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First Premise

TRADITIONAL CATHOLIC TEACHING ON THE UNICITY OF THE FAITH AND CONDEMNATIONS OF ECUMENISM

On the unique character of the Catholic Church, identified as the Church of Christ, Pope Boniface VIII taught: **“Urged by Faith, we are obliged to believe and to maintain that the Church is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. We believe in her firmly and we confess with simplicity that outside of her there is neither salvation nor the remission of sins, as the Spouse in the Canticles proclaims: ‘One is my dove, my perfect one. She is the only one, the chosen of her who bore her,’ and she represents one sole mystical body whose Head is Christ and the head of Christ is God. In her, then, is one Lord, one Faith, one baptism.**

“There was at the time of the deluge only one ark of Noah, prefiguring the one Church, and this ark had only one pilot and guide, i.e., Noah, and we read that, outside of this ark, all that subsisted on the earth was destroyed. We venerate this Church as one, the Lord having said by the mouth of the prophet: ‘Deliver, O God, my soul from the sword and my only one from the hand of the dog.’ He has prayed for His soul that is for Himself, heart and body; and this body is the Church. This is the tunic of the Lord, the seamless tunic, which was not rent.”¹

In the same sense, Leo XIII wrote: **“Dispersed and separated members cannot be united with one and the same head to form one single body. St. Paul tells us, ‘All the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body; so also is Christ’ (1 Cor 12:12). Wherefore this body, he further states, is united and joined together. ‘Christ is the head, 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’ (Eph 4:15,16).**

“And so, therefore, if some member becomes separated and detached from the other members, it cannot belong to the same head to which the rest of the body belongs. St. Cyprian says: ‘There is only one God, only one Christ, only one Church of Christ, only one Faith, only one people, joined together in the solid unity of a single body by the bond of concord. This unity cannot be broken: a body that remains whole cannot be divided by the separation of its constituent parts.’² To establish more clearly the unity of the Church, God presents it to us under the image of a living body, whose members cannot live unless united to the head and drawing incessantly from it their vital force. Separated from the head, they must die. ‘The Church cannot be

¹ Boniface VIII, Bull *Unam Sanctam*, in Giorgio Ballardore Pallieri - Giulio Vismara, *Acta Pontificia Juris Gentium* (Milan: Società Editrice Vita e Pensiero, 1946), p. 8, n. 27.

² St. Cyprian, *De Catholicae Ecclesiae unitate*, n. 23.

divided into parts by the separation and cutting asunder of her members. Everything that is separated from her center of life cannot live or breathe apart from her”³....

“One seeks, therefore, another head similar to Christ, one seeks another Christ, if one wants to imagine another Church outside of that which is His body. ‘See what you must beware of; see what you must avoid; see what you must dread. At times it happens that some member may be cut off from the human body, that is, be separated from the body: a hand, a finger, a foot. **Does the soul follow the amputated member? So long as it was on the body, it lived; separated, it lost its life. Thus the man, so long as he lives on the body of the Church, he is a Christian Catholic; separated from her, he becomes a heretic. The life of the soul does not follow the amputated member.**”⁴

“The Church of Christ, therefore, is one and the same forever. **Whoever leaves her departs from the will and command of Our Lord Jesus Christ; leaving the path of salvation, he enters that of perdition.** ‘Whosoever is separated from the Church is united to an adulteress. He has cut himself off from the promises of the Church. **Whosoever leaves the Church of Christ cannot arrive at the rewards of Christ Whosoever observes not this unity observes not the law of God; whosoever holds not the faith of the Father and the Son, holds not to life and salvation.**”^{5,6}

Addressing the unicity and unity of the Church and the Faith, Leo XIII continued: “**He who instituted this one Church also gave her unity, that is, He made her such that all who are to be her members must be united by the closest bonds, so as to form together one people, one kingdom, one body:** ‘One body and one spirit, as you are called in one hope of your calling’ (Eph 4:4). Jesus Christ desired that this bond of unity should be so closely knit and so perfect among His followers that it might in some measure imitate the union between Himself and His Father: ‘I pray that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee’ (Jo 17:21).

“Now, such concord, such absolute concord between men, should have as necessary foundation the agreement and union of minds; from this harmony of will and agreement of action are the natural results. Wherefore, according to His divine plan, **Jesus ordained that unity of Faith exist in His Church, because the Faith is the first of all the bonds that unite man to God, and whence we receive the name of the faithful:** ‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Eph 4:5). That is, as there is one Lord and one baptism, **so should all Christians, without exception, have but one Faith.**”⁷

Further on, Leo XIII set forth the perennial position of the Church in defending the Catholic Faith against heretics: “**Founded on these principles and mindful of her office, the Church has done nothing with greater zeal and endeavor than she has displayed in conserving in the most perfect manner the integrity of the Faith.**

“Hence she regarded as declared rebels and expelled from the ranks of her children all who held beliefs on any point of doctrine different from her own. The Arians, the Montanists, the Novatians, the Quartodecimans, the Eutychians, certainly did not reject all of Catholic doctrine, but only this or that part of it. Still, who does not know that they were declared heretics and banished from the bosom of the Church? In like manner were condemned all authors of erroneous doctrine who followed them in subsequent ages of History. ‘There can be nothing more dangerous than those heretics who, conserving in almost everything the integrity of doctrine,

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 267, n. 4.

⁵ St. Cyprian, *De Catholicae Ecclesiae unitate*.

⁶ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Satis cognitum*, of June 29, 1896 (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1960), n. 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 11.

by one word, as with a drop of poison, corrupt the purity and simplicity of the Faith that we receive from Our Lord and handed down by apostolic tradition.”⁸

“Such was always the practice of the Church, as is shown by the unanimous teaching of the Holy Fathers, who always considered as excluded from Catholic communion and outside the Church whoever would recede in the least degree from any point of doctrine taught by the authentic Magisterium. Epiphanius, Augustine, Theodoret drew up a long list of the heresies of their times. **St. Augustine noted that yet other heresies could spring up, and that should anyone give his assent to a single one of them, he is by the very fact cut off from Catholic unity.** He said: ‘By the mere fact that someone does not believe these errors [the heresies he had just listed], it does not follow that he can for that reason regard himself as a Catholic or call himself one. For there may be or may arise some other heresies, which are not set out in this work of ours, and anyone who holds to a single one of these, he is not a Catholic.’”^{9,10}

Leo XIII also recalled the luminous words of St. Hilary: “And so St. Hilary wrote, **‘Christ teaching from the ship signifies that those who are outside the Church can never grasp the divine teaching. For the ship represents the Church, the only place where the word of life is deposited and preached. Those who are outside and remain there, sterile and worthless like the sand on the beach, cannot understand Him.’**”^{11,12}

The same Pontiff identified Christianity with the Catholic Church: **“The return to Christianity will not be a true and efficacious remedy unless it signifies the return to and love for the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Yes, because Christianity acts and identifies with the Catholic Church,** the supremely spiritual and perfect society, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, and has as visible head the Roman Pontiff, successor of the Prince of Apostles.”¹³

Echoing the perennial doctrine of the Magisterium, Pius IX, together with Vatican Council I, taught that the Faith is found only in the bosom of the Holy Church. The Pontiff emphasized the separation of the false religions: **“Only the Catholic Church has all the marks, so numerous and so admirably established by God, to make evident the credibility of the Christian Faith.** Beyond this, the Church in herself, by her admirable propagation, her exquisite holiness, and her inexhaustible fecundity in all her goods, by her Catholic unity and unconquerable stability, provides a serious and perpetual motive for credibility, and an irrefutable testimony to her divine mission. Whence it comes that the same Church, like ‘a standard set up unto the nations’ (Is 11:12), not only invites the unbelieving to enter into her body, but also guarantees her children that the Faith that they profess is based on the most firm foundation

“So that in no way is the condition the same for those who, by the celestial gift of Faith, embrace the Catholic truth as for those who, led by human opinions, follow a false religion. Because those who receive the Faith under the Magisterium of the Church never can have just cause to change or place in doubt that same Faith. And for this reason, ‘giving thanks to God the Father, Who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light’ (Col 1:12), we do not underrate such a great benefit, but

⁸ *Tractatus de Fide Orthodoxa contra Arianos.*

⁹ *De Haeresibus*, n. 88.

¹⁰ Leo XIII, *Satis cognitum*, n. 18.

¹¹ *Comment. In Matth., XIII*, n. 1.

¹² Leo XIII, *Satis cognitum*, n. 19.

¹³ Leo XIII, *Encyclical Parvenu* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1952), n. 26.

‘looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of Faith’ (Heb 12:2), ‘let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering’ (Heb 10:23).”¹⁴

Pius XII clearly identified the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church. Basing himself on Vatican Council I, he wrote: “Now, in order to define and describe **this true Church of Christ, which is the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church**,¹⁵ there is nothing more noble, more excellent, or more divine than the concept expressed in the name ‘Mystical Body of Christ.’”¹⁶

In his celebrated Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici gregis*, St. Pius X described and anathematized the basis for the Modernist religious conception. In the text below, the Reader can see the extraordinary similarities that appear between Modernism and conciliar Progressivism. This is the condemned thinking:

“It is thus that **the religious sense, which emerges from the lurking-places of the subconsciousness, is the germ of all religion, and the explanation of everything that has been or ever will be in any religion.** This same *sense*, which was at first only rudimentary and almost formless, under the influence of that mysterious principle from which it originated, gradually matured with the progress of human life, of which, as has been said, it is a certain form. **This, then, is the origin of all, even of supernatural religion. For religions are mere developments of this religious sense. Nor is the Catholic religion an exception; it is on the same level with the rest; for it was engendered by the process of vital immanence, and by no other way, in the consciousness of Christ, who was a man of the choicest nature, whose like has never been, nor will be.**

“**In hearing these things, we shudder indeed at so great an audacity of assertion and so great a sacrilege!** And yet, Venerable Brethren, these are not merely the foolish babblings of unbelievers. There are Catholics, yea, and priests too, who say these things openly; and they boast that they are going to reform the Church by these ravings! The question is no longer one of the old errors which claimed for human nature a sort of right to the supernatural. It has gone far beyond that, and **has reached the point when it is affirmed that our most holy Religion, in the man Jesus Christ as in us, emanated from nature spontaneously and of itself.** Nothing assuredly could be more utterly destructive of the whole supernatural order. For this reason, the [First] Vatican Council most justly decreed: ‘If anyone says that man cannot be raised by God to a knowledge and perfection which surpasses nature, but that he can and should, by his own efforts and by a constant development, attain finally to the possession of all truth and good, let him be anathema.’^{17,18}

To dodge this anathema, progressivists have adopted a terminology with some mention of the “supernatural,” even though their doctrine in general preaches the same errors of the Modernists.¹⁹

In effect, the notions of “Church of Christ,” “Church of God,” “messianic people,” and “people of God” present in the Council documents seem to rely on the same thesis of a religious sentiment immanent in man. And this would be the common

¹⁴ Vatican Council I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, session 3, April 1794, n. 1794 (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1953), pp. 7-8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, chap. 1.

¹⁶ Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1960), n. 9.

¹⁷ First Vatican Council, *De Revel.*, can. III.

¹⁸ Encyclical *Pascendi Dominici gregis*, n. 10.

¹⁹ See Vol. I, *In the Murky Waters of Vatican II*, General Introduction, footnote 23; Chap. IV, § 3, footnotes 3, 5-7, Chap. VI §§ 2-8; Vol. IV, *Animus delendi I*, Chap. II, § 10.

denominator of all the ecumenical attempts for union with other creeds – the “Christians,” non-Christians, and non-believers.

Against Ecumenism

Combating religious Indifferentism, Gregory XVI discerned the germs of what would later be called ecumenism. He taught: “We reach now another cause for the evils that unhappily afflict the Church at this time. That is, **we arrive at this ‘Indifferentism,’ or this perverse opinion that has spread everywhere as the work of evil ones, according to which it would be possible to achieve eternal salvation by means of any profession of faith**, so long as the practices be upright and honest. **It will not be difficult**, in such a clear and evident matter, **to reject from the bosom of the peoples who are confided to your care this fatal error. Given that the Apostle warns us that there is only ‘one Lord, one Faith, one baptism’ (Eph 4:5), these people should fear those who imagine that every religion offers the means to arrive at eternal happiness and should understand that, according to the testimony of the Savior Himself, ‘he that is not with me, is against me’ (Lk 11:23), and that they unhappily scatter since they do not gather with Him. Consequently, ‘it is not to be doubted that they will perish eternally if they do not profess the Catholic Faith and if they do not guard it entire and inviolate.**”^{20,21}

In 1846, Pius IX pronounced severe words against religious Indifferentism, which apply opportunely to the ecumenism of Vatican II and the conciliar Popes. After condemning the “biblical societies” that induced careless Catholics to adopt free examination and fall into the “abyss of the most terrible errors,” the Pontiff censured religious Indifferentism:

“Also perverse is the shocking theory that it makes no difference to which religion one belongs, a theory which is greatly at variance even with reason. By means of this theory, those crafty men remove all distinction between virtue and vice, truth and error, honorable and vile action. They pretend that men can gain eternal salvation by the practice of any religion, as if there could ever be any sharing between justice and iniquity, any collaboration between light and darkness, or any agreement between Christ and Belial.”²²

In 1848, the same Pontiff hurled yet another condemnation against Indifferentism: **“Many enemies of the Catholic truth, above all in our time, direct their efforts to spreading the most monstrous opinions of equality of conditions with the doctrine of Christ, or confuse them with His teaching. Thus do they strive with increasing energy to propagate this impious system of indifference in face of all religion.”**²³

In a document against the Peruvian priest Francisco Vigil, Pius IX denounced one of the foundations for contemporary ecumenism: **“Even though he calls himself Catholic and is engaged in the holy militia [of the divine ministry] the author [Fr. Vigil], in order to sustain with more assurance and impunity the Indifferentism and Rationalism with which he shows himself to be infected, denies to the Church the power to formulate dogmatic definitions. So also does he deny to her the exclusive title of true Religion. Hence he says that each one has the liberty to take up and profess the religion that he judges true according to the light of his reason.”**²⁴

²⁰ Symbol of St. Athanasius.

²¹ Gregory XVI, Encyclical *Mirari vos*, August 15, 1832, *Recueil des allocutions*, p. 163.

²² Pius IX, Encyclical *Qui pluribus*, November 9, 1846, *Recueil des allocutions*, p. 181.

²³ Pius IX, Allocution *Ubi primum*, December 17, 1848, *Recueil des allocutions*, p. 205.

²⁴ Pius IX, Apostolic Letter *Multiplices inter*, June 10, 1851, *Recueil des allocutions*, p. 287.

Responding to the first ecumenical encounters in Catholic ambiances, Pope Pius XI published the Encyclical *Mortalium animos* in 1928. In it he ratified the immutable position of the Pontifical Magisterium in defense of the unity of the Faith and the unicity of the Catholic Church. He reaffirmed the position of fight that Catholics must take in face of ecumenical endeavors. He qualified such initiatives as “pan-Christian,” “blasphemous,” and destructive of the true Faith. Further, he held them to be trailblazers of religious Indifferentism and Modernism.

Pius XI analyzed the nascent ecumenical attempts in this way: “Knowing perfectly that there exist few men who are entirely devoid of the religious sense, they [the men who are trying to introduce a sentiment of universal fraternity into the Church] nourish the hope that all the peoples, despite their religious differences, may yet, without great difficulty, be united in the profession of certain doctrines admitted as a common basis of the spiritual life.

“With this object, they promote congresses, meetings, and conferences, attended by a considerable number of hearers. To join in the discussion they invite all, without distinction, unbelievers of every kind as well as the faithful, and even those who have disgracefully separated themselves from Christ or rudely and obstinately denied the divinity of His nature and mission. **Such efforts can meet with no kind of approval among Catholics, because they support the erroneous opinion that all the religions are more or less good and praiseworthy Those who hold such a view fall into an open error; they also reject the true Religion; they distort its tenets and fall gradually into Naturalism and Atheism. Therefore, it is perfectly evident that one who joins with the partisans and propagators of similar doctrine abandons entirely the divinely revealed Religion.**”²⁵

The same Pontiff analyzed the ecumenical argumentation in order to more easily point out its innumerable errors: “And here it is opportune to expound and to refute an error which lies at the root of this whole question and from which proceeds the activity and multiple efforts of non-Catholics to bring about the union of Christian churches. Toward this aim, the authors of that project have the habit of quoting the words of Christ, ‘that they all may be one [*ut unum sint*] and there shall be one fold and one shepherd (Jn 17:21),’ as if, to their understanding, the prayer and the desire of Christ had not yet been carried out until today. **For they hold that the unity of Faith and government, which is the note of the one true Church, has up to the present time hardly ever existed, and does not exist today;** that this unity is indeed to be desired and realized, at times by a common understanding of wills, but that it is necessary, notwithstanding, to consider it as a type of utopia.

“They add that the Church by her nature is divided, that is, composed of innumerable churches or distinct communities which still remain separate, and although they hold in common some points of doctrine, nevertheless they differ concerning the remainder. Each church, according to them, enjoys the same rights Hence, they say, controversies, even long-standing ones, and doctrinal differences, which still today continue to divide them must be forgotten and set aside. And, with regard to other doctrinal truths, it is necessary to propose and draw up a certain rule of common faith. In this profession of faith they may feel themselves to be true brothers

“Such, Venerable Brethren, is the common contention But **they immediately go on to say that this Roman Church, too, has erred and corrupted the primitive religion** by adding to it a certain number of doctrines not only foreign but contrary to the Gospel, and imposing them on the Faith of the faithful. Chief among these they cite that

²⁵ Pius XI, Encyclical *Mortalium animos*, of January 6, 1928 (Paris: Bonne Presse, 1928), vol. 4, pp. 64-5.

of the primacy of jurisdiction granted to Peter and to his successors in the See of Rome [and they praise secondary aspects of the Papacy] However, even while you may hear many non-Catholics loudly preaching brotherly communion in Jesus Christ, yet **not one will you find who thinks of submitting to the Vicar of Christ in what he teaches or of obeying what he commands. They assert that they prefer to deal with the Church of Rome on equal terms, as equals with an equal. In reality, however, if they propose some eventual accord, it is not with the intention of renouncing those same opinions that hold them, still today, in their errors and deviations, outside the one fold of Christ.**

“In these conditions, it is evident that the Apostolic See cannot under any pretext take part in these [inter-confessional] assemblies; nor do Catholics have any right to favor such enterprises by their support or action. If they did so, they would be attributing authority to a false religion, entirely alien to the one Church of Christ. How could we tolerate that the truth, above all the revealed truth, be made a subject for compromise? This would be the height of iniquity How can it be allowed that the object of Faith become in the process of time so dim and uncertain that we should tolerate these contradictory opinions? If this were so, then we should have to admit that the coming of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles, the perpetual indwelling of the same Spirit in the Church, and even the preaching of Jesus Christ Himself many centuries ago would have lost all their efficacy and value. To affirm this would be blasphemy

“These pan-Christians who strive for the union of the churches would appear to pursue the noblest of ideals in promoting charity among all Christians. But how can one imagine that this growth of charity be made to the detriment of the Faith? Everyone knows that **St. John himself, the Apostle of charity absolutely forbade any relationship with those who did not profess the doctrine of Christ pure and entire: ‘If any man come to you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into the house, nor say to him, God speed you’ (Jn 1:10). Therefore, since the foundation of charity is Faith pure and inviolate, unity of Faith should be, as a consequence, the principal bond that unites the disciples of Christ.**

“How, then, can one conceive of the possibility of a Christian pact, in which each member would have the right, even in questions of Faith, to retain his own way of seeing and thinking, even when it would be in contradiction with the opinions of the others?”²⁶

Pope Pius XI continued by predicting that partisans of ecumenism could easily fall into Indifferentism and Modernism: **“In these profound differences of opinion, we no longer perceive the unity of the Church, because this unity results necessarily only from one single teaching on the Faith and from one law of belief of all Christians. On the contrary, we perceive clearly that from such a state of affairs it is but an easy step to the neglect of religion, or Indifferentism, and to the error of the modernists. Those unfortunate ones infected with these errors hold that dogmatic truth is not *absolute*, but *relative*, that is, that it should adapt to the varying necessities of time and place and to the diverse tendencies of the mind; that it is not contained in an immutable Revelation, but by its nature can be altered to suit the needs of human life.”**²⁷

Pius XI closed his Encyclical prohibiting ecumenism and refuting the thesis of *Ecclesia semper reformanda* and the “Sinning Church,” today defended by conciliar progressivists: “Thus, Venerable Brethren, it is clear why **this Apostolic See has never allowed its subjects to take part in the assemblies of non-Catholics. There is but one**

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-7.

way in which the unity of Christians may be fostered, and that is by furthering the return to the one true Church of Christ of those who are separated from it; for from that one true Church they have in the past fallen away. The one Church of Christ is visible to all, and will remain, according to the will of its Author, exactly the same as He instituted her.

“The mystical Spouse of Christ has never in the course of centuries been contaminated, nor in the future can she ever be, as Cyprian bears witness: ‘The Bride of Christ cannot become false to her Spouse, she is inviolate and pure. She knows but one dwelling and chastely and modestly she guards the sanctity of the nuptial chamber.’²⁸ The same holy martyr marveled that anyone could believe that ‘this unity [of the Church], fruit of divine stability and consolidated by the heavenly Sacraments, could ever be broken by the shock of discordant wills.’²⁹ **For since the Mystical Body of Christ, like His physical body, is one (1 Cor. 12:12), compacted, and fitly joined together (Eph 4:16), it is foolish to say that the Mystical Body is composed of disjointed and scattered members. Whosoever therefore is not united with the body is no member thereof, neither is he in communion with Christ her Head.**”³⁰

The Catholic doctrine presented here clearly demonstrates the constant teaching of the pontifical Magisterium prior to Vatican II.³¹

²⁸ *De Cath. Ecclesiae unitate*, 6.

²⁹ Pius XI, Encyclical *Mortalium animos*, p. 77.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.

³¹ For more examples of doctrine against ecumenism pronounced by Popes prior to Vatican II, see:

Against Ecumenism and religious Indifferentism, Leo XII, Encyclical *Ubi primum*, of May 5, 1824 (DS 2720); Gregory XVI, Encyclical *Mirari vos*, of August 15, 1832 (DS 2730-1); Pius IX, Encyclical *Quanto conficiamur moerore*, of August 10, 1863 (DS 2865-6.); *Syllabus*, of December 8, 1864 (DS 2915, 2918, 2921, 2977-8.); St. Pius X, Letter *Notre Charge Apostolique*, of August 25, 1910 (nn. 30-1, 34-5).

Against those who admit salvation outside the Church: 16th Council of Toledo, *Symbolum*, of May 2, 693 (DS 575); *Fourth Lateran Council*, of November 11-30, 1215 (DS 802); Boniface VIII, Bull *Unam sanctam*, of November 18, 1302 (DS 870); Council of Florence, Bull *Cantate Domino*, of February 4, 1442 (DS 1351); Pius IX, Encyclical *Qui pluribus*, of November 9, 1846 (DS 2785); *Syllabus*, of December 8, 1864 (DS 2916-7); Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici corporis*, of June 29, 1943 (DS 3821); Letter from the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston, of August 8, 1949 (DS 3866-7, 3869-72).