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# ROMAN CATECHISM

*Catechismus ex Decreto Concilii Tridentini*

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*Composed by Order of the Council of Trent*

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## THE APOSTLES' CREED

### ARTICLE I

**"I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH"**

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#### MEANING OF THIS ARTICLE

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The meaning of the above words is this: I believe with certainty, and without a shadow of doubt profess my belief in God the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, who by His omnipotence created from nothing and preserves and governs the heavens and the earth and all things which they contain; and not only do I believe in Him from my heart and profess this belief with my lips, but with the greatest ardor and piety I tend towards Him, as the supreme and most perfect good.

Let this serve as a brief summary of this first Article. But since great mysteries lie concealed under almost every word, the pastor must now give them a more careful consideration, in order that, as far as God has permitted, the faithful may approach, with fear and trembling, to contemplate the glory of His majesty.

#### "I Believe"

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The word *believe* does not here mean to think, to suppose, to be of the opinion; but, as the Sacred Scriptures teach, it expresses the deepest conviction, by which the mind gives a firm and unhesitating assent to God revealing His mysterious truths. As far, therefore, as regards the use of the word here, he who firmly and without hesitation is convinced of anything is said to believe.

#### FAITH EXCLUDES DOUBT

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The knowledge derived through faith must not be considered less certain because its objects are not seen; for the divine light by which we know them, although it does not render them evident, yet suffers us not to doubt them. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath himself shone in our hearts, that the

gospel be not hidden to us, as to those that perish.

### **FAITH EXCLUDES CURIOSITY**

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From what has been said it follows that he who is gifted with this heavenly knowledge of faith is free from an inquisitive curiosity. For when God commands us to believe He does not propose to us to search into His divine judgments, or inquire into their reason and cause, but demands an unchangeable faith, by which the mind rests content in the knowledge of eternal truth. And indeed, since we have the testimony of the Apostle that *God is true; and every man a liar*, and since it would argue arrogance and presumption to disbelieve the word of a grave and sensible man affirming anything as true, and to demand that he prove his statements by arguments or witnesses, how rash and foolish are those, who, hearing the words of God Himself, demand reasons for His heavenly and saving doctrines? Faith, therefore, must exclude not only all doubt, but all desire for demonstration.

### **FAITH REQUIRES OPEN PROFESSION**

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The pastor should also teach that he who says, *I believe*, besides declaring the inward assent of the mind, which is an internal act of faith, should also openly profess and with alacrity acknowledge and proclaim what he inwardly and in his heart believes. For the faithful should be animated by the same spirit that spoke by the lips of the Prophet when he said: *I believe, and therefore did I speak*, and should follow the example of the Apostles who replied to the princes of the people: *We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*. They should be encouraged by these noble words of St. Paul: *I am not ashamed of the gospel. For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth*; and likewise by those other words, in which the truth of this doctrine is expressly confirmed: *With the heart we believe unto justice; but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*.

### **"In God"**

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From these words we may learn how exalted are the dignity and excellence of Christian wisdom, and what a debt of gratitude we owe to the divine goodness. For to us it is given at once to mount as by the steps of faith to the knowledge of what is most sublime and desirable.

### **KNOWLEDGE OF GOD MORE EASILY OBTAINED THROUGH FAITH THAN THROUGH REASON**

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There is a great difference between Christian philosophy and human wisdom. The latter, guided solely by the light of nature, advances slowly by reasoning on sensible objects and effects, and only after long and laborious investigation is it able at length to contemplate with difficulty the invisible things of God, to discover and understand a First Cause and Author of all things. Christian philosophy, on the contrary, so quickens the human mind that without difficulty it pierces the heavens, and, illumined with divine light, contemplates first, the eternal source of light, and in its radiance all created things; so that we experience with the utmost pleasure of mind that we have been called, as the Prince of the Apostles says, *out of darkness into his admirable light*, and believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable.

Justly, therefore, do the faithful profess first to believe in God, whose majesty, with the Prophet Jeremias, we declare incomprehensible. For, as the Apostle says, *He dwells in light inaccessible, which no man hath seen, nor can see*; as God Himself, speaking to Moses, said: *No man shall see my face and live*. The mind cannot rise to the contemplation of the Deity, whom nothing approaches in sublimity, unless it be entirely disengaged from the senses, and of this in the present life we are naturally incapable.

### **KNOWLEDGE OF GOD OBTAINED THROUGH FAITH IS CLEARER**

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But while this is so, yet God, as the Apostle says, *left not himself without testimony, doing good from heaven, giving rains and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness*. Hence it is that the philosophers conceived no mean idea of the Divinity, ascribed to Him nothing corporeal, gross or composite. They considered Him the perfection and fulness of all good, from whom, as from an eternal, inexhaustible fountain of goodness and benignity, flows every perfect gift to all creatures. They called Him the wise, the author and lover of truth, the just, the most beneficent, and gave Him also many other appellations expressive of supreme and absolute perfection. They recognized that His immense and infinite power fills every place and extends to all things.

These truths the Sacred Scriptures express far better and much more clearly, as in the following passages: *God is a spirit; Be ye perfect, even as also your heavenly Father is perfect; All things are naked and open to his eyes; O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! God is true; I am the way, the truth, and the life; Thy right hand is full of justice; Thou openest thy hand, and fillest with blessing every living creature; and finally: Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy face? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I descend into hell, thou art there. If I take my wings early in the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, etc., and Do I not fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?*

### **KNOWLEDGE OF GOD OBTAINED THROUGH FAITH IS MORE CERTAIN**

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These great and sublime truths regarding the nature of God, which are in full accord with Scripture, the philosophers were able to learn from an investigation of God's works. But even here we see the necessity of divine revelation if we reflect that not only does faith, as we have already observed, make known clearly and at once to the rude and unlettered, those truths which only the learned could discover, and that by long study; but also that the knowledge obtained through faith is much more certain and more secure against error than if it were the result of philosophical inquiry.

### **KNOWLEDGE OF GOD OBTAINED THROUGH FAITH IS MORE AMPLE AND EXALTED**

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But how much more exalted must not that knowledge of the Deity be considered, which cannot be acquired in common by all from the contemplation of nature, but is peculiar to those who are illumined by the light of faith?

This knowledge is contained in the Articles of the Creed, which disclose to us the unity of the Divine Essence and the distinction of Three Persons, and show also that God Himself is the ultimate end of our being, from whom we are to expect the enjoyment of the eternal happiness of heaven, according to the words of St. Paul: *God is a rewarder of them that seek Him*. How great are these rewards, and whether they are such

that human knowledge could aspire to their attainment, we learn from these words of Isaias uttered long before those of the Apostle: *From the beginning of the world they have not heard, nor perceived with the ears: the eye hath not seen besides thee, O God, what things thou hast prepared for them that wait for thee.*

### **THE UNITY OF NATURE IN GOD**

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From what is said it must also be confessed that there is but one God, not many gods. For we attribute to God supreme goodness and infinite perfection, and it is impossible that what is supreme and most perfect could be common to many. If a being lack anything that constitutes supreme perfection, it is therefore imperfect and cannot have the nature of God.

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