

Summa De Ecclesia (*Summa of the Church*)

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Liber Quartus, Pars II, Capitulum IX On the Multiple Kinds or Degrees of Catholic Truths

The First Kind of Catholic Truths.

HAVING provided a definition of Catholic truth, since it is known that among Catholic truths there are many truths to which one must adhere with firm belief, we have deemed it opportune to distinguish their degrees or kinds, and it seems to us that seven kinds of Catholic truths can be distinguished. The first consists of those that are contained in the canon of Sacred Scripture of the Old or New Testament, and in the proper form of words. And this kind of Catholic truths can also be distinguished according to the three kinds of credible things set forth above, among which, as we have previously stated, the more principal kind to be enumerated is that of credible things which are believed before they are understood, of which kind are those pertaining to the articles of faith, upon which our salvation principally depends. That truths of this kind, formally contained in Sacred Scripture, are to be considered Catholic is manifest, since the truth of Sacred Scripture is in no way to be doubted. Hence blessed Augustine in his book "On the One Baptism," as recited in chapter "Who does not know," distinction 9, says: "Who does not know that the Holy Canonical Scripture, both of the Old and New Testament, is contained within certain limits, and that it is so set above all subsequent letters of bishops that one cannot at all doubt or dispute whether what is written in it is true or whether what it has established is right, etc."

The second category of Catholic truths consists of those which can be inferred by necessary and formal consequence from the contents of Sacred Scripture alone. Since such truths possess the same firmness of truth and necessity of belief as the truths from which they are derived by necessary and formal consequence, it is manifest that they are counted among Catholic truths. Such is the truth that Christ is true God and true man, which, although not found formally expressed in these exact terms throughout the whole

series of Sacred Scripture, is nevertheless held as Catholic and necessary to believe for salvation, because it is inferred by formal and necessary consequence from what is contained in Sacred Scripture.

The third category of Catholic truths consists of those contained in the canon of sacred scripture, which nevertheless came to the faithful through revelation and approval, with the apostles serving as intermediaries. Indeed, while Christ was living in mortal flesh with the apostles, He taught and did many things that are not contained in the canon of holy scripture, according to the passage in the last chapter of John: "Jesus did many other things which are not written in this book." Christ taught the apostles many other Catholic truths to be taught by them which are not contained in the canon of scripture. Thus Augustine, in the third book on the baptism of infants, says: "Those things which are not written down but which the universal Church observes were received from the apostles as Christ taught them." So the Apostle, concerning the communion of the Lord's body and blood in 1 Corinthians 11, says: "What I received from the Lord, this I handed on to you; the rest I will arrange when I come," that is, "I will order." Likewise, to the same effect is Augustine himself who, as is found in the chapter "Ecclesiasticarum," distinction 11, speaks to the point thus: "Of ecclesiastical constitutions, some we have received through scriptures, others indeed through apostolic tradition confirmed by successors in ministry, and others strengthened by custom which usage has approved; to all of these equal reverence and the same devotion of piety is owed." Thus he speaks.

Furthermore, since according to Christ's provision, the Holy Spirit was to come upon the disciples to teach them all truth, we must certainly believe that they learned many things from the Holy Spirit which they later taught to the faithful, yet which were not placed in the canon of the Bible. Hence Alexander III, in the chapter "Cum Marte," in the section on the celebration of Mass, speaking about the form of consecration of the Eucharist, says thus: "Indeed, we find many things both from the words and from the deeds of the Lord omitted by the evangelists which the apostles are also read to have supplemented by word or explained by deed. For Paul in the Acts of the Apostles says thus: 'We ought to remember the word of our Lord Jesus Christ who said: It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Yet none of the four evangelists described this; whence the gloss on Acts 3 and the gloss of St. Jerome says: "This is not read in the gospel, for not all things have been written, but perhaps Paul heard this from the apostles or received it from the Holy Spirit." And Nicholas of Lyra follows this in his exposition. Therefore, such truths, and those which can be inferred by necessary consequence immutably from them, are to be counted among Catholic truths.

The fourth category of Catholic truths consists of those which have been defined by the universal Church in plenary councils as pertaining to the faith of the Christian religion, although they may not be found expressly in the canon of Sacred Scripture. And the reason for this is manifest: since, as we have most amply and irrefutably demonstrated above in Book 3, Chapter 58, plenary councils of the universal Church cannot err in matters of faith. Hence, blessed Gregory, in Canon "Sicut," Distinction 15, says that just as I profess to receive and venerate the four books of the holy Gospel, so also the four councils. And the

reason is: because, as blessed Gregory says in the treatise entitled “On Catholic Truth,” just as God is truth, so those things which the Apostolic Church has taught about God are true. Whence it is rightly said in Proverbs, chapter one: “Do not forsake the law of your mother” – the gloss adds: “the Church.” Note, however, that it is specifically said: “What the Apostolic Church has taught”; though by judicial definition it is to be believed. This is said because of many things which are permitted to be read by the faithful in the Church, and are tolerated, not all of which are necessary to believe for salvation, nor are they to be counted among Catholic truths, although many of these are piously believed by the faithful. Such are many contents in the legends or histories of the saints and the lives of the fathers, which, since they are not manifestly known to be false, but rather have some appearance of probability, can be believed insofar as they profit towards moving the pious acts of the faithful to devotion; they are safely read and piously believed, provided that one does not adhere to them with pertinacious assertion.

The fifth category of Catholic truths consists of those that have been definitively determined by the judgment of the Apostolic See in matters of faith, which, although they may not be found contained in the canon of Sacred Scripture, are nevertheless to be counted among Catholic truths. For as we have clearly demonstrated in the preceding sections, both by authorities and by reasoned arguments in Book 2, Chapter 109, the judgment of the Apostolic See in matters of faith cannot deviate from the truth. This is supported by that promise of Christ in Luke 22: “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.” This also seems to be most explicitly confirmed by blessed Augustine in the chapter “In canonicis,” Distinction 19, where he places among the canonical writings those epistles which the Apostolic See had the merit to possess and others deserved to receive from it. Likewise, Pope Agapetus in the chapter “Sic,” in the same Distinction, where he states thus: “All the sanctions of the Apostolic See are to be accepted as though confirmed by the divine voice of Peter himself.” Likewise, blessed Jerome most clearly confirms this in the chapter “Haec est fides,” 24, Question 1, where he says thus: “If this our confession is approved by the judgment of your Apostolate, whoever wishes to calumniate me will prove himself to be inexperienced and malevolent, or not Catholic but heretical.”

The sixth category of Catholic truths appears to be those that have been taught assertively by doctors approved by the universal Church concerning the holding of faith and refutation of heretics, even though they are not expressly contained in the canon of sacred scripture. This is evident because: since the universal Church, which is governed by the Holy Spirit, has approved certain doctors, receiving their doctrine as true, it is necessary that the doctrine positively set forth by such men, and never elsewhere retracted, be true and held with firm belief by all the faithful in that part which has been received by the universal Church. Otherwise, the universal Church would seem to have erred in approving and accepting their doctrine as true when it was not truly so.

Who these doctors are, approved by the universal Church in universal councils, is gathered from the Fifth Universal Council, in which, as Saint Thomas relates in the fourth book of *Contra Gentiles*, chapter 24, it is stated thus: “We follow in all things the holy fathers and

doctors of the Church: Athanasius, Hilary, Basil, Gregory the Theologian [Nazianzen], Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine, Theophilus, John of Constantinople [Chrysostom], Cyril, Leo [the Great], Porcius, and we accept all that they have expounded concerning the right faith and the condemnation of heretics.” Thus far that text. Later, Pope Gelasius, in his synod, added other approved doctors, as is evident in the canon “Sancta Romana Ecclesia,” Distinction 15.

However, concerning the approval of the works of the aforementioned doctors, it should be observed and noted that the Fifth Universal Council did not approve simply everything contained in the works of the aforementioned doctors, but only those things which they expounded concerning the right faith and the condemnation of heretics. By this it is sufficiently given to understand that when the Church has approved or approves the works of certain doctors, it is not necessary to understand that everything contained in them is approved, but only those things which they have expounded concerning the right faith and the condemnation of heretics, which they have handed down to the faithful as necessary to believe.

Consequently, from the aforementioned approval, it is not established that all truths contained in the works of the aforementioned holy doctors are to be held as Catholic truths, but only truths of the aforementioned category, which they expounded concerning the right faith and the condemnation of heretics. Indeed, many other things of a different nature are contained in them. And of probability. Hence Augustine, who is among those approved by the universal Church, says to Vincent Victor, and it is found in the chapter “Negare non possum,” Distinction 9: “I cannot deny,” he says, “nor ought I, that just as in the writings of those greater than me, so in my many works there are many things which can be blamed with just judgment and without any rashness.” Nor does that which blessed Augustine says in the chapter “Noli” and in the chapter “Ego solus,” Distinction 9, contradict the aforementioned category of Catholic truths. For as the gloss says in the chapter “Noli,” Augustine speaks according to those times when the writings of Augustine and other holy fathers were not yet authentic, but today all are commanded to be held even to the last iota, as in Distinction 15, final chapter.

The seventh category of Catholic truths consists of those which can be deduced by necessary and formal consequence from the fourth, fifth, and sixth categories of Catholic truths. We say “by necessary and formal consequence” because if something were inferred only by probable consequence, it would not properly be called a Catholic truth, but merely probable.

An eighth category can be distinguished of those truths which, although not absolutely Catholic, nevertheless savor of Catholic truth, for they are closely related to Catholic truths. Hence, a truth savoring of Catholic truth can be defined thus: A truth savoring of Catholic truth or faith by consequence is that which, when joined with some other truth not pertaining to faith, but which nevertheless cannot reasonably be denied, becomes a Catholic truth. For example, because Master Thomas of Sarzana now sits in apostolic dignity, the proposition “Thomas of Sarzana is pope” is a proposition savoring of Catholic

truth. This is evident because when joined with that truth which cannot be denied, namely that he was duly and canonically elected, as for instance by the entire college of cardinal lords or by two-thirds of them, it becomes a truth to be called Catholic. "Master Thomas of Sarzana, duly and canonically elected, and received as pope by the universal Church, is the true pope" - this proposition is Catholic by determination of the universal Church, as in the chapter "In nomine Domini." Likewise in the decretal epistle of Martin from the Council of Constance, it is placed among the things to be believed by every faithful person that the canonically elected pope who holds office at any given time, his proper name being expressed, is the successor of blessed Peter having supreme authority in the Church of God. From the foregoing it is easy to understand that not all truths are of the same nature, but of different kinds or grades. For some, as has been seen, are Catholic, some savoring of Catholic truth, some merely probable, some piously credible, and some impertinent.