dried up, so that the way of **the kings of the East** [apparently meaning **the Turks**] might be prepared."

"Then I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the **dragon** -- and out of the mouth of the **beast** [in **papal Rome**] and out of the mouth of the **false-prophet** [apparently meaning **Mohammad and his Islam**]. For they are the spirits of demons, working [false-]miracles

which go forth to the kings of the Earth and of the whole World – to gather them to the battle of that great Day of God Almighty." Revelation 15:4 & 16:9-14.

Luther says:⁹⁸ "In chapters 15 and 16 come the seven angels with the seven bowls" containing **the seven plagues**. Compare here the 1334-83 **Black Death** and accompanying plagues.

"**The Gospel increases**, and attacks the Papacy on all sides by means of many learned and pious **preachers**.... The **throne of the Beast, the Pope's power, becomes dark and wretched and despised**.... Three frogs, three unclean spirits, go forth from the mouth of the beast -- and stir up kings and princes against the Gospel.... The **Pope...is the real Antichrist**."

Referring to Revelation 17:4, Luther adds:⁹⁹ "You do, you **scarlet whore** of Babylon..., make of our faith a mockery for all the World.... At **Rome**, they think of nothing but to continue in their madness and to increase the abounding misery....

"The **imperial Papacy and papal Empire** is included from beginning to end, in a single picture.... The **Ancient Roman Empire is long since gone**.... Some of its lands -- and **the city of Rome** besides -- are **still here**.... This [papal] **Beast too is shortly to be damned** -- and 'brought to nought by the manifestation of the Lord's coming' [**through powerful preaching** alias through the **Spirit or Breath of His mouth**] as Saint Paul says in Second Thessalonians 2."

Luther explains¹⁰⁰ that '**the great whore**' of Revelation 17 is "**the Romish Church**.... The **Roman Empire** 'was, and is not, and yet is' (17:8) -- for it has, after its fall, been **re-erected by the Pope**. In 17:11, 'the beast that was' -- is "Rome."

In Revelation 17:12, "the 'ten kings' are the other kings [or king-doms] – like Hungary, Bohemia, Poland, France." In 17:16 -- 'the ten horns...shall hate the whore' -- that is, "the Pope's protectors become his assailants."

"In chapter 18," explains Luther,¹⁰¹ "this destruction begins and the glorious great splendour comes to nought.... **Rome** must be plundered and stormed.... [True,] they encourage and arm and defend themselves." But all to no avail. For, concludes Luther,¹⁰² in the words of Revelation 18:2 -- 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen [completely].' We have "the joyous outcry -- at **the fall of the Pope!**"

Luther explains¹⁰³ that "in chapter 19, "when they can do nothing more with the Scriptures...and **the [unclean] frogs have croaked their last** (cf. Revelation 16:13 to 18:2f), they [viz. all those who futilely **attempt to resist the advance of the Kingdom of Christ**]...try to win by force and gather kings and princes for battle. But they are disappointed. **The One on the white horse wins** -- until both [**Romish**] **Beast** and [**False-]Prophet** are seized and cast into hell!"

It should be observed, Luther adds¹⁰⁴ in a marginal note at Revelation 20:2-3, that "**the Turks** only came [toward Europe from Central Asia] -- after a thousand years [when crossing the Euphrates

some time after 1000 A.D.]... But **now** [namely when Luther was writing these words in the sixteenth century], **the Turk wants to help the Pope**, and to **eradicate the Christians**" (meaning the Bible-believing and Christ-loving Protestants).

Luther concludes:¹⁰⁵ "**While** all this is happening, there comes in chapter 20 (vv. 7-10)" alias the final draught of the wine of the wrath of God. "Satan...brings up...**the Turks** [alias the **Muslims**].... But they are soon to go...into the lake of fire."

"This picture...has been put in because of **the Turks**.... The thousand years are to begin.... After the Turks, the Last Judgment follows quickly -- at the end of this chapter [20:11-15], as Daniel 7 [vv. 7-8 *cf.* 12:13] also shows."

Here is how Luther concludes his treatment of the book of Revelation:¹⁰⁶ "We can profit by this Book.... We can know that neither force nor lies neither wisdom nor holiness, neither tribulation nor suffering, shall suppress **the Church**. But it **will gain the victory**.... Manifold offences come upon the Church.... This has happened before now, under the **Papacy and Mohammed**....

"If only **the Word** of the Gospel remains pure among us, and we love and cherish it -- **we are not to doubt that Christ is with us**.... For we see in this book that, through and above all plagues and beasts and bad angels -- Christ is with His saints, and **wins the victory!**"

ENDNOTES

- 88) Luther's *Works*, Weimer ed., 47, 145f; 52, 731.
- 89) Luther: *Works*, Muhlenberg, 1932, VI:480f.
- 90) Luther's *Works*, Muhlenberg, Philadelphia, 1931 ed., V, p. 206.
- 91) *Works*, VI:482f.
- 92) Luther: *Works*, VI, p. 483; and his *Episteln-Auslegung: Ein Commentar zur...Offenbarung*, Stuttgart: Verlag Evangelischen Bücherstiftung, 1866, pp. 1144f.
- 93) *Idem*.
- 94) *Works*, VI:484.
- 95) *Table Talk* pp. 194-96, cited in Fromm's *op. cit.*, II, pp. 275f.
- 96) Holman: *op. cit.*, III:368f.
- 97) *Comm. zur...Offenb.*, pp. 1154f.
- 98) *Works*, VI:485
- 99) *Ib.* I:391f & III:79; and *Works*, VI, p. 485.
- 100) *Comm. zur...Offenb.*, pp. 1163f.
- 101) *Works*, VI, pp. 485f.
- 102) *Comm. zur...Offenb.*, pp. 1163f.
- 103) *Works*, VI, pp. 485f.
- 104) *Comm. zur...Offenb.*, pp. 1144f & 1166.
- 105) *Works*, VI:486.
- 106) *Works*, VI:480f, 483f, 486f, 488.