

The Antichrist and the Office of the Papacy

It is historical fact that the Lutheran Confessors considered the Office of the Papacy to be the Office of Antichrist. This receives reference throughout the Lutheran Confessions, especially in the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*:

It is well known, however, that the Roman pontiffs and their minions defend ungodly doctrines and worship practices. 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 want 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 judgment of councils and 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 (*Treatise* 39-40)

This identification often meets with disbelief or amusement today, an antiquated label left over from a time of religious intolerance.

However, using the description of Antichrist in the *Treatise*, let us examine doctrinal statements which are confessed by the Roman Catholic Church today. (Unless otherwise noted, quotations from *Creeds of the Churches*, edited by John Leith. Louisville: John Knox, 1982.)

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]. (Treatise, 40)

Primacy

I promise and swear true obedience to the Roman Pontiff, vicar of Christ and successor of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles. I unhesitatingly accept and profess all the doctrines (especially those concerning the primacy of the Roman Pontiff and his infallible teaching authority) handed down, defined, and explained by the sacred canons and ecumenical councils and especially those of this most holy Council of Trent. (The Creed of the Council of Trent, 1564. Leith, p. 441)

If anyone, therefore, shall say that Blessed Peter the Apostle was not appointed the Prince of all the Apostles and the visible Head of the whole Church Militant; or that the same directly and immediately received from the same Our Lord Jesus Christ a primacy of honour only, and not of true and proper jurisdiction, let him be anathema. (First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican 1, 1870. Chapter I, Leith, p. 450)

If, then, any should deny that it is by the institution of Christ the Lord, or by divine right, that Blessed Peter should have a perpetual line of successors in the Primacy over the Universal Church, or that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of Blessed Peter in this primacy; let him be anathema. (First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican 1, 1870. Chapter II, Leith, p. 451)

We renew the definition of the Œcumenical Council of Florence, in virtue of which all the faithful of Christ must believe that the Holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff possesses the primacy over the whole world, and that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and is true Vicar of Christ, and Head of the whole Church, and Father and Teacher of all Christians; and that full power was given to him in Blessed Peter to rule, feed, and govern the Universal Church by Jesus Christ our Lord: as is also contained in the acts of the General Councils and in the Sacred Canons.

Hence we teach and declare that by the appointment of our Lord the Roman Church possesses a superiority of ordinary power over all other Churches, and that this power of jurisdiction of the Roman Pontiff, which is truly episcopal, is immediate; to which all, of whatever rite and dignity, both pastors and faithful, both individually and collectively, are bound, by their duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience, to submit, not only in matters which belong to faith and morals, but also in those that appertain to the discipline and government of the Church throughout the world, so that the Church of Christ may be one flock under one supreme pastor through the preservation of unity both of communion and of profession of the same faith with the Roman Pontiff. This is the teaching of the Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and of salvation. (First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican 1, 1870. Chapter III, Leith, p. 451-2)

If then any shall say that the Roman Pontiff has the office merely of inspection or direction, and not full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the Universal Church, not only in things which belong to faith and morals, but also in those which relate to the discipline and government of the Church spread throughout the world; or assert that he possesses merely the principal part, and not all the fullness of this supreme power; or that this power which he enjoys is not ordinary and immediate, both over each and all the Churches and over each and all the Pastors and the faithful; let him be anathema. (First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican 1, 1870. Chapter III, Leith, p. 453-4)

Moreover, within the Church particular Churches hold a rightful place. These Churches retain their own traditions without in any way lessening the primacy of the Chair of Peter. This Chair presides over the whole assembly of charity and protects legitimate differences, while at the same time it sees that such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute toward it. (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican II, 1962-65. Chapter II, Leith, p. 464-5)

For in virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme, and universal power over the Church. And he can always exercise this power freely. (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican II, 1962-65. Chapter III, Leith, p. 474)

This religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*. That is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican II, 1962-65. Chapter III, Leith, p. 478)

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." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Chapter 3 Article 9 Paragraph 4:I:882)

Second, he claims not only the power to loose and bind in this life but also authority over souls after this life. (Treatise, 40)

Authority

The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned.⁶⁰⁴ The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent. The tradition of the Church, by reference to certain texts of Scripture, speaks of a cleansing fire:

As for certain lesser faults, we must believe that, before the Final Judgment, there is a purifying fire. He who is truth says that whoever utters blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will be pardoned neither in this age nor in the age to come. From this sentence we understand that certain offenses can be forgiven in this age, but certain others in the age to come.

This teaching is also based on the practice of prayer for the dead, already mentioned in Sacred Scripture: "Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin." From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God.⁶⁰⁸ The Church also commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead.... (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part 1, Section 2, Chapter 3, Article 12, 1031-1032)

Third, the pope is not willing to be judged by the church or by anyone else and places his authority above the judgment of councils and the whole church. (Treatise, 40)

Infallibility

And with the approval of the Second Council at Lyons, the Greeks professed that the Holy Roman Church enjoys supreme and full Primacy and preeminence over the whole Catholic Church, which it truly and humbly acknowledges that it has received with the plenitude of power from our Lord Himself in the person of blessed Peter, Prince or head of the Apostles, whose successor the Roman Pontiff is; and as the Apostolic See is bound before all others to defend the truth of faith, so also if any questions regarding faith shall arise, they must be defined by its judgment. (First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican 1, 1870. Chapter IV, Leith, p. 454-5)

We teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed: that the Roman Pontiff, when he *speaks ex cathedra*, that is, when in discharge of the office of Pastor and Doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals: and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church.

But if anyone—which may God avert—presume to contradict this Our definition; let him be anathema. (First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican 1, 1870. Chapter IV, Leith, p. 456-7)

The infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed in defining a doctrine of faith and morals extends as far as extends the deposit of divine revelation, which must be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded. This is the infallibility which the Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith (cf. Lk. 22:32), he proclaims by a definitive act some doctrine of faith or morals. Therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly styled irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, an assistance promised to him in blessed Peter. Therefore they need no approval of others, nor do they allow an appeal to any other judgment. For then the Roman Pontiff is not pronouncing judgment as a private person. Rather as the supreme teacher of the universal Church, as one in whom the charism of the infallibility of the Church herself is individually present, he is expounding or defending a doctrine of Catholic Faith. (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican II, 1962-65. Chapter III, Leith, p. 478-9)

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." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Chapter 3 Article 9 Paragraph 4:I:882)

Among the doctrines which the Papacy promulgates is syncretism:

But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these are the Moslems, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God Himself far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and every other gift (cf. Acts 17:25-28), and who as Savior wills that all men be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4).

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by His grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace. Whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the gospel. She regards such qualities as given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life. (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, Vatican II, 1962-65. Chapter II, Leith, p. 467-8)

7. Brothers and Sisters gathered here from different parts of the world! Shortly we shall go to the arranged places in order to beg from God the gift of peace for all humanity. Let us ask that we be given the gift of recognizing the path of peace, of right relationship with God and among ourselves. Let us ask God to open people's hearts to the truth about himself and the truth about man. We have a single goal and a shared intention, but we will pray in different ways, respecting one another's religious traditions. In this too, deep down, there is a message: we wish to show the world that the genuine impulse to prayer does not lead to opposition and still less to disdain of others, but rather to constructive dialogue, a dialogue in which each one, without relativism or syncretism of any kind, becomes more deeply aware of the duty to bear witness and to proclaim.

Now is the time to overcome decisively those temptations to hostility which have not been lacking in the religious history of humanity. In fact, when these temptations appeal to religion, they show a profoundly immature face of religion. True religious feeling leads rather to a perception in one way or another of the mystery of God, the source of goodness, and that is a wellspring of respect and harmony between peoples:

indeed religion is the chief antidote to violence and conflict (cf. [Message for the World Day of Peace 2002](#), 14).

(“[Address of John Paul II to the Representatives of the world religions](#)” at the “Day of Prayer for Peace in the World” at Assisi, January 24, 2002:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2002/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20020124_discorso-assisi_en.html)

Finally, he defends these dreadful errors and this wickedness with the greatest savagery, killing those who dissent. (*Treatise* 39-40; while the Papacy no longer executes heretics as it did at the time of the Reformation, it still declares those who hold to a Lutheran do so under the punishment of condemnation.)

Justification

If anyone says that after the sin of Adam man’s free will was lost and destroyed, or that it is a thing only in name, indeed a name without reality, a fiction introduced into the Church by Satan, let him be anathema. (Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, 1547. Canon 5, Leith p. 420)

If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared, and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema. (Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, 1547. Canon 9, Leith p. 421)

If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema. (Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, 1547. Canon 12, Leith p. 421)

If anyone says that Christ Jesus was given by God to men as a redeemer in whom to trust, and not also as a legislator whom to obey, let him be anathema. (Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, 1547. Canon 21, Leith p. 423)

If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema. (Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, 1547. Canon 24, Leith p. 423)

If anyone says that there is no mortal sin except that of unbelief, or that grace once received is not lost through any other sin however grievous and enormous except by that of unbelief, let him be anathema. (Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, 1547. Canon 27, Leith p. 420)

If anyone says that the good works of the one justified are in such manner the gifts of God that they are not also the good merits of him justified; or that the one justified by the good works that he performs by the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit an increase of grace, eternal life, and in case he dies in grace, the attainment of eternal life itself and also an increase of glory, let him be anathema. (Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canons Concerning Justification, 1547. Canon 5, Leith p. 420)