

Letter 59: On the Oneness of God, Confirmed in the Eucharist & Baptism

Leo the Great, Doctor and Father of the Church

1 I. He congratulates them on their outspoken resistance to error.

2 Leo the [bishop](#) to the [clergy](#), dignitaries, and people, residing at Constantinople.

3 Though we are greatly grieved at the things reported to have been done recently
4 in the council of [priests](#) at Ephesus, because, as is consistently rumoured, and also
5 demonstrated by results, neither due moderation nor the strictness of the Faith
6 was there observed, yet we [rejoice](#) in your devoted [piety](#) and in the acclamations
7 of the [holy](#) people , instances of which have been brought to our notice, we have
8 approved of the right feeling of you all; because there lives and abides in good
9 sons due affection for their excellent Father, and because you suffer the fullness
10 of [Catholic](#) teaching to be in no part corrupted. For undoubtedly, as the [Holy](#)
11 [Spirit](#) has unfolded to you, they are leagued with the [Manichæans'](#) [error](#), who
12 deny that the only-begotten [Son of God](#) took our nature's [true](#) Manhood, and
13 maintain that all His bodily actions were the actions of a false apparition. And lest
14 you should in anything give your assent to this [blasphemy](#), we have now sent you,
15 beloved, by my son Epiphanius and Dionysius, notary of the Roman Church,
16 letters of exhortation wherein we have of our own accord rendered you the
17 assistance which you sought, that you may not [doubt](#) of our bestowing all a
18 father's care on you, and labouring in every way, by the help of God's mercy, to

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19 destroy all the stumbling-blocks which [ignorant](#) and foolish men have raised. And
20 let no one venture to parade his [priestly](#) dignity who can be convicted of holding
21 such detestably [blasphemous](#) opinions. For if [ignorance](#) seems hardly tolerable
22 in [laymen](#), how much less excusable or pardonable is it in those who govern;
23 especially when they dare even to defend their mendacious and perverse views,
24 and persuade the unsteadfast to agree with them either by intimidation or by
25 cajoling.

26 **II. They are to be rejected who deny the truth of Christ's flesh, a truth**
27 **repeated by every recipient at the Holy Eucharist.**

28 Let such men be rejected by the [holy](#) members of [Christ's](#) Body, and let
29 not [Catholic](#) liberty suffer the yoke of the unfaithful to be laid upon it. For they
30 are to be reckoned outside the [Divine grace](#), and outside
31 the [mystery](#) of [man's salvation](#), who, denying the [nature](#) of our flesh in [Christ](#),
32 gainsay the [Gospel](#) and oppose the Creed. Nor do they perceive that their
33 blindness leads them into such an abyss that they have no sure footing in the
34 reality either of the Lord's Passion or His Resurrection: because both are
35 discredited in the [Saviour](#), if our fleshly nature is not [believed](#) in Him. In what
36 density of [ignorance](#), in what utter sloth must they hitherto have lain, not to have

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37 learned from hearing, nor understood from reading, that which in God's Church is
38 so constantly in men's mouths, that even the tongues of infants do not keep
39 silence upon the [truth](#) of [Christ's](#) Body and Blood at the rite of Holy Communion ?
40 For in that mystic distribution of spiritual nourishment, that which is given and
41 taken is of such a kind that receiving the [virtue](#) of the celestial food we pass into
42 the flesh of Him, Who became our flesh. Hence to confirm you, beloved, in your
43 laudably faithful resistance to the foes of Truth, I shall fully and opportunely use
44 the language and sentiments of the Apostle, and say: "Therefore I also hearing of
45 your [faith](#), which is in the [Lord Jesus](#), and [love](#) towards all [saints](#), do not cease to
46 give thanks for you, making mention of you in my [prayers](#) that the [God](#) of [our](#)
47 [Lord Jesus Christ](#), the Father of [glory](#), may give you the spirit of wisdom and
48 revelation in the [knowledge](#) of Him, the eyes of your hearts¹ being enlightened
49 that you may [know](#) what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of
50 the [glory](#) of His inheritance among the [saints](#), and what is the exceeding greatness
51 of His power in us, who [believed](#) according to the working of His mighty power
52 which he has wrought in [Christ](#), raising Him from the dead, and setting Him at His

¹ In biblical context, the heart is the center of the person, where thinking, willing and feeling originate. Deuteronomy 30:6 " And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all your hearts and with all your soul, that you may live." The sacrament of Enlightenment was the name given by early theologians to Baptism. Per CCC 1216, "The bath is called enlightenment..."(St. Justin Martyr)

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53 right hand in heavenly places above every principality, and power, and strength,
54 and dominion, and every name which is named not only in this age, but also in
55 that which is to come: and has put all things under His feet, and given Him to be
56 the head over all the [Church](#) which is His body, and the fullness of Him Who fills
57 all in all” [Ephesians 1:15-23](#) .

58 III. Perfect God and perfect Man were united in Christ.

59 In this passage let the adversaries of the Truth say when or according to what
60 nature did the Almighty Father exalt His Son above all things, or to what
61 substance did He subject all things. For the Godhead of the Word is equal in all
62 things, and consubstantial with the [Father](#), and the power of the Begetter and the
63 Begotten is one and the same always and [eternally](#). Certainly, the Creator of all
64 natures, since “through Him all things were made, and without Him was nothing
65 made” [John 1:3](#), is above all things which He created, nor were the things which
66 He made ever not subject to their Creator, Whose [eternal](#) property it is, to be
67 from none other than the [Father](#), and in no way different to the Father. If greater
68 power, grander dignity, more exalted loftiness was granted Him, then was He that
69 was so increased less than He that promoted Him, and possessed not the full
70 riches of His nature from Whose fullness He received. But one who thinks thus is

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71 hurried off into the society of [Arius](#), whose [heresy](#) is much assisted by
72 this [blasphemy](#) which denies the [existence](#) of [human nature](#) in the [Word of God](#),
73 so that, in rejecting the combination of humility with majesty in [God](#), it either
74 asserts a false phantom-body in [Christ](#), or says that all His bodily actions
75 and [passions](#) belonged to the Godhead rather than to the flesh. But everything he
76 ventures to uphold is absolutely foolish: because neither our religious belief nor
77 the scope of the [mystery](#) admits either of the Godhead suffering anything or of
78 the Truth belying Itself in anything. The impassible² [Son of God](#), therefore, whose
79 perpetually it is with the Father and with the [Holy Spirit](#) to be what He is in the
80 one [essence](#) of the Unchangeable Trinity, when the fullness of time had come
81 which had been fore-ordained by an [eternal](#) purpose, and promised by the
82 prophetic significance of words and [deeds](#), became man not by conversion of His
83 substance but by assumption of our nature, and “came to seek and to save that
84 which was lost” [Luke 19:10](#) . But He came not by local approach nor by bodily
85 motion, as if to be present where He had been absent, or to depart where He had
86 come: but He came to be manifested to onlookers by that which was visible and
87 common to others, receiving, that is to say, [human](#) flesh and [soul](#) in the Virgin
88 mother's womb, so that, abiding in the form of [God](#), He united to Himself the

² incapable of suffering pain. incapable of suffering harm.

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89 form of a slave, and the likeness of [sinful](#) flesh, whereby He did not lessen the

90 Divine by the [human](#), but increased the [human](#) by the Divine.

91 **IV. The Sacrament of Baptism typifies and realizes this union to each** 92 **individual believer.**

93 For such was the state of all mortals resulting from our first ancestors that, after

94 the transmission of original [sin](#) to their descendants, no one would have escaped

95 the punishment of condemnation, had not the Word become flesh and dwelt in

96 us, that is to say, in that nature which belonged to our blood and race. And

97 accordingly, the Apostle says: "As by one man's [sin](#) (judgment passed) upon all to

98 condemnation, so also by one man's righteousness (it) passed upon all to

99 justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so

100 also by one man's [obedience](#) shall many be made righteous" [Romans 5:18-19](#); and

101 again, "For because by man (came) death, by man also (came) the resurrection of

102 the dead. And as in [Adam](#) all die, so also in Christ shall all be made

103 alive" [1 Corinthians 15:21-22](#) . All they to wit who though they be born in Adam,

104 yet are found reborn in [Christ](#), having a sure testimony both to their justification

105 by [grace](#), and to Christ's sharing in their nature ; for he who does not [believe](#) that

106 God's only-begotten Son did assume our nature in the womb of the Virgin-

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107 daughter of David, is without share in the Mystery of the [Christian religion](#), and,
108 as he neither recognizes the Bridegroom nor [knows](#) the Bride³, can have no place
109 at the wedding-banquet. For the flesh of Christ is the veil of the Word, wherewith
110 every one is clothed who confesses Him unreservedly. But he that is ashamed of it
111 and rejects it as unworthy, shall have no adornment from Him, and though he
112 present himself at the Royal feast, and unseasonably join in the sacred banquet,
113 yet the intruder will not be able to escape the King's discernment, but, as the Lord
114 Himself asserted, will be taken, and with hands and feet bound, be cast “into
115 outer darkness; where will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” [Matthew 22:13].
116 Hence whosoever confesses not the [human](#) body in [Christ](#), must [know](#) that he is
117 unworthy of the [mystery](#) of the Incarnation, and has no share in that sacred union
118 of which the Apostle speaks, saying, “For we are His members, of His flesh and of
119 His bones. For this [cause](#) a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to
120 his wife, and there shall be two in one flesh” [Ephesians 5:30-31]. And explaining
121 what was meant by this, he added, “This [mystery](#) is great, but I speak in respect of
122 Christ and the [Church](#)” [Ephesians 5:32]. Therefore, from the very
123 commencement of the [human race](#), Christ is announced to all [men](#) as coming in

³ Failure to recognize Christ (the Bridegroom) or his Church (the Bride of Christ) is the state of those without faith conferred by Baptism where they are “illuminated” (see earlier footnote discussion).

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124 the flesh. In which, as was said, there shall be two in one flesh, there are
125 undoubtedly two, [God](#) and [man](#), Christ and the [Church](#), which issued from the
126 Bridegroom's flesh, when it received the [mystery](#) of redemption and
127 regeneration, water and blood flowing from the side of the Crucified. For the very
128 condition of a new creature which at [baptism](#) puts off not the covering
129 of [true](#) flesh but the taint of the old condemnation, is this, that a man is made the
130 body of [Christ](#), because Christ also is the body of a man.

131 **V. The true doctrine of the Incarnation restated and commended to** 132 **their keeping.**

133 Wherefore we call [Christ](#) not [God](#) only, as the [Manichæan heretics](#), nor [Man](#) only,
134 as the Photinian [heretics](#), nor man in such a way that anything should be wanting
135 in Him which certainly belongs to [human nature](#), whether [soul](#) or reasonable
136 mind or flesh which was not derived from [woman](#), but made from the Word
137 turned and changed into flesh; which three false and empty propositions have
138 been variously advanced by the three sections of the [Apollinarian heretics](#). Nor do
139 we say that the blessed Virgin Mary conceived a Man without Godhead, Who was
140 created by the [Holy Ghost](#) and afterwards assumed by the Word, which we
141 deservedly and properly condemned [Nestorius](#) for preaching: but we call Christ

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142 the [Son of God](#), [true God](#), born of [God](#) the Father without any beginning in time,
143 and likewise [true](#) Man, born of a [human](#) Mother, at the ordained fullness of time,
144 and we say that His Manhood, whereby the Father is the greater, does not in
145 anything lessen that nature whereby He is equal with the Father. But these
146 two [natures](#) form one Christ, Who has said most [truly](#) both according to His
147 Godhead: I and the Father are one , and according to His manhood the Father is
148 greater than I. This [true](#) and indestructible Faith, dearly-beloved, which alone
149 makes us [true Christians](#), and which, as we hear with approval, you are defending
150 with loyal [zeal](#) and praiseworthy affection, hold fast and maintain boldly. And
151 since, besides God's aid, you must win the favour of [Catholic](#) Princes also, humbly
152 and wisely make request that the most clement Emperor be pleased to grant our
153 petition, wherein we have asked for a plenary synod to be convened; that by the
154 aid of God's mercy the sound may be increased in [courage](#), and the sick, if they
155 consent to be treated, have the remedy applied.

156 (Dated October 15, in the consulship of the illustrious Asturius and Protogenes,
157 449.)