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ENCYCLICAL LETTER

OF

POPE PIUS XII

**On the Fifteenth Centenary of the
Council of Chalcedon**

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Encyclical Letter
of
His Holiness Pope Pius XII

TO OUR VENERABLE BRETHREN, PATRIARCHS,
PRIMATES, ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS AND OTHER
LOCAL ORDINARIES ENJOYING PEACE AND
COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE

**ON THE FIFTEENTH CENTENARY OF THE
COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON**

VENERABLE BRETHREN
GREETINGS AND APOSTOLIC BENEDECTION

1. Christ, the Eternal King, before promising to Peter, the Son of John, the primacy of the Church, after He had asked the disciples what was the opinion of men and of the Apostles themselves concerning Himself, praised in an extraordinary way that faith which was destined to vanquish the assaults and tempests of hell, and which Peter, enlightened by the Heavenly Father, expressed in these words: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."¹ This faith, which produces the crowns of the Apostles, the palms of the martyrs, and the lilies of the virgins, and which is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe,² has been effectively defended and splendidly illustrated particularly by three Ecumenical Councils, namely those of Nicea, Ephesus and Chalcedon. The fifteenth centenary of the Council of Chalcedon occurs during this present year.

2. It is fitting that such a joyful event as this be celebrated, both in Rome and in the whole Catholic world,

¹ Matth., 16, 16.

² Cf. Rom., 1, 16.

with those solemnities which, with heart filled with gratitude to God, the Giver of all salutary counsel, We are happy to ordain.

3. Just as Pius XI, Our Predecessor of happy memory, in the year 1925 in this Eternal City wished that the Sacred Council of Nicea be solemnly commemorated, and again in the year 1931 recalled the Sacred Council of Ephesus by the Encyclical Letter *Lux Veritatis*, so also in this Letter We wish to commemorate with no less reverence and care the Council of Chalcedon: for the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon are indissolubly linked together from the fact that both treat of the hypostatic union of the Incarnate Word; from the earliest times both were held in the greatest honor, not only in the Eastern Church, which commemorates them in its liturgy, but also in the Western Church, as St. Gregory the Great himself attested, when, praising them equally with the two Ecumenical Councils held in the previous century, those namely of Nicea and Constantinople, he wrote these memorable words: "Upon these, as upon a cornerstone, the structure of the faith rises, and whoever does not find his support in them, whatsoever be his life or activity, even if he seems as solid as a stone, lies nevertheless outside the edifice."³

4. If this event and its circumstances are attentively considered, two truths in particular stand out prominently and as far as possible We wish to emphasize them: that is, the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff, which emerges clearly from the very serious Christological controversy, and the extreme importance of Chalcedon with regard to dogmatic definition. Let those who, because of the iniquity of the times, especially in Eastern lands, are separated from the bosom and unity of the Church, follow the teaching and example of their forefathers and not hesitate to render duly reverent homage to the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff; and let those who are entangled in the errors of Nestorius and Eutyches penetrate to the mystery of Christ with deeper insight, and accept completely the doctrine of Chalcedon; this same doctrine let those ponder with more profound adherence to the truth, who out of an exagger-

³ *Registrum Epistolarum*, I, 25 (al. 24): PL 77, 478; ed. Ewald, I, 36.

ated desire for novelty dare to go somewhat beyond legitimate and inviolably established limits when they scrutinize the mystery of Redemption. Finally let all those who bear the name of Catholic find therein a strong incentive to cultivate in thought and in word the faith, the pearl of incomparable price of the Gospel, professing and preserving that faith unimpaired, and above all giving testimony to it by their lives, in which with the help of God's mercy everything that is inconsistent, unbecoming, or blameworthy disappears and the splendor of virtue shines forth. For thus will they participate in the divinity of Him Who deigned to share in our humanity.

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I

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE HERESY OF EUTYCHES

5. That We may proceed in an orderly manner, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the events which are being commemorated. The author of the whole controversy which was treated in the Council of Chalcedon was Eutyches, a priest and the Archimandrite of a celebrated monastery of Constantinople. In attacking vigorously the Nestorian heresy, which affirmed two persons in Christ, he fell into the opposite error.

6. "Very imprudent, with far too little learning,"⁴ of an immoderately obstinate temperament, he made these assertions: it is necessary to distinguish two moments of time: before the Incarnation, there were two natures of Christ, namely the human and the divine. But after the "union," there was only one, since the Word had absorbed the man. From the Virgin Mary the body of the Lord took its origin, but this is not of our substance and matter. It is human indeed, but not consubstantial with us or with her who brought forth Christ according to the flesh;⁵ therefore it was not in a true human nature that Christ was born, suffered, was crucified, and arose from the tomb.

⁴ Leo the Great to Flavian (Ep. 28, 1: *PL* 54, 755 s.).

⁵ Cf. Flavian to Leo the Great (Ep. 26: *PL* 54, 745).

7. In this matter Eutyches did not advert to the fact that before the union the human nature of Christ did not exist at all, since it began to exist at the moment of His conception, and that after the union it is absurd to think that one nature results from the coalition of two natures, since two concrete and true natures can in no way be reduced to one, especially since the divine nature is infinite and unchangeable.

8. Whoever considers such opinions with calm reason will easily see that thus the whole mystery of the divine economy vanishes into empty and intangible shadows.

9. To men of sound judgment this was clearly something completely new, absurd, in absolute contradiction to the Prophets and the teaching of the Gospels, as well as to the Apostles' Creed and the dogma of faith ratified at Nicea, something drawn from the tainted fountains of Valentinus and Apollinaris.

10. In a particular Council, assembled at Constantinople and presided over by St. Flavian, Bishop of that city, Eutyches, who had continued obstinately in disseminating his errors in monasteries far and wide, was formally accused of heresy by Eusebius, Bishop of Dorylaeum, and was condemned. But Eutyches, as if the condemnation were unjust to him who was fighting against the nascent impiety of Nestorius, appealed to the judgment of some Bishops of great authority. Such a letter of protest was received also by St. Leo the Great, Bishop of the Apostolic See, who, because of his illustrious and solid virtue, his vigilant solicitude for religion and for peace, his strenuous defense of the truth and the dignity of the Roman See, his dexterity in administration on a par with his graceful eloquence, has won the unfailing admiration of all ages. No one seemed more capable and qualified to refute the error of Eutyches than he, who, in his addresses and letters, with pious eloquence and eloquent piety was accustomed to praise and extol that mystery which can never be proclaimed enough, the mystery of one person and two natures in Christ: "The Catholic Church lives and grows by this faith, that we believe that in Christ Jesus the

humanity is not without the true divinity, and the divinity is not without the true humanity.”⁶

The “Robber Council” of Ephesus

11. But since the Archimandrite Eutyches had little confidence in the protection of the Roman Pontiff, he turned to cunning and deceit and through Chrysaphius, a close friend of his who was an intimate of the Emperor Theodosius II, he obtained from that Emperor a review of his case, and the convocation of another Council at Ephesus, over which Dioscorus, Bishop of Alexandria, was to preside. Dioscorus, an intimate friend of Eutyches but hostile to Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople, deceived by a false analogy of the dogmas, repeatedly asserted that, just as Cyril, his predecessor, had defended a single person in Christ, so he wished to defend with all his might a single nature in Christ after the “union.” St. Leo the Great, for the sake of establishing peace, did not refuse to send his legates to Ephesus; they brought two letters, among others, one addressed to the Council and the other to Flavian, in which the errors of Eutyches were completely and abundantly refuted.

12. But in this Council of Ephesus, which Leo justly called the “Robber Council,” according to the dictates of Dioscorus and Eutyches, everything was managed by violence; the first place in the session was denied to the papal legates; the letters of the Supreme Pontiff were forbidden to be read; the votes of the Bishops were extorted by deceit and threats; together with others Flavian was accused of heresy, deprived of his pastoral office and thrown into prison, where he died.

13. The mad audacity of Dioscorus later even went so far as to commit the unutterable crime of daring to inflict excommunication upon the supreme apostolic authority. As soon as Leo came to know through the deacon Hilarus of the misdoings in the lawless assembly, he rejected and ordered to be retracted everything that had been decreed or done there, but he was bitterly saddened and his grief was increased by the frequent appeals to his judgment made by many deposed Bishops.

⁶ St. Leo the Great Ep. 28, 5 (*PL* 54, 777).

Recourse of Flavian and other Bishops to the Apostolic See

14. Worthy of mention are the accounts which Flavian and Theodoret of Cyrus at that time wrote to the Supreme Pastor of the Church. This is what Flavian wrote: "When, as if by a conspiracy, everything went contrary to me and after he [Dioscorus] was pleased to pronounce that unjust sentence against me, while I was appealing to the throne of the Apostolic See of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, and to the universal Council which is subject to Your Holiness, I was immediately surrounded by a multitude of soldiers who did not permit me to take refuge at the sacred altar but strove to drag me from the church."⁷ And Theodoret wrote: "If Paul, the herald of truth . . . had recourse to the great Peter . . . much more do we, who are humble and insignificant, recur to your Apostolic See to obtain from you a cure for the wounds of the Churches. For it is your prerogative to exercise the primacy over all . . . I await the judgment of your Apostolic See . . . Above all I beg to be instructed by you whether or not I must acquiesce in this unjust deposition: I await your judgment."⁸

Intervention of Pope St. Leo the Great

15. To efface this disgraceful blemish, Leo with insistent letters repeatedly urged Theodosius and Pulcheria to apply a remedy to such sad conditions and to convoke within the confines of Italy a new Council which would repair the misdeeds of Ephesus. On one occasion, surrounded by many Bishops, he received in the Vatican Basilica the Emperor Valentinian III with his mother Galla Placidia and his wife Eudoxia and with tearful entreaty he induced them to provide without delay, as far as they were able, a remedy for the increasing distress of the Church. The Emperor Valentinian wrote to the Emperor Theodosius, and the queens also wrote. But without effect: Theodosius, surrounded by cunning and deceit, rectified none of the

⁷ Schwartz, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, II, vol. II, pars prior, p. 78.

⁸ Theodoret to Leo the Great (Ep. 52, 1. 5. 6: *PL* 54, 847 and 851; cf. *PG* 83, 1311 s. and 1315 s.).

wrongs committed. But when he unexpectedly died, his sister Pulcheria assumed the imperial power and took as her husband and co-ruler Marcian, both of whom were esteemed for their piety and wisdom. Then Anatolius, whom Dioscorus had arbitrarily placed upon the episcopal throne of Flavian, subscribed to the letter which Leo had sent to Flavian concerning the Incarnation of the Lord; the body of Flavian was transported with great pomp to Constantinople; deposed Bishops were restored to their sees; the rejection of the heresy of Eutyches became so widespread that a new Council no longer seemed necessary, especially since the security of the Roman Empire was being threatened by the invasions of the barbarians.

16. Nevertheless the Council was held at the desire of the Emperor and with the consent of the Supreme Pontiff.

The Council of Chalcedon The Primacy of the Apostolic See

17. Chalcedon was a city in Bithynia, near the Thracian Bosphorus, within sight of Constantinople which was situated on the opposite shore. Here, in the spacious suburban Basilica of St. Euphemia, Virgin and Martyr, on the 8th of October, having come from Nicea where they had gathered for the purpose, the Fathers convened, almost 600 in number, all of them from Eastern countries, except for two refugees from Africa.

18. The book of the Gospels was placed in the center and 19 representatives of the Emperor and the Senate took their places before the chancel. The papal legates were devoutly holy men, Paschasinus, Bishop of Lilybaeum in Sicily, Lucentius, Bishop of Asculum, two priests, Boniface and Basil, who were joined also by Julian, Bishop of Cos, who was to assist them. The legates of the Roman Pontiff occupied the first places among the Bishops; they were the first to be named, the first to speak, the first to sign the Acts; by reason of their delegated authority they confirmed or rejected the votes of the others, as manifestly happened in the condemnation of Dioscorus, which the legates ratified in these words: "Leo, the most holy and blessed Archbishop of the great and ancient city of Rome, through us

and through this holy Council, together with the thrice-blessed and most praiseworthy Apostle Peter, who is the rock and groundwork of the Catholic Church, the foundation of orthodox faith, has both stripped him, Dioscorus, of his episcopal dignity and removed him from all priestly ministry.”⁹

19. Moreover, the fact not only that the papal legates exercised the authority of presiding over the assembly but also that their right and honor in presiding was acknowledged by all the Fathers of the Council without opposition is clearly established by the letter sent to Leo by the Council: “You, in truth,” they wrote, “presided as the head over the members, manifesting your benevolence through those who held your place.”¹⁰

20. Our purpose is not to review here each of the acts of the Council, but only to touch briefly upon the principal ones, in as far as they are useful to bring the truth to light and to foster respect for what is sacred. And so, as there is question of the dignity of the Apostolic See, We cannot pass over in silence Canon 28 of that Council, in which after the Roman See the second place of honor is attributed to the episcopal See of Constantinople, as being the imperial city. Although nothing was thereby done against the divine primacy of jurisdiction, which was considered certain, nevertheless that canon, which was clandestinely formulated in the absence and contrary to the will of the papal legates, was devoid of all juridical force and was rejected and condemned by St. Leo in many letters. Furthermore his nullifying judgment was adhered to by Marcian and Pulcheria, and even by Anatolius himself, who in excusing the audacity of that act, thus wrote to Leo: “With regard to what was decreed in the recent universal Council of Chalcedon in favor of the See of Constantinople, may Your Beatitude rest assured that I am not at all to blame . . . , but it was the most reverend clergy of the Church of Constantinople that fostered this desire . . . ; for the

⁹ Mansi, *Consiliorum amplissima collectio*, VI, 1047 (Act. III); Schwartz, II, vol. I, pars altera, p. 29 [225].

¹⁰ Council of Chalcedon to Leo the Great (Ep. 98, 1: *PL* 54, 951; Mansi, VI, 147).

entire validity and confirmation of such an act was reserved to the authority of Your Beatitude.”¹¹

* * *

II

“PETER HAS SPOKEN THROUGH LEO”

21. But We must come now to the cardinal point of the whole question, namely the solemn definition of Catholic faith, by which the pernicious error of Eutyches was rejected and condemned. In the fourth session of the sacred Council, the imperial representatives requested that a new formula of faith be composed; but the papal legate Paschasinus, interpreting the will of all, replied that this was not necessary since the symbols of faith and the canons already in use in the Church were sufficient, chief among them in the present case being the letter of Leo to Flavian: “In the third place [that is, after the Creeds of Nicea and Constantinople and the exposition of them made by St. Cyril in the Council of Ephesus] the writings sent by the most blessed and Apostolic Pope of the universal Church, Leo, in condemnation of the heresy of Nestorius and Eutyches, have already indicated what is the true faith. In like manner also the holy Council holds and conforms to this same faith.”¹²

22. It is useful to mention here that this most important letter of St. Leo to Flavian concerning the Incarnation of the Word was read at the third session of the Council; and scarcely had the words of the reader died away, when all present cried out with one heart and one voice: “This is the faith of the Fathers, this is the faith of the Apostles. So do we all believe, so believe all who hold the true faith. Anathema to him who does not so believe. Peter has spoken through Leo.”¹³

¹¹ Anatolius to Leo the Great (Ep. 132, 4: *PL* 54, 1084; Mansi, VI, 278 s.).

¹² Mansi, VII, 10 (Act. IV).

¹³ Schwartz, II, vol. I, pars altera, p. 81 [277] (Act. III); Mansi, VI, 971 (Act. II).

23. After this, all unanimously proclaimed that the document of the Roman Pontiff agreed perfectly with the Creeds of Nicea and Constantinople. Nevertheless, in the fifth session of the Council, at the repeated requests of the representatives of Marcian and the Senate, a new formula of faith was prepared by a committee of Bishops, selected from various lands, who convened in the oratory of the Basilica of St. Euphemia. It consisted of an introduction, the Creed of Nicea and the Creed of Constantinople, which was promulgated then for the first time, and the solemn condemnation of the doctrine of Eutyches. This formula of faith was approved by the Fathers of the Council with unanimous consent.

24. We think it will be worthwhile, Venerable Brethren, if We now spend a short time in elucidating the document of the Roman Pontiff, which splendidly vindicates the Catholic faith. First of all, against Eutyches who had proclaimed "I profess that the Lord had two natures before the union; but after the union I profess only one nature,"¹⁴ the most holy Pontiff, not without indignation, opposes the brilliant light of truth in these words: "I am astonished that such an absurd and vicious declaration was not censured by any rebuke of the judges . . .; for it is equally impious to assert that the Only-Begotten Son of God had two natures before the Incarnation, as it is to admit in Him, after the Word was made flesh, only a single nature."¹⁵ With no less energy does the Pope strike Nestorius, who had gone to the opposite extreme: "By reason of this unity of person that must be admitted in the two natures, we read that the Son of Man descended from Heaven when the Son of God assumed the flesh from the Virgin, of whom He was born. And again, we say that the Son of God was crucified and was buried, although He suffered these things not in His divinity, by which He is Coeternal and consubstantial with the Father, but in the weakness of His human nature. Thus we all profess in the Creed that the Only-Begotten Son of God was crucified and was buried."¹⁶

¹⁴ St. Leo the Great Ep. 28, 6 (PL 54, 777).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ep. 28, 5: PL 54, 771; cf Augustinus, *Contra sermonem Ariatorum*, c. 8 (PL 42, 688).

25. Besides the distinction between the two natures in Christ, St. Leo demonstrates with great clarity also the distinction between the properties and operations of each of the natures: "Although," he says, "the property of each of the natures, united in one person, remains intact, nevertheless humility is assumed by majesty, weakness by strength, mortality by eternity."¹⁷ And again: "For each of the natures preserves undiminished its own property."¹⁸

26. However, the double series of those properties and operations is attributed to the person of the Word, since "one . . . and the same person is . . . truly the Son of God and truly the Son of Man."¹⁹ Thus "for each of the natures, in harmony with the other, performs that which is proper to itself, namely the Word performs that which is proper to the Word, and the flesh that which is proper to the flesh."²⁰ Here appears the well-known "communication of idioms", as it is called, which Cyril justly defended against Nestorius, relying on the solid principle that the two natures in Christ subsist in the single person of the Word, the Word namely, generated by the Father from all eternity according to the divinity, and born of Mary in time according to the humanity.

The Definition of Chalcedon

27. This profound doctrine, derived from the Gospels, does not differ from the decree of the Council of Ephesus and while it rejects Eutyches, it does not spare Nestorius; and with it the dogmatic definition of the Council of Chalcedon is in perfect harmony when it affirms clearly and precisely in the following words that in Christ there are two distinct natures but one person: "The great and holy and universal Council . . . also condemns those who propound that before the union there are two natures in the Lord and that after the union there is only one. Therefore, following the example of the Venerable Fathers and in perfect agreement, we all teach that we believe that the Son and Our Lord Jesus

¹⁷ Ep. 28, 3: *PL* 54, 763; cf. St. Leo the Great Serm. 21, 2 (*PL* 54, 192).

¹⁸ Ep. 28, 3: *PL* 54, 765; cf. Serm. 23, 2 (*PL* 54, 201).

¹⁹ Ep. 28, 4 (*PL* 54, 767).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Christ is one, that He is perfect in His divinity and perfect in His humanity, true God and true man, that He is composed of a rational soul and a body, at the same time consubstantial with the Father in His divinity, consubstantial with us in His humanity, like unto us in all things, sin alone excepted; born of the Father in His divinity from all eternity, and in these latter days for us and for our salvation born in His humanity of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God; that in one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-Begotten there must be recognized two natures without mixture and without change, undivided and inseparable; that in the union the difference of the natures is never lost but the characteristic of each nature is preserved and is the property of one person and subsistence; that the Lord Jesus Christ is not separated or divided into two persons, but He, one and the same, is the Son, the Only-Begotten, Word, God.”²¹

The Clarity and Precision of the Terms

28. If it is asked how it happens that the Council of Chalcedon used such clear and efficacious language in refuting error, We think it is because it avoided ambiguity and used the most apt terms. In the definitions of Chalcedon the same meaning is given to the two words “person” and “hypostasis” (prosopon-hypostasis), while the word “nature” (physis) has another sense and its meaning is never attributed to the other two.

29. Hence it is wrong to say that the Council of Chalcedon corrected what the Council of Ephesus had defined, as the Nestorians and Eutychians once stated and as some modern historians hold. On the contrary, one Council completes the other in such a way that the harmonious synthesis of the fundamental doctrine about Christ became more apparent in the second and third Ecumenical Councils held in Constantinople.

30. It is a great pity that some ancient adversaries of the Council of Chalcedon, also called Monophysites, rejected the teaching which was so clear, sincere and complete, on

²¹ Mansi, VII, 114 and 115.

account of some expressions wrongly understood by them. Even though these were opposed to Eutyches who falsely spoke about the mixing of the natures of Christ, they held on tenaciously to the well-known expression, *Una natura Dei Verbi incarnata* ("The Word of God has one nature incarnate"). St. Cyril of Alexandria used this expression as coming from St. Athanasius, but in the correct sense, because he was using "nature" to mean "person." But the Fathers of Chalcedon eliminated all equivocation and uncertainty from these terms: by using the same terminology for the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the Incarnation, they identified, on the one hand, the words "nature" and "essence," (*ousia*) and on the other hand the words "person" and hypostasis." They distinguished carefully between the two sets of terms, while the above-mentioned adversaries identified "nature" with "person" but not with "essence." In keeping then with the ordinary and clear terminology one must say that in God there is one nature, three persons; but in Christ one person, two natures.

31. For the reason just given there are even today some dissident groups in Egypt, Ethiopia, Syria, Armenia and elsewhere who seem to stray from the right path chiefly in the words used, when formulating the doctrine of the Incarnation of Our Lord. This can be deduced from their liturgical and theological documents.

32. Even in the twelfth century a writer who had the greatest authority among the Armenians openly spoke his thoughts in this matter: "We say that Christ has one nature, not as according to Eutyches through a mixing nor as according to Apollinaris through a diminution, but according to the mind of St. Cyril of Alexandria, who in his book *Scholiorum adversus Nestorium* says: The nature of the Word Incarnate is one, as the Fathers taught . . . And we say the same, following the tradition of the Saints, not following the dissidents who speak about one nature and introduce into the union of Christ a mixing or change or alteration; we mean the hypostasis which you also admit in Christ. This is correct and we admit it; it is exactly equal to our formula: One nature . . . Nor do we refuse to say "two natures, provided it does not mean a division

as Nestorius wished, but that the separation be maintained against Eutyches and Apollinaris."²²

33. If joy and spiritual happiness reach their height when the words of the Psalmist are verified: "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity";²³ if the glory of God and the greatest benefit to mankind shines forth especially when the full truth and the full charity of Christ unite the sheep of Christ, let those consider—those whom We have mentioned in love and in sorrow—if it be right and useful for them, on account of an initial misunderstanding in terminology, to remain still separated from the one holy Church, founded on sapphires,²⁴ namely on the Prophets and Apostles, on the chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ!²⁵

Some Modern Errors

34. Also strongly opposed to the Chalcedon profession of faith is the opinion, rather widely held outside the Catholic religion, based on an arbitrary and false interpretation of a text of St. Paul the Apostle to the Philippians.²⁶ We refer to the doctrine called "kenotica" which teaches that in Christ there is a limitation of the Divinity of the Word. This is a sacrilegious invention and, like its opposite error of Docetism, should be condemned, since it reduces the entire mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption to lifeless and empty shadows. "In the integral . . . and perfect nature of true man," as Leo the Great eloquently teaches, "was the true God born, complete in His properties, complete in ours."²⁷

35. Although there is nothing against making a deeper study of the humanity of Christ even from the psychological point of view, nevertheless there are some who in this difficult field have strayed too far from the ancient positions

²² Thus Nerses IV (1173) in *Libellus confessionis fidei*, to Manuel Comnenus, Byzantine Emperor (Cf. I, Cappelletti, *S. Narsetis Claiensis, Armenorum Catholici, opera*, I, Venetiis, 1836, pp. 182-183).

²³ *Ps.* 132, 1.

²⁴ Cf. *Is.* 54, 11.

²⁵ Cf. *Eph.*, 2, 20.

²⁶ *Philipp.*, 2, 7.

²⁷ *Ep.* 28, 3: *PL* 54, 763. Cf. *Serm.* 23, 2 (*PL* 54, 201).

and built up new theories; they falsely use the authority and the definitions of the Council of Chalcedon to defend their own positions.

36. These authors exalt the state and condition of the human nature of Christ so much that it seems to be, at least psychologically, a subject *sui iuris* and as if it did not subsist in the person of the Word. But the Council of Chalcedon, in complete agreement with that of Ephesus, clearly affirms that the two natures of Our Redeemer meet "in one sole person and subsistence"; it denies that there are two individuals in Christ, as if there were together with the Word of God an "assumed man," endowed with complete autonomy.

37. St. Leo, then, not only makes this doctrine his own but points out the sources from which he derives these principles: "Whatever we have written," he says, "is proved to have been taken from the doctrine of the Apostles and Evangelists."²⁸

Doctrine of the Apostles and Evangelists

38. The Church from the earliest times, in written documents, sermons and liturgical prayers, clearly and definitely professes that the Son, the Only-Begotten of the substance of God the Father, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, was born on earth, suffered, was nailed to the tree of the cross, and after He had risen from the dead, ascended into heaven. Besides this, the Sacred Scripture attributes to the one Christ, the Son of God, human properties, and to the same, the Son of Man, divine properties.

39. For instance St. John the Evangelist says: "The word was made flesh";²⁹ Paul writes of Him: "Who though by nature God . . . humbled Himself becoming obedient unto death";³⁰ and "But when the fulness of time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman";³¹ even the Divine Redeemer Himself unhesitatingly asserts: "I and the Father

²⁸ Ep. 152 (*PL* 54, 1123).

²⁹ John, 1, 14.

³⁰ *Philipp.*, 2, 6-8.

³¹ *Gal.*, 4, 4.

are one”;³² and again “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world.”³³ The heavenly origin of Our Redeemer is also clearly shown in this text of the Gospel: “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me”;³⁴ and also from the text: “He who descended, he is the same who ascended also above all the heavens.”³⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas thus comments and illustrates the passage: “He who descends is the same as he who ascends. In this the unity of the person of God and man is shown. The Son of God descends . . . by assuming human nature, but the Son of Man ascends in his human nature to the sublimity of life immortal. Thus it is the same Son of God who descends and the Son of Man who ascends.”³⁶

40. Our Predecessor Leo the Great had already expressed the same idea in these words: “Because . . . in the justification of man it is of the greatest help that the Only-Begotten of God deigned to be also the Son of Man, namely that the same God (homoousios) (of the one substance) with the Father is also true man and consubstantial with His Mother according to the flesh. We rejoice in one and in the other since it is only in virtue of both that we are saved and not by dividing the visible from the invisible, the corporal from the incorporeal, the passible from the impassible, the palpable from the impalpable, the form of the servant from the form of God; for although one exists from eternity and the other began in time, having been united, they cannot now be separated or come to an end.”³⁷

41. The untold magnificence and mercifulness of our Redemption is apparent only when one believes with a pure and sincere faith that in Christ there is only one person, the person of the Word, uniting two completely distinct natures, the divine and the human, different in their properties and their operations.

³² John, 10, 30.

³³ John, 16, 28.

³⁴ John, 6, 38.

³⁵ *Eph.*, 4, 10.

³⁶ St. Thomas, *Comm. in Ep. ad Ephesios*, c. IV, lect. III, near the end.

³⁷ St. Leo the Great *Serm.* 30, 6 (*PL* 54, 233 s.).

42. O the sublimity of the mercy and the justice of God, Who comes to the help of the guilty and at the same time gains children for Himself! O heaven, bent down to scatter the winter gloom and make flowers appear again on our earth³⁸ and to make of us new men, a new creature, a new being, a holy nation and a heavenly race! The Word indeed suffered truly in His flesh, shed His Blood on the cross and paid to the Eternal Father superabundant satisfaction for our sins; from this arises certain hope of salvation for those who follow Christ with true faith and lively charity, and who produce works of justice with the help of grace gained by Him.

* * *

III APPEAL TO RETURN

43. While We recall the memory of these outstanding and glorious annals of the Church, We naturally turn Our thoughts with greater affection than usual to the Eastern Churches. The Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon is truly their glorious monument which will certainly last for all time. There, under the guidance of the Apostolic See, in an assembly of about 600 Eastern Bishops the doctrine of the unity of Christ—in Whom the two natures distinct and separate, human and divine, unite in one person—was opportunely defended and wonderfully explained against an impious attempt to weaken it. How unfortunate that many in Eastern lands for long centuries are pitifully cut off from the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, of which the hypostatic union is such a shining example. Is it not holy and salutary and according to the will of God that all at long last return to the one fold of Christ?

44. For Our part, We wish them to know clearly that Our thoughts are of peace and not of affliction.³⁹ It is well known that We have proved this to be Our disposition by Our actions, and if, moved by necessity We rejoice over it, We rejoice in the Lord, Who is the author of the good will of

³⁸ Cf. *Cant.*, 2, 11 s.

³⁹ Cf. *Jerem.*, 29, 11.

all. Following the footsteps of Our Predecessors, We have constantly labored to make the return to the Catholic Church easier for the Eastern Christians. We have defended their legitimate rites, promoted research with regard to them, promulgated laws to provide for them; We have taken a special interest in the Congregation for the Eastern Church, established in the Roman Curia; and We have adorned the Patriarch of the Armenians with the splendor of the Roman purple.

45. When the recent war was raging, with its want, hunger and disease, We strove to alleviate the increasing misery wherever it was found, without any distinction between them and those who call Us "Father." We tried in every way possible to help widows, children, the old and sick, and We would have been happier had We been able to do all that We wished to do. Let those who by the calamity of the times are separated from the Apostolic See behold and imitate Flavian, a second John Chrysostom, in undergoing persecution for justice' sake, the Fathers of the Council of Chalcedon, outstanding members of the Mystical Body of Christ, the brave Marcian, mild and wise prince, and Pulcheria, a lily brilliant with royal and pure beauty; and let them not hesitate to honor with a just tribute this Apostolic See, whose power lies in serving this divinely established and unshaken rock of truth. We foresee what a rich source of good this return to the unity of the Church would be for the common benefit of Christendom.

46. Of course, We are not unaware that a mass of ancient prejudices persistently hinders the happy realization of the prayer made at the Last Supper to the Eternal Father by Christ Our Lord for His followers: "That they all may be one."⁴⁰ But We also know that if those who pray, united as in battle array, are filled with the fervor of a confident faith and a clear conscience, the power of prayer is great enough to lift a mountain and cast it into the sea.⁴¹ We greatly desire, then that all who have at heart this earnest call to embrace Christian unity—let no one who is of Christ esteem this lightly—may pour out prayers and entreaties to God, the author of order, unity, and beauty, that the

⁴⁰ John, 17, 21.

⁴¹ Cf. Mark, 11, 23.

laudable wishes of all good men may be fulfilled as soon as possible. For attaining this goal, the way is made smooth, certainly, by quiet research, without anger or passion, through which today more than in the past it is usual to reconstruct and ponder events of ages gone by.

Unity Against the Enemies of God and of Christ

47. There is another reason which urgently demands that the Christian forces immediately close ranks and fight under the one and only standard of Christ against the fierce attacks of the enemy from hell. Who is not horrified at the hatred and ferocity with which the God-haters in many parts of the world threaten to stamp out or uproot whatever is divine and Christian? Against this united front, those who are signed with the sacred mark of Baptism and in duty bound to fight the good fight for Christ, cannot any longer remain divided and disunited.

Unity in Martyrdom and Blood

48. The chain, the sufferings, the torments, the groans, the blood of that immense multitude, known and unknown, who for their constancy in virtue and their Christian faith have suffered and today still suffer, with a voice growing more insistent day by day, urge all to embrace this holy unity of the Church.

49. Hope for the return of Our brothers and sons, long separated from this Apostolic See, has become stronger because of the bitter and bloody cross of martyrdom borne by so many other brothers and sons: let no one either hinder or neglect this salutary work of God! To the benefits and the joys of this return with paternal exhortation We urge and invite those also who follow the Nestorian and Monophysite errors. Let them understand that We would regard it a most splendid triumph of Our apostolate if it were given to Us to embrace in charity and honor those who are all the more dear to Us as their long absence has increased Our longing for their return.

50. Finally, it is Our wish, Venerable Brethren, that when, through your efforts, the holy Council of Chalcedon is com-

memorated, on that occasion all be urged to adhere with total loyalty to Christ Our Redeemer and King. Let no one, allured by the fallacy of human reasoning and deceived by the ambiguities of human language, either shake by doubt or pervert by harmful innovation the dogma ratified by Chalcedon, that in Christ there are two true and perfect natures, the divine and the human, which are joined together, but not confused, subsisting in the one person of the Word. Rather let all, united closely with the Author of our salvation, Who is the "Way of holy living, the Truth of divine teaching, and the Life of eternal happiness,"⁴² love in Him their restored human nature, respect their restored liberty, and, putting away the foolishness of senile worldlings, pass on in joy to the ageless wisdom of a spiritual childhood.

51. May the Triune God Whose nature is goodness, Whose will is power, deign to accept these ardent prayers, recommended by the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and of Euphemia, triumphant virgin and martyr of Chalcedon. Venerable Brethren, add your prayers to Ours for this end, and see to it that what We have written to you is made known to as many as possible. Gratefully then to you and to all the priests and faithful for whose spiritual profit your pastoral care is vigilant, from Our heart, We impart the Apostolic Benediction, in the hope that you may sustain with greater alacrity the yoke of Christ, neither burdensome nor odious, and become more and more like Him in humility Whose glory you wish to share.

52. Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, the eighth day of September, on the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, in the year 1951, the thirteenth of Our Pontificate.

PIUS PP. XII

⁴² St. Leo the Great Serm. 72, 1 (*PL* 54, 390).

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