

The Smalcald Articles

Lesson Six

The Antichrist

Part II, Article IV

Article IV: Of the Papacy.

1] The Pope is not, according to divine law or according to the Word of God, the head of all Christendom (for that belongs to One only, whose name is Jesus Christ). He is only the bishop and pastor of the Church at Rome, and of those who voluntarily or through a human arrangement (that is, a temporal government) have attached themselves to him. They do this, not to be under him as a lord, but to be Christians with him as brothers and comrades, as the ancient councils and the age of St. Cyprian show. **2]** But today none of the bishops dare address the Pope as brother, as it was done at that time. They must call him “most gracious lord,” even if they are kings or emperors. **[Q1]** We will not, cannot, must not let this bind our consciences. Whoever wants to do this, do it without us. **[Q2]**

3] It follows from this that everything which the Pope has done and undertaken from such false, mischievous, blasphemous, and arrogant power has been and still is pure business and work of the devil (with the exception of the things that pertain to the secular government, where God often permits much good to be done for a people, even through a tyrant and scoundrel). It has all been done for the ruin of the entire holy Christian Church (so far as it is in the devil’s power) and for the destruction of the first and chief article concerning the redemption made through Jesus Christ. **[Q3]**

4] All his bulls and books are here. In them he roars like a lion (as the angel in Revelation 12 depicts him) crying out that no Christian can be saved unless he obeys him and is subject to him in all things that he wishes, says, and does. **[Q4]** All of which amounts to nothing less than saying: “Although you believe in Christ, and have in Him everything you need for salvation, it is nothing and all in vain unless you regard me as your god, and be subject and obedient to me.” Yet it is clear that the holy Church was without the Pope for more than five hundred years at least. Even to the present day the churches of the Greeks and of many other languages have never been and are not now under the Pope. **[Q5]** **5]** Besides, as is often said, the papacy is a human invention. It is not commanded, and it is unnecessary and useless. The holy Christian Church can exist very well without such a head. It certainly would have remained better if such a head had not been raised up by the devil. **6]** The Papacy is also of no use in the Church, because it exercises no Christian office. **[Q6]** Therefore the Church must continue and exist without the Pope.

7] And I submit that if the Pope would yield this point—that he would not be supreme by divine right or from God’s command, but rather in order that the unity of Christians may be preserved against sects and heretics, because we must have a head to whom all the rest belong, and that such a head would be chosen by men, and that it would be placed within the choice and power of men to change or remove this head, just as the Council of Constance almost dealt in this way with reference to the Popes, deposing three and electing a fourth—supposing, I say, that the Pope and See at Rome would yield and accept this **[Q7]** (which, nevertheless, is impossible; for he would have to allow his entire realm and estate to be overthrown and destroyed, with all his rights and books, a thing which, to speak in few words, he cannot do), nevertheless, Christianity would not be helped and many more sects would arise than before.

8] For since men would have to be subject to this head, not from God's command, but from their personal good will, he would quickly and easily be despised. In the end, he would have no members left. He would not always have to be in Rome or in any other place. He might be wherever and in whatever church God would grant a man fit for the office. Oh, the complicated and confused state of affairs that would result! **[Q8]**

9] Therefore the Church can never be better governed and preserved than if we all live under one head, Christ. All the bishops (although they are unequal in gifts) should be equal in office and diligently joined in unity of doctrine, faith, Sacraments, prayer, and works of love, etc. St. Jerome writes that the priests at Alexandria governed the churches together and in common, as did also the apostles. Afterwards all bishops did the same throughout all Christendom, until the Pope raised his head above all. **[Q9]**

10] This teaching shows forcefully that the Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God. **11]** This is, properly speaking, to *exalt himself over everything that is called God*, as Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:4. **[Q10]** Even the Turks or the Tartars, great enemies of Christians as they are, do not do this. They let whoever wants to believe in Christ do so, and take physical tribute and obedience from Christians.

12] The Pope, however, prohibits this faith, saying that to be saved a person must obey him. This we will not do, even if we must die for this in God's name. **13]** This all comes from the fact that the Pope wants to be called the supreme head of the Christian Church by divine right. So he had to make himself equal and superior to Christ. He had to have himself proclaimed the head and then the lord of the Church, and finally of the whole world, and simply God on earth, until he dared to issue commands even to the angels in heaven. **14]** And when we distinguish the Pope's teaching from, or measure and hold it against, Holy Scripture, it is found that the Pope's teaching, where it is best, has been taken from the imperial and heathen law and treats of political matters and decisions or rights, as the Decretals show. Furthermore, it teaches about ceremonies concerning churches, garments, food, persons and childish, theatrical and deceptive things without measure. But in all these things nothing at all of Christ, faith, and the commandments of God. Lastly, he is nothing other than the devil himself, because above and against God he urges his falsehoods concerning masses, purgatory, the monastic life, one's own works and divine worship (for this is the very Papacy). He condemns, murders and tortures all Christians who do not exalt and honor these abominations above all things. Therefore, just as little as we can worship the devil himself as Lord and God, we can endure his apostle, the Pope, or Antichrist, in his rule as head or lord. For to lie and to kill, and to destroy body and soul eternally, that is wherein his papal government really consists, as I have very clearly shown in many books. **[Q11]**

15] In these four articles they will have enough to condemn in the Council, for they cannot and will not concede to us even the least point in one of these articles. Of this we should be certain and encourage ourselves with the hope that Christ, our Lord, has attacked His adversary. He will press the attack home both by his Spirit and his coming. Amen. **[Q12]**

16] In the Council we will stand not before the Emperor or the political magistrate, as at Augsburg (where the Emperor published a most gracious edict, and caused matters to be heard kindly). But we will stand before the Pope and devil himself. He intends to listen to nothing, but merely to condemn, to murder and to force us to idolatry. Therefore we ought not here to kiss his feet, or to say: "You are my gracious lord," but like the angel in Zechariah 3:2 said to Satan: *The LORD rebuke you, Satan!*

1. What change had taken place in the institution of the papacy? [Para 2]

2. Why was Luther so emphatic about this point? [Para 2]

3. What was Luther saying here? Do you agree with it? [Para 3]

4. Go to the source. [Para 4]

Read Revelation 10:1-6.

- What did John see here? Who does the angel seem to be?

5. What was Luther's point about the existence of other Christian churches outside the pope's control? [Para 4]

6. How could Luther say this? [Para 6]

7. What hypothetical possibility did Luther advance? Why? [Para 7]

8. What problem did Luther predict would result if the pope's authority was limited in this way? [Para 8]

9. You make the call. [Para 9]

Lutheran churches in Europe are generally governed by a bishop and often are "state" churches. In America, most Lutheran churches are run on a synodical model, with some form of elected leader (either a president or a bishop), who exercises some centralized authority. Have we made the mistake that Luther was concerned about in the Smalcald Articles?

10. Go to the source. [Para 11]

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4.

- Whom was Paul talking about?

- What kind of work does the antichrist do?

- Where does he do his work?

- What does he claim?

Read verses 5-10.

- What was the antichrist doing in Paul's day?
- When he is revealed, what special works will he do?
- Why do you think the Lutheran confessions call the papacy the antichrist?

11. These are harsh words. Which pope is Luther talking about? [Para 14]

12. How does Christ "press his attack" by his Spirit? by his coming? [Para 15]

During the week

1. Reread Part II, Article IV.
2. Read Part III, Articles I and II.
3. In the past, a great many protestant churches and theologians agreed with Luther that the institution of the papacy was the antichrist. Today, very few people, even in the Lutheran church, make this claim. Why do you suppose that is? What is the difference between saying that an individual pope is the antichrist and that the institution of the papacy is the antichrist? Think of ways in which we can testify to the truth of this doctrine in a world that considers intolerance to be the greatest evil a church can commit.