

ON THE PAPACY

John Wyclif (c. 1320–1384) to Pope Urban VI (1378–1389)

1384

I have joyfully to tell what I hold, to all true men that believe, and especially to the Pope; for I suppose that if my faith be rightful and given of God, the Pope will gladly confirm it; and if my faith be error, the Pope will wisely amend it.

I suppose over this that the gospel of Christ be heart of the corps of God's law; for I believe that Jesus Christ, that gave in His own person this gospel, is very God and very man, and by this heart passes all other laws.

I suppose over this that the Pope be most obliged to the keeping of the gospel among all men that live here; for the Pope is highest vicar that Christ has here in earth. For moreness of Christ's vicar is not measured by worldly moreness, but by this, that this vicar follows more Christ by virtuous living; for thus teaches the gospel, that this is the sentence of Christ.

And of this gospel I take as believe, that Christ for time that He walked here, was most poor man of all, both in spirit and in having possessions; for Christ says that He had naught for to rest His head on. And Paul says that He was made needy for our love. And more poor might no man be, neither bodily or in spirit. And thus Christ put from Him all manner of worldly lordship. For the gospel of John tells that when they would have made Christ king, He fled and hid Him from them, for He would none such worldly highness.

And over this I take it as believe, that no man should follow the Pope, nor no saint that now is in heaven, but in as much as the Pope follows Christ. For John and James erred when they coveted worldly highness; and Peter and Paul sinned also when they denied and blasphemed in Christ; but men should not follow them in this, for then they went from Jesus Christ. And this I take as wholesome counsel, that the Pope leave his worldly lordship to worldly lords, as Christ gave them—and more speedily all his clerks to do so. For thus did Christ, and taught thus His disciples, till the fiend had blinded this world. and it seems to some men that clerks that dwell lastingly in this error against God's law, and flee to follow Christ in this, been open heretics, and their fautors been partners.

And if I err in this sentence, I will meekly be amended, yea, by the death, if it be skilful, for that I hope were good to me. And if I might travel in mine own person, I would with good will go to the Pope. But God has needed me to the contrary, and taught me more obedience to God than to men. And I suppose of our Pope that he will not be Anti-Christ, and reverse Christ in this working, to the contrary of Christ's will; for if he summon against reason, by him or by any of his, and pursue this unskillful summoning, he is an open Anti-Christ. And merciful intent excused not Peter, that Christ should not call him Satan; so blind intent and wicked counsel excuses not the Pope here; but if he ask of true priests that they travel more than they may, he is not excused by reason of God, that he should not be Anti-Christ. For our belief teaches us that our blessed God suffers us not to be tempted more than we may; how should a man ask such service? And therefore pray we to God for our Pope Urban the Sixth, that his early holy intent be not quenched by his enemies. And Christ, that may not lie, says that the enemies of a man been especially his home family; and this is sooth of men and fiends.