

THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF EPHESUS (431)

(701) The basic Mariological dogma of the true divine motherhood of Mary is in fact a Christological dogma asserted in the general Council of Ephesus (431) against Nestorius. It is contained in the second letter of Cyril of Alexandria to Nestorius which was solemnly approved by the Council Fathers as representing the Catholic faith; it is also explicitly affirmed in the first of the twelve anathematisms of St Cyril against Nestorius. See the texts under nn. 605, 606/1.

JOHN II

LETTER TO THE SENATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE (534)

(702) The Christological dogma was formulated more precisely in the Council of Chalcedon (451) than it had been at Ephesus; along with it the doctrine of the divine motherhood of Mary was also repeated. Later still, the import of the title 'Mother of God' (theotokos) was officially declared by John II in a letter to the Senate of Constantinople. Among other points under discussion, the Pope explains that this title must be strictly understood against both the Nestorian and the Monophysite interpretations. See text under n. 617.

THE COUNCIL OF LATERAN (649)

Martin I gathered a Council in the Lateran against the heresy of Monothelitism (cf. n. 627i). In the context of the Christological doctrine this Council also teaches in peremptory terms the perpetual virginity of Mary.

(Mary, Mother of God and Virgin)

703 3. If anyone does not, according to the holy Fathers, confess
503 truly and properly that holy Mary, ever virgin and immaculate,
is Mother of God, since in this latter age she conceived in true
reality without human seed from the Holy Spirit, God the Word
Himself, who before the ages was born of God the Father, and gave
birth to Him without corruption, her virginity remaining equally
inviolable after the birth, let him be condemned.

SIXTUS IV

CONSTITUTION CUM PRAEEXCELSA (1477)

Once Mary's divine motherhood and the unique place which it confers upon her in God's plan of salvation had been clearly stated and understood, the reflection of the Church turned to the implications of her role for Mary herself. If she was to be at the service of God in the act by which God brought about the salvation of mankind and the conquest of sin, she could not be herself subject to sin. Thus the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate

Conception, i.e., her freedom from sin from the very beginning of her existence, became more and more firmly established.

In fact, already the Council of Basel had decreed in its thirty-sixth session (1439): "The doctrine which asserts that the glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God, through the working of a singular prevenient grace of the divine power was never subject to original sin and was always immune from original and actual sin, holy and immaculate, is a pious doctrine which accords with the liturgy of the Church, with the Catholic faith, with sound reasoning and Holy Scripture; we define that it is to be approved by all Catholics and that from now on no one should be allowed to preach or teach the contrary."¹

This session of the Council of Basel, however, took place at a time when the Council was no longer in communion with the Pope and, therefore, its decrees were not held as binding. The controversy to which the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception had already previously been subjected went on. The Dominican school opposed it because it seemed to contradict the dogma of the universality of original sin; the Franciscans on the contrary defended it.

Pope Sixtus IV, himself a Franciscan, approved the feast of the Immaculate Conception in this Constitution; later, in Grave nimis (1483) he forbade anyone to censure those who celebrated the feast and held the Immaculate Conception as doctrine of faith (cf. DS 1425-1426).

(On the Immaculate Conception)

704 ...In His divine providence the almighty God looked from
1400 eternity on this humble virgin. Having prepared her by the

Holy Spirit, He made her the dwelling place of His only-begotten in order to reconcile to its author the human nature that had been subject to eternal death through the fall of the first man. From her He was to receive the flesh of our mortality for the redemption of His people, while she would remain an immaculate virgin also after His birth. All the faithful of Christ should give thanks and praise to almighty God for the wonderful conception of the immaculate virgin and should celebrate the Mass and the other divine offices instituted to this end in the Church of God and assist at them. With indulgences for the forgiveness of sins we invite them to do so in order that through the merits and the intercession of the same virgin they may become more capable of receiving divine grace.

THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF TRENT

The Council of Trent was concerned with re-asserting the Catholic faith

1. Cf. MANSI, 29, 183 BC.