

FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL (1869-1870)

Session 3 : 24 April 1870

“*Dei Filius*” – The dogmatic constitution on the Catholic faith

Pius, bishop, servant of the servants of God, with the approval of the Sacred Council, for an everlasting record.

1. The Son of God, redeemer of the human race, our lord Jesus Christ, promised, when about to return to his heavenly Father, that he would be with this Church militant upon earth all days even to the end of the world [3]. Hence never at any time has he ceased to stand by his beloved bride, assisting her when she teaches, blessing her in her labors and bringing her help when she is in danger.

2. Now this redemptive providence appears very clearly in unnumbered benefits, but most especially is it manifested in the advantages which have been secured for the Christian world by ecumenical councils, among which the Council of Trent requires special mention, celebrated though it was in evil days.

3. Thence came 1. a closer definition and more fruitful exposition of the holy dogmas of religion and 2. the condemnation and repression of errors; thence too, 3. the restoration and vigorous strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline, 4. the advancement of the clergy in zeal for learning and piety, 5. the founding of colleges for the training of the young for the service of religion; and finally 6. the renewal of the moral life of the Christian people by a more accurate instruction of the faithful, and a more frequent reception of the sacraments. What is more, thence also came 7. a closer union of the members with the visible head, and an increased vigor in the whole mystical body of Christ. Thence came 8. the multiplication of religious orders and other organizations of Christian piety; thence too 9. that determined and constant ardor for the spreading of Christ's kingdom abroad in the world, even at the cost of shedding one's blood.

4. While we recall with grateful hearts, as is only fitting, these and other outstanding gains, which the divine mercy has bestowed on the Church especially by means of the last ecumenical synod, we cannot subdue the bitter grief that we feel at most serious evils, which have largely arisen either because the authority of the sacred synod was held in contempt by all too many, or because its wise decrees were neglected.

5. Everybody knows that those heresies, condemned by the fathers of Trent, which rejected the divine magisterium of the Church and allowed religious questions to be a matter for the judgment of each individual, have gradually collapsed into a multiplicity of sects, either at variance or in agreement with one another; and by this means a good many people have had all faith in Christ destroyed.

6. Indeed even the Holy Bible itself, which they at one time claimed to be the sole source and judge of the Christian faith, is no longer held to be divine, but they begin to assimilate it to the inventions of myth.

7. Thereupon there came into being and spread far and wide throughout the world that doctrine of rationalism or naturalism,—utterly opposed to the Christian religion, since this is of supernatural origin,—which spares no effort to bring it about that Christ, who alone is our lord and savior, is shut out from the minds of people and the moral life of nations. Thus they would establish what they call the rule of simple reason or nature. The abandonment and rejection of the Christian religion, and the denial of God and his Christ, has plunged the minds of many into the abyss of pantheism, materialism and atheism, and the consequence is that they strive to destroy rational nature itself, to deny any criterion of what is right and just, and to overthrow the very foundations of human society.

8. With this impiety spreading in every direction, it has come about, alas, that many even among the children of the Catholic Church have strayed from the path of genuine piety, and as the truth was gradually diluted in them, their Catholic sensibility was weakened. Led away by diverse and strange teachings [4] and confusing nature and grace, human knowledge and divine faith, they are found to distort the genuine sense of the dogmas which Holy mother Church holds and teaches, and to endanger the integrity and genuineness of the faith.

9. At the sight of all this, how can the inmost being of the Church not suffer anguish? For just as God wills all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth [5], just as Christ came to save what was lost [6] and to gather into one the children of God who were scattered abroad [7], so the Church, appointed by God to be mother and mistress of nations, recognizes her obligations to all and is always ready and anxious to raise the fallen, to steady those who stumble, to embrace those who return, and to strengthen the good and urge them on to what is better. Thus she can never cease from witnessing to the truth of God which heals all [8] and from declaring it, for she knows

that these words were directed to her: My spirit which is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth from this time forth and for evermore.[9]

10. And so we, following in the footsteps of our predecessors, in accordance with our supreme apostolic office, have never left off teaching and defending Catholic truth and condemning erroneous doctrines. But now it is our purpose to profess and declare from this chair of Peter before all eyes the saving teaching of Christ, and, by the power given us by God, to reject and condemn the contrary errors. This we shall do with the bishops of the whole world as our co-assessors and fellow-judges, gathered here as they are in the Holy Spirit by our authority in this ecumenical council, and relying on the word of God in Scripture and tradition as we have received it, religiously preserved and authentically expounded by the Catholic Church.

Chapter 1

On God the creator of all things

1. The Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church believes and acknowledges that there is one true and living God, creator and lord of heaven and earth, almighty, eternal, immeasurable, incomprehensible, infinite in will, understanding and every perfection.

2. Since he is one, singular, completely simple and unchangeable spiritual substance, he must be declared to be in reality and in essence, distinct from the world, supremely happy in himself and from himself, and inexpressibly loftier than anything besides himself which either exists or can be imagined.

3. This one true God, by his goodness and almighty power, not with the intention of increasing his happiness, nor indeed of obtaining happiness, but in order to manifest his perfection by the good things which he bestows on what he creates, by an absolutely free plan, together from the beginning of time brought into being from nothing the twofold created order, that is the spiritual and the bodily, the angelic and the earthly, and thereafter the human which is, in a way, common to both since it is composed of spirit and body [10].

4. Everything that God has brought into being he protects and governs by his providence, which reaches from one end of the earth to the other and orders all things well [11]. All things are open and laid bare to his eyes [12], even those which will be brought about by the free activity of creatures.

Chapter 2

On revelation

1. The same Holy mother Church holds and teaches that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason : ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. [13] 2. It was, however, pleasing to his wisdom and goodness to reveal himself and the eternal laws of his will to the human race by another, and that a supernatural, way. This is how the Apostle puts it : In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son [14].

3. It is indeed thanks to this divine revelation, that those matters concerning God which are not of themselves beyond the scope of human reason, can, even in the present state of the human race, be known by everyone without difficulty, with firm certitude and with no intermingling of error.

4. It is not because of this that one must hold revelation to be absolutely necessary; the reason is that God directed human beings to a supernatural end, that is a sharing in the good things of God that utterly surpasses the understanding of the human mind; indeed eye has not seen, neither has ear heard, nor has it come into our hearts to conceive what things God has prepared for those who love him [15].

5. Now this supernatural revelation, according to the belief of the universal Church, as declared by the sacred Council of Trent, is contained in written books and unwritten traditions, which were received by the apostles from the lips of Christ himself, or came to the apostles by the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and were passed on as it were from hand to hand until they reached us [16].

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6. The complete books of the old and the new Testament with all their parts, as they are listed in the decree of the said Council and as they are found in the old Latin Vulgate edition, are to be received as sacred and canonical.

7. These books the Church holds to be sacred and canonical not because she subsequently approved them by her authority after they had been composed by unaided human skill, nor simply because they contain revelation without error, but because, being written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and were as such committed to the Church.

8. Now since the decree on the interpretation of Holy Scripture, profitably made by the Council of Trent, with the intention of constraining rash speculation, has been wrongly interpreted by some, we renew that decree and declare its meaning to be as follows: that in matters of faith and morals, belonging as they do to the establishing of Christian doctrine, that meaning of Holy Scripture must be held to be the true one, which Holy mother Church held and holds, since it is her right to judge of the true meaning and interpretation of Holy Scripture.

9. In consequence, it is not permissible for anyone to interpret Holy Scripture in a sense contrary to this, or indeed against the unanimous consent of the fathers.

Chapter 3

On faith

1. Since human beings are totally dependent on God as their creator and lord, and created reason is completely subject to uncreated truth, we are obliged to yield to God the revealer full submission of intellect and will by faith.

2. This faith, which is the beginning of human salvation, the Catholic Church professes to be a supernatural virtue, by means of which, with the grace of God inspiring and assisting us, we believe to be true what He has revealed, not because we perceive its intrinsic truth by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself, who makes the revelation and can neither deceive nor be deceived.

3. Faith, declares the Apostle, is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen [17].

4. Nevertheless, in order that the submission of our faith should be in accordance with reason, it was God's will that there should be linked to the internal assistance of the Holy Spirit external indications of his revelation, that is to say divine acts, and first and foremost miracles and prophecies, which clearly demonstrating as they do the omnipotence and infinite knowledge of God, are the most certain signs of revelation and are suited to the understanding of all.

5. Hence Moses and the prophets, and especially Christ our lord himself, worked many absolutely clear miracles and delivered prophecies; while of the apostles we read: And they went forth and preached every, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the

signs that attended it [18]. Again it is written: We have the prophetic word made more sure; you will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place [19].

6. Now, although the assent of faith is by no means a blind movement of the mind, yet no one can accept the gospel preaching in the way that is necessary for achieving salvation without the inspiration and illumination of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all facility in accepting and believing the truth [20].

7. And so faith in itself, even though it may not work through charity, is a gift of God, and its operation is a work belonging to the order of salvation, in that a person yields true obedience to God himself when he accepts and collaborates with his grace which he could have rejected.

8. Wherefore, by divine and Catholic faith all those things are to be believed which are contained in the word of God as found in Scripture and tradition, and which are proposed by the Church as matters to be believed as divinely revealed, whether by her solemn judgment or in her ordinary and universal magisterium.

9. Since, then, without faith it is impossible to please God [21] and reach the fellowship of his sons and daughters, it follows that no one can ever achieve justification without it, neither can anyone attain eternal life unless he or she perseveres in it to the end.

10. So that we could fulfill our duty of embracing the true faith and of persevering unwaveringly in it, God, through his only begotten Son, founded the Church, and he endowed his institution with clear notes to the end that she might be recognized by all as the guardian and teacher of the revealed word.

11. To the Catholic Church alone belong all those things, so many and so marvelous, which have been divinely ordained to make for the manifest credibility of the Christian faith.

12. What is more, the Church herself by reason of her astonishing propagation, her outstanding holiness and her inexhaustible fertility in every kind of goodness, by her Catholic unity and her unconquerable stability, is a kind of great and perpetual motive of credibility and an incontrovertible evidence of her own divine mission.

13. So it comes about that, like a standard lifted up for the nations [22], she both invites to herself those who have not yet believed, and likewise assures her sons and daughters that the faith they profess rests on the firmest of foundations.

14. To this witness is added the effective help of power from on high. For, the kind Lord stirs up those who go astray and helps them by his grace so that they may come to the knowledge of the truth [23] ; and also confirms by his grace those whom he has translated into his admirable light [24], so that they may persevere in this light, not abandoning them unless he is first abandoned.

15. Consequently, the situation of those, who by the heavenly gift of faith have embraced the Catholic truth, is by no means the same as that of those who, led by human opinions, follow a

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false religion; for those who have accepted the faith under the guidance of the Church can never have any just cause for changing this faith or for calling it into question.

This being so, giving thanks to God the Father who has made us worthy to share with the saints in light [25] let us not neglect so great a salvation [26], but looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith [27], let us hold the unshakable confession of our hope [28].

Chapter 4.

On faith and reason

1. The perpetual agreement of the Catholic Church has maintained and maintains this too: that there is a twofold order of knowledge, distinct not only as regards its source, but also as regards its object.

2. With regard to the source, we know at the one level by natural reason, at the other level by divine faith.

3. With regard to the object, besides those things to which natural reason can attain, there are proposed for our belief mysteries hidden in God which, unless they are divinely revealed, are incapable of being known.

Wherefore, when the Apostle, who witnesses that God was known to the gentiles from created things [29], comes to treat of the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ [30], he declares: We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this. God has revealed it to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God [31]. And the Only-begotten himself, in his confession to the Father, acknowledges that the Father has hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to the little ones [32].

4. Now reason, does indeed when it seeks persistently, piously and soberly, achieve by God's gift some understanding, and that most profitable, of the mysteries, whether by analogy from what it knows naturally, or from the connection of these mysteries with one another and with the final end of humanity; but reason is never rendered capable of penetrating these mysteries in the way in which it penetrates those truths which form its proper object.

For the divine mysteries, by their very nature, so far surpass the created understanding that, even when a revelation has been given and accepted by faith, they remain covered by the veil of that same faith and wrapped, as it were, in a certain obscurity, as long as in this mortal life we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, and not by sight [33].

5. Even though faith is above reason, there can never be any real disagreement between faith and reason, since it is the same God who reveals the mysteries and infuses faith, and who has endowed the human mind with the light of reason.

6. God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever be in opposition to truth. The appearance of this kind of specious contradiction is chiefly due to the fact that either the dogmas of faith are not

understood and explained in accordance with the mind of the Church, or unsound views are mistaken for the conclusions of reason.

7. Therefore we define that every assertion contrary to the truth of enlightened faith is totally false [34].

8. Furthermore the Church which, together with its apostolic office of teaching, has received the charge of preserving the deposit of faith, has by divine appointment the right and duty of condemning what wrongly passes for knowledge, lest anyone be led astray by philosophy and empty deceit [35].

9. Hence all faithful Christians are forbidden to defend as the legitimate conclusions of science those opinions which are known to be contrary to the doctrine of faith, particularly if they have been condemned by the Church; and furthermore they are absolutely bound to hold them to be errors which wear the deceptive appearance of truth.

10. Not only can faith and reason never be at odds with one another but they mutually support each other, for on the one hand right reason established the foundations of the faith and, illuminated by its light, develops the science of divine things; on the other hand, faith delivers reason from errors and protects it and furnishes it with knowledge of many kinds.

11. Hence, so far is the Church from hindering the development of human arts and studies, that in fact she assists and promotes them in many ways. For she is neither ignorant nor contemptuous of the advantages which derive from this source for human life, rather she acknowledges that those things flow from God, the lord of sciences, and, if they are properly used, lead to God by the help of his grace.

12. Nor does the Church forbid these studies to employ, each within its own area, its own proper principles and method: but while she admits this just freedom, she takes particular care that they do not become infected with errors by conflicting with divine teaching, or, by going beyond their proper limits, intrude upon what belongs to faith and engender confusion.

13. For the doctrine of the faith which God has revealed is put forward not as some philosophical discovery capable of being perfected by human intelligence, but as a divine deposit committed to the spouse of Christ to be faithfully protected and infallibly promulgated.

14. Hence, too, that meaning of the sacred dogmas is ever to be maintained which has once been declared by Holy mother Church, and there must never be any abandonment of this sense under the pretext or in the name of a more profound understanding.

May understanding, knowledge and wisdom increase as ages and centuries roll along, and greatly and vigorously flourish, in each and all, in the individual and the whole Church: but this only in its own proper kind, that is to say, in the same doctrine, the same sense, and the same understanding [36].

Endnotes:

3 See Mt 28, 20.

4 See Heb 13, 9.

5 1 Tm 2, 4.

6 Lk 19, 10.

7 Jn 11, 52.

8 See Wis 16, 12.

9 Is 59, 21.

10 See Lateran Council IV, const. 1 (see above, p. 230).

11 Wis 8, 1.

12 Heb 4, 13.

13 Rm 1, 20.

14 Heb 1, 1-2.

15 1 Cor 2, 9.

16 Council of Trent, session 4, first decree (see above p. 663).

17 Heb 11, 1.

18 Mk 16, 20.

19 2 Pt 1, 19.

20 Council of Orange II (529), canon 7 (Bruns 2, 178; Msi 8, 713).

21 Heb 11, 6.

22 Is 11, 12.

23 1 Tm 2, 4.

24 1 Pt 2, 9; Col 1, 13.

25 Col 1, 12.

26 Heb 2, 3.

27 Heb 12, 2.

28 Heb 10, 12.

29 Rm 1, 20.

30 Jn 1, 17.

31 i Cor 2, 7-8, 10.

32 Mt 11, 25.

33 2 Cor 5, 6-7.

34 See Lateran Council V, session 8 (see above p. 605).

35 See Col 2, 8.

36 Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium* (Notebook), 28 (PL 50, 668).

Canons

1. On God the creator of all things

1. If anyone denies the one true God, creator and lord of things visible and invisible: let him be anathema.

2. If anyone is so bold as to assert that there exists nothing besides matter: let him be anathema.

3. If anyone says that the substance or essence of God and that of all things are one and the same: let him be anathema.

4. If anyone says that finite things, both corporal and spiritual, or at any rate, spiritual, emanated from the divine substance; or that the divine essence, by the manifestation and evolution of itself becomes all things or, finally, that God is a universal or indefinite being which by self determination establishes the totality of things distinct in genera, species and individuals: let him be anathema.

5. If anyone does not confess that the world and all things which are contained in it, both spiritual and material, were produced, according to their whole substance, out of nothing by God;

or holds that God did not create by his will free from all necessity, but as necessarily as he necessarily loves himself; or denies that the world was created for the glory of God: let him be anathema.

2. On revelation

1. If anyone says that the one, true God, our creator and lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason: let him be anathema.

2. If anyone says that it is impossible, or not expedient, that human beings should be taught by means of divine revelation about God and the worship that should be shown him : let him be anathema.

3. If anyone says that a human being cannot be divinely elevated to a knowledge and perfection which exceeds the natural, but of himself can and must reach finally the possession of all truth and goodness by continual development: let him be anathema.

4. If anyone does not receive as sacred and canonical the complete books of Sacred Scripture with all their parts, as the holy Council of Trent listed them, or denies that they were divinely inspired : let him be anathema.

3. On faith

1. If anyone says that human reason is so independent that faith cannot be commanded by God: let him be anathema.

2. If anyone says that divine faith is not to be distinguished from natural knowledge about God and moral matters, and consequently that for divine faith it is not required that revealed truth should be believed because of the authority of God who reveals it: let him be anathema.

3. If anyone says that divine revelation cannot be made credible by external signs, and that therefore men and women ought to be moved to faith only by each one's internal experience or private inspiration: let him be anathema.

4. If anyone says that all miracles are impossible, and that therefore all reports of them, even those contained in Sacred Scripture, are to be set aside as fables or myths; or that miracles can never be known with certainty, nor can the divine origin of the Christian religion be proved from them: let him be anathema.

5. If anyone says that the assent to Christian faith is not free, but is necessarily produced by arguments of human reason; or that the grace of God is necessary only for living faith which works by charity: let him be anathema.

6. If anyone says that the condition of the faithful and those who have not yet attained to the only true faith is alike, so that Catholics may have a just cause for calling in doubt, by suspending their assent, the faith which they have already received from the teaching of the Church, until

they have completed a scientific demonstration of the credibility and truth of their faith: let him be anathema.

4. On faith and reason

1. If anyone says that in divine revelation there are contained no true mysteries properly so-called, but that all the dogmas of the faith can be understood and demonstrated by properly trained reason from natural principles: let him be anathema.

2. If anyone says that human studies are to be treated with such a degree of liberty that their assertions may be maintained as true even when they are opposed to divine revelation, and that they may not be forbidden by the Church: let him be anathema.

3. If anyone says that it is possible that at some time, given the advancement of knowledge, a sense may be assigned to the dogmas propounded by the Church which is different from that which the Church has understood and understands: let him be anathema.

And so in the performance of our supreme pastoral office, we beseech for the love of Jesus Christ and we command, by the authority of him who is also our God and savior, all faithful Christians, especially those in authority or who have the duty of teaching, that they contribute their zeal and labor to the warding off and elimination of these errors from the Church and to the spreading of the light of the pure faith.

But since it is not enough to avoid the contamination of heresy unless those errors are carefully shunned which approach it in greater or less degree, we warn all of their duty to observe the constitutions and decrees in which such wrong opinions, though not expressly mentioned in this document, have been banned and forbidden by this Holy See.