

APK 9937

Pius XI

Lux Veritatis: On the Council  
of Ephesus. 1931.

**THE LIGHT OF TRUTH**  
CONCERNING THE CELEBRATION OF THE  
FIFTEENTH CENTENARY OF THE OECU-  
MENICAL COUNCIL OF EPHESUS

**Encyclical Letter**

*(Lux veritatis)*

of

**His Holiness, Pope Pius XI**

*(Vatican Press Translation)*

**Issued December 25, 1931**



**NATIONAL CATHOLIC WELFARE CONFERENCE**  
1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W.  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

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ENCYCLICAL  
OF  
POPE PIUS XI  
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THE FIFTEENTH CENTENARY OF THE  
OECUMENICAL COUNCIL OF EPHESUS

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J-21139

# ENCYCLICAL LETTER

TO THE VENERABLE BRETHREN,  
PATRIARCHS, PRIMATES, ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS  
AND OTHER LOCAL ORDINARIES  
IN PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE  
CONCERNING THE  
CELEBRATION OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTENARY  
OF THE OECUMENICAL COUNCIL OF EPHESUS

POPE PIUS XI

VENERABLE BRETHREN  
GREETING AND APOSTOLICAL BLESSING

## I

**H**ISTORY as the light of truth and witness of the ages, if properly investigated and diligently explored, shows that the divine promise made by Jesus Christ: "I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world"<sup>1</sup> has never failed His spouse, the Church, and will certainly never fail in future. Nay more, the fiercer the waves on which the divine bark of Peter is tossed, in the course of the centuries, the closer at hand and stronger is the aid of divine grace. This is what happened in the early days of the Church, not only when the Christian name was a hated stigma to be punished by death, but also when the True Faith of Christ, owing to the treachery of the sowers of heresies, especially in Eastern countries, was greatly confused and in imminent peril. As the persecutors of Catholicity one after another perished miserably, and the Roman Empire itself

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28, 20.

fell in ruins, so the heretics all, as withered branches<sup>2</sup> severed from the divine vine, could not drink in the sap of life, nor produce fruit.

The Church of God, however, amid so many storms and changes in perishable institutions, relying solely on God has at all times proceeded on her way with sure and stately step, and has never ceased to guard devotedly the sacred deposit of evangelical truth confided to her by her Founder.

These things occur to Our mind, Venerable Brethren, as We begin to address you by this letter on the most happy event, the celebration of the fifteenth centenary of the Oecumenical Council of Ephesus, in which the cunning impudence of the erring was exposed, and, supported by heavenly aid, the unshaken faith of the Church shone brightly.

#### COMMEMORATION IS APPLAUDED

We know how at Our request two excellent men<sup>3</sup> formed a committee to commemorate as worthily as possible this centenary, not only here in the chief city of the Catholic world, but among the nations everywhere. We know also how those to whom this charge was given by Us spared neither study nor labor, each to the best of his ability, that this salutary undertaking might be carried forward. On this alacrity of minds—with which nearly everywhere and with an altogether admirable cooperation bishops and distinguished members of the laity freely responded to their utmost—We express Our hearty congratulations. By it We

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<sup>2</sup> John 15, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to the Most Eminent Cardinals, B. Pompili and A. Sincero, d. 25 Dec., 1930, Acta Ap. Sedis, Vol. XXIII, pp. 10-12.

are confident the Catholic cause will reap in the future no slight advantage.

Considering this event and all the facts and circumstances connected with it, as the celebration draws to a close, and the sacred season when the Blessed Virgin Mary brought forth for us the Saviour comes round again, We, by the apostolical office which We hold from on high, deem it proper to communicate with you by this Encyclical Letter on this most important matter. We cherish the good hope that not only will Our words be pleasing and useful to you and yours, but also, that if the many who are separated from the Apostolic See, brothers and sons most dear to Us, being moved by the quest of truth, reflect and ponder on them, they cannot help being led by history as teacher of life, and affected by the desire at least of one fold and one Shepherd, to embrace the true faith which is ever kept sound and entire in the Roman Church. In the process which the Fathers of the Council of Ephesus followed, in opposing the Nestorian heresy and conducting the Council three dogmas of the Catholic Religion, which We shall treat principally, shine forth with brilliancy in the eyes of all; namely, that the person of Jesus Christ is one and divine; that the Blessed Virgin Mary should be acknowledged and venerated by everyone as really and truly the Mother of God; and that when matters of faith or morals are concerned the Roman Pontiff has from on high an authority which is supreme, above all others and subject to none.

#### THE WARNING OF ST. PAUL

To proceed with order, as a beginning We make Our own the sentiment and warning of the Apostle

of the Gentiles to the Ephesians: "Until we all meet into the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ; That henceforth we be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the wickedness of men, by cunning craftiness, by which men lie in wait to deceive. But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in Him Who is the Head, even Christ: From Whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity."<sup>4</sup>

Just as the Fathers of the Council followed this apostolical exhortation with wonderful unanimity, so We wish that everyone without discrimination or prejudice should take it as addressed to himself and turn it to good account.

As all know, Nestorius was the author of the whole controversy. He did not originate new doctrine by his own talent and study, but borrowed it from Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia, and undertook to popularize it zealously, after developing it and clothing it with the appearance of novelty and with great array of language and sentiment, excelling as he did in the gift of expression.

Born in Germanicia, a town of Syria, he went as a youth to Antioch there to be instructed in sacred and profane learning. In that city, so famous at the time, he first embraced the monastic life and next, owing to instability of character, left it and

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<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 4, 13-16.



became a priest, taking wholly to preaching in the quest of human applause more than of the glory of God. The fame of his eloquence inflamed the multitude and spread so far and wide that he was invited to Constantinople, then widowed of its Shepherd, and not long after, with the hearty approbation of all, he was raised to the episcopal dignity. In this truly distinguished See, instead of ceasing to spread his perverse doctrines, he continued to teach and popularize them with still greater authority and boastfulness.

#### POINTS OF NESTORIUS' HERESY

To appreciate the matter properly, it will help to touch briefly on the principal points of the Nestorian heresy. This highly elated man, claiming that there were two hypostases, the human of Jesus, and the divine of the Word, meeting in one common "prosopo" as he termed it, denied the marvellous and substantial union of the two natures, which we call hypostatic, and asserted that the only begotten Word of God was not made man, but was in human flesh only by indwelling, by good pleasure and by virtue of operating in it: that therefore He should be called not God but "Theophoron," or god-bearer, in much the same manner as prophets and other holy men, owing to the divine grace imparted to them, might be called god-bearing.

From these perverse fabrications of Nestorius it was easy to recognize in Christ two persons, one divine, the other human. It followed necessarily that the Blessed Virgin Mary is not truly the Mother of God. *Theotokos*, but Mother rather of

the man Christ, *Christotocon*, or at most *Theodochon*, that is, the recipient of God.<sup>5</sup>

Wicked dogmas of this kind, proclaimed not covertly nor obscurely by a private individual, but openly and plainly by the very Bishop of the See of Constantinople, created the greatest mental disturbance, especially in the Eastern Church. Among the opponents of the Nestorian heresy, who were numerous in the Eastern Empire's capital city itself, was that most holy man and champion of Catholic integrity, Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, who holds without question the principal place. As soon as he heard of the perverse opinions of the Bishop of Constantinople, he earnestly defended the orthodox faith, as he was most zealous not only for his own sons, but also for the erring brethren, and endeavored by letters to Nestorius written in a fraternal spirit to bring him back to the norm of Catholic truth.

When, however, the obdurate pertinacity of Nestorius made useless this earnest effort of charity, Cyril, dutifully aware, and fearless champion, of the authority of the Roman Church, would not urge the matter by himself nor in so grave a case pass sentence without previously petitioning and obtaining the judgment of the Apostolic See. To the "Most Blessed" therefore "and most dear to God Father Celestine" he wrote a most respectful letter in which, in filial spirit, he says, among other things: "The longstanding custom of the Church requires that such matters be made known to Your Holiness." . . . "We are not breaking off com-

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<sup>5</sup> Mansi, Conciliorum Amplissima Collectio IV, c. 1007; Schwartz, Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum 1, 5. p. 408.

<sup>6</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1011.



munion with him openly and plainly until we shall have made these things known to your loving kindness. Deign therefore to declare your opinion so that it may be clearly known to us whether we should have anything in common with him, or tell him plainly that no one can have anything in common with one who fosters and preaches such erroneous doctrine. Furthermore, your entire opinion and your decision in this matter should be clearly made known to the most pious and godfearing bishops of Macedonia and to every bishop in the East.”<sup>7</sup>

#### CONDEMNATION OF THE HERESY

Nestorius was not ignorant of the supreme authority of the Bishop of Rome over the universal Church. More than once, in fact, by letters written to Celestine, he attempted to prove the correctness of his teaching, and to preoccupy and win over the mind of the Pontiff to himself, but in vain. Since therefore the ill-coined words of the heresiarch expressed serious errors, no sooner had the Bishop of the Apostolic See perceived these than, applying the remedy, lest the plague of heresy might become more dangerous by delay, he solemnly condemned the errors found by a synodal examination, and decreed that they should be condemned by all.

Now here We request you, Venerable Brethren, to observe closely how greatly the procedure of the Roman Pontiff in this case differed from that which was followed by the Bishop of Alexandria. Although the latter occupied the See which ranked

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<sup>7</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1015.

as primatial in the Eastern Church, he was unwilling, as We have said, to adjudge this most grave controversy about Catholic faith until he could learn the sacred decision of the Apostolic See. Celestine, on the other hand, convoking a synod in Rome, and weighing the matter carefully, by virtue of his supreme and absolute authority over the universal flock of Christ, solemnly decreed and sanctioned what follows about the teaching of the Bishop of Constantinople. He wrote to Nestorius: "Know plainly therefore that this is Our sentence: Unless you preach what the Roman, the Alexandrian, and the universal Catholic Church holds, and what the sacred and holy Church of Constantinople held so well up to your time, and unless within ten days from the time this covenant becomes known to you, you shall have in open and written confession condemned this perfidious innovation, which aims at separating what the venerable Scripture has joined together, you are cast out from communion with the universal Catholic Church. This formula of Our judgment, with all the documents, We have forwarded by Our esteemed deacon Possidonius to my saintly fellow priest, the Bishop of the renowned city of Alexandria, who has fully reported to Us on this subject, so that as Our viceregent he may make known Our decision to you and to all the brethren, as they should all know what is done, since the matter treated concerns them all."<sup>8</sup>

The Roman Pontiff enjoined on the Patriarch of Alexandria the execution of this sentence in these grave words: "Armed with the authority of Our

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<sup>8</sup> Mansi, l. c., IV, 1034 sq.

See, and acting in Our stead, you will execute this sentence with strict vigor so that within the ten days as numbered in this covenant, he shall condemn his perverse preachings by written profession, and affirm that he holds concerning the birth of Christ as God the faith which the Roman Church, the Church of your holiness and the faithful hold universally. Unless he shall do this, let your holiness provide for that Church, and let him know that he is in every way removed from our body.”<sup>9</sup>

#### ROME'S PLACE IN THE COUNCIL

Some writers, however, both of earlier and more recent date, as if attempting to make light of the indisputable authority of the documents We have quoted, have put forth this opinion of the whole affair often in a proud and boastful spirit. Grant, they say thoughtlessly, that the Roman Bishop did issue a peremptory and absolute judgment which the Alexandrian Bishop, through enmity with Nestorius, had provoked and gladly made his own: nevertheless, the Council of Ephesus, convened afterwards, again passed judgment on the whole matter, that had been already judged and wholly reprobated by the Holy See, and decided by its own supreme authority what all should think of it. Whence, as they conclude, it follows that an Oecumenical Council has rights more powerful and valid than the authority of the Bishop of Rome.

However, all who look diligently into facts and written documents for honest history, with minds wholly free of prejudices, can see how these men strive vainly to invest a counterfeit with semblance

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<sup>9</sup> Migne, P. L., 50, 463; IV, 1019 sq.

of truth. First of all, be it observed that when the Emperor Theodosius, and his colleague Valentinian in his name, convoked an Oecumenical Council, the sentence of Celestine had not yet reached Constantinople, and was in no way known there. Besides, when Celestine learned that the Council of Ephesus had been convoked, he did not object to the proposed deliberation; nay he even wrote to Theodosius<sup>10</sup> and the Alexandrian Archbishop<sup>11</sup> praising this proposal, and delegated and sent as his legates to preside over the Council, the Patriarch Cyril, the Bishops Arcadius and Projectus, and the priest Philip.

Now in doing this the Roman Pontiff did not leave to the arbitration of the Council the case as if undecided, but firmly adhering to "what has already been decided by Us,"<sup>12</sup> he ordered the Fathers of the Council to execute the sentence imposed by him so that, conferring among themselves and offering prayers to God, they might endeavor to bring back the erring Bishop of the Constantinopolitan See to the unity of the Faith. Cyril inquired from the Pontiff how he should act in the business, "whether the sacred Council should admit a man who condemned what it held; or whether, as the time for indulgence had passed, the sentence already imposed should take effect."

Celestine wrote: "Let this be the part of your holiness and of the venerable brethren in the Council, that the strife arisen in the Church be suppressed, and let Us learn that, God helping, the affair is closed with the avowed correction. We do

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<sup>10</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1291.

<sup>11</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1292.

<sup>12</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1287.

not say We are not of the Council, because We cannot be absent from those, wherever they may be, with whom one faith still unites Us . . . We are there because what is done there for all is in Our thoughts; We are acting spiritually, because We do not appear to act corporally. I am eager for Catholic peace, and I am eager for the salvation of one perishing if only he be willing to admit his ailment. This We say lest perhaps We might seem to be wanting to one who may be willing to correct himself. Let this show that Our feet are not swift to shed blood, since he knows that the remedy is offered to him.”<sup>13</sup>

#### ACCEPTANCE OF PAPAL AUTHORITY

These words of Celestine reveal his paternal spirit, and prove most convincingly that before everything else he sought to have the true light of faith shine upon blinded minds and that he would rejoice at the return of the erring to the Church. Moreover, what he prescribed to his legates as they set out for Ephesus makes clear the concern and solicitude with which he ordered that the divinely bestowed rights of the Roman See should be kept safe and secure: “We command that the authority of the Apostolic See be protected, as the instructions which have been given you state. You are to be present at the Council since, should disputes arise, you are to judge of the various opinions, not to take part in the contest.”<sup>14</sup>

The legates did as instructed, with the Fathers of the sacred Council in full agreement. Indeed, in firm and faithful accordance with the most

<sup>13</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1292.

<sup>14</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 556.



absolute commands of the Pontiff as stated above, when they arrived at Ephesus after the conclusion of the first session, they insisted that all the decrees enacted at the previous session should be submitted to them, to be confirmed and approved in the name of the Apostolic See: "We request you to direct that we be shown all the acts of this sacred Council so that in accordance with the decision of our blessed Pope and of this sacred gathering we also may confirm. . . ." <sup>15</sup>

Before the entire Council the priest Philip uttered that remarkable opinion on the primacy of the Roman Church which the dogmatic Constitution of the Vatican Council itself quotes (*Pastor Aeternus*) <sup>16</sup>: "No one doubts, nay for centuries it has been known that the holy and most blessed Peter, prince and head of the Apostles, column of faith, and foundation of the Catholic Church, received from Our Lord Jesus Christ, Saviour and Redeemer of the human race, the keys of the Kingdom, that the power of binding and loosing sins was given to him; that up till now and forever he lives in his successors and exercises judgment." <sup>17</sup>

What more? Did the Fathers of the Oecumenical Council object to the way the legates acted, or were they in any way opposed to it? On the contrary. Written documents have come down which establish most clearly their obedient respect and reverence. In the second section of the Council when the pontifical legates, reading Celestine's letters, said among other things: "In Our solicitude We have directed Our holy brothers and fellow

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<sup>15</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1290.

<sup>16</sup> Conc. Vatic., sess IV, cap 2.

<sup>17</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1295.



priests, one in mind with Us, the Bishops Arcadius and Projectus and Our fellow priest Philip, to be present at what is done and to perform what We have before decreed, not doubting that the assent of your holiness will be given to this. . . .”<sup>18</sup> So far from resenting this ruling of the supreme judge, the Fathers of the Council, praising it, with one voice acclaimed the Supreme Pontiff with these utterances: “A just judgment! To the new Paul Celestine, to the new Paul Cyril, to Celestine, guardian of the faith, to Celestine one in heart with the Council, to Celestine, the whole Council gives thanks; one Celestine, one Cyril, one faith in the Council, one faith the world over!”<sup>19</sup>

#### OTHER CONFIRMATIONS

When it came to condemning and reprobating Nestorius, the Fathers of the Council did not think that the matter was for them to judge freely and all over again, but plainly professed themselves anticipated and bound by the oracle of the Roman Pontiff. “Overtaking him (Nestorius) as thinking and preaching impiously, and obliged by the sacred canons and the letter of our most holy father and fellow in the ministry, Celestine, Bishop of the Church of Rome, in a flood of tears we have to arrive at this sad sentence against him. Wherefore Our Lord Jesus Christ, outraged by his blasphemous utterances, by this most sacred Council has defined that the same Nestorius is deprived of the episcopal dignity and cut off from all sacerdotal association and gathering.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1287.

<sup>19</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1287.

<sup>20</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1294 sq.

Firmus, Bishop of Caesarea, proclaimed the very same thing in the second session of the Council: "The Apostolic and Holy See by letters of the most holy Bishop Celestine, which he has sent to most devoted Bishops, . . . even before he prescribed the decision and rule concerning this affair, which we also have followed . . . since Nestorius, when cited by us, has not appeared, we command that the formula be executed pronouncing on him canonical and apostolical judgment."<sup>21</sup>

Now therefore the documents quoted by Us establish so expressly and significantly that the belief in the authority of the Roman Pontiff over the entire flock of Christ, subject to none and infallible, flourished in those days in the universal Church, as to recall to Our mind that clear and brilliant statement of Augustine a few years before on the judgment brought by Pope Zosimus in his Tractorial Letter against the Pelagians: "In these words of the Holy See Catholic belief is so venerable and well founded, so certain and clear, that no Christian may doubt it."<sup>22</sup>

Would that the most holy Bishop of Hippo could have been present at the Council of Ephesus; grasping with his keen intellect the point at issue between the disputants, how ably he would have shed light on the dogmas of Catholic truth and defended them with his courage! However, when the legates of the Emperors reached Hippo, to hand him the letters of invitation, there was nothing to be done, except to mourn over the extinction of that sur-

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<sup>21</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1287 sq.

<sup>22</sup> Epist. 190, Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum, 57, p. 159 sq.

passing splendor of Christian wisdom and his See ravaged by the Vandals.

You are aware, Venerable Brethren, that some who are engaged in historical investigation specialize not only in clearing Nestorius from the stain of heresy, but also in accusing the most holy Alexandrian bishop Cyril of a wicked rivalry, of calumniating Nestorius as an enemy and of contending with all his might to bring about his condemnation for things he did not teach. Indeed, the defenders of the Bishop of Constantinople do not hesitate to brand with this grave incrimination Our most blessed predecessor Celestine himself and even the sacrosanct Council of Ephesus.

#### GENERAL RECOGNITION OF DECREE

However, the universal Church answers by reprobating this vain and rash venture. At all times she has recognized that the condemnation of Nestorius was justly pronounced, that Cyril's doctrine was orthodox, and she has ever regarded with veneration the Council of Ephesus as one of the Oecumenical Councils celebrated under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, passing by many of the most convincing written documents, everyone surely knows that very many of the disciples of Nestorius—who had before their eyes the course of events, and who had no tie of relationship with Cyril—although they had been drawn to the other side out of friendship with Nestorius and on account of the strong attraction of his writings and the very exciting ardor of his controversies, after the Council of Ephesus, as if they had been stricken by the light of truth, they gradually deserted the heretical Constanti-

nopolitan Bishop as one to be shunned by the law of the Church. Of these there were certainly many survivors when Our predecessor of happy memory, Leo the Great, wrote as follows to Paschasinus, Bishop of Lilybæum, his legate to the Council of Chalcedon: "You know that the whole Church of Constantinople with all its monasteries and many bishops agreed in subscribing to anathematize Nestorius and Eutyches and their dogmas."<sup>23</sup> In a dogmatic letter to the Emperor Leo he proclaimed Nestorius in the plainest terms as a heretic and teacher of heresy with no one to gainsay it. "Anathema therefore," he says, "to Nestorius, who believed the Blessed Virgin Mary was Mother not of God but of man only; who did not believe that there was one Christ in the Word and in the flesh, but one person in the flesh and another of the Deity, and preached as a separate and apart one son of God, another son of man."<sup>24</sup> As all should know, the Council of Chalcedon sanctioned this by reprobating Nestorius again and praising the doctrine of Cyril. Our most holy predecessor, Gregory the Great, had scarcely been raised to the Chair of Peter when in his synodical letter to the Eastern Bishops, after mentioning the four Oecumenical Councils—of Nice, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon—he makes this most noble and most important statement: "On these as on a foursquare stone rises and stands the structure of faith and of each one's life and action. Whosoever does not cling to their solidity, even though he be a stone, lies outside the structure."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mansi, l.c., VI, 124.

<sup>24</sup> Mansi, l.c., VI, 351-354.

<sup>25</sup> Migne, P.L., 77, 478, cfr. Mansi, l.c., IX, 1048.

It should be clear to all therefore that Nestorius really preached heretical tenets, that the Patriarch of Alexandria was a strenuous defender of Catholic faith, and that the Pontiff Celestine, with the Council of Ephesus, guarded the ancient doctrine and the supreme authority of the Apostolic See.

## II

Let us now, Venerable Brethren, proceed to investigate further those points of doctrine which the Oecumenical Council of Ephesus openly professed and sanctioned with its authority by the condemnation of Nestorius. Besides condemning Pelagius and his followers—one of whom Nestorius surely was—the principal matter in question, and one on which the Fathers solemnly and almost unanimously agreed, was that the opinion of the heresiarch was impious and opposed to Holy Writ, and that what he rejected is therefore certain, namely, that there is one person in Christ, and that divine. Since Nestorius, as We have said, stubbornly contended that the Divine Word is not substantially and hypostatically united with human nature, but by a certain accidental and moral bond, the Fathers at Ephesus, in condemning the Bishop of Constantinople, clearly professed the right doctrine of the Incarnation to be held firmly by all. In letters and capitularies sent previously to Nestorius and inserted in the Acts of this Oecumenical Council, Cyril, in wonderful agreement with the Roman Church, maintained this in these learned and insistent words . . . “On no account is it lawful to divide our one Lord Jesus Christ into two sons . . . For Scripture does not say that the Word associated with Himself the person of man,



but was made flesh. That the Word was made flesh means It communicated like us with flesh and blood. It made our body Its own and came forth as man from a woman not losing divinity nor origin from the Father, but, in assuming flesh, It remained what It was."<sup>26</sup>

We are taught by Sacred Scripture and by divine tradition that the Word of God united Itself not to any individual man, already in existence, but that the one and the same Christ is the Word of God dwelling in the bosom of God before all ages, and made man in time. Divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ, Redeemer of the human race, are bound together in the wonderful union which is justly styled hypostatic, and this is proved most clearly in Holy Writ wherein the one Christ is called not only God and Man, but distinctly held also as God and likewise as man, and, finally, as man to die, and as God to rise from the dead.

In other words, He Who is conceived in the womb of the Virgin by the action of the Holy Spirit, born, laid in the crib, calling Himself son of man, suffers, dies nailed to the Cross, is altogether the same, called by the Eternal Father in a wonderful and solemn manner: "My Beloved Son,"<sup>27</sup> with divine power grants pardon for sin,<sup>28</sup> restores by His own power the sick to health<sup>29</sup> and recalls the dead to life.<sup>30</sup> All this is clear evidence of two natures in Christ, from which proceed works that are divine and human, and shows also very clearly

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<sup>26</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 891.

<sup>27</sup> Matt. 3, 17; 17, 5. 11 Peter 1, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Matt. 9, 2-6. Luke 5, 20-24. VII 48, al.

<sup>29</sup> Matt. 8, 3. Mark 14, 1. Luke 5, 13. John 9, al.

<sup>30</sup> John 11, 43. Luke 7, 14 al.



that Christ is one, God and man alike, through the unity of the Divine Person by which he is called "Theantropos."

#### DOCTRINES APPROVED AND CONFIRMED

It is clear to all that this doctrine handed down by the Church has been approved and confirmed by the dogma of human Redemption. For how could Christ, said to be "First born of many brethren,"<sup>31</sup> wounded on account of our iniquities,<sup>32</sup> redeem us from the servitude of sin unless, like ourselves, he possessed human nature? In like manner, by what right could He be said to satisfy the justice of the Heavenly Father, outraged by the human race, unless by His Divine Person He was able to do so by His immense and infinite dignity?

This principle of Catholic truth cannot be contradicted for the reason that our Redeemer, not having a human person, should seem to lack some perfection of His human nature and therefore as man be inferior to ourselves. As Aquinas shrewdly and wisely reminds us: "Personality belongs to the dignity and perfection of any being in so far as the dignity and perfection of any being require that it should have its own existence as is understood, by the term person. It is, however, a greater dignity for anyone to exist in someone of greater dignity than to have one's own existence. Therefore human nature is more dignified in Christ than in us, because in us with our own existence it has its own personality, whereas in Christ it exists in the person of the Word. As it pertains to the

<sup>31</sup> Rom. 8, 29.

<sup>32</sup> Isaias 53, 5. Matt. 8, 17.

dignity of the form to be the completion of the species, so the sensitive nature in man is more noble because of its conjunction with the more noble completing form than it is in the brute animal in which it is the completing form."<sup>33</sup>

Moreover it is worth while observing that an Arius, that most nefarious subverter of Catholic unity, opposed the divine nature of the Word consubstantial with the Eternal Father, so Nestorius, arguing in a wholly different manner, by denying the hypostatic union of the Redeemer, denied to Christ divinity full and entire as not being the Word. If, as he rashly considered, the divine and human nature in Christ were united only by a moral connection—which, as We have said, the prophets and others of heroic Christian holiness had obtained on account of their union with God—the Saviour of the human race would differ little or not at all from those whom He redeemed by His grace and blood. With the abandonment therefore of the doctrine of the hypostatic union, on which the dogma of the Incarnation and human Redemption rests and depends, the whole foundation of the Catholic religion falls away in ruin. We do not wonder therefore that the entire Catholic world trembled before the perilous advance of the Nestorian heresy; nor do we wonder that the Council of Ephesus zealously resisted its rash and very crafty attack on the ancestral faith and, by executing the sentence of the Roman Pontiff, overthrew it with dire anathema.

We therefore, responding with minds in concord with every age of the Christian era, venerate as Re-

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<sup>33</sup> Summ. Theol. 111.11.2.

deemer of the human race not "Elias . . . nor one of the Prophets" in whom the God of heaven dwells by His grace, but with the Prince of the Apostles, acknowledging like him this heavenly mystery, with one voice proclaim: "Thou art Christ, Son of the living God."<sup>34</sup>

With this dogma of truth safely established, it is easy to conclude that the entire fabric of mundane things has by the mystery of the Incarnation been invested with a dignity greater than can be imagined, far greater than that to which the work of creation was raised. Among the offspring of Adam there is One, namely Christ, Who attained everlasting and infinite, divinity, and Who is united with it in a mysterious and most intimate manner; Christ, We repeat, our brother, possessed of human nature, but God with us, or Emmanuel, Who by His grace and merits has brought us back to the divine Author and recovered for us that heavenly blessedness from which by original sin we had fallen away. Let us therefore be of grateful mind, follow our precepts, imitate our examples. In this way we shall be partakers of the Divinity, "Who deigned to partake of our human nature."<sup>35</sup>

#### THOSE WHO WANDERED FROM FAITH

At all times, as We have said, through the course of ages the true Church of Jesus Christ has diligently safeguarded this genuine and incorrupt doctrine on the personal unity and divinity of its Founder, but unfortunately it is otherwise among those who wander most pitiably outside the one fold

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<sup>34</sup> Matt. 16, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Roman Missal.

of Christ. We regret that, whenever anyone separates himself obstinately from the infallible teaching of the Church, he loses gradually the certain and true doctrine about Jesus Christ. If we should ask the many different sects, those especially dating from the XVI and XVII centuries and still bearing the honored name Christian, all of which at the time they broke away professed firm belief in Christ as God and man, what they now think of Him, we would receive various and often conflicting answers. Indeed, few of them have kept the right doctrine and full faith concerning the person of our Redeemer; the others, even when they affirm something like it, seem to be like evaporated perfumes bereft of their essence. They present Jesus Christ as man, endowed with divine gifts, united more than others in some hidden way with divinity, very close to God; but they are far removed from a full and sincere profession of Catholic faith. Others still admit nothing divine in Christ, believe He is merely man favored, it is true, with unusual gifts of body and soul, but liable to error and to human frailties. Hence it appears clearly that all these, like Nestorius, wish by rash endeavor "to dissolve Christ," and therefore, according to the Apostle John, are not of God.<sup>36</sup>

From the exalted summit of this Apostolic See We therefore, with fatherly spirit, call upon all who glory in being disciples of Christ, and who place in Him their hope of salvation, of each one in particular and of human society, to cling always fast to the Roman Church in which Christ is believed with one faith, whole and perfect, worship-

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<sup>36</sup> 1 John 4, 3.

ped with sincere adoration, and loved with undying flame of burning charity. Let those who preside over flocks separated from us remember how their forerunners solemnly professed the faith of Ephesus, and how in the past as in the present it has been kept and earnestly defended by this supreme Chair of Truth. Let them remember that this genuine unity of the faith rests and stands only on the one rock set by Christ, and further that it has been preserved safe and secure by the supreme authority of the successors of Blessed Peter.

On this unity of the Catholic religion We discoursed a few years ago in the Encyclical Letter *Mortalium animos*, but it will help to recall this briefly to mind, since the hypostatic union of Christ, solemnly affirmed in the Council of Ephesus, brings back and puts before us the image of that unity by which our Redeemer wishes His Mystical Body, the Church, to be distinguished as one body<sup>37</sup> "fully compacted and joined together."<sup>38</sup> If the personal unity of Christ exists as the mysterious exemplar with which He wishes the structure of Christian society to conform, everyone can see that this certainly cannot result from a feigned combination of discordances, but only from one hierarchy, one teaching body, one rule of belief, one Christian faith.<sup>39</sup> To this unity of the Church which is kept by communion with the Apostolic See Philip, the legate of the Bishop of Rome, witnessed when, reading the letters of Celestine with the unanimous applause of the Fathers of the Coun-

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<sup>37</sup> 1 Cor. 12, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Ephesian 4, 16.

<sup>39</sup> Encycl. *Mortalium animos*.



cil, he uttered these memorable words: "We give thanks to this sacred and venerable Council, for as the letters of our holy and blessed Father were read to you, your holy members have followed them with your holy salute to the holy head, and with your holy acclamations. Your holiness is aware that the blessed Apostle Peter is the source of all faith and chief of the Apostles."<sup>40</sup>

Now if ever, Venerable Brethren, all good men should be bound together in professing one and the same sincere faith in Jesus Christ and His mystical Spouse the Church, when everywhere so many men strive to throw off the yoke of Christ, spurn the light of His doctrine, shut off the channels of His grace, repudiate the divine authority of Him Who has become "a sign of contradiction."<sup>41</sup> Since innumerable evils result from this deplorable desertion of Christ and increase daily, it is time that all should seek a remedy from Him Who is the One "under heaven given unto men, whereby we must be saved."<sup>42</sup>

In this way alone, with the Sacred Heart of Jesus inspiring the souls of mortals, can happier times come to the individual, the family and to civil society, so bitterly disturbed in these days.

### III

From this principle of Catholic doctrine, which We have treated thus far, there necessarily follows the dogma of the divine motherhood which we predicate of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as Cyril reminds us, "not that the nature or divinity of the

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<sup>40</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 1290.

<sup>41</sup> Luke 2, 34.

<sup>42</sup> Acts 4, 12.



Word took its origin or beginning from the holy Virgin, but that He derived from her His sacred body perfected by an intelligent soul to which the Word of God hypostatically united is said to be born according to the flesh."<sup>43</sup>

If the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary is God, she certainly who bore Him should rightly and deservedly be called Mother of God. If the person of Jesus Christ is one and divine, surely Mary is not only Mother of Christ but she should be called *Deipara, Theotocos*. She who was saluted by Elizabeth, her relative, "Mother of my Lord,"<sup>44</sup> who is said by the Martyr Ignatius to have brought forth God,<sup>45</sup> she from whom Tertullian says God was born,<sup>46</sup> we can all venerate as the benign parent of God, whom the eternal Godhead favored with fullness of grace and honored with so much dignity.

Moreover, no one can reject this truth handed down from the first ages of the Church, because the Blessed Virgin Mary gave to Jesus Christ a body but did not generate the Word of the heavenly Father; for Cyril in his day rightly and luminously answers that as all in whose womb our earthly fabric is procreated, but not a human soul, are truly mothers and are styled so, so in like manner through the unity of person of the Son she acquired divine maternity.<sup>47</sup> Rightly therefore the impious opinion of Nestorius which the Bishop of Rome, led by the divine spirit, had condemned the year before, was

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<sup>43</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 891.

<sup>44</sup> Luke 1, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Ad Ephes VII, 18-20.

<sup>46</sup> De Carne Christi, 17 P.L., II, 781.

<sup>47</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 599.

again solemnly reprobated by the Council of Ephesus.

So great was the piety of the people of Ephesus to the Virgin as *Deipara*, and so intense their love that on hearing the judgment of the Fathers of the Council they acclaimed them with an outpouring of joy, and forming ranks with blazing torches they accompanied them to their homes. Surely she, the great *Parens Dei*, smiling sweetly from heaven on that remarkable spectacle, took care of her children of Ephesus and all the faithful of Christ in the Catholic world who were disturbed by the treachery of the Nestorian heresy, with maternal heart and ever ready assistance.

From this dogma of the divine maternity, as from a hidden spring of gushing water, flows the singular grace of Mary and, after God, her great dignity. Indeed, as Aquinas nobly writes, "The Blessed Virgin as Mother of God has a certain infinite dignity from the infinite Good God is."<sup>48</sup> This Cornelius a Lapide develops and explains more fully: "The Blessed Virgin is Mother of God, and therefore by far excels all the angels, even the seraphim and cherubim. She is Mother of God, therefore most pure and holy, so much so that under God no greater purity can be imagined. She is Mother of God, and therefore whatever privilege has been granted to any of the saints (in the way of grace ingratiating, *gratum faciens*), that she has above all."<sup>49</sup>

#### CATHOLIC PIETY TOWARD MARY

Why therefore should so many innovators and

<sup>48</sup> Theol. III, a.6.

<sup>49</sup> In Matt. 1, 6.

non-Catholics bitterly condemn our piety toward the Virgin as *Deipara* as if we took away a worship due to God alone? Do they not know or consider attentively that nothing can be more pleasing to Christ Jesus, Who certainly loves His mother with a boundless love, than that we should venerate her, love her ardently, and, by imitating her most holy example, endeavor to obtain her powerful patronage?

Here We cannot pass over in silence what is of great comfort to Us, the fact that in our days some of the innovators know better the dignity of the Virgin as *Deipara* and are drawn and disposed to reverence and honor her diligently. Provided this proceeds from a serious and sincere conscience, and not with the motive of winning the favor of Catholics, as we have found in some places, We trust that, through the works and prayers of all good people, and the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, these may be at length brought back to the fold of Jesus Christ, and in this way to Us, who, though unworthy, act in His place on earth and exercise His authority.

We feel that We should mention another function of the Motherhood of Mary, Venerable Brethren, which is still more pleasant and delightful. Since she brought forth the Redeemer of the human race and of all of us, whom the Lord Christ has willed to regard as brothers, she is in a certain manner the most benign mother.<sup>50</sup>

Our predecessor of happy memory, Leo XIII, wrote: "Such a one God gave us in whom, as He chose her for Mother of His Only Begotten, He im-

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<sup>50</sup> Rom. 8, 29.

planted a maternal heart, capable of nothing but love and forgiveness; such by His own acts Jesus Christ manifested her, since He was subject and of His own accord obedient to her as a son to a mother; such He proclaimed her from the Cross when He committed the whole human race, through the disciple John, to be cared for and cherished by her; such finally she dedicated herself when, assuming, with great courage, the vast responsibility of the heritage left by her divine Son, she began at once to discharge maternal duties to all."<sup>51</sup>

Wherefore let us be drawn to her by a certain very powerful impulse and let us trust to her confidently all that is ours—joys, if we rejoice; woes, if we are in trial; hopes, if we endeavor to rise to better things. If the Church falls on difficult times, if faith wanes and charity grows cold, if morals, private and public, grow worse, if any danger threatens the Catholic cause or civil society, let us have recourse to her begging help from heaven; in the supreme trial of death, when all hope, all help, is gone, let us lift up our eyes in tears and trembling, imploring through her pardon from her Son and eternal joy in heaven.

#### PLEA FOR UNITY

With more ardent effort therefore in the present needs under which we labor, let all go to her, and with supplication beg earnestly "that, by interceding with her Son, the erring nations may return to Christian principles and precepts, on which the foundation of public welfare rests, and through which desirable peace and true happiness flourish in

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<sup>51</sup> Encycl. Oct. Mens. Adventante, Sept., 1891.

abundance. From her also let them more earnestly pray for what all should have most at heart, that Mother Church may have liberty and the fruit of it in tranquillity, a liberty which it will use for the sole purpose of procuring the highest interests of mankind, and from which harm has never come to individuals or states, but always many very great benefits."<sup>52</sup>

Under the auspices of the heavenly Queen, We desire all to beg for a very special favor of the greatest importance, that she who is loved and venerated with such ardent piety by the people of the East, may not permit that they should be unhappily wandering and still kept apart from the unity of the Church and thus from her Son, Whose Vicar on earth We are. May they return to the common Father whose judgment the Fathers of the Council of Ephesus accepted so reverently, and whom they all saluted as "guardian of the faith." May all return to Us, Who feel for all a paternal kindness, and Who repeat as Our own those most loving words with which Cyril appealed to Nestorius: "May the peace of the Church be preserved and may the bond of love and concord remain unbroken among the priests of God!"<sup>53</sup>

Would, moreover, that very soon the happiest of days might dawn when the Virgin Mother of God, looking out through her image so exquisitely worked in mosaic under Our predecessor Sixtus III in the Liberian Basilica, and restored by Us to its original beauty, would see the separated children returning to venerate her with Us with one mind

<sup>52</sup> Epist. Encycl. s.c.

<sup>53</sup> Mansi, l.c., IV, 891.



and one faith! That certainly would be Our greatest possible joy.

We deem it auspicious that We are celebrating Our tenth anniversary; We, who have defended the dignity and sanctity of the chastity of marriage against the assault of all manner of fallacy,<sup>54</sup> and who have solemnly championed the sacred rights of the Catholic Church in the instruction of youth, and set forth and explained the manner in which it is to be imparted and the principles to which it should conform.<sup>55</sup> The directions We have given on both subjects are in accordance with the exalted exemplar of the divine maternity and of the family of Nazareth. As Our predecessor of happy memory, Leo XIII, says: "In Joseph fathers of families have the most beautiful model of fatherly attention and providence; in the most holy Virgin Mother of God the most extraordinary pattern of love, modesty, perfect submission and fidelity; in Jesus, Who as son of the household was subject to them, a Divine Exemplar of obedience to admire, cultivate and imitate."<sup>56</sup>

In a special manner is it opportune that those mothers of our day who, wearied of child-bearing or of the matrimonial bond, have neglected or violated the obligation they assumed, should look and meditate intently upon Mary, who ennobled the responsible charge of motherhood to the highest degree. This inspires the hope that with the grace received through the Queen of Heaven, they may become ashamed of the dishonor branded on the

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<sup>54</sup> Litt. Encycl. Casti Connubii, XXI, Dec., 1930.

<sup>55</sup> Litt. Encycl. Divini Illius Magistrii XXI, Dec., 1929.

<sup>56</sup> Litt. Apost. Neminem fugit XIV, Jan., 1882.

great sacrament of matrimony and be happily moved, as far as possible, to attain to her wonderfully laudable virtues.

#### MASS OF THE DIVINE MATERNITY

If all these things should result as We counsel, if domestic society—the principle and foundation of all human intercourse—should revert to the most exalted standard of this holiness, we could in time provide a remedy for our dangerous evil conditions.

May it so happen that “the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding”<sup>57</sup> keep the minds and hearts of all and, with all our minds and forces united, may the longed-for Kingdom of Christ be established!

We shall not conclude this Letter without announcing something that will surely please you greatly. We desire that this centenary shall have a liturgical memorial, which will help to revive piety toward the great Mother of God among clergy and people. Wherefore We have directed the supreme Congregation of Sacred Rites to issue a Mass and Office of the Divine Maternity to be celebrated by the universal Church.

Meantime, as a presage of heavenly gifts and a mark of Our paternal will, We bestow affectionately in Our Lord on you, each and all, Venerable Brethren, and on your clergy and people, the Apostolical Benediction.

Given at Rome, in Saint Peter’s, 25 December, on the Feast of the Birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the year 1931, the tenth of Our Pontificate.

*PIUS PP. XI.*

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<sup>57</sup> Philippians 4, 7.





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