

A Second and Greater Reformation

By Edwin de Kock

A Voice from the Past

Fifty-five years ago at Ladysmith, Natal, I met a distant relative with vivid memories from her childhood about a godly Seventh-day Adventist teacher. Apart from his normal subjects, he taught Bible, which was a feature of all the schools in the old South Africa. One day he talked about Martin Luther and said to her class: “Children, one day there will be another and greater Reformation than in his time.” She did not belong to our Church but never forgot his words.

When she told me this, she was a middle-aged woman, older than I. Her teacher probably predicted that second Reformation in the 1920s or the 1930s, when she was a young girl. But what about the here and now in which we find ourselves?

A Hundred Years of Religious Conflict and War

On 31 October 1517 Martin Luther (1483-1546) nailed his 95 theses against indulgences to the church door at Wittenberg, Germany, and—without planning it—kindled the Reformation of the sixteenth century. At first he hoped that the Church of Rome would accept his Protestant message of righteousness by faith and turn away from all its false doctrines and corruptions. But it did not.

Quite soon he realized that Catholicism, headed by the man at the Vatican, was not going to change in any meaningful way.

When Luther received the papal bull of excommunication that kicked him out of his ancestral Church, he declared: “I despise and attack it, as impious, false. . . . It is *Christ* Himself who is condemned therein. . . . I rejoice in having to bear such ills for the best of causes. Already I feel greater liberty in my heart; for at last I know that the pope is antichrist, and that his throne is that of Satan himself.”—D’Aubigné, b. 6. Ch. 9.” (*The Great Controversy*, 126)

Immediately after his magnificent stand for the truth and his refusal to recant at Worms, before the emperor, the princes, and other dignitaries of the Holy Roman Empire, a stake awaited him. On his way home, however, his supporters kidnapped and spirited him away to the Wartburg castle, where he translated much of the Bible into German. Heaven protected him there, but other Protestants were not so fortunate. Many of them were burned or slaughtered.

With a shock he recognized the Church in which he had grown up as the Babylon of the Apocalypse. Soon he trumpeted forth the message of Rev. 18:4: “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.”

Within a few years, Protestantism spread like a wildfire through northwestern Europe. Other Reformers spread a message similar to that of Luther, especially from Geneva, Switzerland. Country after country, adopted the Reformed religion.

To the papacy it eventually became plain that murdering individuals could not extinguish Protestantism. Therefore, a century after 1517, when Luther lifted the hammer to nail his document to that door, the Catholics marshaled entire armies to destroy it in what became the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), the most destructive conflict that ever ravaged modern Europe.

But the Lord raised up a mighty warrior to save his people: Gustav II Adolf (1594–1632), most commonly known by his Latin name as Gustavus Adolphus, the King of Sweden. During his brief reign of eleven years (1611–1632), he transformed his country into a great power,

bestowing on it military supremacy during the Thirty Years' War. This determined the political as well as the religious balance of power in Europe. A military genius, he inflicted great defeats on the Catholic armies and thwarted the design of the Roman Church to the Protestant Reformation. He personally led his armies from the age of 16 until he fell in battle in 1632 while leading a charge. (Wikipedia, s.v. "Gustavus Adolphus")

The Counter Reformation

Rome, however, did not give up. What she could not achieve by force of arms, she sought to gain through theological subtlety. The Catholic Church proceeded to cleanse itself of its most obvious corruptions through a Counter-Reformation, inaugurated at the multi-session Council of Trent (1545-1563). It also had at its disposal a powerful new tool, the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, created by Ignacio de Loyola (1491–1556) in 1539 and approved a year later by the pope. The basic purposed of this order was and is to defend him.

The Achilles heel of the papacy is prophetic Historicism. This interprets the predictions of the Bible by comparing them with the events of history, which the Protestants had effectively used to show that the pope is the antichrist. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, three Jesuit scholars did their utmost to debunk or at least blunt the effectiveness of Historicism by deflecting attention away from the Roman pontiff. They did so through two alternative methods of prophetic interpretation.

Luis del Alcázar (1554–1613), a Spanish Catholic theologian, wrote *Vestigatio arcane sensus in Apocalypsi* (An Investigation into the Hidden Sense of the Apocalypse), a book of 900 pages. This tome was published in 1614, a year after his death. He maintained that everything in the book of Revelation, apart from the three last chapters, referred to things that have already happened. This work is also "regarded as the first major application of the method of interpretation of prophecy by reading in terms of the author's contemporary concerns." (Wikipedia, s.v. "Luis del Alcázar"). For instance, the Antichrist could be identified with a pagan Roman persecutor of Christianity who lived a long time ago. He could therefore not be the pope. Because it points back to the past, this approach to prophecy is known as Preterism. As pointed out in my book, *The Truth About 666 and the Story of the Great Apostasy* (2011, 2013), the *Vestigatio* was also indebted to the allegorical method used by Origen, partly under the influence of pagan Neoplatonism, to whom prophetic Idealism is traceable.

A fellow Spanish Jesuit Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), also wrote an anti-Historicist book to deflect the finger of accusation that Protestants were pointing at the pope. It bears the title *In Sacrum Beati Ioannis Apostoli, & Evangelistiae Apocalypsis Commentarij* (1590), this work on the book of Revelation is likewise a lengthy work (500 pages), which appeared a year before its author died. Unlike Luis del Alcázar, Ribera mostly did not point back into the past but to the Future. He proposed that only the first few chapters of the Apocalypse applied to ancient pagan Rome but projected the rest to a brief period immediately before the Second Coming. This, he insisted, would not be a symbolic 3½ years, 42 months, 1,260 days, based on the Historicist idea that in prophecy a day is equal to a year of calendar time (Numbers 14:34, Ezekiel 4:6). No, he maintained, it would be a literal 3½ years. (Wikipedia, s.v. "Francisco Ribera). Cardinal Archbishop Roberto Francesco Romolo Bellarmino (1542-1621), was another Futurist, who also belonged to the Society of Jesus.

As I show in *The Truth About 666* and my other books on prophecy, Catholic Futurism is the theological ancestor of Protestant Dispensationalism. Together with Preterism and Idealism, these alternative methods of prophetic interpretation—largely the result of Jesuit thinking—have almost eliminated Historicism. This is a striking example of what Ellen G. White has so aptly called “false prophecy . . . kindled from the hellish torch of Satan” (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 409, 410).

Nowadays liberal Protestants are mostly Preterists. On the other hand, Southern Baptists and other more conservative Protestants, having accepted Ribera’s interpretation, no longer believe that the Roman pontiff is the antichrist of Bible prophecy. Therefore, like Evangelicals who favor ecumenism, they have, eschatologically speaking, been totally vanquished by the Vatican. This, alas, is also true of the Lutheran Church. The Catholic Counter Reformation, which since the sixteenth and seventeenth century has never flagged, is spectacularly successful.

Sweden and Luther’s Church Today

Next year is almost upon us. On October 31, 2017, it will be 500 years since Luther’s hammer nailed those theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. But how well is Sweden doing nowadays. Can we look to it for further leadership as a champion in the second, even greater Reformation predicted by that saintly Seventh-day Adventist teacher of so long ago?

Sadly, after so many centuries, it is now largely a secular country. Gustavus Adolphus, though still honored as a historical figure, belongs to a fading past. Lutheranism is still its leading church, at least nominally. But observe what happened at the cathedral of Lund in southern Sweden. This is what happened on October 31, 2016, as reported by the *BBC News* of that day, as well as the multilingual Vatican web site under Francis Homilies 2016.

Pope Francis himself arrived there to commemorate Reformation Day. Together with Lutheran leaders, he presided over an ecumenical prayer. The Jesuit pontiff praised the Reformation “for helping to give greater centrality to scripture in the church’s life.” He conveniently overlooked some ugly facts Luther was excommunicated, Protestants were often slain or burned at the stake. Decades of religious wars in Europe also followed as Catholicism tried to stamp out the Reformation.

Previously Pope Francis had actually praised Martin Luther himself “for his fight against corruption and greed in the church of the time,” but now he stressed unity for all Christians—under himself, of course, although he did not say so. To put the capstone on this ecumenical love affair, “in a joint statement, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation said that both partners ‘are no longer strangers’ and that their joint goal was to bring members of the two churches together at the Eucharistic table.”

Among other things, he made the following ecumenical statement: “Here in Lund, at this prayer service, we wish to manifest our shared desire to remain one with Christ, so that we may have life. We ask him, ‘Lord, help us by your grace to be more closely united to you and thus, together, to bear a more effective witness of faith, hope and love.’ This is also a moment to thank God for the efforts of our many brothers and sisters from different ecclesial communities who refused to be resigned to division, but instead kept alive the hope of reconciliation among all who believe in the one Lord.” (“Common Ecumenical Prayer at the Lutheran Cathedral of Lund, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Sweden, 31 October–1 November 2016,” in Francis Homilies 2016.)

In America, too, the Evangelical Lutheran Church this year declared officially that on many points “there are no longer church-dividing issues” with the Roman Catholic Church, according to Emily McFarlan Miller of Religion News Service.. We also note that the ELCA is in full communion with the Episcopal Church, the Moravian Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ. The “*Declaration on the Way*” was approved 931-9 by the 2016 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Churchwide Assembly held last week at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans.”

According to Wikipedia and other sources, the ELCA, which has about four million members, came into existence in 1988 by merging three denominations: The American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the Lutheran Church in America. Apart from belonging to the World Council of Churches as well as the Lutheran World Federation, “the ELCA is in full communion with the Episcopal Church, Moravian Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church.

We wonder which way they will go. And what would Martin Luther have thought of so much Protestant treachery?

But 400 Years Ago, A Mighty Lutheran Voice

During 1600 at Greifswald, northeastern Germany, a mystery book was published in Latin, which scholars still used as an international language. Here is an English translation of its title: *Of the Question Whether Any Certain Name of Antichrist Happens to Exist, to Which That Apocalyptic Number 666 Corresponds Exactly; An Apodictic Treatise, the Author Being Carolus Aglaeonius Irenochoraeus, Dedicated to David Chytraeus*, a Lutheran theologian and writer, who died in 1600. The writer who used this pseudonym was Andreas Helwig, who taught in Greifswald. His work called attention to *vicarius Filii Dei* (The vicar of the Son of God), a very old pontifical title, which has a numerical value of 666.

Nowadays perhaps only three libraries still have this 1600 edition (two in Germany and one in Scotland).

In 1612, the author dropped the pseudonym, openly revealing his real identity. Apparently the first person on earth who made this discovery, Helwig was a prominent intellectual, “a professional teacher of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew for twenty-seven years.” During his life, he was amongst other things the author of an etymological Greek Dictionary, rector at Berlin (1611–1614) and professor of poetry at the University of Rostock (1614–1616). Froom stated that Helwig’s “specialty in language and his conspicuous ability in Greek and Latin won him the standing of royal crown poet.” (LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol. II, pp. 605-606, 608.)

The best-known version of Helwig’s great prophetic work is the one published in 1612 while he was still professor at Rostock. At that stage, its title—translated into English—was *The Roman Antichrist, Revealed by His Own Name, Which Contains That Notorious Apocalyptic Number (DCLXVI); and to the Honor and Praise of Our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, the Highest and Only High Priest of the Church, Whose Seat, Fraudulently Occupied, This Person Claims for Himself*.

From Rostock, Helwig relocated to Stralsund as the rector at its gymnasium, in 1617 or 1618. There he also continued his scholarly work and eventually produced a final, definitive edition of his book. It appeared in 1630, under yet another name: *The Roman Antichrist, Revealed by His Own Name: Made Public and Subjected to the Glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Highest and Only*

High Priest of the Church, Whose Honor and Seat This Vaunted VICarIVs fILII DeI Claims for Himself and Imposes upon the Entire World the Judgment of the Holy Catholic Church, by Master Andreas Helwig, Rector of the Stralsund Gymnasium.

This last edition was almost never published, being completed during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Dated 25 June 1630 at Stralsund, it was dedicated to the great Swedish monarch, Gustavus Adolphus. At the very time when Helwig was putting the finishing touches to his book, this mighty warrior was playing a crucial role in the Thirty Years' War, when he saved Sweden from the Habsburgers and at the same time ensured the survival of Protestantism against the Catholic armies marshaled to blot it out.

What makes Helwig's Dedication so fascinating is that just two years earlier, in 1628, Stralsund—"the last remaining Protestant bastion in Pomerania"—was saved in the nick of time from Wallenstein's army, by Gustavus Adolphus together with Christian IV, the Danish King. We need hardly doubt that Helwig, by not falling into his enemies' hands, as a notorious heretic escaped a most unpleasant fate. He owed his very life to the Swedish king. It is pleasant to imagine Gustavus Adolphus in late 1630 sparing a little time to read the dedication and sad to know that only two years later he would fall in battle at Lützen on 6 November 1632.

But the Catholic armies and the accompanying Inquisition overspreading so much German, Protestant territory may also have contrived to destroy nearly all the copies of the 1630 edition. A few, however, did survive. One of them came into the possession of Carl Frederik Muhrbeck, whose identity is obscure. In 1772, he gave it to the Västerås City Library, Sweden. There it lay silently since then, for 235 years—from before the American Revolution. Fortunately Helwig's editions have now also acquired digital immortality and are no longer confined to a few locations.

A translation into English will hopefully be available in 2017. Those interested in acquiring it can get in touch with me for details by e-mailing edwdecock@hotmail.com.

When Will We Be Ready for the Second Reformation?

When the fourth angel speaks, the Holy Spirit will be poured out as the Latter Rain upon the Remnant Church. This will be a second Pentecost. Here is a part of what Ellen G. White has predicted about that time:

The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close. Here are "the times of refreshing" to which the apostle Peter looked forward when he said: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus." Acts 3:19, 20. The work will be similar to that of the Day of Pentecost. (GC 611-612)

It is with an earnest longing that I look forward to the time when the events of the day of Pentecost shall be repeated with even greater power than on that occasion. John says, "I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory." Then, as at the Pentecostal season, the people will hear the truth spoken to them, every man in his own tongue. . . . Thousands of voices will be imbued with the power to speak forth the wonderful truths of God's Word. The stammering tongue will be unloosed, and the timid will be made strong to bear courageous testimony to the truth. May the Lord help His

people to cleanse the soul temple from every defilement, and to maintain such a close connection with Him that they may be partakers of the latter rain when it shall be poured out. (SDABC, EGW's comments on Acts 2:1-4, p. 1035)

This is to be a revival and reformation without parallel since the last apostles died some two thousand years ago, among Christians in any denomination, including Seventh-day Adventists. Though this is not be the primary function of the Latter Rain, many amazing miracles, including divine healing, will be performed. In the paragraphs cited, one is especially fascinating: "Then, as at the Pentecostal season, the people will hear the truth spoken to them, *every man in his own tongue*" (emphasis added). Does this mean that the true gift of tongues, the supernatural endowment of speaking a foreign language, will again be manifested? That is surely what this sentence says.