

## The Anti-Christ and You

When religious-news days are slow (or writers are stuck) our fascination turns to the end of the world. We should be focused on the end of our lives which is probably more immediate. Yesterday, I received three Facebook postings about the Anti-Christ. They came from members of your Church, but were more expressive of Protestant Theology than our own.

The term "Anti-Christ" can mean "in opposition to" or "in place of" Christ.

To look at this and any other theological question, the first place we turn is Scripture. In I John 2:18 we read, "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that the antichrist was coming, so now many antichrists have appeared. Thus we know this is the last hour." So while one is coming, there have been many already. Further in verse 22 we are told who the antichrist is: "Who is the liar? Whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Whoever denies the Father and the Son, this is the antichrist." While the author may be thinking about the Gnostics and their denial that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, and the point is that to deny the divinity of Jesus is to be the antichrist. The Anti-Christ is many.

While the term "antichrist" is only found in I and II John, the Gospels of Matthew (24:24) and Mark (13:22) speak of false messiahs and false prophets. Another place that speaks of a false prophet and has been used in antichrist explanations is the Book of Revelation 20:10: "The Devil who had led them astray was thrown into the pool of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." What is different in this text from the others is that the Anti-Christ is one individual.

Following upon the Scriptures we look to the Fathers of the Church. The first to use the term, was Polycarp. He writes to the Philippians (Paragraph 7), "For every one who shall not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is antichrist." The antichrist is a category of persons. They are the persons who deny the humanity of the Son of God.

Cyril of Jerusalem uses the imagery of Revelation and speaks of an antichrist who will "At first indeed put on a show of mildness (as though he were a learned and discreet person), and of soberness and benevolence. The Jerusalem Editor quotes as from Hippolytus a similar description of Antichrist (§ 23): "In his first steps he will be gentle, loveable, quiet, pious, pacific, hating injustice, detesting gifts, not allowing idolatry, etc." But the treatise is a forgery of unknown date, apparently much later than Cyril: and by the lying signs and wonders of his magical deceit. (Iren. V. 28, § 2): "Since the demons and apostate spirits are at his service, he through their means performs wonders, by which he leads the inhabitants of the earth astray." having beguiled the Jews, as though he were the expected Messiah, he shall afterwards be characterized by all kinds of crimes of inhumanity and lawlessness, so as to outdo all unrighteous and un-

godly men who have gone before him; displaying against all men, but especially against us Christians, a spirit murderous and most cruel, merciless and crafty. (Iren. V. 25, § 4): "He shall remove his kingdom into that city (Jerusalem), and shall sit in the Temple of God, leading astray those who worship him as if he were Christ." According to the genuine treatise of Hippolytus, the antichrist was to restore the kingdom of the Jews (*De Antichristo*, § 25), to collect the Jews out of every country of the Dispersion, making them his own, as though they were his own children, and promising to restore their country, and establish again their kingdom and nation, in order that he may be worshipped by them as God (§ 54), and he will lead them on to persecute the saints, i.e. the Christians (§ 56). Compare the elaborate description of Antichrist and his cruelty in Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* vii. 17; Epit. § 71.. "And after perpetrating such things for three years and six months only, he shall be destroyed by the glorious second advent from heaven of the only-begotten Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus, the true Christ, who shall slay Antichrist with the breath of His mouth. (2 Thess ii. 8. Cf. Iren. V. 25, § 3: Hippol. § 64.,) and shall deliver him over to the fire of hell." (Lecture 15).

Before we get all excited and start reading the Left Behind series, we should remember the caution of St John Chrysostom, who writes, "Let us not therefore enquire into these things." It is in our curiosity that we open ourselves to the deceptions and lies of the anti-Christ because they seem so credible. So if we do not listen, we cannot be deceived. We should listen to the Church and not to those who claim to speak for Christ. St. Jerome saw the antichrist in people who "chatters about his views." The antichrist is the source of this lawlessness. When everyone thinks that their view is the right view and spreads it, it is spreading confusion, which leads people away from Christ.

As people are being led away, they are being led away from the Church by their own choosing. They can pick and choose what they want to believe. This sin of pride hides the fact that they have decided that their reasons are right; and the teachings of Christ are wrong. As St John Damascene cautions, "If someone is teaching you outside of the things which the holy catholic Church received from the Holy Apostles, Fathers and Synods and preserved until now, do not listen to him..., close your ears." There will even be those who are in the Church and claim to speak for the Church. St Theodore the Studite reminds us "The Church of Christ is not comprised of the many, but of those who keep the correct and saving confession of faith, even if they are few."

So a person who feels that they can ignore the centuries-old teachings of the Church and passes falsehood on to another is the Anti-Christ. Are you listening to the Anti-Christ? Are you the Anti-Christ?