

Acta Sanctæ Sedis

Pope Pius XII

Encyclical Letter *Sempiternus Rex Christus* on the Council of Chalcedon.

20. We think it of importance, Venerable Brothers, to delay a little in elucidating this document of the Roman Pontiff, which was such an outstanding vindication of the Catholic faith. Firstly, against the assertion of Eutyches: 'I confess that Our Lord was of two natures before their union; after their union I confess that he had only one nature,' the holy bishop, not without a certain indignation, opposed the following clear statement of the luminous truth: 'I am surprised that this absurd and perverse statement should have escaped the severe reprimand of those who gave judgement ... the Only Begotten Son of God is impiously described as being of two natures before the Incarnation and, equally wickedly to the Word made Flesh is attributed only one nature.' He attacked with equal force and directness the opposite errors of Nestorius. 'It is because there was only one person in both natures, that the Son of God took flesh from the Virgin from whom he was born. And again the Son of God is said to have been crucified and been buried, because he suffered these things in the weakness of human nature, not in the divinity itself, for through the divinity the only Begotten is co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father. Wherefore in the Creed we all confess "the only Begotten Son of God to have been crucified and buried."'

21. In addition to the distinction of natures in Christ, there is clearly

shown here the distinction of the properties and activities, which arise from his double nature, 'Since the properties of each nature remain intact, and they are joined together in one person, majesty accepts lowliness, strength accepts weakness and the Eternal becomes mortal.' And again: 'Each nature possesses its properties without defect.'

22. But both sets of properties and activities are attributed to the One Person of the Word, because 'One and the same [Person] is ... truly the Son of God and truly the Son of Man.' Whence 'In his actions either nature with the co-operation of the other performs what is proper to it; thus the Word performs the part of the Word, and the humanity the part of the humanity.' In these expressions appears the use of what is called the Common Application of Terms (*Communicatio Idiomatum*), which Cyril vindicated against Nestorius. It depends on the firm foundations that both natures subsist by the One Person of the Word begotten before all ages of the Father and born of Mary according to the flesh in the course of time.

23. This sublime doctrine, which is drawn from the gospels and differs in no way from that of the council of Ephesus refutes Eutyches as well as Nestorius. The dogmatic definition of the council of Chalcedon concords with it absolutely and perfectly, for this definition likewise defines two distinct natures and one person in Christ in the

