

## ARTICLE 3

**“HE WAS CONCEIVED BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND WAS BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY”**

## Paragraph 1. The Son of God Became Man

## I. WHY DID THE WORD BECOME FLESH?

456 With the Nicene Creed, we answer by confessing: “For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.”

457 The Word became flesh for us *in order to save us by reconciling us with God*, who “loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins”: “the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world,” and “he was revealed to take away sins”.<sup>70</sup> 607

Sick, our nature demanded to be healed; fallen, to be raised up; dead, to rise again. We had lost the possession of the good; it was necessary for it to be given back to us. Closed in the darkness, it was necessary to bring us the light; captives, we awaited a Savior; prisoners, help; slaves, a liberator. Are these things minor or insignificant? Did they not move God to descend to human nature and visit it, since humanity was in so miserable and unhappy a state?<sup>71</sup> 385

458 The Word became flesh *so that thus we might know God's love*: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.”<sup>72</sup> “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>73</sup> 219

459 The Word became flesh *to be our model of holiness*: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.” “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.”<sup>74</sup> On the mountain of the Transfiguration, the Father commands: “Listen to him!”<sup>75</sup> Jesus is the model for the Beatitudes and the norm of the new law: “Love one another as I have loved you.”<sup>76</sup> This love implies an effective offering of oneself, after his example.<sup>77</sup> 520 823, 2012 1717, 1965

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70 1 Jn 4:10; 4:14; 3:5.

71 St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Orat. catech.* 15: PG 45, 48B.

72 1 Jn 4:9.

73 Jn 3:16.

74 Mt 11:29; Jn 14:6.

75 Mk 9:7; cf. Deut 6:4-5.

460 The Word became flesh to make us "*partakers of the divine nature*":<sup>78</sup> "For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of  
 1265, 1391 God became the Son of man: so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might  
 1988 become a son of God."<sup>79</sup> "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God."<sup>80</sup> "The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods."<sup>81</sup>

## II. THE INCARNATION

461 Taking up St. John's expression, "The Word became flesh,"<sup>82</sup>  
 653, 661 the Church calls "Incarnation" the fact that the Son of God assumed  
 449 a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it. In a hymn cited by St. Paul, the Church sings the mystery of the Incarnation:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.<sup>83</sup>

462 The *Letter to the Hebrews* refers to the same mystery:

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'Lo, I have come to do your will, O God.'"<sup>84</sup>

463 Belief in the true Incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith: "By this you know the Spirit of God: every  
 90 spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God."<sup>85</sup> Such is the joyous conviction of the Church from her beginning whenever she sings "the mystery of our religion": "He was manifested in the flesh."<sup>86</sup>

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76 *Jn* 15:12.

77 Cf. *Mk* 8:34.

78 *2 Pet* 1:4.

79 St. Irenaeus, *Adv. haeres.* 3, 19, 1: PG 7/1, 939.

80 St. Athanasius, *De inc.*, 54, 3: PG 25, 192B.

81 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opusc.* 57: 1-4.

82 *Jn* 1:14.

83 *Phil* 2:5-8; cf. *LH*, Saturday, Canticle at Evening Prayer.

84 *Heb* 10:5-7, citing *Ps* 40:6-8 ([7-9] LXX).

85 *1 Jn* 4:2.

86 *1 Tim* 3:16.

### III. TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN

464 The unique and altogether singular event of the Incarnation of the Son of God does not mean that Jesus Christ is part God and part man, nor does it imply that he is the result of a confused mixture of the divine and the human. He became truly man while remaining truly God. Jesus Christ is true God and true man. During the first centuries, the Church had to defend and clarify this truth 88 of faith against the heresies that falsified it.

465 The first heresies denied not so much Christ's divinity as his true humanity (Gnostic Docetism). From apostolic times the Christian faith has insisted on the true incarnation of God's Son "come in the flesh."<sup>87</sup> But already in the third century, the Church in a council at Antioch had to affirm against Paul of Samosata that Jesus Christ is Son of God by nature and not by adoption. The first ecumenical council of Nicaea in 325 confessed in its Creed that the Son of God is "begotten, not made, of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the Father," and condemned Arius, who had affirmed 242 that the Son of God "came to be from things that were not" and that he was "from another substance" than that of the Father.<sup>88</sup>

466 The Nestorian heresy regarded Christ as a human person joined to the divine person of God's Son. Opposing this heresy, St. Cyril of Alexandria and the third ecumenical council at Ephesus in 431 confessed "that the Word, uniting to himself in his person the flesh animated by a rational soul, became man."<sup>89</sup> Christ's humanity has no other subject than the divine person of the Son of God, who assumed it and made it his own, from his conception. For this reason the Council of Ephesus proclaimed in 431 that Mary truly became the Mother of God by the human conception of the Son of God in her 495 womb: "Mother of God, not that the nature of the Word or his divinity received the beginning of its existence from the holy Virgin, but that, since the holy body, animated by a rational soul, which the Word of God united to himself according to the hypostasis, was born from her, the Word is said to be born according to the flesh."<sup>90</sup>

467 The Monophysites affirmed that the human nature had ceased to exist as such in Christ when the divine person of God's Son assumed it. Faced with this heresy, the fourth ecumenical council, at Chalcedon in 451, confessed:

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87 Cf. 1 Jn 4:2-3; 2 Jn 7.

88 Council of Nicaea I (325): DS 130, 126.

89 Council of Ephesus (431): DS 250.

90 Council of Ephesus: DS 251.

Following the holy Fathers, we unanimously teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, composed of rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father as to his divinity and consubstantial with us as to his humanity; "like us in all things but sin." He was begotten from the Father before all ages as to his divinity and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, was born as to his humanity of the virgin Mary, the Mother of God.<sup>91</sup>

We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord, and only-begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation. The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (*prosopon*) and one hypostasis.<sup>92</sup>

468 After the Council of Chalcedon, some made of Christ's human nature a kind of personal subject. Against them, the fifth ecumenical council at Constantinople in 553 confessed that "there is but one *hypostasis* [or person], which is our Lord Jesus Christ, one of the Trinity."<sup>93</sup> Thus everything in Christ's human nature is to be  
254 attributed to his divine person as its proper subject, not only his miracles but also his sufferings and even his death: "He who was  
616 crucified in the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, is true God, Lord of glory, and *one of the Holy Trinity*."<sup>94</sup>

469 The Church thus confesses that Jesus is inseparably true  
212 God and true man. He is truly the Son of God who, without ceasing to be God and Lord, became a man and our brother:

"What he was, he remained and what he was not, he assumed," sings the Roman Liturgy.<sup>95</sup> And the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom proclaims and sings: "O only-begotten Son and Word of God, immortal being, you who deigned for our salvation to become incarnate of the holy Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary, you who without change became man and were crucified, O Christ our God, you who by your death have crushed death, you who are one of the Holy Trinity, glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit, save us!"<sup>96</sup>

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91 Council of Chalcedon (451): DS 301; cf. *Heb* 4:15.

92 Council of Chalcedon: DS 302.

93 Council of Constantinople II (553): DS 424.

94 Council of Constantinople II (553): DS 432; cf. DS 424; Council of Ephesus, DS 255.

95 *LH*, January 1, Antiphon for Morning Prayer; cf. St. Leo the Great, *Sermo in nat. Dom.* 1, 2; PL 54, 191-192.

96 Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, Troparion "*O monogenes*."

#### IV. HOW IS THE SON OF GOD MAN?

470 Because "human nature was assumed, not absorbed,"<sup>97</sup> in the mysterious union of the Incarnation, the Church was led over the course of centuries to confess the full reality of Christ's human soul, with its operations of intellect and will, and of his human body. In parallel fashion, she had to recall on each occasion that Christ's human nature belongs, as his own, to the divine person of the Son of God, who assumed it. Everything that Christ is and does in this nature derives from "one of the Trinity." The Son of God 516 therefore communicates to his humanity his own personal mode of existence in the Trinity. In his soul as in his body, Christ thus 626 expresses humanly the divine ways of the Trinity:<sup>98</sup>

The Son of God . . . worked with human hands; he thought 2599 with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin.<sup>99</sup>

#### Christ's soul and his human knowledge

471 Apollinarius of Laodicea asserted that in Christ the divine Word had replaced the soul or spirit. Against this error the Church confessed that the eternal Son also assumed a rational, human soul.<sup>100</sup> 363

472 This human soul that the Son of God assumed is endowed with a true human knowledge. As such, this knowledge could not in itself be unlimited: it was exercised in the historical conditions of his existence in space and time. This is why the Son of God could, when he became man, "increase in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man,"<sup>101</sup> and would even have to inquire for himself about what one in the human condition can learn only from experience.<sup>102</sup> This corresponded to the reality of his voluntary emptying of himself, taking "the form of a slave."<sup>103</sup>

473 But at the same time, this truly human knowledge of God's Son expressed the divine life of his person.<sup>104</sup> "The human nature

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97 GS 22 § 2.

98 Cf. *Jn* 14:9-10.

99 GS 22 § 2.

100 Cf. Damasus I: DS 149.

101 *Lk* 2:52.

102 Cf. *Mk* 6:38; 8:27; *Jn* 11:34; etc.

103 *Phil* 2:7.

104 Cf. St. Gregory the Great, "*Sicut aqua*" *ad Eulogium*, *Epist. Lib.* 10, 39: PL 77, 1097A ff.; DS 475.

of God's Son, *not by itself but by its union with the Word*, knew and showed forth in itself everything that pertains to God."<sup>105</sup> Such is  
 240 first of all the case with the intimate and immediate knowledge that the Son of God made man has of his Father.<sup>106</sup> The Son in his human knowledge also showed the divine penetration he had into the secret thoughts of human hearts.<sup>107</sup>

474 By its union to the divine wisdom in the person of the Word incarnate, Christ enjoyed in his human knowledge the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans he had come to reveal.<sup>108</sup> What he admitted to not knowing in this area, he elsewhere declared himself not sent to reveal.<sup>109</sup>

### Christ's human will

475 Similarly, at the sixth ecumenical council, Constantinople III in 681, the Church confessed that Christ possesses two wills and two natural operations, divine and human. They are not opposed  
 2008 to each other, but cooperate in such a way that the Word made flesh  
 2824 willed humanly in obedience to his Father all that he had decided divinely with the Father and the Holy Spirit for our salvation.<sup>110</sup> Christ's human will "does not resist or oppose but rather submits to his divine and almighty will."<sup>111</sup>

### Christ's true body

476 Since the Word became flesh in assuming a true humanity,  
 1159-1162 Christ's body was finite.<sup>112</sup> Therefore the human face of Jesus can be  
 2129-2132 portrayed; at the seventh ecumenical council (Nicaea II in 787) the Church recognized its representation in holy images to be legitimate.<sup>113</sup>

477 At the same time the Church has always acknowledged that in the body of Jesus "we see our God made visible and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see."<sup>114</sup> The individual characteristics of Christ's body express the divine person of God's

105 St. Maximus the Confessor, *Qu. et dub.* 66: PG 90, 840A.

106 Cf. *Mk* 14:36; *Mt* 11:27; *Jn* 1:18; 8:55; etc.

107 Cf. *Mk* 2:8; *Jn* 2:25; 6:61; etc.

108 Cf. *Mk* 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34; 14:18-20, 26-30.

109 Cf. *Mk* 13:32; *Acts* 1:7.

110 Cf. Council of Constantinople III (681): DS 556-559.

111 Council of Constantinople III: DS 556.

112 Cf. Council of the Lateran (649): DS 504.

113 Cf. *Gal* 3:1; cf. Council of Nicaea II (787): DS 600-603.

114 *Roman Missal*, Preface of Christmas I.

Son. He has made the features of his human body his own, to the point that they can be venerated when portrayed in a holy image, for the believer "who venerates the icon is venerating in it the person of the one depicted."<sup>115</sup>

### The heart of the Incarnate Word

478 Jesus knew and loved us each and all during his life, his  
 agony, and his Passion and gave himself up for each one of us: "The  
 Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me."<sup>116</sup> He has loved 487  
 us all with a human heart. For this reason, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, 368  
 pierced by our sins and for our salvation,<sup>117</sup> "is quite rightly 2669  
 considered the chief sign and symbol of that . . . love with which 766  
 the divine Redeemer continually loves the eternal Father and all  
 human beings" without exception.<sup>118</sup>

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### IN BRIEF

- 479 At the time appointed by God, the only Son of the Father,  
 the eternal Word, that is, the Word and substantial Image  
 of the Father, became incarnate; without losing his divine  
 nature he has assumed human nature.
- 480 Jesus Christ is true God and true man, in the unity of  
 his divine person; for this reason he is the one and only  
 mediator between God and men.
- 481 Jesus Christ possesses two natures, one divine and the  
 other human, not confused, but united in the one  
 person of God's Son.
- 482 Christ, being true God and true man, has a human  
 intellect and will, perfectly attuned and subject to his  
 divine intellect and divine will, which he has in com-  
 mon with the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- 483 The Incarnation is therefore the mystery of the won-  
 derful union of the divine and human natures in the  
 one person of the Word.
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115 Council of Nicaea II: DS 601.

116 *Gal* 2:20.

117 Cf. *Jn* 19:34.

118 Pius XII, encyclical, *Haurietis aquas* (1956): DS 3924; cf. DS 3812.

Paragraph 2. "Conceived by the Power of the Holy Spirit  
and Born of the Virgin Mary"

I. CONCEIVED BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT . . .

484 The Annunciation to Mary inaugurates "the fullness of  
time,"<sup>119</sup> the time of the fulfillment of God's promises and prepa-  
rations. Mary was invited to conceive him in whom the "whole  
461 fullness of deity" would dwell "bodily."<sup>120</sup> The divine response to  
her question, "How can this be, since I know not man?" was given  
721 by the power of the Spirit: "The Holy Spirit will come upon  
you."<sup>121</sup>

485 The mission of the Holy Spirit is always conjoined and  
ordered to that of the Son.<sup>122</sup> The Holy Spirit, "the Lord, the giver  
689, 723 of Life," is sent to sanctify the womb of the Virgin Mary and  
divinely fecundate it, causing her to conceive the eternal Son of the  
Father in a humanity drawn from her own.

486 The Father's only Son, conceived as man in the womb of  
the Virgin Mary, is "Christ," that is to say, anointed by the Holy  
437 Spirit, from the beginning of his human existence, though the  
manifestation of this fact takes place only progressively: to the  
shepherds, to the magi, to John the Baptist, to the disciples.<sup>123</sup> Thus  
the whole life of Jesus Christ will make manifest "how God  
anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with  
power."<sup>124</sup>

II. . . . BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

963 487 What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on  
what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary  
illuminates in turn its faith in Christ.

Mary's predestination

488 "God sent forth his Son," but to prepare a body for him,<sup>125</sup>  
he wanted the free cooperation of a creature. For this, from all

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119 *Gal* 4:4.

120 *Col* 2:9.

121 *Lk* 1:34-35 (Gk.).

122 Cf. *Jn* 16:14-15.

123 Cf. *Mt* 1:20; 2:1-12; *Lk* 1:35; 2:8-20; *Jn* 1:31-34; 2:11.

124 *Acts* 10:38.



eternity God chose for the mother of his Son a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee, "a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary":<sup>126</sup>

The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life.<sup>127</sup>

489 Throughout the Old Covenant the mission of many holy women *prepared* for that of Mary. At the very beginning there was Eve; despite her disobedience, she receives the promise of a posterity that will be victorious over the evil one, as well as the promise that she will be the mother of all the living.<sup>128</sup> By virtue of this promise, Sarah conceives a son in spite of her old age.<sup>129</sup> Against all human expectation God chooses those who were considered powerless and weak to show forth his faithfulness to his promises: Hannah, the mother of Samuel; Deborah; Ruth; Judith and Esther; and many other women.<sup>130</sup> Mary "stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from him. After a long period of waiting the times are fulfilled in her, the exalted Daughter of Sion, and the new plan of salvation is established."<sup>131</sup>

### The Immaculate Conception

490 To become the mother of the Savior, Mary "was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role."<sup>132</sup> The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as "full of grace."<sup>133</sup> In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace.

491 Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, "full of grace" through God,<sup>134</sup> was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the

125 Gal 4:4; Heb 10:5.

126 Lk 1:26-27.

127 LG 56; cf. LG 61.

128 Cf. Gen 3:15, 20.

129 Cf. Gen 18:10-14; 21:1-2.

130 Cf. 1 Cor 1:17; 1 Sam 1.

131 LG 55.

132 LG 56.

133 Lk 1:28.

134 Lk 1:28.

Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:

The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.<sup>135</sup>

492 The “splendor of an entirely unique holiness” by which  
 Mary is “enriched from the first instant of her conception” comes  
 wholly from Christ: she is “redeemed, in a more exalted fashion,  
 2011 by reason of the merits of her Son.”<sup>136</sup> The Father blessed Mary  
 1077 more than any other created person “in Christ with every spiritual  
 blessing in the heavenly places” and chose her “in Christ before the  
 foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in  
 love.”<sup>137</sup>

493 The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God  
 “the All-Holy” (*Panagia*) and celebrate her as “free from any stain  
 of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new  
 creature.”<sup>138</sup> By the grace of God Mary remained free of every  
 personal sin her whole life long.

“Let it be done to me according to your word . . .”

494 At the announcement that she would give birth to “the Son  
 of the Most High” without knowing man, by the power of the Holy  
 2617 Spirit, Mary responded with the obedience of faith, certain that  
 148 “with God nothing will be impossible”: “Behold, I am the hand-  
 maid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word.”<sup>139</sup>  
 Thus, giving her consent to God’s word, Mary becomes the mother  
 of Jesus. Espousing the divine will for salvation wholeheartedly,  
 without a single sin to restrain her, she gave herself entirely to the  
 968 person and to the work of her Son; she did so in order to serve the  
 mystery of redemption with him and dependent on him, by God’s  
 grace.<sup>140</sup>

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135 Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*, 1854: DS 2803.

136 LG 53, 56.

137 Cf. *Eph* 1:3-4.

138 LG 56.

139 *Lk* 1:28-38; cf. *Rom* 1:5.

140 Cf. LG 56.