

Theological Opinions of the Consistory of the COELC

XV

On the Antichrist

Adopted in May 2020

What does Scripture say concerning the Antichrist?

- 1) Antichrist comes from within the Church, for Scripture says he will sit in the temple of God, i.e., the Church (2 Thess. 2:4).
- 2) He sets himself against the Church and its doctrine. His sin is described as apostasy, and he will cause a great falling away from the truth of the Gospel so that many will join him in his apostasy (2 Thess. 2:3, 4).
- 3) He will rule as the Head of the Church contrary to Matthew 20:25 and 1 Peter 5:2-3, in which the ministers of the Church are told not to rule or lord authority over the Church, and Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 5:23, where Christ is called the only Head of the Church, and the Church is to submit to Christ alone as Her Head (Eph. 5:24).
- 4) From his false office in the Church he will exalt himself above the true God and identify himself as God. (2 Thess. 2:4).
- 5) He will exhibit great power and will be the cause of many “lying wonders” founded upon the works and power of Satan (2 Thess. 2:9).
- 6) Matthew 24:24 and Mark 13:22 speak of false Christs and false prophets who will come and led astray the believers through signs and wonders. Matthew 24:5 and 2 John 1:7 say that many will come claiming to be the Christ, but any such a person is a deceiver and an antichrist. 1 John 2:18 speaks of many antichrists that have gone out into the world. However, even though these texts speak of many antichrists, 1 John 2:18 states that the Antichrist was coming, and 1 John 4:3 states that the Antichrist was coming and now is in the world already. It is this Antichrist that 2 Thessalonians 2:3,9 calls the Man of Lawlessness and the Son of Perdition.

What does the *Book of Concord* say about the Antichrist?

- 1) The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* Article VII and VIII: The Church states that “*Paul predicts (2 Thess. 2:4) that the Antichrist “takes his seat in the Temple of God” that is, he will rule and hold office in the church.*” (4)
- 2) The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* Article XV: Human Traditions in the Church states, “*If our opponents defend these human acts of worship as meriting justification, grace and forgiveness of sins, they are simply establishing the Kingdom of the Antichrist. For the Kingdom of the Antichrist is a new kind of worship of God, devised by human authority in opposition to Christ, just as the Kingdom of Mohammed has religious rites and works, through which it seeks to be justified before God. It does not hold that people are freely justified by faith on account of Christ. So also the papacy will be a part of the Kingdom of the Antichrist if it defends human rites as justifying. For they deprive Christ of His honour when they teach that we are not freely justified on account of Christ through faith but through such rites, and especially when they teach that such rites are not only useful for justification but even necessary. In the above article on the*

Church they also condemned us because we said that it is not necessary for the true unity of the Church that rites instituted by man be everywhere alike. Daniel 11:38 indicates that new religious rites will be the very form and constitution of the Kingdom of the Antichrist. For there he says, "He shall honour the god of fortresses instead of these; a god whom his fathers did not know he shall honour with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts." Here he is describing the invention of new religious rites, for he says that a god such as the fathers did not know will be worshipped." (.18-19)

- 3) *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession Article XXVII: Monastic Vows states, "Just as a false opinion concerning sacrifices clung to the godless priests in Judah and just as in Israel services of Baal continued – even though the Church of God was there, which condemned the godless services – so Baal worship clings to the realm of the Pope, namely, the abuse of the Mass, which they direct in such a way that by it they might merit the remission of guilt and punishment for the unrighteous. It appears that this Baal worship will endure together with the reign of the Pope until Christ comes for Judgement and by the glory of His coming destroys the Kingdom of the Antichrist."* (.98)
- 4) *The Smalcald Articles Part II, Article II, states, "The invocation of saints is also one of the abuses of the Antichrist that is in conflict with the first, chief article [Justification by grace through faith in Christ] and that destroys the knowledge of Christ."* (.25)
- 5) *The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope states, "Moreover, the marks of the Antichrist clearly fit the reign of the Pope and his minions. For describing the Antichrist to the Thessalonians, Paul calls him an adversary of Christ who "exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the Temple of God, declaring himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:4). He is speaking, therefore, of someone reigning in the Church, not of pagan rulers, and calls that one an adversary of Christ because he will invent doctrine that conflicts with the gospel and will arrogate to himself divine authority. First of all, the pope clearly reigns in the Church and has established this dominion for himself on the pretext of the authority of the Church and the Ministry, offering as justification the words, "I will give you the keys" (Matt. 16:19). Next, papal teaching contradicts the gospel at numerous points, and the pope arrogates to himself divine authority in three ways. First, he assumes the right to alter Christ's teaching and the worship instituted by God, and he wants his own doctrine and worship regarded as divine. Second, he claims not only the power to loose and bind in this life but also authority over souls after this life. Third, the pope is not willing to be judged by the Church or by anyone else and places his authority above the judgement of Councils and of the whole Church. To refuse to be judged by the Church or by anyone is to make himself God. Finally, he defends these dreadful errors and this wickedness with the greatest savagery, killing those who dissent. This being the situation, all Christians must beware lest they become participants in the ungodly teachings, blasphemies, and unjust cruelty of the pope. Indeed, they ought to abandon and curse the Pope and his minions as the realm of the Antichrist, just as Christ commanded, "Beware of false prophets" (Matt. 7:15). Paul also commanded that ungodly teachers are to be shunned and denounced as accursed, and in 2 Corinthians 6:14 he says, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship is there between light and darkness?" To dissent from the consensus of so many nations and to be called schismatics is a grace matter. However, divine authority commands all people not to be accomplices and defenders of ungodliness and unjust cruelty. Thus, our consciences are sufficiently absolved. For the errors of papal rule are manifest, and the Scriptures cry out with one voice that those errors are the teaching of demons and of the Antichrist."* (.39-42)

What does the Pope say about himself?

- 1) Ever since Innocent III (1198-1216) the popes have called themselves "*The Vicar of Christ*".

The term "*Antichrist*" indicates not only those who oppose and stand contrary to, but also those who replace Christ or claim to be a substitute for Christ on earth. The Greek *anti* as well as the Latin *vicarius* denotes one who stands in the place of another.

- 2) *2. Only the Pope can with right be called "Universal".*
9. All princes shall kiss the feet of the Pope alone.
10. His name alone shall be spoken in the churches.
11. His name is unique in the world.
17. No chapter and no book shall be considered canonical without his authority.
18. A sentence passed by him may be retracted by no one. He alone may retract it.
19. He himself may be judged by no one.
(Pope Gregory VII *Dictatus Pape*, 1075)

In this statement the Pope makes himself the ultimate judge, who cannot be judged by any and his judgements may not be undone by any but himself.

The Pope makes himself the ultimate authority over God's Word as he alone determines which books are to be considered Holy Scripture.

Lastly the Pope has turned himself into an idol or false deity, considering himself Universal, commanding princes to kiss his feet and declaring that his name alone shall be spoke in the churches.

- 3) *Of the one and only Church there is one body and one head, not two heads like a monster; that is, Christ and the Vicar of Christ, Peter and the successor of Peter, since the Lord speaking to Peter Himself said: 'Feed my sheep' [Jn 21:17], meaning, my sheep in general, not these, nor those in particular, whence we understand that He entrusted all to him [Peter]. Therefore, if the Greeks or others should say that they are not confided to Peter and to his successors, they must confess not being the sheep of Christ, since Our Lord says in John 'there is one sheepfold and one shepherd.'*
(Pope Boniface VIII *Unum Sanctum*, 1302)

In this statement the Pope makes several claims about the Papal Office. Here the Pope identifies himself as the One Head of the Church, stating that the Church has but One Head, Christ and the Pope. In doing this the Pope has not only usurped the Headship from Christ, but has identified himself as Christ. For the Pope states that the single One Head is Christ and the Pope, thus the Pope is Christ.

In addition the Pope states that since there is One Church and One Head, and that Head is the Pope himself, all who are not under the headship of the Pope do not belong to the One Catholic Church. In this statement the Pope claims that the Greek Church (Eastern Orthodox) do not belong to the one Christian Church because they do not accept the Headship of the Pope, thus making a person's status of Christian and their ultimate salvation dependant on submission to the Pope.

- 4) *We are informed by the texts of the gospels that in this Church and in its power are two swords; namely, the spiritual and the temporal. For when the Apostles say: 'Behold, here are two swords' [Lk 22:38] that is to say, in the Church, since the Apostles were speaking, the Lord did not reply that there were too many, but sufficient. Certainly the one who denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter has not listened well to the word of the Lord commanding: 'Put up thy sword into thy scabbard' [Mt 26:52]. Both, therefore, are in the power of the Church, that is to say, the spiritual and the material sword.*
(Pope Boniface VIII *Unum Sanctum*, 1302)

Here the Pope claims to have Headship over the Two Kingdoms of Church and State. Thus the Pope is both the Head of the Church and also an Earthly Ruler.

How the Two Swords are to be administered are described as thus in the *Unum Sanctum*, “but the former is to be administered for the Church but the latter by the Church; the former in the hands of the priest; the latter by the hands of kings and soldiers, but at the will and sufferance of the priest.”

- 5) *We declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.*
(Pope Boniface VIII *Unum Sanctum*, 1302)
- 6) *We also define that the Holy Apostolic See and the Roman pontiff holds the primacy over the whole world and the Roman Pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter prince of the Apostles, and that he is the true Vicar of Christ, the Head of the whole Church and the Father and Teacher of all Christians, and to him was committed in blessed Peter the full power of tending, ruling and governing the whole Church, as is contained also in the acts of Ecumenical Councils and in the sacred canons.*
(Council of Florence, Session 6-6, 1439)
- 7) *1. We teach and declare that, according to the gospel evidence, a primacy of jurisdiction over the whole Church of God was immediately and directly promised to the blessed apostle Peter and conferred on him by Christ the lord...*
3. And it was to Peter alone that Jesus, after his resurrection, confided the jurisdiction of Supreme Pastor and ruler of his whole fold, saying: Feed my lambs, feed my sheep...
6. Therefore, if anyone says that blessed Peter the apostle was not appointed by Christ the lord as prince of all the apostles and visible head of the whole Church militant; or that it was a primacy of honour only and not one of true and proper jurisdiction that he directly and immediately received from our Lord Jesus Christ himself: let him be anathema.
(Vatican I, Session 4, chapter 1, 1870)
- 8) *2. For no one can be in doubt, indeed it was known in every age that the holy and most blessed Peter, prince and head of the apostles, the pillar of faith and the foundation of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the kingdom from our lord Jesus Christ, the savior and redeemer of the human race, and that to this day and for ever he lives and presides and exercises judgment in his successors the bishops of the Holy Roman See, which he founded and consecrated with his blood.*
3. Therefore whoever succeeds to the chair of Peter obtains by the institution of Christ himself, the primacy of Peter over the whole Church. So what the truth has ordained stands firm, and blessed Peter perseveres in the rock-like strength he was granted, and does not abandon that guidance of the Church which he once received.
4. For this reason it has always been necessary for every Church – that is to say the faithful throughout the world – to be in agreement with the Roman Church because of its more effective leadership. In consequence of being joined, as members to Head, with that See, from which the rights of sacred communion flow to all, they will grow together into the structure of a single body.
5. Therefore, if anyone says that it is not by the institution of Christ the Lord Himself (that is to say, by divine law) that blessed Peter should have perpetual successors in the primacy over the whole Church; or that the Roman Pontiff is not the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy: let him be anathema.
(Vatican I, Session 4, chapter 2, 1870)
- 9) *1. And so, supported by the clear witness of Holy Scripture, and adhering to the manifest and explicit decrees both of our predecessors the Roman Pontiffs and of general councils, we promulgate anew the definition of the ecumenical Council of Florence ⁴⁹, which must be believed by all faithful Christians, namely that the Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff hold a world-wide primacy, and that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter, the prince of the apostles, true vicar of Christ, head of the whole Church and father and teacher of all Christian people. To him, in blessed Peter, full power has been given by our lord Jesus Christ to tend, rule and govern the universal Church. All this is to be found in the acts of the ecumenical councils and the sacred canons.*

2. Wherefore we teach and declare that, by divine ordinance, the Roman Church possesses a preeminence of ordinary power over every other Church, and that this jurisdictional power of the Roman Pontiff is both episcopal and immediate. Both clergy and faithful, of whatever rite and dignity, both singly and collectively, are bound to submit to this power by the duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience, and this not only in matters concerning faith and morals, but also in those which regard the discipline and government of the Church throughout the world.

3. In this way, by unity with the Roman Pontiff in communion and in profession of the same faith, the Church of Christ becomes one flock under one Supreme Shepherd.

4. This is the teaching of the Catholic truth, and no one can depart from it without endangering his faith and salvation...

8. Since the Roman Pontiff, by the divine right of the apostolic primacy, governs the whole Church, we likewise teach and declare that he is the supreme judge of the faithful, and that in all cases which fall under ecclesiastical jurisdiction recourse may be had to his judgment. The sentence of the Apostolic See (than which there is no higher authority) is not subject to revision by anyone, nor may anyone lawfully pass judgment thereupon. And so they stray from the genuine path of truth who maintain that it is lawful to appeal from the judgments of the Roman pontiffs to an Ecumenical Council as if this were an authority superior to the Roman Pontiff.

9. So, then, if anyone says that the Roman Pontiff has merely an office of supervision and guidance, and not the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole Church, and this not only in matters of faith and morals, but also in those which concern the discipline and government of the Church dispersed throughout the whole world; or that he has only the principal part, but not the absolute fullness, of this supreme power; or that this power of his is not ordinary and immediate both over all and each of the Churches and over all and each of the pastors and faithful: let him be anathema.

(Vatican I, Session 4, chapter 3, 1870)

In this chapter the Pope is not only declared the Supreme Head of the Church, but it states that one must be in Communion with the Pope in order to belong to the Church of Christ. It is stated that if one departs from the Roman Catholic Church they cannot do so without endangering their faith and salvation.

It also states that the Pope is not subject to revision by anyone, nor may anyone pass judgement upon him. The Pope is also deemed to be the superior authority over and above all Ecumenical Councils. Thus, the Pope can teach whatever he wills and cannot be rebuked, challenged or questioned by anyone, not even an Ecumenical Council.

10) 1. That apostolic primacy which the Roman Pontiff possesses as successor of Peter, the prince of the apostles, includes also the supreme power of teaching. This Holy See has always maintained this, the constant custom of the Church demonstrates it, and the Ecumenical Councils, particularly those in which East and West met in the union of faith and charity, have declared it...

6. For the Holy Spirit was promised to the successors of Peter not so that they might, by his revelation, make known some new doctrine, but that, by his assistance, they might religiously guard and faithfully expound the revelation or deposit of faith transmitted by the Apostles. Indeed, their apostolic teaching was embraced by all the venerable fathers and revered and followed by all the holy orthodox doctors, for they knew very well that this See of St. Peter always remains unblemished by any error, in accordance with the divine promise of our Lord and Saviour to the prince of His disciples: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren."

7. This gift of truth and never-failing faith was therefore divinely conferred on Peter and his successors in this See so that they might discharge their exalted office for the salvation of all, and so that the whole flock of Christ might be kept away by them from the poisonous food of error and be nourished with the sustenance of heavenly doctrine. Thus the tendency to schism is removed and the whole Church is preserved in unity, and, resting on its foundation, can stand firm against the gates of Hell.

8. But since in this very age when the salutary effectiveness of the apostolic office is most especially needed, not a few are to be found who disparage its authority, we judge it absolutely necessary to affirm solemnly the prerogative which the only-begotten Son of God was pleased to attach to the supreme pastoral office.

9. Therefore, faithfully adhering to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith, to the glory of God our Saviour, for the exaltation of the Catholic religion and for the salvation of the Christian people, with the approval of the Sacred Council, we teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman Pontiff speaks *EX CATHEDRA*, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals 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. Therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irrefragable. So then, should anyone, which God forbid, have the temerity to reject this definition of ours: let him be anathema.
(Vatican I, Session 4, chapter 4, 1870)

It was here at the First Vatican Council that the doctrine of Papal Infallibility was officially established. Thus, when the Pope speaks *Ex Cathedra*, that is *from the chair* of St. Peter in the official position of shepherd and teacher of all Christians, the doctrine that he speaks is thus declared to be infallible doctrine that can never be changed, challenged or refuted. Thus, the Pope is making his words equal to the Word of God.

- 11) **881** *The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the "rock" of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock. "The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of apostles united to its head." "This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope."*
- 882** *The Pope, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, "is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful." "For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered."*
- 883** *"The college or body of bishops has no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, as its head." As such, this college has "supreme and full authority over the universal Church; but this power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff."*
- 884** *"The college of bishops exercises power over the universal Church in a solemn manner in an Ecumenical Council." But "there never is an Ecumenical Council which is not confirmed or at least recognized as such by Peter's successor."...*
- 889** *In order to preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the apostles, Christ who is the Truth willed to confer on Her a share in His own infallibility. By a "supernatural sense of faith" the People of God, under the guidance of the Church's living Magisterium, "unfailingly adheres to this faith."*
- 890** *The mission of the Magisterium is linked to the definitive nature of the covenant established by God with his people in Christ. It is this Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error. Thus, the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates. To fulfil this service, Christ endowed the Church's shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The exercise of this charism takes several forms:*
- 891** *"The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful - who confirms his brethren in the faith he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals. . . . The infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter's successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium," above all in an Ecumenical Council. When the Church through its supreme Magisterium proposes a doctrine "for belief as being divinely revealed," and as the teaching of Christ, the definitions "must be adhered to with the obedience of faith." This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself.*
- 892** *Divine assistance is also given to the successors of the apostles, teaching in communion with the successor of Peter, and, in a particular way, to the bishop of Rome, pastor of the whole Church, when, without arriving at an infallible definition and without pronouncing in a*

"definitive manner," they propose in the exercise of the ordinary Magisterium a teaching that leads to better understanding of Revelation in matters of faith and morals. To this ordinary teaching the faithful "are to adhere to it with religious assent" which, though distinct from the assent of faith, is nonetheless an extension of it.
(*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

- 12) *In this Church of Christ the Roman pontiff, as the successor of Peter, to whom Christ entrusted the feeding of His sheep and lambs, enjoys supreme, full, immediate, and universal authority over the care of souls by divine institution. Therefore, as pastor of all the faithful, he is sent to provide for the common good of the universal Church and for the good of the individual churches. Hence, he holds a primacy of ordinary power over all the churches.*
(Pope Paul VI, Vatican II, Preface.2, 1965).

Confessional statements

1. We believe, teach and confess, according to the Scriptures, that the Office of the Pope is the fulfilment of the Antichrist who claims religious supremacy over the Church as Her Head, thus usurping the authority of Christ, the one true Head of the Church.
2. We reject and condemn the speculations that would have any world leader or any of the myriad of religions or philosophies that fight against Christianity as being the Antichrist. Even though many antichrists have gone out into the world as 1 John 2:18 records, Scripture reveals that there will be one who is named the Antichrist (1 John 2:18; 4:3), who is called in 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4 the Man of Lawlessness and the Son of Perdition. This Scripture has been fulfilled in the Roman Pope.
3. We reject, however, the notion that Roman Catholics cannot be Christians and that the Roman Catholic Church is not a Christian church, since it still maintains the marks of the Church, having both Word and Sacrament.