

sume to violate by any disputation the evangelical and apostolic decisions of the Council of Chalcedon, made in corroboration of the most sacred Council of Nicaea, we condemn him as well as all heretics who have held impious and detestable views concerning the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. We condemn them by a like and equal anathema; that is, the remedy of penance is not to be denied to those who have reformed by performing the required satisfaction, and the sentence of the council (which is filled with truth) is to remain operative against those who rebel. May the omnipotent God watch over your realm and your welfare unto length of days, most glorious and clement Emperor, Augustus.

Issued on the first of September in the consulship of Leo and Majorian, Augusti.

165. *Bishop Leo, to his most glorious and clement son Leo, Augustus (August 17, 458).*¹

Venerable Emperor, I recall my promise² that a fuller letter from my humble self would be sent to you in the interests of the faith, about which I know that your Clemency is dutifully solicitous. With God's help, now that I have a sure opportunity, I am fulfilling my promise, so that you may not lack instruction, useful (in my judgment) for your

¹ The texts here are Silva-Tarouca, 9, pp. 44-58; Schwartz, II.4, pp. 113-119; Greek version, *Abhandlung d. Bayer. Ges. d. Wiss.* 32 (1927), 52-62.

² Cf. Letter 156 n. 7.

Piety's holy zeal. Although I am aware that your Clemency does not lack instruction from men and that, from the abundance of the Holy Spirit, you have imbibed the purest doctrine, it is my duty to make clear what you know and to preach what you believe, in order that the fire which Christ at His coming cast on the earth,³ being aroused by the impulse of frequent meditation, may so heat up as to glow, may so burn as to give light. The heresy of Eutyches attempted to overcast the Eastern world with enormous clouds and tried to blind the eyes of the unskilled to that light which, as the Gospel says, 'shines in the darkness, and the darkness grasped it not.'⁴ Although the heresy itself collapsed in its own blindness, that which failed in the author is now sprouting anew among his disciples.

Two enemies (the one shortly after the other) attacked the Catholic faith, which is one and true; nothing can be added to or subtracted from it. The first of these to rise was Nestorius; then came Eutyches. They⁵ sought to introduce into God's Church two heresies, the one contrary to the other. As a result, both were rightly condemned by the advocates of truth, for the teachings of both men, false in different ways, were utterly foolish and blasphemous. Nestorius believed that the blessed Virgin Mary was the mother of the man only and not of God; that is, in his opinion, the divine Person was different from the human Person. He did not think there was one Christ existing in the Word of God and the flesh, but taught that one was the son of man and the other the Son of God, each separate and distinct

³ Cf. Luke 12.49.

⁴ John 1.5.

⁵ Most of the rest of this letter was written about five years earlier, as Letter 124, paragraphs 2-7.

from the other. For this he was condemned. The truth is that, while that essence of the unchangeable Word remained (which is timeless and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit), the Word was made flesh in the womb of the Virgin in such a way that, by an ineffable mystery, through one conception and one birth the same Virgin and Handmaid was also the Mother of the Lord, according to the reality of both natures. Elizabeth also realized this and said, as Luke the Evangelist relates: 'And how have I deserved that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'⁶ Eutyches is likewise crushed by the same condemnation. Wallowing about in the impious errors of old heretics, he picked out the third teaching of Apollinaris;⁷ that is, in denying the reality of the human flesh and soul, he stated that the whole of our Lord Jesus Christ is of one nature, as if the very divinity of the Word had changed Itself into the flesh and soul. By this view, to be conceived and born, to take food and grow, to be crucified and to die, to be buried and to rise again, and to ascend into heaven and to sit at the right hand of the Father, whence He will come to judge the living and the dead—all these pertained only to His divine nature, which in fact did none of these in Itself apart from the reality of the flesh. For the nature of the only-begotten Son is the nature of the Father, is the nature of the Holy Spirit—at once incapable of suffering, unchangeable, the undivided unity and consubstantial equality of the eternal Trinity. Hence, if any Eutychian departs from the error of Apollinaris in order to avoid having a non-sentient God feel and be mortal, yet dares to proclaim that there is but one nature of the Word Incarnate, that is, the Word and the

⁶ Luke 1.43.

⁷ Cf. Letter 21 n. 13, and Letters 26 and 109.

flesh, he has obviously veered over into the madness of Valentinus and Mani.⁸ And he believes that the man Christ Jesus, the Mediator between God and men, did all these things by trickery; that is, He had no human body, but to the eyes of the beholders there was an imaginary appearance of a body.

Since the Catholic faith of old detested these impious lies, and the views of the blessed Fathers, in accord throughout the entire world, have already condemned such sacrilegious statements, there is no doubt that we preach and defend the same faith which the holy Council of Nicaea established. It stated: 'We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of things visible and invisible, and in our one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten of the Father, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father (which they call in Greek '*homoousion*'), by whom all things were made, whether in heaven or on the earth, who for us and for our salvation came down and was made flesh; and being made man, suffered, and arose on the third day; He ascended into heaven and will come to judge the living and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit.'⁹ In this profession of faith is most clearly contained what we also profess and believe concerning the Incarnation of the Lord. To restore salvation to the human race, He did not bring from heaven with Him the real flesh containing our weakness, but He assumed the flesh in the womb of His Virgin Mother.

⁸ Cf. Letter 59, paragraphs 1 and 5.

⁹ For the version of the Nicene Creed used by St. Leo, cf. Turner, *Monumenta* I 306. In the *Tome*, Leo had relied upon the Apostles Creed. Since the heretics kept claiming to abide by Nicene definitions, Leo proved them wrong there, also. Cf. Letters 54 and 69.

Whoever, then, are so blinded and so estranged from the light as to deny the reality of human flesh in the Word of God from the moment of the Incarnation on, ought to show what right they have for using the title of Christians. They should show by what process of reasoning they are in agreement with the Gospel of truth in their claim that, when the blessed Virgin gave birth, there was produced either flesh without divinity or divinity without the flesh. As it is impossible to deny that, according to the Evangelist's words, 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,'¹⁰ so it is impossible to deny that, according to the teaching of blessed Paul the Apostle, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.'¹¹ What reconciliation could there be in which God might again be made propitious to the human race if the Mediator between God and men did not take upon Himself the cause of all men? How, indeed, might anyone fulfill the reality of a mediator unless he shared in the nature of God, equal to the Father, and also in our servile nature, so that the bonds of death, brought about by the lie of one person, might be loosed by the death of One who alone was in no way subject to death? The outpouring¹² of Christ's blood for sinners was so rich in value that, if all the enslaved believed in their Redeemer, none of them would be held by the chains of the Devil. For, as the Apostle says: 'Where the offense has abounded, grace has abounded yet more.'¹³ And since those born under the sentence of original sin have received the power of rebirth unto justification, the gift of freedom became stronger than the debt of slavery.

¹⁰ John 1.14.

¹¹ Cf. 2 Cor. 5.19.

¹² From here to note 19 is taken largely from his *Sermo* 64.6 (PL 54.359-361).

¹³ Rom. 5.20.

Consequently, what hope do they leave themselves in the refuge of this mystery who deny the reality of the human body in our Saviour? Let them say by what sacrifice they have become reconciled; let them say by what blood they have been redeemed. Who is there, as the Apostle says, that 'has delivered himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God to ascend in fragrant odor'?¹⁴ Or what sacrifice was ever more holy than that which the true and eternal Priest placed upon the altar of the cross by the immolation of His own flesh? Although the death of many holy people was precious in the sight of the Lord,¹⁵ the redemption of the world was not effected by the killing of any of these guiltless persons. The just received, did not give, crowns; and from the courage of the faithful came examples of patience, not the gifts of justification. Indeed, their individual deaths affected them individually, and none gave his life to pay another's debt. For among the sons of men only one stood out, our Lord Jesus Christ, who was truly the spotless Lamb, in whose person all were crucified, all died, all were buried, all were even raised from the dead. He Himself said about them: 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself.'¹⁶ Indeed, true faith, justifying the impious and making just men, being drawn to Him who shares in their human nature, receives salvation in Him in whom alone man finds himself without guilt. And it can freely boast, through God's grace, of the power of Him who in the lowliness of our flesh attacked the enemy of the human race and who turned over His victory to those in whose body He triumphed.

It is true, therefore, that there is in one Lord Jesus Christ,

¹⁴ Eph. 5.2.

¹⁵ Cf. Ps. 115.14.

¹⁶ John 12.32.

the true Son of God and man, one person of the Word and the flesh, and without separation and division they perform their acts in common. Still, we must understand the character of the acts themselves and must note, by the contemplation of pure faith, to which acts the lowliness of the flesh is elevated, to which acts the height of Divinity bends down; what the flesh does not perform apart from the Word, what the Word apart from the flesh does not effect. Without the power of the Word the Virgin would not conceive and not give birth, and without the reality of the flesh the infant would not lie wrapped in swaddling clothes. Without the power of the Word the Magi would not adore the boy pointed out to them by the guiding star, and without the reality of the flesh there would be no command to transfer the boy into Egypt and remove Him from Herod's persecution. Without the power of the Word the voice of the Father sent from heaven would not say: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'¹⁷ And without the reality of flesh John would not exclaim: 'Behold the lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sin of the world.'¹⁸ Without the power of the Word there would be no curing of the infirm, no restoration of life to the dead, and without the reality of flesh there would be no need for Him to eat when hungry, to sleep when tired. Finally, without the power of the Word the Lord would not claim to be equal to the Father, and without the reality of flesh He would not say that the Father was greater than He. For, both are accepted and defended by the Catholic faith, which, according to the profession of the blessed Apostle Peter, believes in one Christ,

¹⁷ Matt. 3.17.

¹⁸ John 1.29.

the Son of the living God, both man and the Word.¹⁹ Hence it is true that, from that beginning when 'the Word was made flesh'²⁰ in the womb of the Virgin, there never existed any division between the two natures, and, during the entire growth of His body, His acts were at all times the work of one person. Yet, those very acts which were performed by one person are not confused, in our thinking, by any mixing of them; we decide from the character of the acts what is pertinent to each nature.

Consequently, let those hypocrites (who with blinded minds are unwilling to accept the light of truth) say in which nature Christ, the Lord of Majesty, was affixed to the wood of the cross, which lay in the tomb, and which flesh arose on the third day after the stone of the tomb was rolled back; and in which nature, after the Resurrection, He upbraided some of His unbelieving disciples and blamed the hesitation of the doubting when He said: 'Feel me and see; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have';²¹ and to the Apostle Thomas: 'Put thy hand into my side, and see my hands and feet; and be not unbelieving, but believing.'²² So, by this display of His body He already destroyed the lies of heretics. And thus the universal Church, imbued with the teachings of Christ, did not doubt that it should believe what the Apostles undertook to preach. And if in the presence of so great a light of truth heretical obstinacy does not abandon its darkness, let them show from what source they promise themselves hope of eternal life, which no man can

¹⁹ Cf. Matt. 16.16.

²⁰ John 1.14.

²¹ Luke 24.39.

²² Cf. John 20.27.

attain without the help of the man Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and men. As the blessed Apostle Peter says: 'There is no other name under heaven given to men by which they must be saved.'²³ There is no redemption of captive humanity except in the blood of Him 'who gave himself a ransom for all,'²⁴ and, as the blessed Apostle Paul says: 'Who though he was by nature God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to, but emptied himself, taking the nature of a slave and being made like unto men. And appearing in the form of man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even to death on the cross. Therefore God also has exalted him and has bestowed upon him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those in heaven, on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father.'²⁵

Although, then, the Lord Jesus Christ is one and there is really one and the same person in Him, composed of true divinity and true humanity, the exaltation with which God exalted Him (as the Teacher of the Gentiles says) and gave to Him a name superior to every other name—this exaltation, as we know, took place in that same nature which needed enrichment by the increase of so great a glorification. Indeed, in His nature as God the Son was equal to the Father; and there was no distinction of essence between the Father and the Only-begotten, no difference in majesty; and through the mystery of the Incarnation the Word did not lose anything which the Father might restore to Him as a gift. But the servile form, through which the non-sentient

²³ Acts 4.12.

²⁴ 1 Tim. 2.6.

²⁵ Phil. 2.6-11.

God fulfilled the mystery of great and fatherly concern, is human lowliness, which was carried up to the glory of divine power. The divinity and humanity were bound together in so great a unity from the very time of conception by the Virgin that divine acts were not done without the man and human acts were not done without God. For that reason, just as the Lord of Majesty is said to have been crucified, so He who from all eternity is equal to the Father is said to have been exalted. For, since the unity of person remains inseparable, He is one and the same—wholly the Son of Man because of the flesh, and wholly the Son of God because of the divinity He has in common with the Father. Hence, whatever Christ received in time He received in His humanity, on which are bestowed the things it did not have. As regards the power of the Godhead, all that the Father has belongs also to the Son without distinction; He Himself, in His nature as God, was also the giver of those same things which He received from the Father, in His nature as a slave. According to His nature as God, He and the Father are one; in His servile nature He did not come to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him.²⁶ According to His divine nature, 'as the Father has life in himself, even so he has given to the Son also to have life in himself.'²⁷ But in His servile state, His soul is sad even unto death.²⁸ As the Apostle teaches, He is at once both poor and rich: 'rich' because, as the Evangelist says: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God: and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing.'

²⁶ Cf. John 10.30; 5.30.

²⁷ John 5.26.

²⁸ Cf. Matt. 26.38.

But he was 'poor' because on our account 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.'²⁹ But what is His emptying of self, or what is His poverty, if not the taking on of a slave's nature, wherein the majesty of the Word was veiled and the design for man's redemption was carried out?

The bonds of captivity with which we are born could not be loosed unless a man of our species and our nature existed who was not bound by any previous conviction for sin and who by His stainless blood would blot out the decree of death against us.³⁰ On that account it so happened in the fullness of appointed time (as had been divinely ordained from the beginning) that the promise expressed in so many ways became the actuality so long awaited; and there could be no doubt about what had always been announced by continual testimony. But the impiety of heretics shows that they live in great sacrilege since they deny the reality of human flesh in Christ, under the guise of honoring His divinity; and they think they are religious in their belief in claiming that what brings salvation in our Saviour is not real. Yet, according to the promise repeated throughout all ages, the world was reconciled to God in Christ, but, if in so doing the Word did not deign to become flesh, no flesh could be saved. The whole mystery of the Christian faith, taken the way the heretics want it, is darkened with profound obscurity if the light of truth is thought to have hidden under the false guise of a phantasm. Let no Christian, therefore, feel that he should blush because of the reality of our body in Christ. For, all the Apostles and their disciples and all the illustrious Doctors of the Church who merited to gain the martyr's crown or the confessor's glory shone

²⁹ John 1.1-3, 14; cf. 2 Cor. 8.9.

³⁰ Cf. Col. 2.14.

forth in the light of this belief. They everywhere in harmony proclaimed that we must profess but one Person in the Lord Jesus Christ, composed of divinity and flesh. By what species of reasoning, by what part of the divine books, do the impious heretics think they are supported, those who deny the reality of Christ's body? Yet the Law has not ceased to attest to this reality, the Prophets to herald it, the Gospel to teach it, Christ Himself to point it out. Let them search through all the books of Scripture for a means to escape from their darkness, not a way to obscure the true light, and they will find the truth so shining throughout all ages that they will see this great and wonderful mystery believed in from the beginning, one which finally came to pass. Although no part of holy Scripture is silent about it, it is enough to have set forth certain tokens of harmonious truth. By these, diligence may be directed into the most illustrious fullness of the faith and perceive by the pure light of reason that Christians ought not to blush for but ought constantly to glory in the Son of God, who professes without ceasing that He is the Son of Man and a man.

In order to let your Piety know that we are in harmony with the teachings of the venerable Fathers, I thought some of their views should be added to this letter.³¹ If you deign to read these, you will find that we preach nothing different from what our holy Fathers everywhere taught, and that no one is at variance with these ideas, except only the impious heretics. Hence, venerable and most glorious Emperor, from these statements, which I have put together as briefly as possible, you realize that our teaching is also in line with the faith inspired in you by God and that we are in no way at odds with evangelical and apostolic doctrine

³¹ These views are translated at the end of this letter; cf. Letter 117 n. 8.

or with the Catholic profession of faith in the Creed. As the blessed Apostle Paul teaches: 'Great is the mystery of godliness: which was manifested in the flesh, was justified in the spirit, appeared to angels, was preached to gentiles, believed in the world, taken up in glory.'³² Hence, what is more useful for your salvation, what more in accord with your power, than for you to further the peace of the Lord's churches by your government, to defend the gifts of God for all those subject to you, and under no circumstances to allow the ministers of the Devil through his malice to vent their rage to the ruin of anyone. Thus you who are eminent for temporal rule in this generation will merit to reign forever with Christ. May the omnipotent God guard your realm and your welfare unto length of days, O most glorious and clement Emperor, Augustus.

Issued on the seventeenth of August in the consulship of Leo and Majorian, Augusti.

³² 1 Tim. 3.16.

TESTIMONIA¹

(1)² Indeed, for the sake of the human race the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary and of the Holy Spirit, planted the seeds of a body for Himself and instituted the birth of His flesh; the Son Himself shared in this operation, with His (that is, God's) power overshadowing it. He did this in order that as a man produced from a virgin He might take to Himself the nature of flesh and that, by means of this assumption of flesh, the body of the entire human race might be sanctified in Him. Thus, just as all might be established in Him through the fact that He willed to become a body, so also He in turn might be restored to all through that part of Him which is invisible. The unseen image of God, therefore, did not refuse the ignominy of a human birth, and He ran the gamut of all the degradations of our nature: conception, birth, crying, and the cradle. In a word, what fitting return can we make to Him for displaying so great a condescension? The one only-begotten God through an ineffable birth from God, having been placed in the womb of the holy Virgin, grew into the shape of a human body. He who contains all things and in whom all things exist is brought forth according to the law of human birth. And infant cries are heard from Him at whose voice the angels and archangels tremble and the sky and earth and all the elements of this universe will be dissolved. He who is invisible and incom-

¹ The texts here are Silva-Tarouca, 9, pp. 34-43; Schwartz, II.4, pp. 119-131.

² St. Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 2.24-25; cf. Fathers of the Church 25 (New York 1956), translated and annotated by Stephen McKenna, C.S.S.R.

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