

Antichrist tempts Christians to place dialogue above Jesus

VATICAN CITY – Christians tempted to set aside their belief in Christ as the only savior in order to promote dialogue with others are being tempted by the Antichrist, retired Italian Cardinal Giacomo Biffi told Pope Benedict XVI.

Cardinal Biffi, who has been leading a Feb. 25-March 3 retreat for the pope and top Vatican officials, cited as “prophetic” a warning about the modern guises of the Antichrist presented in the work of Vladimir Solovyev, a 19th-century Russian philosopher.

While the Vatican has not published Cardinal Biffi’s talks to the pope, Vatican Radio provided a daily summary and some quotations from his presentations.

The cardinal, who wrote the introduction to an anthology of Solovyev’s work, said the philosopher’s most important message was that Christianity cannot be reduced to a collection of values.

In one of the philosopher’s works, Cardinal Biffi told the pope, “the Antichrist presents himself as a pacifist, ecologist and ecumenist. He convokes an ecumenical council and seeks the consensus of all the Christian confessions, conceding something to each one.

“The crowds follow him, except for tiny groups of Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants. Chased by the Antichrist, they tell him, ‘You have given us everything except for the one thing that interests us, Jesus Christ,’” said the cardinal, according to the radio’s Feb. 28 report.

Cardinal Biffi said the account should be taken as a warning.

“Today, in fact, we run the risk of having a Christianity that puts Jesus with his cross and resurrection into parentheses,” he said.

The 78-year-old cardinal said that if the church were to speak about only those

values that it shares with others it would find great acceptance “on television shows,” but “we would have renounced Christ.”

Obviously, he said, the church does espouse values that it shares with other people of good will.

He said there are “absolute values such as the good, the true and the beautiful. One who perceives them and loves them also loves Christ, even if he does not know it, because Christ is the truth, beauty and justice.

“There also are relative values such as solidarity, love for peace and respect for nature,” he said. “If these are given an absolute value or uprooted from or placed in opposition to the proclamation of the fact of salvation, then they become the basis for idolatry and are obstacles on the path to salvation.”

If Christians set aside their belief that salvation comes only through Christ, he said, they may find dialogue with others easier, but they will have denied their obligation to share the Gospel and will have placed themselves “on the side of the Antichrist.”

In an earlier meditation, reported by Vatican Radio Feb. 27, Cardinal Biffi told the pope and Vatican officials that by “believing in the unique and indispensable value of the cross” Christians can appear to be unwilling to understand and appreciate what is true and good in others.

However, he said, Christians recognize and even seek out what is true and good in others knowing that “objectively they always flow from Christ,” because God created all men and women in Christ and wants to save all of them through his Son.

“For this reason Christianity does not have a precept to love the believer but rather to love your neighbor, because he already is an image of Christ,” the cardinal said.