

SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH*

1. The mystery of the Son of God, who was made man, and the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, both pertaining to the innermost substance of Revelation, must be in their authentic truth the source of light for the lives of Christ's faithful. But because some recent errors undermine these mysteries, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has determined to reaffirm and to safeguard the belief in them that has been handed down to us.

2. Catholic belief in the Son of God who was made man, Jesus Christ, while dwelling on this earth, manifested in various ways, by word and by deed, the adorable mystery of his person.

DECLARATION FOR SAFEGUARDING THE BELIEF IN THE MYSTERIES OF THE INCARNATION AND OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY AGAINST SOME RECENT ERRORS.

After being made "obedient unto death"¹ he was divinely exalted in his glorious resurrection, as was fitting for the Son "by whom all things"² were made by the Father. Of him St. John solemnly proclaimed: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh".³ The Church reverently preserved the mystery of the Son of God, who was made man, and "in the course of the Ages and of the centuries"⁴ has propounded it for belief

* This article is taken from *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 30, 1972.

¹ Cfr. Phil. 2, 6-8.

² 1 Cor. 8, 6.

³ Jn. 1, 1, 14 (cfr. 1, 18).

⁴ Conc. Decr., Herder 1962, p. 785 Dz.-Sch. 3020.

in a more explicit way. In the Creed of Constantinople, which is still recited today during Mass, the Church proclaims her faith in "Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God and born of the Father before all the ages... true God from true God... consubstantial with the Father... who for us men and for our salvation... was made man".⁵ The Council of Chalcedon laid down to be believed that the Son of God according to his divinity was begotten of the Father before all the ages, and according to his humanity was begotten in time of the Virgin Mary.⁶ Further, this council called one and the same Christ the Son of God a "person" (hypostasis), but used the term "nature" to describe his divinity and his humanity, and using these terms it taught that both his natures, divine and human, together belong, without confusion, unalterably, individedly and inseparably, to the one person of our Redeemer.⁷ In the same way, the Fourth Lateran Council taught for belief and profession that the Son of God, coeternal with the Father, was made true man and is one person in two natures.⁸ This is the Catholic belief which the recent Vatican Council II, holding to the constant tradition of the whole Church, clearly expressed in many passages.⁹

3. **Recent errors in regard to belief in the Son of God.** The opinions according which it has not been revealed and made known to us, that the Son of God subsists from all eternity in the mystery of the Godhead, distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit, are in open conflict with this belief; likewise the opinions according to which the notion is to be abandoned of the one person of Jesus Christ begotten in his divinity of the Father before all the ages and begotten in his humanity of the Virgin Mary in time; and lastly the assertion that the humanity of Christ existed not as being assumed into the eternal person of the Son of God but existed rather of itself as a person, and therefore that the mystery of Jesus Christ consists only in the

⁵ *Missale Romanum*, ed. typica Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970, p. 389; Dz-Sch. 150.

⁶ Cfr. Conc. Chalcedonensis (Definitio); Conc. Oec. Decr., p. 62; Dez-Sch. 301.

⁷ Cfr. *ibid.*, Dez-Sch. 302.

⁸ Cfr. Conc. Lat. IV: Const. *Firmiter credimus*; Conc. Oec., Decr. p. 206; Dz-Sch. 800 f.

⁹ Cfr. Conc. Vat. II: Const. dogm. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 3, 7, 52, 53; Const. dogm. *Dei Verbum*, nn. 2, 3; Const. pas *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 22; Decr. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 12; *Christus Dominus*, n. 1; Decr. *Ad Gentes*, n. 3; also Pope Paul VI *Solemnis professio fidei*, n. 11, A.A.S. 60 (1968), 437.

fact that God, in revealing himself, was present in the highest degree in the human person Jesus.

Those who think in this way are far removed from the true belief in Christ, even when they maintain that the special presence of God in Jesus results in his being the supreme and final expression of divine Revelation. Nor do they come back to the true belief in the divinity of Christ by adding that Jesus can be called God by reason of the fact that in what they call his human person God is supremely present.

4. **Catholic belief in the Most Holy Trinity, and especially in the Holy Spirit.** Once the mystery of the divine and eternal person of Christ the Son of God, is abandoned, the truth respecting the Most Holy Trinity is also undermined, and with it the truth regarding the Holy Spirit who proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, or from the Father through the Son¹⁰. Therefore, in view of recent errors, some points concerning belief in the Most Holy Trinity, and especially in the Holy Spirit, are to be recalled to mind.

The Second Epistle to the Corinthians concludes with this admirable expression: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all"¹¹. The commission to baptize, recorded in St. Matthew's Gospel, names the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit as the three pertaining to the mystery of God and it is in their name that the converts must be reborn¹². Lastly, in St. John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of the coming of the Holy Spirit: "When the Paraclete comes whom I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, he will give testimony of me"¹³.

On the basis of the indications of divine Revelation, the Magisterium of the Church, to which alone is entrusted "the office of authentic interpretation of the Word of God, written or handed down"¹⁴, acclaims in the Creed of Constantinople "the Holy Spirit, Lord and giver of life... who together with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified"¹⁵. In like manner the Fourth Lateral Council taught that it is to be believed and

¹⁰ Cfr. Conc. Flor.: Bull *Laetentur caeli*; Conc. Oec. Decr., p. 501 f.

¹¹ 2 Cor. 13, 14.

¹² See Math. 28, 19.

¹³ Jn. 15, 26.

¹⁴ Con. Vat. II: Const. dogm. *Dei Verbum*, n. 10.

¹⁵ *Missale Romanum*, loc. cit.: Dz.-Sch. 150.

professed "that there is but one only true God . . . Father and Son and Holy Spirit; three persons indeed, but one essence . . . : the Father proceeding from none, the Son from the Father alone and the Holy Spirit equally from both, without beginning, always, and without end"¹⁶.

5. Recent errors concerning the most Holy Trinity, and especially concerning the Holy Spirit. The opinion that Revelation has left us uncertain about the eternity of the Trinity, and in particular about the eternal existence of the Holy Spirit as a person in God distinct from the Father and the Son, is out of line with the faith. It is true that the mystery of the most Holy Trinity was revealed to us in the economy of salvation, and most of all in Christ himself who was sent into the world by the Father and together with the Father sends to the People of God the life-giving Spirit. But by this Revelation there is also given to those who believe some knowledge of God's intimate life, in which "the Father who generates, the Son who is generated, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds" are "consubstantial and co-equal, alike omnipotent and co-eternal"¹⁷.

6. The mystery of the Incarnation and of the Trinity are to be faithfully preserved and expounded. What is expressed in the documents of the Councils referred to above, concerning the one and same Christ the Son of God, begotten before the ages in his divine nature and in time in his human nature, and also concerning the eternal persons of the Most Holy Trinity, belongs to the immutable truth of the Catholic faith.

This certainty does not prevent the Church in her awareness of the progress of human thought from considering that it is her duty to take steps to have the aforesaid mysteries continually examined by contemplation and by theological examination and to have them more fully expounded in up to date terminology. But while the necessary duty of investigation is being pursued, diligent care must be taken that these profound mysteries do not be interpreted in a meaning other than that in which "the Church has understood and understands them"¹⁸.

¹⁶ See Conc. Lat. IV: Const. *Firmiter credimus*; Conc. Oec. Decr., p. 206; Denz.-Sch. 800.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Conc. Vat. I: Const. dogm. *Dei Filius*, c. 4, can. 3; Conc. Oec. Decr., p. 787; Dz.-Sch. 3043. See Pope John XXIII Alloc. in S. Conc. Vat. II inauguratione, A.A.S. 54 (1962) 792, and Conc. Vat. II: Const. past. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 62. Cfr. Also Paul VI *Sollemnis professio fidei*, n. 4, A.A.S. 60 (1968), 434.

The unimpaired truth of these mysteries is of the greatest moment for the whole Revelation of Christ, because they pertain to its very core, in such a way indeed that if they are undermined, the rest of the treasure of Revelation is falsified. The truth of these same mysteries is of no less concern to the Christian way of life both because nothing so effectively manifests the charity of God, to which the whole of Christian life should be a response, as does the Incarnation of the Son of God, our Redeemer¹⁹, and also because "through Christ, the Word made flesh, men have access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and are made partakers of the divine nature"²⁰.

7. With regard to the truths which the present Declaration is safeguarding, it pertains to the Pastors of the Church to see that there is unity in professing the faith on the part of their people, and especially on the part of those who by mandate received from the Magisterium teach the sacred sciences or preach the word of God. This function of the Bishops belongs to the office divinely committed to them "of keeping pure and whole"... "the deposit of faith" in common with the Successor of Peter and "of proclaiming the Gospel without ceasing"²¹; and by reason of this same office they are bound not to permit that ministers of the word of God, deviating from the way of sound doctrine, should pass it on corrupted or incomplete²². The people, committed as they are to the care of the Bishops who "have to render account to God"²³ for them, enjoy "the sacred and inalienable right of receiving the word of God, the whole word of God, into which the Church does not cease to penetrate ever more profoundly"²⁴.

The faithful, then, and above all the theologians because of their important office and necessary function in the Church, must make faithful profession of the mysteries which this Declaration reaffirms. In like manner, by the movement and illumi-

¹⁹ Cfr. 1 Jn. 4, 9 f.

²⁰ Cfr. Conc. Vat. II: Const. dogm. *Dei Verbum*, n. 2; cfr. Eph. 2, Pet. 1, 4.

²¹ Cfr. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Quinque iam anni*, in A.A.S. 68 (1971), 99.

²² Cfr. 2 Tim. 4, 1-5. See Pope Paul VI *ibid.*, p. 103 f. See also *Synodus Episcoporum* (1967): *Relatio Commissioni Synodali constitutae ad examen ulterius peragendum circa opiniones periculosas et atheismum II 3: De Pastoralis ratione agendi in exercitio magisterii*, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1967 p. 10 f. (*Oss. Rom.* 30-31 Oct. 1967, p. 3).

²³ Pope Paul VI, *ibid.* p. 3.

²⁴ Cfr. Paul VI, *ibid.* p. 103.

nation of the Holy Spirit, the sons of the Church must hold fast to the whole teaching of the faith under the leadership of their Pastors and of the Pastor of the universal Church²⁵ "so that, in holding, practising and professing the faith that has been handed down, a common effort results on the part of the Bishops and faithful"²⁶.

The Supreme Pontiff by divine Providence Pope Paul VI, in an audience granted on February 21, 1972, to the undersigned Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ratified and confirmed this Declaration for safeguarding from certain recent errors the belief in the mysteries of the Incarnation and of the Most Holy Trinity, and ordered it to be published.

Given at Rome, from the offices of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on the 21st day of February, feast of St. Peter Damian, in the year of our Lord 1972.

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Prefect

PAUL PHILIPPE
Tit. Archp. of Heracleopolis
Secretary

8 March 1972

²⁵ Cfr. Conc. Vat. II: Const. Dogm. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 12, 25; *Synodus Episcoporum* (1967): *Relatio Commissionis Synodalis* . . II, 4: *De Theologorum opera et responsabilitate* . . p. 11 (Oss. Rom., loc. cit.).

²⁶ Conc. Vat. II: Const. dogm. *Dei Verbum*, n. 10.