

Editorial Note:

On July 8, 1927, the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office issued a response to a *dubium* as to whether it be permissible for Catholics to be present at or to approve of gatherings of non-Catholics that seek to procure the unity of all Christians.^a The Holy Office responded, “In the negative”, and declared that the decree issued by the same Congregation on July 4, 1919, prohibiting the participation of Catholics in the “Society for the Union of Christendom”, was “absolutely to be observed”.^b This 1919 decree, in turn, reiterated the binding force of two instructions promulgated by the Holy Office under Pope Pius IX, one on September 16, 1864, the other on November 8, 1865. The second of these instructions, *Ad Quosdam Puseistas Anglicos*, is reproduced below. It appears that this is the first time this important text, eminently rich in doctrinal content, has been made available in English.

Source: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XI (1919): 312-316

SUPREME SACRED CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY OFFICE

TO CERTAIN PUSEYITE ANGLICANS

Honorable and dearest Sirs,

In the letter written to me, you profess with a sincere heart and unfeigned voice to desire only this: that according to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ there be one fold and one shepherd. Your wish conveys to the Sacred Congregation the very pleasant hope that at last you will arrive at true unity by the divine grace of the same Jesus Christ. Nevertheless you must take care lest, while seeking unity, you turn yourselves aside from the way. Furthermore, the Sacred Congregation is exceedingly sorry that you happened to think those Christian groups that boast of having the inheritance of the priesthood and the catholic name belong to the true Church of Jesus Christ, even though they are divided and separated from Peter. In that opinion, there is nothing that is more averse to the genuine notion of the Catholic Church. For the Catholic Church, as I advised in my letter to the English bishops, is the one that, built upon one Peter, rises up into one body joined together and compacted in the unity of faith and charity.¹ Indeed, the clear testimony of the Sacred Scriptures along with the notable metaphors, comparisons, and images by which the Church is portrayed and, as it were, represented, the very well known documents of the holy Fathers along with synods of great antiquity, and the firm policy against heretics and schismatics of whatever kind (which the Church customarily followed without

a *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XIX (1927): 278

b *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XI (1919): 309

1 ST. AMBROSE, *On the Duties of the Clergy*, Book III, ch. III, no. 19.

interruption from her beginnings, even though several of them claimed the inheritance of the priesthood and the catholic name) has shown that this unity of faith and charity or communion, by reason of Christ's unalterable instruction, not only is the extraordinary and fundamental property of the true Church, but also and always is the most definite visible note by which the Church herself is securely and easily distinguished from all sects, most evidently from you, if you wish to examine and consider the matter in an earnest and peaceful spirit. Therefore, just as the Church of Christ is — and is said to be — catholic because of the supreme unity of faith and communion, which she, spread throughout all nations and every age, most steadfastly retains, so too is she declared holy and apostolic owing to the same unity. And just as if she were to abandon that unity, she would be, both by law and in fact, immediately stripped of being catholic, and thus at the same time she would also be stripped of the distinguishing marks of sanctity and apostolic succession.

But the Church of Christ never lost her unity. She will never lose it, not even for the shortest space of time. In fact, she will continue everlastingly according to divine revelation. How, indeed, can one believe the Church will continue everlastingly, if generation after generation, exactly as it occurs in the changeableness of earthly things, she were to take on to her essential state a new appearance and shape, and, what is more, if the Church herself at some time or other could withdraw from the unity of faith and communion on which she was founded by Jesus Christ and by which she was spread by the Apostles? For this reason St. Ambrose says the kingdom of the Church will remain forever because the faith is indivisible, the body is one.² But if the Church of Christ is absolutely indivisible, it naturally follows that she must also be called and believed to be infallible in handing down the teaching of the Gospels; and it is an unshakeable dogma of Catholic faith that, by a wondrous gift, Christ the Lord conferred the sign of infallibility upon His Church, of which He is the head, spouse, and cornerstone. And really, what sane person will persuade himself that error can underlie the Church's public and solemn magisterium, which Christ established by design so that we may be now no longer children tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine devised in the wickedness of men, in craftiness, according to the wiles of error;³ He promised His Presence would never leave the magisterium, and the Holy Ghost would thoroughly instruct it about every truth. He willed all nations to be called by it to the obedience of the faith, and so to receive the teaching of things to be believed and done, such that he who had not believed the Apostles and their legitimate successors would stand condemned; on whom did He bestow the office and authority of dictating the form of correct utterance, on which all God's disciples should agree? Hereupon

2 *Commentary on Luke's Gospel*, book VII, no. 91.

3 *Eph.*, IV, 14.

Paul calls the Church the pillar and ground of truth.⁴ But how would the Church be the ground of truth, if she did not pursue the truth without danger? The most holy Fathers also speak and declare with one voice that, in the unity of the Church, the unity of the faith and the doctrine of Christ are so firmly bound together that the one cannot be disjoined from the other; that golden saying of St. Cyprian, the Church is the home of unity and truth,⁵ refers to this. The Catholic Church never had doubts about this special privilege for herself, promised through the perpetual presence of Christ and communicated by the breath of the Holy Ghost, whenever she undertook to end the disputes that arose, to interpret the sense of the Holy Scriptures, and to overcome the errors opposed to the entrusted deposit of revelation. She always published her dogmatic definitions and proposed them as the certain and unchangeable rule of faith. As rules of faith, each person must give them his innermost assent without any doubt, suspicion, or hesitation. Indeed, those who in this very matter would stubbornly resist these same definitions would be considered to have suffered shipwreck in respect to the faith necessary to gain salvation, and they would be thought to belong no longer to the fold of Christ. These facts more and more show the absurdity of that falsehood about the Catholic Church uniting from three communions; the proponents of that falsehood are compelled to deny necessarily the infallibility of the Church.

It is now no less certain and established that Christ Jesus by his singular providence chose most blessed Peter ahead of the rest of the Apostles as their chief and the center of the same unity and the visible bond, in order that unity of faith and communion be produced and perpetually preserved in the Church, and also so that the occasion⁶ of schism might be removed with the establishment of a head. Upon him, He built his Church, and He conferred upon him the supreme care and authority — to be extended to his successors in every age — of feeding his entire flock, of strengthening the brethren, and of binding and loosening throughout the entire world. This is Catholic dogma received from the lips of Christ, handed down and defended in the durable preaching of the Fathers, which the Universal Church has in every era most sacredly maintained and more often has confirmed in the decrees of the Supreme Pontiffs and Councils against the errors of innovators. Accordingly, the Catholic Church solely is always believed as that which by faith and communion clings to the See of the Roman Pontiffs, the successors of Peter. St. Cyprian therefore calls that See the root and womb of the Catholic Church.⁷ By antonomasia, the Fathers and Councils designate it by the name Apostolic See. Out of it has arisen priestly unity⁸ and the laws of the venerable communion flow out to all;⁹ in it, Peter

4 I *Tim.*, III, 15.

5 *Epistle VIII, to Cornelius*, no. 1 in Constant.

6 ST. JEROME, *Book I, Against Jovinian*, no. 26.

7 *Epistle IV to Cornelius*, no. 3 in Constant.

8 ST. CYPRIAN, *Epistle XII to Cornelius*, no. 14 in Constant.

9 *Epistle of the Council of Aquila to the Emperor Gratian*, of the year 381, among the *Epistles* OF ST. AMBROSE.

continually lives and presides and furnishes the truth to those who inquire.¹⁰ Certainly, St. Augustine, in order to summon the Donatists convicted of schism to the root and vine from which they had departed, uses the argument oft repeated by the more ancient Fathers: “Come, brethren, if you wish to be grafted on the vine. It is grief when we see you thus lying lopped off. Number the priests from the very chair of Peter, and in that order of Fathers, see who succeeded whom. This is the rock that the proud gates of hell do not conquer.”¹¹ It is sufficiently evident that no one is in the Catholic Church who does not cling to that Rock, on which the foundation of Catholic unity has been set. St. Jerome did not suppose otherwise; to him, anyone who was not united in communion to the Chair of Peter and to the sitting Pontiff was unholy. “Following no superior except Christ,” he writes to Pope Damasus, “I am united in Communion to Your Blessedness, that is, to the Chair of Peter: I know the Church was built upon that rock. Whoever eats the lamb outside this house is unholy. If anyone is not in the ark of Noah, he will perish when the flood holds sway. Whoever does not gather with you, scatters. That is to say, he who is not of Christ is of Antichrist.”¹² Similar is the opinion of St. Optatus of Milevis, who celebrates that chair as alone of its kind, known to all, established at Rome, on which unity must be so preserved by all, such that he who sets up a second chair against that unique chair is a schismatic or heretic.¹³ Indeed, this is the correct view, for in this order and succession of Roman Pontiffs, as St. Irenaeus openly declares to all, the tradition, which is in the Church from the Apostles, and the proclamation of the truth have come down to us; this is the fullest evidence that there is one and the same vivifying faith that has been preserved in the Church from the Apostles right up to now and handed down in truth.¹⁴

Therefore, if it is the proper and lasting sign of the true Church of Christ that she be preserved in supreme unity of faith and social charity, let her flourish and be made visible to all men in every age as a city placed upon a hill; and if, in another respect, Christ wished the Apostolic See of Peter to be source, the center, and the bond of the same unity, it is logical to conclude that all groups entirely separated from external and visible communion with and obedience to the Roman Pontiff cannot be the Church of Christ, nor in any way whatsoever can they belong to the Church of Christ, namely, to that Church, which, in the Creed after the commendation of the Trinity, is proposed to be believed as the holy Church, the one Church, the true Church, [and] the Catholic Church;¹⁵ she is called catholic not only by her own members but also by all her enemies;¹⁶ and so she alone has maintained the name of Catholic, such that

10 ST. PETER CHRYSOLOGUS, *Epistle to Eutyches*, Act. III of the Council of Ephesus, 1, 1478 in Hardouin.

11 *Psalm Against the Party of Donatus*.

12 *Epistle 14 to Damasus*.

13 *Against the Donatist Parmenianus*, Book II, no. 2

14 *Book III, Against Heresies*, ch. III, no. 3, from the old translation.

15 ST. AUGUSTINE, *On the Creed: Sermon to Catechumens*, ch. VI.

16 ST. AUGUSTINE, *On the True Religion*, ch. VII.

although all heretics might wish to be called catholic, nevertheless, no heretic would dare point out¹⁷ either his own church or house to some stranger asking where one may gather at a Catholic church. Through the Church, Christ bestows the benefits of redemption as though through a body very thoroughly joined to Himself, and whoever will have been separated from her, no matter how much he may think he lives in a praiseworthy manner, he will not have life, because he is severed from the unity of Christ by this sin: rather, the wrath of God remains upon him.¹⁸ Consequently, the name catholic cannot at all be suitable to groups of this sort both by law, and by no means, short of manifest heresy, can they be attributed to them in fact. However, you will see from that circumstance, honorable and dearest sirs, why this Congregation has been on its guard with such a great concern lest the faithful allow themselves to be admitted to or in some way be well disposed toward the society recently established by you to promote, as you say, the unity of Christianity. You will also perceive that any possible effort to bring about harmony necessarily falls into nothingness unless it be made to conform with those principles by which the Church was both established from the beginning by Christ and thereafter in every succeeding age was spread, one and the same thing, by the Apostles and their successors to the whole world. Moreover, these principles are explained clearly in the well known “Formula of Hormisdas”, which, it is certain, has been approved by the entire Catholic Church. Finally, you will observe that the ecumenical intercommunion, which you mention, flourished, therefore, before the schism of Photius, because the eastern churches had not yet broken away from the obedience due to the Apostolic Chair; you will also see that it was not enough to restore this much desired intercommunion [and] to lay aside enmity and hatred against the Roman Church, but that it was wholly necessary to embrace the faith and communion of the Roman Church by reason of the command and ordinance of Christ. As the Venerable Bede, the most brilliant ornament of your people, says, “All who separate themselves in any way whatsoever from the unity of faith and the fellowship of him (Blessed Peter) cannot be loosened from the bonds of sins and cannot enter upon the gate of the heavenly kingdom.”¹⁹

And indeed, honorable and dearest sirs, since the Catholic Church has been shown to be one and cannot be broken asunder or divided,²⁰ would that you no longer hesitate to hide yourselves in the bosom of that same Church that, even unto the confession of the human race from the Apostolic See through the successions of bishops, as the heretics were vainly barking round about, has maintained the height of authority.²¹ Would that without delay the Holy Ghost vouchsafe to complete and perfect what He has begun in you through the good-will bestowed

17 ST. AUGUSTINE, *Against the Epistle of Manichaeus, Which They Call Fundamental*, ch. IV, no. 5.

18 ST. AUGUSTINE, *Epistle 141*, no. 5.

19 *Horn, On the Feast Day of Ss. Peter and Paul*.

20 ST. CYPRIAN, *Epistle VIII to Cornelius*, no. 2 in Constant.

21 ST. AUGUSTINE, *On the Utility of Believing*, ch. XVII, n. 35.

[by God] toward this Church. Together with this Sacred Congregation, Our most holy Lord Pope Pius IX with his whole mind wishes this for you and earnestly prays for it from God the Father of Mercy and Light: [to wit,] that finally all of you, calling aloud from a disinherited truncated end, may merit to receive auspiciously, as the heritage of Christ, as the true Catholic Church to which your ancestors certainly looked before the woeful separation of the sixteenth century, the root of charity in the bond of peace and in the fellowship of unity.²² Farewell.

Rome, on this 8th day of November 1865.

C. CARD. PATRIZI.

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²² ST. AUGUSTINE, *Epistle 61*, no. 2; *Epistle 69*, no. 1.

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