

Circa A. D. 1400

Lantern of Light *

The Lollards ON ANTICHRIST

SOURCE: *Writings and Examinations of Brute, Thorpe, Cobham, Hilton, Pecoock, Bilney, and Others; With The Lantern of Light*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1842).

*NOTE: First printed from manuscripts circa 1523-40. It is one of the earliest and rarest books of the Reformation. The 1842 edition was taken from the early manuscripts. Brackets indicate this present writer's additions for clarity.

Chapter 1

Prologue [excerpts]

God, who is good in himself, fair in his angels, marvelous in his saints, merciful upon sinners, have mercy on us, now and ever, and give us grace to hold the way of truth in these days of great tribulation. For now, many that seemed to have been stable in virtue, fall from their holy purpose, dreading loss of goods and bodily pain. As Christ said, Matt. 24, "*The great plenty and abundance of wickedness shall make cold the charity of many.*" For now the Fiend [i.e., Satan] hath marred the world by his lieutenant, antichrist..... Verily the wicked man that Christ speaketh of, Matt. 13, hath done this deed. The enemy of God hath sown tares among the seed of Jesus Christ. This wicked man is antichrist, who [patches together] his laws, as rotten rags, to the clean cloth of Christ's gospel; and waketh in malice as a child of Judas, while Simon [Peter] sleepeth and taketh no heed. O thou wicked man, is there any other that may save souls than Jesus Christ? Holy and true Jesus Christ hath the key of David, which openeth and no other closeth, closeth and then no other openeth, Rev. 3..... Art thou not a wicked man, a [foolish] shepherd, a cruel beast, the son of perdition, and antichrist himself, who pretends to bind and to loose, to bless and curse [in the name of] Jesus. People without number, following thee and thy divided laws, are divided from Christ Jesus, and go with the blind to hell forevermore. And this is quite sorrowful, so much so that Christ mourns, and

saith, John 5, *"I have come in the name of my Father, and ye have not received me, [but] when another comes in his own name, him ye shall receive."* And this is antichrist, as St. John Chrysostom saith upon the gospel, *"He that will not receive Christ in pain of sin, he is constrained to receive antichrist."*

Therefore, in this time of hideous darkness, some seek the lantern of light, of which spake the prophet, Psalm 119, *"Lord, thy word is a lantern to my feet."* For as far as the light of this lantern shineth, so far darkness of sin, and clouds of the Fiend's temptations vanish away, and may not abide. And always when the lantern giveth light into the heart, it cleanseth from corruption, and [soothes] and heals spiritual sores.....

Chapter 2

A Petition For Wisdom [excerpts]

Dear friends, help me with your prayer with almighty God, for St. James saith, *"The busy prayer of the righteous is worth much".....* We must not fail God in good living, that he may not fail to give us such wisdom as is needful to us, and also to constrain our tongue, and to give us true [speech] of ready eloquence, to edifying of our neighbor, as Christ saith, Matt. 10, [In truth] *it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.* For the apostles of Christ and his other followers were not graduate men in schools, but the Holy Ghost suddenly inspired them, and made them [fruitful] in heavenly [knowledge].....as St. Jerome saith, *"Preachers unlettered are sent to preach".....* And so saith St. Augustine, writing to Simplician, *"Untaught men rise and catch heaven, and we, with our [licensed] clergy, are drowned to hell."* And St. Gregory saith, *"Right as truth incarnate, that is, Christ in his manhood, chose poor simple men for his preaching, so antichrist is to choose sturdy and double-minded men, having the wisdom of this world, to preach his falsehood.".....*

Chapter 3

The Six General Sins of Antichrist [excerpts]

Generally speaking, antichrist is every man that liveth against Christ; as St. John saith, [Truly] *now there are many antichrists*. And therefore saith St. Augustine, "*Whoso liveth contrary to Christ, he is an antichrist.*" Whether inside or out, if thou live contrary to Christ, thou art but chaff. Of which Christ saith, Matt. 3, *The chaff shall burn with fire that may not be quenched*.....Six sins there are against the Holy Ghost, that turn the wretched soul into this chaff. The philosopher saith, "*One cannot flee evil unless it be known.*" Therefore we shall name them in this small treatise for the enlightenment of those who have little understanding.

1. The Sin of Presumption

The first of these sins is presumption - that is, high swelling of the spirit, without dread of God's righteousness. And of this sin all manner of malice and wickedness taketh root, that reigneth among mankind, in ignorant or learned. In whomsoever this sin of presumption hath no lordship, in him the devil is overcome.

2. The Sin of Despair

The second sin is desperation or despair - that is, too little trust in the mercy of God. St. Augustine saith, "*Dread of God's righteousness, and hope of God's mercy, are two gates of life*".....Those who dread him are well pleasing unto the Lord, as are those who trust in his mercy. And again, presumption and desperation are two gates of death, by which men enter into sin and trouble, and afterwards into the pains of hell without end.....

3. The Sin of Obstinacy

The third sin is obstinacy or hardness of heart, which will not be contrite through compunction, nor made soft with pity, nor moved with prayers or preachings, and is not set [aright] by beatings. It is unkind against good deeds, unfaithful to counsels, fierce and raging against judgments, shameless in foul

things, [foolishly] fearless when faced with [serious] perils, neither manly [in the true sense], foolhardy against God, not cognizant of precious time wasted, [daily] negligent, not providing [for the future]. In summary, this is that sin which neither fears God nor feels shame.....

4. The Sin of Unrepentance

The fourth sin is unrepentance. This is he that will never do true penance, but leadeth his life continually after the desires of his flesh, overcome by the Fiend and the false world. For no man doeth true penance to God, but he that fully leaveth that sin for which he suffereth penance.....His goods he giveth to God, himself to the devil. For he [values] worldly riches more than he does his body or soul, loving most that which God loves least; wherefore his love is turned to hate.....

5. The Sin of Envy

The fifth sin is envy of thy brother's grace, as when thy neighbor is wise, well governed, praised or borne up, rich, wealthy, strong, fair or virtuous in abundance of grace. The envious man slanders, upbraids, reproves, despises, hates, hinders, scorns, and pursues to defoul his brother's grace as much as he can.....When Jesus Christ cast out a devil from a man that was dumb, then Scribes and Pharisees, envious sects, that were a false, private religion, slandered Christ [by accusing him of working] this miracle in Beelzebub, prince of devils. Since these sects [dare speak this way] to Christ, how much [more so] will they [in like manner] speak to his followers?

Roman Catholic Prelates and Friars Slander and Persecute the Lollards For Preaching the Gospel

Thus prelates and friars in these days shamefully slander their simple brethren that travail through Christ's holy law to cast evil [behavior] from their souls, preaching the gospel as Christ intended, to turn the people to virtuous living. These have directed their malice and slander at the Lollards, those who

speak of God, and these drive the people from the faith, [through intimidation], that they dare not [do good] work, or speak [righteousness for fear] of themselves being slandered. But assuredly they are not worthy of Christ, those who [remain silent] for the barking of the hounds. [I.e., due to the threats of the Dominicans.] For none is worthy to be with the Lord who is ashamed to be in his service, in [prosperity or tribulation]. And such men show themselves traitors to God, who with their slanders hinder their brethren, saying, [in effect], that the Fiend gives wisdom to his members [the Roman Catholic priesthood] who serve him in sin, yet the Lord gives no such wisdom to his beloved servants [the Lollards] , who live chaste, virtuous lives in his service. This dispute stretches unto the Godhead to be punished in the day of judgment.

Biblical Admonitions to Allow the Word of God to Go Forth

That a priest should not be hindered to preach the truth, nor God's people to speak of their faith, is openly taught in the book of Numbers 11. There it is read that Eldad and Medad prophesied, although they were not licensed by Moses. Joshua [was envious] and complained to Moses; and Moses said, *"Why are you envious on my behalf? Who am I to forbid the people to prophesy? I would that God grant his Spirit unto them."*

This is confirmed in the gospel. St. John said unto Christ, We have seen a man casting out devils in thy name, who followeth not us, and we have forbidden him. Jesus said, *"Forbid him not."* Alas! How dare our bishops for shame offend against these God's laws. The enemies of truth object, [bringing forth their proof texts, such as] Romans 10, *"How shall they preach unless they are sent?"* With this [text] they blind many folk, cutting the meaning from the words. For Paul meaneth that priests should preach, for they are sent both of God and of the bishop, to perform that office. [We ask,] how shall these [Roman Catholic] bishops maintain their [unrighteous laws which make void the laws of] their God, and [harm] his holy people, [when they stand before him in judgment]? [We

answer,] it shall be more sufferable to Sodom and Gomorrah, than to these people who disturb God's ordinance.

6. The Sin of Fighting Against Known Truth

The sixth sin is fighting against the truth which a man knoweth. That is, when the truth is told to the guilty who is not disposed to amend [his conduct], but instead makes blind ungrounded reasonings, with subtle arguments and foul sophistications, and damneth the truth against his conscience, with a bold forehead which cannot shame, as the prophet saith, Jeremiah 3. As Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses in the sight of Pharaoh, so these withstand the truth, men corrupted in their minds. St. Peter calleth these men by names, when he saith, These are master-liars that shall bring in among the people sects of perdition [2 Peter 2:1]. *“Though ye rise with Lucifer, and make yourselves nests among the stars, from thence ye shall be drawn and thrown to the ground.”* [Cf. Matt. 13:32; Rev. 6:13]. When will ye mark the words of Christ, who curseth you for your apostasy, and for [removing] children from their fathers. [I.e., by the wiles of the friars in seducing children to join their Orders.] Christ saith unto you, Matt. 23, *“Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, that compass about the sea and the land, to seek novices [i.e., religious novitiates to join their Orders]; and when ye have found him, ye make him twice the hell-brand as yourselves”*.....All men take heed of these six sins.

Chapter 4

Antichrist's Parts Specifically Identified:

His Head, Body and Tail all comprise the Roman Catholic Church

Of the great chief antichrist, that in a special manner bringeth forth false laws against Jesus Christ[’s laws], and pretendeth himself to most holy, the Lord God thus teacheth by the prophet Isaiah 9:15. A man of great age, and worthy to be worshipped, [held captive by the things] of the world, he is head and chief antichrist. A prophet or preacher teaching [lies], he is the tail of this antichrist. Of

this tail speaketh St. Peter more plainly, and saith, These are spiritual merchants which [haggle over the price of salvation] with the people in feigned words, and with their sugar-coated speech they beguile the hearts of simple people. [2 Peter 2:3]. For Jude saith they shall worship the persons of men because [it is advantageous for them to do so]. This tail of antichrist shall not preach [the truth] freely.

[This edition of the lantern of light unfortunately edits the Lollard commentary on key prophetic verses which follow: Rev.13:16-17; 14:9-11; Zech.11:15-17; Rev.16:10-11. The editors do admit, however, that these important prophetic Scriptures were utilized by the Lollards "*with an application of them to the Romish prelates of that day.*" Then follows]:

Lincoln Grostead saith, "*I quake, I dread, I am in horror, I am afraid, but I dare not be still, lest peradventure that sentence fall on me, which the prophet saith, Isaiah 6, Woe to me if I [remain] still. The well, the beginning, and the cause of all ruin and mischief is the court of Rome.*" Now, by the one authority of God, and one accordance of his holy saints, follows an open conclusion firmly grounded in true belief, that in the court of Rome is the head of antichrist, and in prelates is the body of antichrist, but in those [ragged] sects, as monks, canons, and friars is the venomous tail of antichrist.

How this antichrist shall be destroyed, God himself teacheth by the prophet Daniel, and saith, *This antichrist shall be destroyed without hands*, that is, without the power of man. For Paul saith, II Thess. 2, *Christ shall slay antichrist with the spirit of his mouth, that is, with the holy word of his law. And the Lord shall destroy him with the shining of his coming*, that is, with turning of men's hearts by his grace, to his law, a little before the doom.

Chapter 5

The Five Assaults of Antichrist By Which He May Be Identified

1. Antichrist Enacts Laws Which Are Contrary To Holy Writ

Holy David the king, had the full spirit of prophecy given to him; and he, seeing the coming of antichrist, his life and fall, marked five hideous assaults

which he shall commit against the servants of God. The first assault of antichrist is constitution, as the prophet saith, Lord, suffer thou to ordain a lawmaker upon thy people, in pain of their sin, for they will not consent to the truth. That is to mean antichrist uses false, lucrative, or winning laws, such as absolutions, indulgences, pardons, privileges, and all other heavenly treasure that is offered for sale, to spoil the people of their worldly goods; and principally these new constitutions, by whose strength antichrist interdicts churches, examines preachers, and deprives them of their benefices; curses hearers, and takes away the goods of them that further the preaching of a [true] priest, yea, though it were an angel of heaven, unless that priest show the mark of the beast, which is turned into a new name [i.e., he must change his birth name to one which pleases the Roman Catholic Church], and called a special letter of license [i.e., he must be licensed by the authority of the Church of Rome to preach], to further blind the ignorant people.

2. Antichrist Causes Tribulation For The Saints

The second assault of antichrist is tribulation, as the prophet saith, antichrist vexes the people by might, by hunting them [down that they might commit] idolatry. God saith by the prophet, Isaiah 5, Woe to you that say good is evil and evil is good, putting light into darkness, and darkness into light, turning sweet into bitter and bitter into sweet. And thus doth antichrist when he transposes virtues into vices, and vices into virtues; as [he turns] pilgrimage into outrage and outrage into pilgrimage [i.e., the Crusades against the innocent Albigenses were ordered by Innocent III, who called the troops 'pilgrims'].

3. Antichrist Causes Inquisition Against The Saints

The third assault of antichrist is inquisition, as the prophet saith, antichrist inquires, searches, and hearkens where he may find any man or woman that writes, reads, learns, or studies God's law in their mother tongue, to lead their life after the pleasing will of God, and soon he catches them in his censures, and afterwards smites, as he may [by his laws] most grievously hurt them. But he

shall not make this inquisition after the greatness of his wrath, for God shall refrain and abridge the power of his malice, so that he shall do no more than God shall suffer him.

4. Antichrist Persecutes The Saints

The fourth assault of antichrist is persecution. Antichrist sits and drinks with the peace of this world, with rich men in their dens. But the poor, meek, simple, and lowly he catches sight of and pursues, destroying them both bodily and spiritually. Antichrist with his clergy always build their nests in a country that is fat and abounding with worldly goods, and if thou look about thee thou shalt find them among woods and waters. [I.e., an allusion to the locations of the principle ancient abbeys and monasteries in the most fertile parts of the country.] [The editors of this edition then note that what follows is a citation of Rev.16:13 which the Lollards teach indicates the monastic orders. Then follows]:

They gain much of their goods from the lords, through flattery and feigned hypocrisies; and from the commoners about them by beguiling them. What goods they have [amassed] they hold fast against the authority of God's laws; and with these riches they nourish wild, strong and lawless men, who pursue those who speak out against this cursed sin. But God comforts his servants during this persecution, and saith, Psalm 46, Our God is help in tribulations. True [Christian] men shall not be abashed, though proud fleshly men are confederated to antichrist, helping him in his persecutions.

5. Antichrist Executes The Saints

The fifth assault of antichrist is execution. When he seeth he avails not in these torments, then he executes his malice against God's chosen. In this time of execution, the vicious part of the laity, from the highest to the lowest, shall consent to execute the wickedness of the vicious part of the clergy. Then shall this prophecy be fulfilled, Psalm 79, *They shall shed out innocent blood and no man shall dare to bury their bodies* [Cf. Rev.11:9]. But, as St. Augustine declares, "*When antichrist deems that he has lordship over all the servants of God, roaring*

upon them, with divers of devices of tormenting, then shall he fall to open reproof for evermore." [The editors of this edition then indicate that several references to the witnesses of Rev.11 and the 3 ½ year time period are given by the Lollards. Unfortunately, this portion of the work was deleted by the editors. Then follows]:

Let no man look after Enoch and Elijah in person [as the two witnesses of Rev.11], for then he may be beguiled, but [rather look for witnesses who come] in spirit and power. Now they are come to make men's hearts ready before Christ's doom, to whom be glory, now and forever. Amen.

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