

The Banner of Truth Book Reviews

Whether it can be proven the Pope of Rome is the Antichrist

Francis Turretin

Protestant Reformation Publications, 130pp.

Who is the antichrist? The consensus among the Reformers and Puritans was that there could be no doubt that it is the papacy. It would appear that today this is a minority view among evangelicals. The reasons for this shift of view are complex. One senses, however, that there is a widespread perception that the Reformers were prejudiced and so any stick was good enough to beat their opponents. Rome now addresses Protestants as 'separated brethren' and in turn many Protestants are benevolent in their attitude towards Rome.

A new generation of readers has recently come into contact with Francis Turretin as a result of the translation of his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. This much smaller work demonstrates that the old Reformed view rested on a careful exegesis of Scripture. This book is part of a larger work which justifies Protestant separation from Rome. Originally written in Latin, this is the first English translation. It demands careful study. The present reviewer believes that Turretin establishes his case, although he is not convinced by every detail of the exegesis. If Turretin's arguments are correct, his work is a timely warning to evangelicals who are seeking closer co-operation with Rome.

ROBERT W OLIVER

Concordia Theological Quarterly Book Reviews

Whether It Can Be Proven the Pope of Rome is the Antichrist: Francis Turretin's Seventh Disputation. By Francis Turretin. Translated by Kenneth Bubb. Edited by Rand Winburn. Protestant Reformation Publications.

As Reformation Day AD. 1999 approached, the Lutheran World Federation, and hence its member body the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, stood poised to sign the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* with the Roman Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, there is little mention from these two bodies of Luther's claim that the pope is the Antichrist. "This [the doctrine of papal supremacy] is a powerful demonstration that the pope is the real Antichrist who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ, for the pope will not permit Christians to be saved except by his own power, which amounts to

nothing since it is neither established nor commanded by God" (SA II, IV:10). Even the more irenic Melancthon clearly links the papacy with the Antichrist (*Ir* 39): "But it is manifest that the Roman pontiffs and their adherents defend godless doctrines and godless forms of worship, and it is plain that the marks of the Antichrist coincide with those of the pope's kingdom and his followers."

The Reformed tradition accepted the Lutheran argument that the pope is the Antichrist. One of the more able treatments of the subject from the pen of an American proceeded from Princeton Seminary's Charles Hodge (*Systematic Theology*, 3 volumes [London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons; New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1871], 3:813-832). Hodge saw himself as no innovator, however. He simply sought to reprimarize the Reformed theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Hodge anticipated the problem many Americans would have with Reformed scholasticism - the language barrier would prove insurmountable. Indeed, translations of "orthodox" Reformed theology of the post-Reformation period are as illusive as those of Lutheran Orthodoxy.

That brings us to the present book. It is a partial translation of Francis Turretin's *Concerning Our Necessary Secession from the Church of Rome and the Impossibility of Cooperation with Her*, published about 1661. Francois Turretini (1623-1687) was one of the most able defenders of Dortian Orthodoxy, better known among Lutherans as "Five-point Calvinism" or "Tulip Theology." His most important work, *Institutio theologiae elencticae* (Three parts, Geneva, 1679-1685), has recently appeared in English translation as *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. Now another of his significant doctrinal treatises has appeared. *Whether It Can Be Proven the Pope of Rome is the Antichrist* is a biblical/systematic treatment that affirms that the pope is the Antichrist.

Turretin assembles a bevy of scriptural, philosophical, and social arguments to support his contention. Some arguments will sound familiar to Lutheran ears, for example, that the "pope rules as God in the place of God" as testified to in the Scripture. Further, Turretin notes that apostasy is a key trait and that the pope's adversarial nature opposes Christ. Other arguments are more derivative/historical in nature. For example, Turretin finds evidence for the pope's character as the Antichrist in the "common opinion of Protestants." Here he cites the more significant Reformed Confessions (the Helvetic, Belgic, Scottish,

and Anglican, among others), as well as the Augsburg Confession and the Magdeburg Centuries from the Lutheran tradition.

Turretin brings all together to bolster his conclusion that separation from the Church of Rome is a confessional necessity. "Having been persuaded that the pope is the Antichrist, and since truly it is clear from the words of Scripture that this be so, we must conclude that our secession from his communion, is consummately necessary and that it is quite impossible that there be a reconciliation between us, if things so remain as they are" (113).

Now the question that faces the present-day reader presents itself. Why is Turretin's conclusion that the pope is the Antichrist, which was a clear confession of the Reformed Tradition in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, essentially unknown in the American Protestantism of today? After all, American Protestantism certainly has its roots in the Reformed Tradition. Part of the undoing of Turretin's conclusion is embedded within his own argument. Put another way, while Turretin is fully convinced that the office of the papacy is, in fact, the Antichrist, one of the key arguments he develops to prove his point centers in the issue of fulfilled prophecy. Put simply, do the Scriptures speak of a future fulfillment of prophecy in regard to the Antichrist, or have such prophecies been fulfilled historically. Turretin affirms the latter. However, he does so by adopting an important medieval hermeneutic. The key to the interpretation of prophecy for Turretin is the so-called "Year-Day Principle"; namely, that when the prophetic sections of the Scriptures speak of a "day," the interpreter must properly read "year." Futurists, according to Turretin, see the forty-two months of Revelation 13:5 and the 1260 days of Revelation 12:6 as literal days. Such is not the case, for "this explanation is erroneous because the Scripture is not speaking of natural days, consistent with the literal meaning of the term 'day,' but instead speaking mystically of *prophetic days* which represent the number of years" (104). In the technical language of modern prophecy interpretation, Turretin is an historicist. However, his method -- the Year-Day-theory -- has become the chosen hermeneutic of futurist premillennialists - those who believe that the prophecies of the Bible are yet to be fulfilled. Put another way, loosed from the constraints of the historicist claim that the papacy is the identifiable Antichrist - because the papacy fulfills the prophecies of the Scriptures - futurists have looked to the unfolding future (that is, the present) to identify the emerging Antichrist. In a sense, then, the pope *cannot* be the Antichrist for the futurist - the revelation of the

Antichrist remains a coming event. Hence, American Protestants have delightedly expended their energy in identifying the Antichrist.

Still, Turretin's little treatise is a fascinating glimpse into the theology of the Reformed Tradition. In the end this little volume underscores the long-standing differences in theological method between orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition and Lutheranism; though the language used by the two traditions is similar, the meaning attached to such language differs significantly.

Lawrence R. Rast Jr.

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Review of Turretin's *7th Disputation On the Antichrist*

By Dr. Leonardo De Chirico

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Translated from the Italian by Riccardo Zanettini

Examining the historical evidence of the Papacy, between the dark and radiant, between upright and improbable popes, what appears on the surface to be decisive as to its orthodoxy because of the dogmatic wrapping which has been fastened upon this historical institution, is not viewed as such, theologically speaking, by its evangelical critics who also argue from history. Their questions press deeper, and really concerns the doctrinal claims, those dogmatic structures which hold up the Papacy.

Though these tasks are not for Denzler, whose book, *The Papacy*, is limited to exposing the main events and turning points in Papal history, they clearly appear in the work of the great Genevan theologian, Francis Turretin, (1623-1687).

Turretin's work, published in 1661, is a polemical treatise; the *7th Disputations on the Necessity of Secession from the Church of Rome*. Its main thrust is severance of ties with Rome, and, as such, takes a polemic path followed by many Reformers, but nowadays almost abandoned in the evangelical world. According to the modern perception, the idea of identifying the Papacy with the Antichrist is antiquated, a daughter of a by-gone era, meaning that this concept finds credence only within the confines of the polarizing confessions written in the 16th and 17th centuries, and therefore lacking any substantial historical and biblical supporting proof.

The question then arises whether the arguments of Turretin's *Dispute* is leftover from an age marked by visceral contentions or do they deserve to be seriously considered in light of his scholarly exegesis and theology, which go far beyond that of simple, impassioned polemics. (pp. 200-201.)

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