37. "The pope is the Antichrist" and the Whore of Babylon

Often heard: "Rome is the city on seven hills, and the woman in Revelation 17 is arrayed in purple and scarlet colour. The pope is the Antichrist."
Also heard: "John says antichrist denies that Christ came in the flesh. Every pope has confessed that He did."

The papacy is the Antichrist

HELD BY Lutheran Confessions | Reformed Westminster 1646 | Methodist Wesley's Notes | Baptist older confessions

Many Reformers and older Baptist confessions identified the papacy as the Antichrist or "man of sin," and Rome as Babylon. Confessional Lutheran synods, some Presbyterians and some modern Baptists still hold this; many others reject it.

VERSES CITED

2 Thess 2:3–4 (man of sin in the temple); Rev 13; Rev 17:1–9, 17:18 (woman on seven hills, purple and scarlet, drunk on the blood of saints); Dan 7:8, 25; 1 Tim 4:1–3.

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

Medieval dissenters (some Franciscan Spirituals, Wycliffe, Hus) applied it to corrupt popes. Luther (1520) and Calvin taught it, and the Smalcald Articles (1537) and the Westminster Confession (1646, 25.6) made it confessional; American Presbyterians removed the Westminster clause in 1903 and 1936. The Second London Baptist Confession (1689, 26.4) called the pope "that antichrist, that man of sin." Hislop and Chick tracts popularized it in the 19th–20th centuries. Many modern confessions, including the BF&M, omit it.

The Antichrist is a coming individual, not the papacy

HELD BY Catholic | Orthodox | Anglican Articles silent

The Antichrist in John's letters is anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh, which the papacy has always confessed. Paul's "man of sin" is a final individual who exalts himself above God, not an office held by hundreds of men over two thousand years. In Revelation, "Babylon" in John's day was pagan imperial Rome, which killed the saints, including Peter and Paul. Purple and scarlet were also the colors of the Tabernacle and the high priest.

VERSES CITED

1 John 2:22; 4:2–3; 2 John 7; 2 Thess 2:3–10; Rev 17:6; 18:24; 1 Pet 5:13 (Peter calls Rome "Babylon"); Exod 28:5–6.

EARLY CHURCH AND HISTORY

Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 5.25–30, c. 180) and Hippolytus (*On Christ and Antichrist*, c. 200) expected a single final Antichrist. Most early interpreters read Revelation's Babylon as pagan Rome or the world system.

CATECHISM AND COUNCILS

CCC 675–677 (the final trial and "religious deception"); Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio* on dialogue with other Christians.

Across the traditions

What each major tradition has taught about the pope and the Antichrist, in its own words and from its own documents.

Catholic

John's antichrist is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh, which the papacy has always confessed; Paul's "man of sin" is a final individual, not an office held by many men, and Revelation's Babylon was pagan imperial Rome. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Chapter text above; Catechism of the Catholic Church 675-677.

Orthodox

Orthodox teaching expects a personal Antichrist: St Philaret's Longer Catechism lists his coming among the signs before Christ's return and calls him an adversary of Christ who will strive to overthrow Christianity and come to a fearful end. Official Orthodox texts criticise the papacy sharply without calling the pope Antichrist: the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs (1848) counts the Papacy among the heresies and calls the Filioque heresy. Harsher charges in some anti-Western polemic are not official teaching.

Sources: Longer Catechism of St Philaret, Q234-235 (azbyka.ru English text); Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs (1848), sections 4-5, 12 (sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/mod/1848orthodoxencyclical.asp).

Lutheran

The Smalcald Articles call the pope "the very Antichrist" for exalting himself above Christ, and Melanchthon's Treatise finds the marks of Antichrist in the papal kingdom. Confessional synods keep this: the Missouri Synod's Brief Statement (1932) says the prophecies "have been fulfilled in the Pope of Rome and his

Reformed

The Westminster Confession (1646) said the pope is the Antichrist, the man of sin and son of perdition. American Presbyterians later removed the clause: the PCUSA in 1903, which called any man's claim to be Christ's vicar "a usurpation dishonoring to the Lord Jesus Christ," and the OPC in 1936. The OPC and PCA texts now say

dominion," and WELS (1959) identifies Antichrist with the Papacy "as it is known to us today." The Lutheran Church of Australia (1993) judged that its 1950s statement, though "valid and correct at the time," now "requires critical review."

Sources: Smalcald Articles II.4.10-11 (bookofconcord.org/smalcald-articles/part-ii/article-iv); Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope 39 (as quoted from Kolb-Wengert p. 337 in M. R. Noland, issuesetcarchive.org/issues_site/resource/archives/papacy.htm); Brief Statement (1932) section 43 'Of the Antichrist' (projectwittenberg.org mosynod doct-17); WELS, Statement on the Antichrist (1959), Introduction and section IV (wels.net/about-wels/what-we-believe/doctrinal-statements/antichrist); Lutheran Church of Australia, Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions vol. 2, I7 'Is the Pope the Antichrist?' (1993), 3.2.

only that the pope cannot "in any sense" be head of the church. Some Presbyterians, such as the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, defend the original wording.

Sources: Westminster Confession 25.6, original text (footnote) and 1903 revision, in P. Schaff, Creeds of Christendom vol. 3 (ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.vi.ii.iii.html); OPC, The Confession of Faith and Catechisms, Preface (opc.org/documents/Preface.pdf) on 1903 and 1936; WCF 25.6 current text (opc.org/wcf.html; PCA, WCF with Scripture proofs, 2022 PDF, pcaac.org); Free Presbyterian Magazine, July 1975, 'Tampering with the Westminster Confession' (fpchurch.org.uk).

Anglican

The Thirty-Nine Articles reject papal authority, stating that "The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this Realm of England," and that the Church of Rome has erred in living, ceremonies and matters of faith. They do not call the pope Antichrist, and Anglicanism has no official teaching identifying the Antichrist.

Sources: Thirty-Nine Articles XIX, XXII, XXXVII (churchofengland.org/liturgy/book-of-common-prayer/articles-religion).

Methodist

Wesley's 1784 abridgement kept several anti-Roman articles, such as XIV on "Romish doctrine," but the Methodist Articles never mention the pope or Antichrist. Wesley's *Explanatory Notes*, a United Methodist doctrinal standard, identify the beast of Revelation 13 with "the Romish Papacy" and the woman of Revelation 17 with "the city of Rome." In 1970, and again in 2000, the United Methodist General Conference resolved to interpret all its doctrinal standards "in consonance with our best ecumenical insights and judgment."

Sources: UMC Articles of Religion XIV (umc.org/en/content/articles-of-religion); Wesley, Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, Rev 13:1, 13:15, 17:3 (ccel.org/ccel/wesley/notes.i.xxviii.xiv.html and notes.i.xxviii.xviii.html); UMC General Conference, Resolution of Intent (1970; re-adopted 2000 as 'A Resolution of Intent: With a View to Unity', Book of

Resolutions 2000, 241), text in J. L. Topolewski, Methodist History 40:2 (2002) (archives.gcah.org).

Baptist

Older Baptists shared the Reformation identification: the Second London Confession (1689, 26.4) calls the pope "that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition." Modern confessions such as the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 do not mention the pope or the Antichrist, and many Baptists today reject the identification. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Second London Baptist Confession (1689) 26.4 (the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-26); Baptist Faith and Message 2000, full text (bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000).

Where it gets contested: The identification is now rare among scholars in the traditions that once confessed it, and American Presbyterians removed it from the Westminster Confession, but it is widespread online. Catholics concede that Rome has had wicked popes; the question is whether the office itself denies Christ.

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