1 The Antichrist in the Johannine Letters: A Christological Criterion of Discernment and the Limits of Eschatological Synthesis

1.1 Abstract

This study analyzes the notion of antíchristos in the Johannine Letters. It notes that the term occurs only in 1 J and 2 J (1 J 2,18; 2,22; 4,3; 2 J 7) and in these letters primarily performs a Christological, spiritual, and ecclesial function: the Antichrist appears where the truth about Jesus Christ is denied and apostolic communion is torn apart. The text examines the etymology of the Greek word ἀντίχριστος (antíchristos), analyzes the key passage 1 J 2,18–24 (including the formula "ἐσχάτη ὥρα" — "last hour"), explains the significance of the perfect in the statement that "many antichrists γεγόνασιν," describes the drama of the departure "they went out from us," and presents the category of abiding (μένω) in the apostolic testimony as the essential criterion of discernment and communal resilience.

1.2 Keywords

antíchristos; the Johannine Letters; 1 J 2,18–24; 2 J 7; ἐσχάτη ὥρα; gegonasin (γεγόνασιν); menō (μένω); Christology; heresy and schism; discernment of spirits; charism and truth.

1.3 Introduction

The task of this study is to transform a textbook presentation of the Antichrist into a coherent, deepened theological narrative faithful to the text of the Johannine Letters and their internal logic. At the same time it preserves the distinction required by the Johannine letters: the concept of the Antichrist in John differs functionally and hermeneutically from the later synthesis that combined it with the images of the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2) or the Beast of Revelation (Rev 13). In Catholic theology, tradition recognizes both the presence of the spirit of the Antichrist already active in history and the possibility of a future culmination of opposition to Christ (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church 675–677). In interpreting the Johannine Letters, however, one must respect their own perspective: the author shifts attention from abstract speculation about "one future adversary" to recognizable and present forms of antichristian activity in the Church — erroneous Christology, false prophets, and schism.

An important pastoral principle of this text is caution: it forbids identifying contemporary persons, nations, institutions, or events with the Antichrist in the Johannine sense. The Johannine Letters ask about faithfulness to Jesus Christ and the apostolic testimony, not about labeling political or ethnic opponents.

1.4 Occurrence of the term ἀντίχριστος in the New Testament

The noun ἀντίχριστος (antíchristos) appears in the New Testament corpus only in the Johannine Letters:

- 1 J 2,18 — "The Antichrist is coming" and "many antichrists";
- 1 J 2,22 — the antichrist is the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ;
- 1 J 4,3 — "the spirit of the Antichrist" is already in the world;
- 2 J 7 — the deceiver who does not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh is called the Antichrist.

The term does not occur in Revelation, the Synoptic Gospels, or the Pauline letters. In later theological tradition the Johannine image was juxtaposed with images from 2 Thess and Revelation — a linkage that can be theologically justified but is risky if one uncritically transfers all features of one tradition to another.

In the Johannine Letters antíchristos functions primarily as a Christological category (concerning the truth about Jesus), a spiritual category (concerning the action of the Spirit), and an ecclesial category (the community is its place of operation).
From a historico-literary standpoint this limited distribution of the word in the NT points to a specific problem the Johannine author addresses: not so much a universal figure of an eschatological tyrant, but a real threat to the identity of the Church resulting from false interpretations of Christ.

1.5 Etymology of ἀντίχριστος

A syntactic and semantic analysis of the Greek term helps grasp the inner logic of the concept:

- ἀντί — anti: against, in opposition to; sometimes also "in place of";
- Χριστός — Christos: the Anointed, the Messiah, Christ.

The basic meaning is "opponent of Christ" or "one who stands against Christ." There is, however, also a nuance of "substitution": someone or something may present itself "in place" of Christ, offering a false, competitive image of the Savior. In the Johannine Letters priority is given to the meaning of opposition — antíchristos is one who denies the truth about Jesus and severs the community from the apostolic testimony. It is also worth noting that in the letters the word appears without the article, which grammatically does not determine its use as a proper name; the traditional and communal context supplies its theological content.
The etymology therefore reveals a duality: antichristian action can be an open opposition or a subtle imitation that attempts to replace the real Christ with a "spiritual" image.

1.6 1 J 2,18–24: textual analysis and interpretation

The passage 1 J 2,18–24 is crucial for understanding the Johannine concept of the Antichrist. The Greek of 2,18 begins:
Παιδία, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν, καὶ καθὼς ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν· ὅθεν γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν.
Translation: "Children, it is the last hour. You have heard that the Antichrist is coming; and now many antichrists have appeared. Hence we know that it is the last hour."
In this short but dense sentence three perspectives meet:

1. the perspective of communal tradition: "you have heard that the Antichrist is coming" — the community knows an expectation of some coming opponent;
2. the author's critical perspective: "and now many antichrists have appeared (νῦν … πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν)" — the author recognizes present phenomena that already realize the antichristian logic;
3. the eschatological perspective: their presence is a "sign" that "ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν" — "it is the last hour."

The author does not reject the expectation of future eschatological events; rather he shifts the emphasis: pondering a single, hypothetical future Antichrist does not relieve one of the duty to discern antichristian action that already threatens the life of the Church.
It is useful to distinguish three levels of the same reality that the author consistently maintains:

- the eschatological level: "The Antichrist is coming" — a formula of expectation known to the community about an ultimate opponent;
- the historical/concrete level: "many antichrists γεγόνασιν" — concrete teachers and leaders who are already active in the Church and the world;

- the spiritual level: “the spirit of the Antichrist” — the power of error that inspires false teaching and breaks communion.

For the author these three levels are not opposed but interdependent; the multiplicity of historical antichrists manifests and realizes the spiritual principle of opposition to Christ, which in tradition may also assume the form of an ultimate concentration in a single adversary.

Several important hermeneutical observations arise from the linguistic and contextual analysis:

- the use of the perfect gegonasin (γεγόνασιν) in the sentence “many antichrists have become/appeared” emphasizes that their appearance is a completed fact with ongoing effects — this is not a purely future warning, but a present challenge;
- the expression ἐσχάτη ὥρα (“last hour”) appears in the New Testament only here and should not be treated as a calculable chronological unit; it rather has a signaling value: the author’s present is a time of final decision when the divide between truth and falsehood is being carried out;
- the absence of the article with ἀντίχριστος in the Greek text does not settle whether the term functions as a proper name; the author refers to a communal tradition, but the text does not present a biography of “one Antichrist.”

From this follows the most cautious and at the same time faithful interpretation: the Johannine Letters do not literarily or theologically exclude the possibility of a future, personal ultimate opponent, but their hermeneutical rigor focuses on discerning antichristian action already present in specific teachers, in false Christology, and in the consequences for communion.

1.7 “Last hour” (ἐσχάτη ὥρα): two dimensions of understanding

The formula ἐσχάτη ὥρα requires a delicate distinction that matters both historically and theologically.

1. Historical/near-term dimension: the author may indeed have expected the imminent fulfillment of history — false teachers are read as a symptom of an intensifying crisis preceding the parousia. In such a reading “last hour” expresses concrete eschatological hope and tension.
2. Theological/ontological dimension: with the coming, death, and resurrection of Christ, a decisive change in history has occurred — history has entered an ultimate period. The decisive revelation has been accomplished in the Son; there is no other, “higher” revelation beyond that which has already been given. In this sense “last hour” signifies a time of determinations: now, in the light of what has been accomplished by the Incarnation, one must recognize truth or depart from it.

Pastorally the implication is clear: expectation of the future cannot justify lack of vigilance and discernment here and now. Faithfulness to the apostolic testimony carries eschatological weight — abiding in the truth is a sign of life in the time of the end.

1.8 “Many antichrists” (γεγόνασιν) — personification of evil in history

The word γεγόνασιν (perfect of ginomai “to become, to come into being”) stresses that the presence of antichrists is a completed event with current effects. Antichrists in the Johannine Letters are not merely a hypothetical figure of the future; they are concrete people and groups who:

- speak and teach in a particular way;
- deny key truths about Jesus (especially His identity as the Christ and His coming “in the flesh”);
- deceive others, attempting to detach them from apostolic communion;

- go out from the community, yet continue to affect it.

The author details the mechanisms by which evil assumes human form: word, teaching, decisions, social networks, and the use of hospitality structures. In this way spiritual rebellion becomes a real historical event — personified by teachers and prophets who function as instruments of error.

Analyzing practical manifestations of antichristian actions is important for discernment. The Antichrist may adopt Christian rhetoric and the appearance of charismatic gifts, yet his essence is recognized by whether he leads to the rejection of the apostolic truth about Jesus Christ.

1.9 Internal crisis of the community: "they went out from us" (1 J 2,19)

The following sentence 1 J 2,19 reads: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us." This passage describes the dynamics of internal schism: the opponents are not merely an "external" threat but arise from within the ecclesial environment. Their former association with the community and familiarity with its language facilitate deception.

Several important theological-pastoral conclusions follow from this pericope:

- the drama consists in the rupture of communion paired with the rejection of the central Christological confession;
- the departure functions as a test: it reveals who truly abides in the faith;
- the author interprets the departure as evidence that those who left were not permanently part of the living community;
- at the same time one cannot mechanically apply this pattern to every dispute within the community — the context points to questions of the identity of Jesus and authentic belonging to the Church.

Pastoral prudence requires protecting the community from teaching that destroys its center, while also leaving room for the possibility of conversion of those who err. The letter's author combines firmness against error with a call to abiding and mercy.

1.10 The category of "abiding" (μένω) in the apostolic testimony

In response to the crisis the author centrally places the concept of abiding — the Greek μένω (menō): "to remain, to stay, to dwell." The antichrists "went out"; the faithful are to "abide" in what they heard "from the beginning" (1 J 2,24). Abiding is an attitudinal and practical confession: it consists in accepting the apostolic testimony about Jesus Christ and in the consistent life that flows from that testimony — a life of truth, righteousness, and fraternal love.

From this perspective the author offers criteria of discernment and spiritual resilience:

- abiding in what was "heard from the beginning" — maintaining continuity with the apostolic tradition, not leaping to "new revelations" that break unity;
- abiding in the Son and the Father — Christological bonds of communion, since denial of the Son is equivalent to lacking the Father (1 J 2,23);
- abiding in truth and love — Christological truth and ethical practice form an inseparable whole.

In the Second Letter of John (2 J 9) the author uses the image of those who "go on ahead" (literally: some "go further") in order to exalt themselves above the teaching of Christ — he warns that whoever does not

abide in the teaching of Christ "does not have God." This warning is a pastoral indication: progress that abandons the beginning is not development but loss of source.

Abiding in the apostolic testimony is not, however, an individualistic experience of private piety. It is a communal practice of discernment, rooted in apostolic memory and strengthened by the Spirit, which prevents the community from being absorbed by the world's logic of deception. At the same time abiding requires openness to humility and conversion — those who have erred may return to the community if their conversion is authentic.

1.11 1 J 2,22–23: denial of the Son and the Father as the criterion of recognition

In the brief but theological sentence 1 J 2,22 the author formulates the center of his definition of the Antichrist: "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? (…) He is the Antichrist" (cf. translation in the source text). The parallel 2,23 completes this thesis: whoever denies the Son "does not have the Father also; he who confesses the Son has the Father also." Here we see a decisive shift in language: the Antichrist is not primarily a political category nor an apocalyptic mask of an external enemy, but an offense against the revelation of the Triune God through the Son.

Denial therefore appears as a separation with ontological-relational consequences:

- a separation of the historical Jesus from Christ the Anointed;
- a separation of Christ from His real humanity (from the Incarnation);
- consequently — a rupture of the relation between the One who reveals the Father (the Son) and anyone who would claim to have "the Father" apart from the Son.

From this perspective 1 J 2,22–23 is not only a dogmatic polemic: it concerns whether the community has access to the Father through the revelation of the Son. Rejection of the Son thus becomes rejection of the way by which God himself reveals and saves.

1.11.1 1 J 4,1–3: testing the spirits as a constant practice of the community

The appeal 1 J 4,1: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits…" indicates that spiritual discernment is an integral, continuous ecclesial practice. The author does not reduce "spirits" to a psychological metaphor: in Johannine writings "spirits" have a real dimension, but are discernible by the words and the fruits they produce.

The most important test criterion is formulated in 4,2–3: "Every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ come in the flesh (ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκί ἐληλυθότα) is from God; and every spirit that does not confess is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist…". Here the author links three points: pneumatology — Christology — ecclesiology: a spirit that comes from God issues a confession uniting Jesus with Christ and affirming His real coming "in the flesh."

From a practical point of view the call to "dokimazete ta pneumata" (δοκιμάζετε τὰ πνεύματα) means that the community must actively verify prophetic and supernatural claims, not adopting a naive openness. Discernment is continuous and communal; where this criterion is absent, false inspirations more easily gain influence.

1.11.2 The confession "Jesus Christ come in the flesh": theological and practical significance

The formula ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκί ἐληλυθότα combines several elements whose separation leads to heresy and schism:

- "Jesus" — the concrete, historical person of Nazareth;
- "Christ" (Χριστός) — the Anointed, the Messiah, the one who fulfills the saving mission;
- "ἐν σαρκί" — "in the flesh" (σάρξ), which emphasizes the reality of the Son's human existence;
- the perfect ἐληλυθότα — indicating that this coming is an event accomplished with lasting effects.

John defends the integrity of the Incarnation: an abstract "Christological" confession or a sentimental appeal to "Jesus" without reception of the full meaning of his body, cross, and resurrection is insufficient. This confession is also an act of loyalty (ὁμολογέω — homologeō): it is not a mere verbal formula but a binding act of belonging that should shape moral and communal life.

1.11.3 The meaning of sarx (σάρξ) and homologeō (ὁμολογέω)

σάρξ (sarx)

- In Johannine texts σάρξ means "flesh" in the sense of real human condition — birth, susceptibility to suffering, historical situatedness, and mortality — and not as a synonym for "sinful nature."
- Emphasizing "in the flesh" therefore defends the real redemptive dimension: if body and blood were only a semblance, the meaning of the sacrifice and God's solidarity with humanity would be distorted.

ὁμολογέω (homologeō)

- "To confess" in John denotes authentic adherence to the truth about Christ: acceptance of the apostolic testimony and subordination of life to that confession.
- Homology is not an escape into privacy: it is a public and existential "standing with" the Son, translated into love and justice.

Together: a true confession of Christ inseparably unites word and deed, dogma and ethics, conviction and practice.

1.11.4 "Spirit of the Antichrist": nature and mechanisms of action

The Johannine "spirit of the Antichrist" is not an abstract force but a spiritual power that inspires false prophecy and leads to distortion of the identity of Jesus. Its characteristics include:

- imitating the action of the Holy Spirit (inspiration, charisms) while separating from the truth of the Incarnation;
- creating an alternative confession that sounds religious yet divides Jesus from Christ or Christ from His body;
- fostering separations and secessions within the community, leading to schism and the decline of fraternal love.

An important distinction: although evil can "personify" itself in concrete teachers, John does not teach that the devil ontologically "incarnates" in them in the same manner as the Son incarnated in human nature. Evil appears rather as a human response — consent, voice, teaching, and institutionalization of error — through which the spirit of falsehood acquires historical form.

1.11.5 2 J 7–11: the deceiver, the Antichrist, and the problem of hospitality

The Second Letter of John briefly and sharply links the terms "πλάνος" (planos — deceiver), "πλάνης" and "antíchristos." In 2 J 7 the author censures those "who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the

flesh," calling them both deceivers and Antichrists. From this passage grows a practical application: the prohibition of offering support to such teachers (2 J 10–11).

Historical context: itinerant teachers in communities received hospitality, material support, and logistical assistance. "Receiving" them into one's house meant, in practice, endorsing their teaching and facilitating its spread. Therefore the author draws a firm boundary: Christian hospitality must not become an instrument for propagating teaching that severs the bond with the apostolic "beginning."

Pastoral nuances of this prohibition:

- it is not a call to tactless indifference toward persons of different beliefs nor to violence;
- it is, however, a clear warning against providing institutional support and public endorsement for teachings that divide the community and distort the Incarnation;
- in practice it means distinguishing between human hospitality and doctrinal approval.

The Johannine appeal requires prudence: the Church must be hospitable to those in need while protecting its doctrinal and sacramental sources from instrumentalization.

1.11.6 Ecclesial criteria of discernment — practical synthesis

The Johannine Letters do not leave the community without tools. Discernment of antichristian influence should appeal to integrated criteria that combine doctrinal, pneumatological, and moral dimensions:

- Christological criterion: Does the teaching confess Jesus as the Christ and Son of God who really "came in the flesh" (ἐν σαρκί)?
- Apostolic criterion: Does it remain in agreement with what was handed down "from the beginning" (the apostolic testimony)?
- Pneumatological criterion: Do the claims of inspiration lead to the confirmation of the Incarnation and love, or do they bypass them? (dokimazete ta pneumata)
- Moral criterion: Does the teacher "practice righteousness" and embody commandments in life, or does his teaching lead to ethical slackening?
- Criterion of love and communion: Does the teaching foster genuine fraternal love and unity of the Church, or does it cause exclusion, pride, and instrumentalization of others?
- Criterion of relation to the world: Are we witnessing the cross and the call to conversion, or are we hearing what the world desires to hear?

These criteria are not a legalistic checklist but a summons to communal discernment in which truth and love go together. In practice discernment requires prayer, study of Scripture and Tradition, pastoral consultation, and sensitivity to fruits: does the teaching lead to living faith and active love?

1.11.7 Catechism of the Catholic Church (675–677) — a brief practical-doctrinal reference

The Catechism of the Catholic Church in nos. 675–677 considers the problem of the "Antichrist" in a spirit that harmonizes with the Johannine emphasis: the Church in tradition recognizes in the New Testament texts a foretelling of the action of falsehood and deception, which reaches its climax before the parousia; at the same time it emphasizes the necessity of discernment and the hope of Christ's ultimate victory. The Catechism should be read as a pastoral complement: concern over an emerging or final Antichrist must not lead to panic or demonization of people; rather it should mobilize the community to fidelity to the truth of the Incarnation, prayer, and vigilance.

(I do not quote verbatim passages from the Catechism here — I convey the sense of those paragraphs in outline consistent with their content — following the principle of not attributing the exact wording of texts I do not reproduce.)

1.11.8 Pastoral-theological conclusion

For the pastor and theologian the Johannine teaching yields clear and demanding conclusions: the greatest danger to the Church is not an invented political figure but the internal drifting away from the truth about Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh. Defense against the spirit of the Antichrist does not consist in seeking an enemy outside, but in faithfully abiding in the Word, in living communion with the Father through the Son, in the discipline of spiritual discernment, and in incarnate love toward one's neighbor. Discernment is both an academic and pastoral requirement: it must be practiced with wisdom, love of truth, and concern for the conversion of those who have erred.

1.11.9 The Antichrist in the perspective of 2 Thess 2, the Synoptics, and the Apocalypse — similarities and differences

When comparing the image of the Antichrist in the Johannine letters with apocalyptic and synoptic texts, one must maintain terminological and literary distinctions while also recognizing the historical and theological dynamics of later syntheses.

- Terminology and categories: in 1–2 J the noun ἀντίχριστος (antíchristos) appears alongside categories such as "spirit of the Antichrist" and "many antichrists" — explicitly Christological and ecclesial categories. In 2 Thess 2 the language speaks of ἀνθρώπου τῆς ἀνομίας / τοῦ ἀνομίας (ho anthrōpos tēs anomias, "the man of lawlessness" / "the one of lawlessness"), who acts "by the power of the devil" and performs signs and wonders; in Rev 13 images of the Beast, signs, and cult appear — apocalyptic language full of political-cultural symbolism. Synoptic warnings (e.g., Mk 13:6, 22) caution against "false messiahs" and "signs and wonders": the motif of deception through apparent signs is common.
- Differences of function and emphasis: the Johannine letters emphasize the Christological criterion — recognition of the Antichrist by his denial of the real Incarnation of Jesus (ὁ ἀρνούμενος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χριστός). 2 Thess presents a more eschatological-apocalyptic figure of the adversary, stressing his future, spectacular manifestation and "signs" (the realm of wondrous deeds and public pressure). Revelation portrays a cosmic and symbolic realization of opposition to God (Beasts, power, cult), which in tradition served to link the images.
- Hermeneutical conclusion: it is possible and theologically justifiable to treat these traditions as complementary aspects of one spiritual problem (opposition to Christ): John shows its intra-ecclesial, Christological dimension; 2 Thess and Revelation show the public, spectacular, and eschatological dimension. One must not, however, automatically transfer the full apocalyptic picture (dates, biographical details, political signs) onto the Johannine letters nor — conversely — reduce the Johannine diagnosis to a purely political figure.

1.11.10 Patristic and Catholic reception

In patristic tradition and subsequent Catholic development two main tendencies in the reading of the Antichrist are found:

- a futurist/personal reading: certain Fathers and patristic writers interpreted parts of the texts as a prediction of a single, final personified adversary of Christ who will appear before the parousia and be characterized by dazzling power and signs;

- a spiritual-historical reading: other Fathers and authors emphasized the antichristian dimension already active — the principle of heresy, deception, and denial of the Incarnation that manifests in concrete teachers and movements.

The Catholic Church, while taking up both poles, in its magisterial reflection (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church nos. 675–677) stresses that there exists a real historical and spiritual action opposed to Christ and that before the parousia an ultimate test of faith may reveal "the supreme trial of deception." The Catechism 675–677 highlights both the presence of "many antichrists" already in the history of the Church and the expectation of an eschatological resolution of history, while warning against excessive sensationalism and encouraging perseverance in faith. The magisterium does not reduce the Antichrist to simple political or ethnic labels but reads the problem in the context of salvation history and the life of the Church.

(Note: patristic and medieval literature contains numerous developments of these motifs; both the "personal" and the "principial" interpretations have histories and mutual interactions.)

1.11.11 Limits of eschatological speculation

Reflections on the Antichrist give rise to the temptation of easy, sensational identifications and prophetic speculation. From a theological and pastoral standpoint one must remain cautious:

- do not identify the term with specific contemporary persons, nations, institutions, or events;
- do not project contemporary political or media categories onto ancient texts;
- distinguish between theological description (what it means to deny the Incarnation, what it means to be "the spirit of antichrist") and fantasies about the details of a future single reign of "the Antichrist";
- acknowledge the multiplicity of forms in which error acts in history and the possibility that a final culmination of evil may have characteristics not precisely detailed by earlier texts.

This caution does not diminish eschatological discussion; on the contrary — it protects the Church from distraction and misinformation, directing attention toward practical discernment and faithful abiding in Christ.

1.11.12 The Christological criterion — pastoral application

The Johannine Letters provide simple but demanding instruments of discernment, useful in pastoral ministry, catechesis, and parish life:

- the basic test: does the teaching confess Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ and Son of God who "came in the flesh" (ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκί; cf. 1 J 4,2)? This criterion requires not only verbal affirmation but loyalty to the apostolic testimony about the Incarnation;
- the pneumatological criterion: "dokimazete τὰ πνεύματα" — ongoing discernment of charisms and spiritual claims, discerning whether they lead to the Spirit of Truth or rather to a spirit of division and demonization of the body;
- the moral-communal criterion: does the teaching promote justice and genuine fraternal love (1 J 3,16–18), or does it weaken concern for the body, suffering, and the needy;
- pastoral practices deriving from these criteria:
  - catechetical formation in the fundamental truths about Christ and the Incarnation;
  - teaching discernment of spirits in parish groups and movements;
  - limits on hospitality toward itinerant teachers that protect the community (cf. 2 J 10–11) — without renouncing mercy toward persons;

- protection of vulnerable persons (e.g., youth) who are more easily swayed by charismatic authority without critical discernment;
- a coherent liturgical and sacramental witness that roots the community in the event of the Incarnation and Salvation.

Pastoral posture should combine firmness in defense of truth with love toward those who err — call for conversion, not ostracism or demonization.

1.11.13 Synthesis and closure: the victory of Christ as the perspective of hope

The diagnosis of the Antichrist outlined in the Johannine letters is above all a summons: to recognize and reject every form of denial of the Incarnation and religious practices that turn people away from the Father through false confession of Christ. Apocalyptic and synoptic texts complete this picture by also showing the public and eschatological aspects of opposition to God. The Church's tradition reads these images together, but with prudence and theological fidelity.

The Catholic Church, drawing on Scripture as well as patristic and magisterial experience (cf. CCC 675–677), calls for vigilance and discernment — but always within a horizon of hope: the Son of God revealed himself "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 J 3,8), and those who abide in his truth and love participate in this victory (1 J 4,4). Thus the life of the Church consists in defending the truth about the Incarnation and the work of salvation through fidelity to the creed, the sacraments, mercy, and communion.

In practice this means: do not seek sensational "discoveries" about the Antichrist, but build in parishes and communities a stable Christological and spiritual formation so that the faithful can recognize both subtle deformations of the truth and overt heresies; at the same time, proclaim the Gospel with confidence and humility, which transforms life and strengthens Christ's victory over all evil.

Bibliography (selected works and primary sources)

- Sacred Scripture: 1 J, 2 J, 2 Thess 2; Mk 13; Rev 13 (the principal pericopes discussed in the text).
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 675–677.
- T. Griffith, "A Non-Polemical Reading of 1 John" (article cited in the source section).
- Martin F. Connell, "On Chrism and Anti-Christs in 1 John 2:18–27" (article cited in the source section).
- Selected patristic writings (for historical reception): Irenaeus (Adversus Haereses), Hippolytus (including treatises relating to the Antichrist), Origen (De Principiis) and Augustine (including eschatological reflections).

  (When consulting patristic readings it is advisable to use critical editions and translations and specialized studies.)
- Recommended supplementary readings: contemporary commentaries on 1–2 J and syntheses on eschatology and the Antichrist in Catholic theological literature — for deepening: commentary works and review articles (selection depends on language and research perspective).

(The above bibliography indicates texts and research directions useful for further study of the subject; when quoting and interpreting, one should consult critical editions and official magisterial texts.)