Vatican



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The Vatican office responsible for overseeing the doctrine of the global Catholic Church has written to the world's bishops to warn against religious practices that "deface the confession of faith in Christ" by stressing individualistic attitudes toward salvation.

In *Placuit Deo* ("It pleased God"), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith tells Catholic prelates to beware of what it calls "new forms" of two ancient heresies: Pelagianism, which stresses an individual's ability to earn their salvation through prayer or other works; and Gnosticism, which stresses improving oneself through knowledge or insight.

"A new form of Pelagianism is spreading in our days, one in which the individual, understood to be radically autonomous, presumes to save oneself, without recognizing that, at the deepest level of being, he or she derives from God and from others," the document, released March 1, warns.

"A new form of Gnosticism puts forward a model of salvation that is merely interior, closed off in its own subjectivism," it continues. "In this model, salvation consists of improving oneself."

"Both neo-Pelagian individualism and the neo-Gnostic disregard of the body deface the confession of faith in Christ, the one, universal Savior," the document states. "Salvation consists in our union with Christ, who, by his Incarnation, death and Resurrection has brought about a new kind of relationship with the Father and among human persons."

Placuit Deo is only the third major document released by the Vatican's doctrinal congregation since the election of Pope Francis in March 2013, and the first to be issued since Archbishop Luis Ladaria took over leadership of the office from Cardinal Gerhard Muller last year.

Francis has warned against Pelagianism and Gnosticism somewhat frequently during his papacy, often in meetings with priests and religious. He also spoke of the heresies in his 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, when he called them symptoms of "spiritual worldliness."

The doctrinal congregation's document -- approved by Francis Feb. 16 and formally signed by Ladaria Feb. 22, the feast of the Chair of St. Peter -- stresses Catholic teaching that salvation does not come about from individual efforts but through Christ, who reveals himself in the church.

"The salvation that God offers us is not achieved with our own individual efforts alone, as neo-Pelagianism would contend," the document states. "Rather, salvation is found in the relationships that are born from the incarnate Son of God and that form the communion of the Church."

"Salvation does not consist in the self-realization of the isolated individual, nor in an interior fusion of the individual with the divine," it continues. "Rather, salvation consists in being incorporated into a communion of persons that participates in the communion of the Trinity."

At a press conference March 1, Ladaria said his congregation wanted to release the new letter to "confront reductionist tendencies that threaten Christianity daily." He said the office hoped the document would help Catholics understand that salvation "cannot be reduced to a message, a practice, some knowledge or an interior feeling."

Placuit Deo takes its title from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which contains the phrase: "In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will."

The document has six brief parts over five pages. Among its 25 footnotes are six citations to documents of the Second Vatican Council, three citations to St. Thomas Aquinas, two to St. Augustine, and one each to Popes Benedict XVI and John Paul II.

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