

The Power and Primacy of the Pope

Introduction

At the same time Luther was preparing the Smalcald Articles and the Lutherans were meeting at Smalcald in February 1537 to prepare for the ill-fated Church Council at Mantua later that summer, they knew that they needed to present something to the Council and come prepared with Confession in hand.

For this, Luther wrote up his Smalcald Articles, and while the Lutherans gathered there subscribed to them and they would become confessional in the generations to come, ultimately the Smalcald meeting concurred to present the Augsburg Confession and the Apology instead.

But there was one topic that was not in the Augsburg Confession and Apology that had been left out at the time. It was left out as to not receive a blanket condemnation before they could even confess. That topic was the subject of the Office of the Papacy.

Philip Melancthon (1497-1560), who wrote the Augsburg Confession and the Apology and was close friends with Luther, was commissioned to write a document that covered the subject of the Papacy. He was told to make it direct, clear cut, and showed the Lutheran position without mincing words.

The Power and Primacy of the Pope became the document that was written. It is seen as an addendum to the Augsburg Confession, a 29th Article if you will.



Figure 1: Philip Melancthon in 1532

Very Brief History of the Pope

The title Pope is Latin for “father” and was used by most Latin speaking churches in reference to their Bishop/Pastor. It became exclusive to the Roman Bishop in the sixth century AD. The first major reference we get outside of the Bible to the Bishop of Rome was a man named Clement who wrote a letter to the Church in Corinth in the early 2nd century AD and is perhaps mentioned by name by Paul in Philippians 4:3.

For the first three hundred years of the Church, there was a growing network of Churches that was spread throughout the Roman Empire and even beyond. There soon came to be five major centers where the Church was centralized and organized: Jerusalem in the Middle East, Antioch in Eastern Turkey, Alexandria in Egypt, Constantinople in what is now Istanbul, and Rome. By way to show size, by 250 AD, the records show that the congregation in Rome was 30,000 people with 150 pastors/clerics and 1500 registered widows and poor people being cared for.

From here these Bishops at these churches looked after the churches in their area to make sure Christians stayed on the same page and the faith remained united, and pastoral care was organized. Naturally, these bishops became leaders and were looked to by many. Of these five major centers, only one would survive to the modern day: Rome. The others were destroyed during the Muslim conquests

and withered away from the 600's-1500's.



Figure 2: Pope Leo meets Attila the Hun in 456 AD

By the time the Roman Empire was crumbling in the 400's, the Bishop of Rome rose to fill the vacuum left by a dying Empire. When Attila the Hun came to sack Rome, it was Bishop Leo of Rome who came to negotiate peace while the Emperor fled to a safe location to let the

citizens of Rome fend for themselves. If not for Bishop Leo of Rome, many would have died.

And not once, but twice, would Leo do this. By his actions he saved tens of thousands of people, and his respect grew. In the void of the Roman Empire, it was the Bishop of Rome that organized defense, provided hope to people, and also was a spiritual leader. Many, such as Gregory the Great, worked at organizing the Church and bringing unity and structure to worship and the betterment of the lives of Christians.

These humble and honorable beginnings would soon bring dire consequences as the Church entered the Middle Ages. Soon the Pope and Kings would compete for political power, and abuses set in which had begun first as necessity. Soon, the Pope took on more and more titles for himself. Pontifex Maximus (a title reserved for the Emperor of the Roman Empire) was one such title. Abusive teachings also crept it and were not corrected. The nature of the beast would not allow it.

By the 1200's the Pope reigned supreme. Abuses were rampant, money was buying office, and Popes saw themselves as conquerors and lords more than servants of Christ, though they gladly called themselves the Vicar of Christ, or someone who stands in the place of Jesus. A few abuses can here be noted: Pope Innocent III (1161-1216) claimed sovereignty over all creatures and that claim was never retracted. Pope Boniface VIII (1230-1303) even declared that allegiance to the papacy was a condition of salvation. When the new World was discovered, it was the Pope who divided up spheres of influence for the reigning kings.

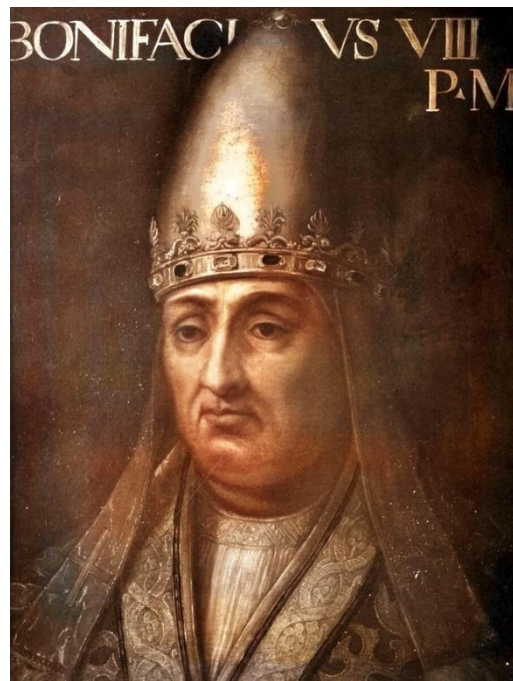


Figure 3: Pope Boniface VIII

For centuries leading up to Luther, theologians had been whispering and some even boldly declaring that the Pope was out of line, but any organized resistance

was killed off. A century before Luther, Jon Hus, had spoken boldly against the pope and was tricked to come to a council where he was burned at the stake without a trial. A fact that Luther was keenly aware of whenever he spoke against the pope.

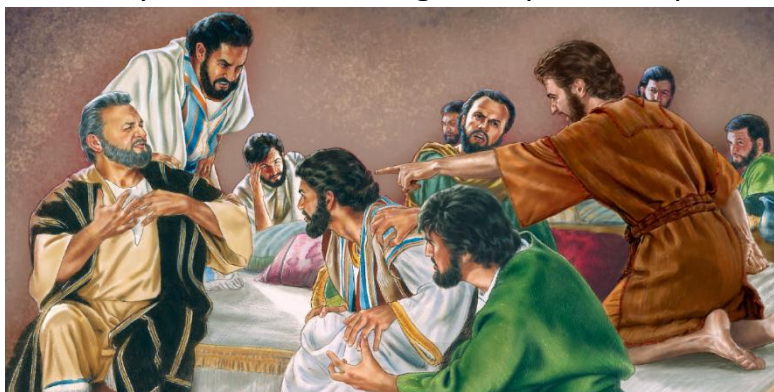
By the time of Luther, the pope had his hand fully upon religious, political, and economic realities. And in Luther's Day the claim was made that the pope had authority over souls in the afterlife.

It could be said that the Papacy was the defining institution that led to the Reformation. While Luther was the one that ignited the fire, the gunpowder was already there for centuries. By noting how the Church broke into dozens of pieces as a result of the Reformation, shows that what became known as Protestantism had always a matter of when not if.

Structure of Document

After the introduction and giving us the Papal claim, Melancthon's argument in this treatise is twofold.

He first tests the papal claim of supremacy over all bishops, pastors and Christians with the Testimony of Scripture. Using Luke 22, Matthew 18, John 20, and Galatians 2 as the primary texts that show how the apostles all had equal standing and their office of the keys is shared by the Church at large and practiced publicly by all ordained clergy. The source of authority being Jesus Christ and not Roman Pontiff.



After this first testimony, Melancthon then moves into the Testimony of

History. He shows how Bishop of Rome has been received throughout the lifetime of the Church. From the Council of Nicaea, we see that the authority in the East was from the Bishop of Alexandria, and in the West by Rome. This was done by human law and not claimed by divine law. It is good to note that while honor was

given to Rome Bishop, no jurisdiction was discussed until the early middle ages. Irenaeus and Cyprian in the 2nd and 3rd centuries also at times disagreed with the Roman Bishop on decisions.

Also Nicaea determined the practice of electing the Bishop from the congregation itself and supported by the presence of neighboring pastors and bishops. The practicality of one person running all churches from a human standpoint is also made. (Which is why a claim to divine status is pressed).

Another testimony of history is the fact that none of the ecumenical councils were called by or led by the Pope, but were called by Emperor's and run by appointed Bishops, though it would seem that the opinion of the Roman Bishop also was weighed, such as Bishop Leo's during the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

As Melancthon continues the argument he notes that practically speaking the Roman Bishop cannot manage all churches and historically has not. Since God's people are scattered across the world, they cannot all be maintained by one man, even though they should have contact with each other. Finally, Melancthon notes when Pope's themselves have refused primacy when offered.

After these two testimonies of scripture and history are argued, Melancthon refutes the arguments used by the Roman Catholic Church concerning Primacy of the Pope. The two main arguments from the Bible for the Pope is Matthew 16 and John 21. After he refutes, he moves into a contrast between the Pope and Christ himself. This leads to the conclusion of the marks of the antichrist which the office of the Papacy fulfills.

Finally after all of this, Melancthon and the Lutherans make the arguments on the proper understanding of the Power and Jurisdiction of Pastors and Bishops. This is a very important discussion here to understand who pastors are and what they are to be doing and why the Church makes and ordains pastors.

The document ends with a list of those present at Smalcald who subscribe to the Augsburg Confession, Apology, and now this Treatise.

Testimony of Scripture

1. Read paragraphs 7-8a. Luke 22:24-27 is first argued against the Papal Claim. Read that passage. Then what is argued here?
2. Read paragraphs 8b. Matthew 18:2 is quoted. Read that passage. What is argued here against the Papal claim?
3. Read paragraph 9. John 20:21 is quoted. Read that passage and discuss the arguments against the papal claim.
4. Read paragraph 10. Galatians 2:7-10 is cited. Read that passage and discuss the argument.
5. Read paragraph 11. Next, 1 Corinthians 3 is cited. Read that passage and discuss the argument against the claim to Papal supremacy.

Testimony of History

1. Read paragraph 12. The council of Nicaea made what resolution about administration of churches?
2. Read paragraph 13-16. The council of Nicaea and also several church fathers discuss how churches were managed and even claim this is how it was done since the apostles. How were churches managed? Do all churches follow Rome's lead? Who doesn't?
3. Read paragraph 17. Who called the ecumenical council of the churches? What does this say about Rome's primacy?
4. Read paragraph 18. What does St. Jerome (342-420), writer of the Latin Vulgate, say concerning primacy in the church?

5. Read paragraph 19. What did Pope Gregory the Great (540-604) say was turned down at the Council of Chalcedon?

6. Read paragraphs 20-21. What has the conflict about decisions in the Church reveal about the nature of Roman Pontiff supremacy?

Refutation of Roman Arguments

1. Read paragraphs 22-26. Matthew 16 is used by Rome to argue for Papal supremacy. Read Matthew 16 and discuss the claim and what the Lutherans state about it. Who does Peter stand in the place of?
2. Read paragraphs 26-29. Talk about Peter as Confessor. What is Christ building his church off? How has the Church in the past understood Matthew 16? John Chrysostom (347-407) and Hilary of Poitiers (310-367) are quoted and what do they add to the discussion? Are Lutherans alone or isolated in seeing it this way? Or is Rome the one inventing new understanding?
3. Read paragraph 30-31. Read John 21:15-19. Jesus talking to Peter is another place Rome turns to argue for Papal Supremacy. What has Christ given to Peter (and notice John who is already following Jesus!) and what has Jesus not given to Peter? Is the Pope meant to be an earthly ruler? What is Jesus' kingdom anyway?

A Contrast between Christ and the Pope

1. Read paragraphs 32-34. How is Christ first contrasted with the Pope? Due to the Papal claim, what is neglected?
2. Read paragraphs 35-37. What abuses are listed with the popes? How have they made their advancements into the secular realm? How does this refuse Christ's mandate? Can these claims be ignored?
3. Read paragraph 38. A concession is offered. If the Pope did have divine right of supremacy. What would still not be allowed that he has done? What Scripture and Church law is cited here? Does this claim mean that the Pope is untouchable?

Marks of the Antichrist

1. Read paragraphs 39-40. Melanchthon makes three assertions that shows the Pope to be the antichrist and ties this to how the antichrist is described in 2 Thessalonians 2. Read that passage. (quote some Church Fathers on this argument too).

2. Read paragraphs 41-44. What should Christians take heed from since the Papacy is the Anthchrist? Is this dissent against the grain to be done lightly as Lutherans? What does the antichrist reveal himself through the Papacy? What is shrouded over?

3. Read paragraphs 45-51. What abuses are listed and how has the Gospel suffered? How has the Papacy added sin to these errors? Could a Church Council overturn the Pope? A Canon Law is quoted, and what does it claim about the Pope?

4. Read Paragraphs 52-54. What should we be on guard against? Who do the Lutherans call upon to defend the Church? Is this surprising?

5. Read paragraphs 55-56. What is called upon to restrain the Pope? How has this actually happened in history?

6. Read paragraphs 57-59. What are Christians called upon to resist and flee from as a result of this? Those who remain with the Papacy are guilty of what? How should we take this serious matter?

The Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops

1. Read paragraphs 60. What is the proper power of Bishops/pastors/etc.?
2. Read paragraphs 61-64. What is given by divine right? Who shares this equally? Talk about how pastor/elder/bishop are all the same ordained office, the Office of the Holy Ministry. Why are their distinctions in the office? What is served by having associate pastors, senior pastors, District Presidents, etc? Is this by divine or human right?
3. Read paragraphs 65-67. Since all grades of church offices are man made and carry the same divine authority, what can the church do when bishops refuse? Who has Jesus given authority to? Who can make and ordain pastors? Can only other pastors? Note the language of gift that overrides our thoughts of "I have the right to do x or y." What are pastors given for as Paul writes in Ephesians 4? What cool anecdote is given from St. Augustine? (354-430)

4. Read paragraphs 69-72. Who has Jesus given the keys to? Who has them? What does the Jesus give to the Church to exercise those keys publicly? What is ordination? What was added by men into ordination? Note that the Catholic Bishops and Pope denied new pastors to be given to lands confessing the faith that the Lutherans are advocating. This is why the argument is being made this way.

5. Read paragraphs 73-76. While there are a lot of things to discuss, the rest of this turns to jurisdiction (Latin for the words of law). Who has jurisdiction in the Church? Who stole it? What do they do with this jurisdiction? How should jurisdiction be used?

6. Read paragraphs 77-78. What is needed in Church law, where does church law come from? How should it be used. Note the abuses listed that need correction.

7. Read paragraphs 79-82. What should be done with corrupt bishops? Why are alms given to the Church? Who will these bishops answer to?

Conclusion: The Papacy and our Confession Today

What happened to the Office of the Papacy in the centuries following the Reformation era of the 1500's? Was this office reformed? Can we still call the Office of the Papacy the Antichrist? Some struggle with that label today, though it is part of our confessional stance.

To Confess that the Pope is the Antichrist has serious consequences that we should recognize. Hermann Sasse (1895-1976) a Lutheran Professor in Germany had this to say in a letter to the LCMS in 1950:

“For the pope, and with him, then, every Roman Catholic, this judgment (the excommunication of Luther) will stand with this judgment before the judgment seat of Christ and will be judged by him. What also still stands is the judgment which Luther gave when he burnt the papal bull and the Roman canon law. This was still a part of his solemn confession at the end of his life. It was not some fit of anger that prompted him to name the pope the Antichrist.

At that time, there were faithful Catholics who did the same. Luther was fully aware that this judgment would have to be answered for before the judgment seat of God. For him it was a part of doctrine, of the Christian doctrine of the Church. He knew well ‘what lies ahead for me to answer for in the final judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ.’ He was aware of what he time and again said to himself, ‘If this is wrong, then you are guilty of so many souls going to hell.’

To affirm that the pope is the Antichrist, and everything that follows from that, is indeed something that Luther will have

to answer for before the judgment seat of Christ, and with him, the Lutheran Church, which either makes this affirmation its own or at least tolerates it and has not struck it from the Smalcald Articles.

If it is indeed the case that the pope is there in the place of Christ, then what a failure to grasp the truth, indeed what a sin is Luther's judgment, a judgment it must be said that does not strike the individual pope as a man but his office. God will also render His judgment upon this at the final judgment. What a truly tragic situation for Christianity! Is the pope the vicar of Christ on earth or is he the Antichrist? That is the question that it is finally all about in the discussions between Evangelicals and Catholics that have gone on for centuries. Upon all that has been said God will give the final judgment at the Final Judgment."

This brings this conversation into focus. The realization that what we teach will be judged before Jesus. We might be tempted to believe that we have more pressing arguments to make and battles in our age to wage or to shelve it and move on. But yet, as Sasse goes on to argue, if we are faithfully living as a church that sees what is happening in the world around us, and are expecting the return of Jesus at any moment then we find in these centuries' old discussions a vibrant need to join in them and also make confession.

We could though ask if the Pope still is the Antichrist? To assist that, what happened in the years and centuries after Luther and the Reformation? Luther noted in the Smalcald Articles that the Pope would never surrender the power he had, if he did, the Roman Catholic

Church would cease to be. Their entire confession is built off the Papacy. Without him, their traditions, piety, and beliefs would come undone, that is unless they came to heed to which the Church truly catholic made in the Augsburg Confession.

Looking into history after the Reformation, we can see the steps the Roman Catholic Church made to secure the position of the Papacy by looking at their Church Councils that met and dictated their confession further. We turn now to look at the Council of Trent and Vatican I.

The Council of Trent 1545-1563

The ill fated Council of Mantua set in 1537 that the Lutherans had been preparing for at Smalcald did eventually meet. It began meeting in 1545 in the city of Trent, Italy, a year before Luther died. Though the aged reformer no longer cared what the council had to say due to both his poor health and his realization that the council had nothing to say but to condemn the teachings of the Christ and the Gospel.

This was not a council that was 18 years long, but rather a series of 25 sessions that met on and off for a series of three periods (1545-1547, 1551-1552, 1562-1563).

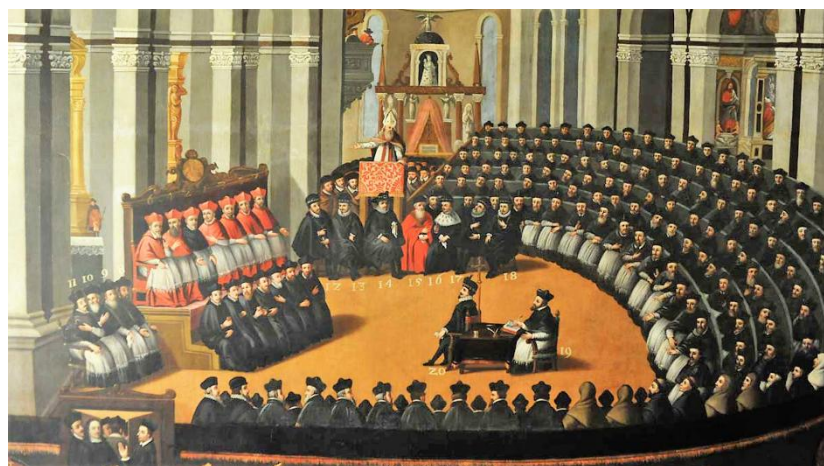


Figure 4: Council of Trent convenes

The Council of Trent gathered to resolve what to do about the Reformation. This council became the driving force of the Counter-

Reformation, which aimed at sweeping through Reformed lands by either conquering, converting, and condemning the teaching.

The efforts of the Council of Trent finalized and codified what would become the Roman Catholic Church, which was termed at the council. Before the Reformation, the Church was simply Catholic, but following the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church was born.

Some of the things that the Council of Trent worked on were the clarifications of the Bible, what was to be included in the Bible, the role of tradition in the church, among others. Most notably, the Council of Trent branded Luther as not just a heretic, but The Heretic, a stance still held by Rome today. One famous anathema in the Council of Trent stated that anyone who said that someone was justified by faith alone was considered to be damned. A position still held today as well.

Beyond that, many of the abuses that began the Reformation were addressed, and a few reforms were made. But by and large, what the Augsburg Confession had complained about concerning abuses were codified into canon law. One such consequence was that church tradition carried as much authority as Scripture, and the one who decided and interpreted Scripture was the Pope.

The Pope is therefore set above the Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church. This means that the authority behind the Church is the Papacy, not the Scriptures. The fruit of this will lead the next Church Council that the Roman Catholic Church had nearly 300 years later, which we turn to now.

Vatican I 1869-1870

The Pope once ruled a kingdom that covered much of Italy. Beginning in 756 AD, the Pope ruled over the many territories in Italy that were called the Papal States. The Pope had his own armies, administration, and all the trimmings of a nation of this world that answered to the Pope. By the 1700's, when the United States came to be, the Papal States ruled over most of Central Italy and parts of Southern France, which was their greatest extent.

Besides this, it was commonly understood that if any Christian kingdom had a problem with a claim to the throne, then it was the Pope who was in charge until the Pope granted succession and recognized a new king.

An interesting side note is that Charles V, Emperor who heard the Augsburg Confession in 1530, also had his own problems with the Pope. In 1527 Charles V sacked Rome and imprisoned Pope Clement VII and forced him to give up some territories that were disputed.

The Papal States suffered hard during Napoleon, who conquered them and made them vassal states to his empire. But in 1814, the Papal States were restored during the Congress of Vienna. By the 1850's the feudal system ended and titles became honorary titles, like how the King of England can "knight" someone and so we call them "Sir."

By the 1860's Italian Independence was in full swing, and they looked to end the Papal States. The Kingdom of Italy in 1869 began a conquest of the Papal States and a battle for Rome commenced which, though minor, did inflict 12 dead and 47 wounded among Papal forces and 32 dead and 145 wounded among Italian Troops. Rome was captured on

September 20th, 1870. What was left of the Papal states dissolved though the Pope did not relinquish them until 1920 and was given Vatican City in return. What was once a sizeable chunk of land ruled by the Pope is now just a city.

But all of this is to say something interesting that was grabbed in all of this. While the Pope lost territory, he gained something. In 1869, seeing the writing on the wall, Pope Pius IX called for a Church Council, which was eventually named Vatican I.

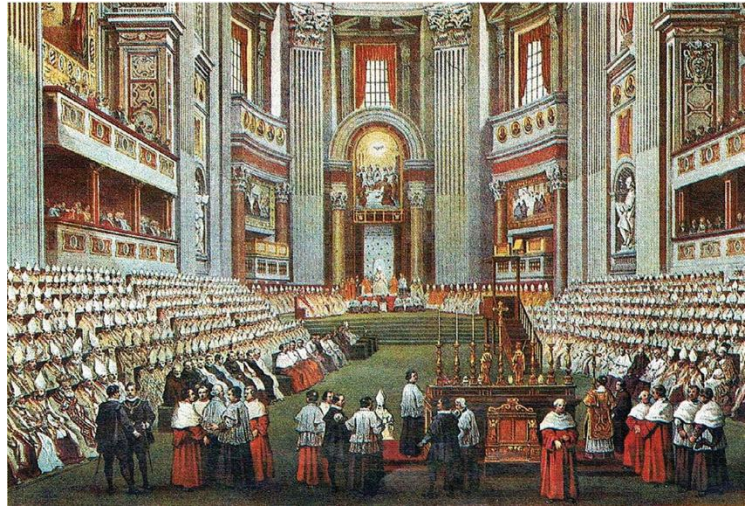


Figure 5: Vatican I Meets

The Council met to discuss modernity, rationalism, communism, and other things. The council ended up condemning many of the strains of Modernity in a documents called *Dei Filius* (Son of God)

But the reason the Pope called the Council was for another main reason. Seeing the loss of the Papal States, he sought to grab more spiritual authority. In the document called *Pastor Aeternus* (The Eternal Shepherd), the Vatican I Council codified Papal infallibility. This was something people already believed and did, and something the Pope already was doing, but now Vatican I made it Church Doctrine, something that must be believed.

During the proceedings, the Archbishop of Bologna wanted to add that the Bishops give counsel to the Pope to help manifest the tradition of

the churches. But Pope Pius IX rejected this stating, "I am the tradition." Once the dissenters to this vote left, the final vote approving Papal infallibility was approved by the Bishops by 533 for it and 2 against.

Here is what the document stated,

"The Pope has full and supreme power and jurisdiction of the whole Church and when he speaks ex cathedra, that is, when, in the exercise of this office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or moral to be held by the whole Church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals."

The Vatican I council concluded discussions and was dismissed on September 20th, 1870, the same day that Rome was conquered. Though the council itself would not be closed until 1960 when Pope John XXIII closed the council to open Vatican II.

The Pope may have lost territorial claim, but now his spiritual claim was undisputed and without question. In response to the Pope's claims of infallibility which included supremacy over all secular states, many European nations took action to suppress the Catholic Church and revoke treaties. Hermann Sasse, penned the thought that the creation of an infallible church head lead to the creation in the next generation of secular states to the creation of

an infallible head of state, an autocrat, of the likes of Mussolini and Hitler.

As a result of Papal infallibility. Mary being born sinless was codified. Pope Leo XIII, Pius' successor, was the first pope to fully embrace and teach Mary's role as Mediatrix. Or that Mary also mediates for us before God the Father. Mary being assumed into heaven and not dying was also codified as doctrine to be believed by Roman Catholics by Pope Pius XII during the 1900's who also was neutral and open to human evolution (until this the Catholic Church was open evolution for non human species).

All of this shows us that the discussion of the Pope being the Antichrist is still relevant and necessary today. Our confessional stance as Lutherans looks at the writings of the Apostles, looks forward to the coming of Christ, and looks to the Pope to see in his office something that stands in the place of Christ and in Christ's chair. Something that doesn't belong.