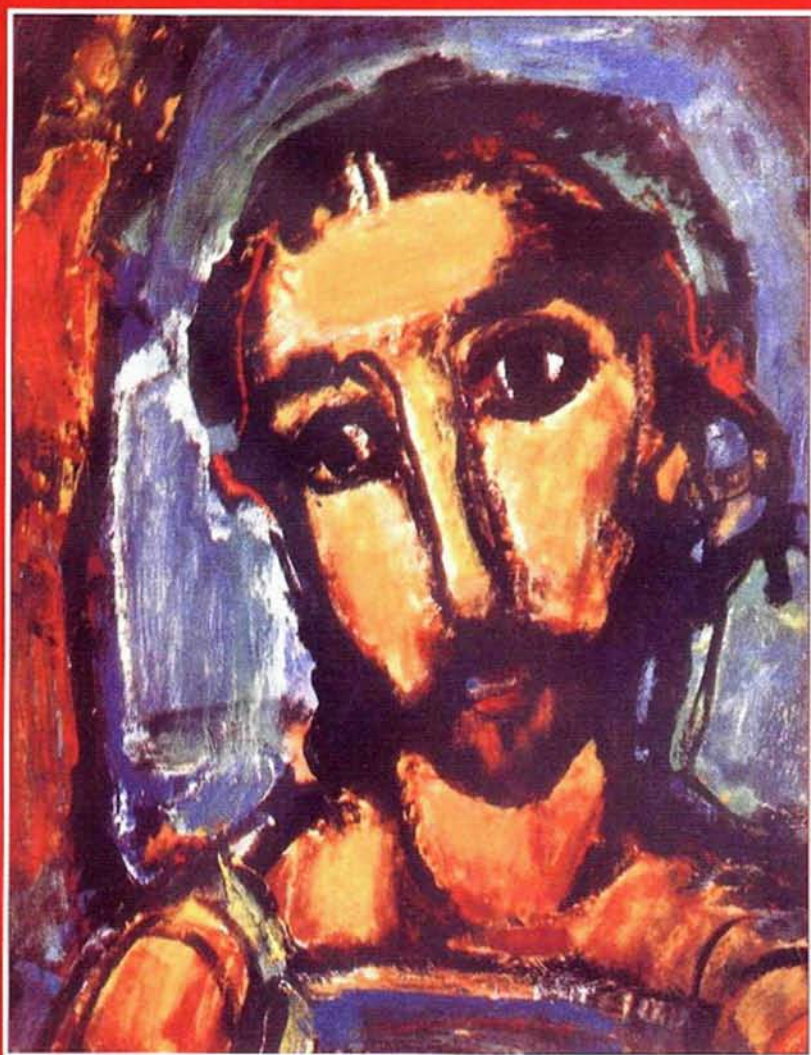


# CHRIST *JESUS*

to know him • to love him • to follow him



**Juan Manuel García de Alba S.J.**

Translated from the Spanish by William Quinn

# CHRIST *JESUS*

to know him • to love him • to follow him

*"If it is you,  
tell me to come to you."*

*Mt 14,28*

*"As they talked this over,  
Jesus himself came up and walked by their side."*

*Lk 24,15*

*"As for Mary, she treasured all these things,  
and pondered them in her heart."*

*Lk 2,19*

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**With ecclesiastical approval**

**IMPRIMATUR**

Msgr. Miguel Romano Gómez  
Auxiliary Bishop of Guadalajara  
RECTOR OF THE MAJOR SEMINARY

January 26, 2006

*To those who by word or by lived example try  
to help others to find Jesus.*

*To those who find this book useful for coming to know him better.  
And to all those who are looking for him without realizing it.*

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## PRESENTATION

This book, born of discussions in university classrooms about the person of Jesus, strives to go beyond the limits of young people's questions, and to offer solid, challenging answers that compel our thinking and our action to follow the examples and teachings of the Teacher par excellence.

Although this book was nurtured in the classroom, by exploring the questions posed by today's university students, don't expect a textbook of subtly developed questions and answers. Its aim is bolder and more ambitious than that: it seeks to present Jesus of Nazareth, as we know him in the light of our human experience, because he is a man, but at the same time illuminated by the faith of the Church. Only the illuminated side of the moon is visible to us, so we rely on science to complete the picture of our satellite for us. In the same way, faith illuminates the mystery of Jesus, unknown to our own experience. The Gospels arose from a personal encounter with Jesus within the community of the Church, in a context of faith and catechesis. Now we are invited to live an adult faith



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and to seek a more solid and well-grounded understanding, within the community of the Church and in dialogue with Jesus himself.

The author has organized the material in structured chapters that follow the process by which faith and Christian reflection gradually developed in dialogue with the culture of the times.

The aim of the present book is "the internal knowledge of Our Lord Jesus Christ", -as Saint Ignatius would put it- by means of an affective encounter with Christ Jesus with whom the reader may establish a dialogue "as a friend speaks to a friend".

This Christology fosters dialogue not just with university students, but with the problems of current Christology. One of the merits of this book, and by no means the least of them, is its clarity: it takes profound topics- pondered over many long hours of mediation, reflection and study- and makes them accessible to the general public.

The author reveals his good sense by approaching different topics in different ways, depending on the demands of each one. Some chapters discuss purely historical information, others are more reflective. Those that examine the origin of Jesus and his pre-existence, have gone through the rigors of theological and scriptural scrutiny.

The chapter on dogmas, which could have been particularly dry given the specialized philosophical and theological issues that underlie the discussion, has

been dramatized by allowing different authors to defend their points of view. This stylistic device does not compromise the book's unity, but rather makes it livelier and more compelling, while giving the reader the sensation of progress in the internal knowledge of the person of Our Lord.

What does Ignatius mean by his insistence on "internal knowledge" in the Spiritual Exercises? It's not just intellectual knowing, although it does demand clear ideas about Jesus, in the faith of the Church. It is a kind of knowing that identifies with the known person to such an extent that the knower feels, savors, relishes and imitates the feelings, the joy and the attitudes of Jesus. This kind of knowing is an indispensable requirement for committing to Jesus, and at the same time it is the fruit of loving and following the Lord.

Having presented the focus of this book, and a few brief comments on its chapters and content, I would now like to pull back the curtain and introduce the author. Fr. Juan Manuel García de Alba is known not just at ITESO University, where he has taught for years, but also to a wider audience due to the success of his first book: "The Value of Your Life", now in its seventh edition.

Luis Sánchez Villaseñor, S.J.



## PREFACE

What I hope to do in this book is to sketch the fundamental features of an interpretation of Jesus. It's my belief that the way to understand Jesus and believe in him, should correspond to the way we understand ourselves, so that faith in Jesus enriches and vitalizes our life.

This book was not written to resolve academic issues. It aims to bridge the chasm that exists between theology on the one hand, and believers' convictions and concrete needs on the other.

I would be delighted if this book helped to illuminate in some way the face of Jesus that each person imagines, and if it highlighted those features that make Christ more deserving than ever of being known, loved and followed.

The entire book, down to the last line, has been studied, meditated and written in the context of the faith of the Church and of tradition, but at the same

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time open to a contemporary vision of the human person and of Christ, in dialogue with those who have preceded us in the faith, and with those who will come after us.

I have written the book so as to make it accessible to anyone interested in the topic. The chapters have been ordered and written in such a way that the reader can recognize Jesus' own internal growth as well as his or her own, the core of Jesus' message and the transformation that it calls forth in our lives.

I have tried to avoid using too many technical terms and Latin texts, although at times it has been unavoidable. The Glossary gives definitions of a number of technical terms and historical information that the reader may find useful.

Before concluding, I wish to express my thanks to all those who have shared with me their friendship, support, collaboration and hard work, especially Luis Armando Aguilar Sahagún and Federico Portas Lagar, and my fellow Jesuits and revisors Luis González Cosío Elcoro, S.J. and Luis Sánchez Villaseñor, S.J.

Juan Manuel García de Alba Morales, S.J.

## THE INFORMATION ABOUT JESUS

There are very few things that we know with certainty about Jesus of Nazareth, so few in fact that it is impossible to make a precise description of his activity. This does not mean however that we should doubt his existence or the fundamental ideas of his message.

Even though it would be impossible to write a biography of Jesus, we do have some facts that we are sure of. He was born, for example, a few years before our era and died in the year thirty. We know his name was

Herod the Great died in  
the year 4 B.C.



Mt 13:54-55;  
Jn 6:42

Jesus; he was the son of a craftsman by the name of Joseph, and of a simple village woman of Israel named Mary. His brothers (or relatives) were James, Joseph, Simon and Jude. He went unnoticed for many years until the end of his life, when he came out in public and preached the kingdom of God, with a peculiar understanding of the things of God and with a message of mercy for sinners, the poor, the suffering and those rejected by society.

Lk 2: 1 ff  
Mk 15: 1  
Lk 3: 1

Jesus was born during the reign of the Emperor Augustus (66 B.C. - 14 A.D.). He preached the kingdom during the reign of Emperor Tiberius (14-35 A.D.), and died under the Procurator Pontius Pilate. Herod was the tetrarch of Galilee (4 B.C.- 39 A.D.) when Jesus announced his message about the kingdom.

There are almost no extra-Biblical sources that contain facts about Jesus and the early Christians.

In the year 90 A.D., the oldest Jewish testimony was written in Rome: the Hebrew historian Flavius Josephus mentions the stoning of James, the "brother of Jesus" called "the Christ", which occurred in the year 62.

Tertullian,  
Apologeticum II,2

Around the year 112, Pliny the Younger, Roman governor of Bithynia, a province of Asia Minor, consulted the Emperor Trajan about "the Christians". They were accused of refusing to worship the emperor and of singing hymns to "Christ as God".

Not long afterwards, a friend of Pliny's, Tacitus, wrote about the great fire of Rome that took place in

the year 64 A.D. The disaster is generally attributed to the Emperor Nero, but he blamed the Christians. In this context, Tacitus explains that the word "Christian" comes from a certain "Christ", executed by the Procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor. After the death of Jesus, Tacitus reports, Christianity, that "despicable superstition, like all that is shameful and vulgar, found its way to Rome, where it gained many followers after the fire."

Suetonius, the imperial biographer, wrote about how the Emperor Claudius ran the Jews out of Rome after they disturbed the peace in the name of "Christ".

These are in essence the oldest Pagan and Jewish testimonies. The authors clearly saw an intimate relationship between Christ and the Christians. Christianity was something that was directly related to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

Thus, for the early Christians, the distinctive feature of their Christianity was their consideration of Jesus as the decisive, definitive, normative element for human beings in all their dimensions. A person's relationship with God, with other people, and with society, were to be determined by Jesus of Nazareth.

This relationship was translated into words, values and action. Christianity was to be an effective belief that activated the memory of Jesus as the ultimate determining factor.

From the beginning, Christians experienced Jesus as a super-human, divine reality. They bestowed on

him a great number of honorific titles, even while Jesus continued to be for them, as he was for his contemporaries, a real, flesh-and-blood man.

Modern Biblical scholarship has detected certain myths (1) in the Gospel about the person of Jesus, some legends (2), along with meditations and perhaps exaggerations (3). But it's clear that the myth grew out of the history, and not the history out of the myth. In other words, the real Jesus gave rise to subsequent popular exaltation.

The importance of the person of Jesus and his message, the severity of the problems of our times and our world, and the weight of our own lives, demand that we examine Jesus seriously. We need a deeper, more committed knowledge.

*"I tell the Hindus that their life will be imperfect if they don't respectfully study the life of Jesus."      Gandhi*

### **Gospels and evangelists**

The life of Jesus as told in the Gospels is full of information, but much of it is uncertain, because in the Gospel, history is used on behalf of faith. The evangelist's aim is not to present a thorough, coordinated account of the facts about Jesus, but to set down the most important memories, even though they have been modified by the earliest oral traditions.

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(1) The star and the Wise Men from the East (Mt 2:2)

(2) The flight into Egypt (Mt 2:13)

(3) If your eye should cause you to sin, tear it out (Mt 5:29)

The facts about Jesus' life, like many other facts from ancient history, cannot be determined with accuracy.

1.-At first, the facts about Jesus, his teachings and his death, must have been told in a simple way. The evangelists, not all of whom were direct disciples of Jesus, at a much later date collected the stories and sayings of Jesus that had been transmitted orally and partially written down; they took the information as it was kept and used in the early Church, in the preaching, teaching and worship of the communities of believers.

The earliest written documents naturally arose out of a certain "living situation" ("Sitz em Leben"), i.e., a setting in which they were developed and shaped.

2.- The evangelists were not interested in Jesus' development, or in the development of his religious and messianic consciousness, or in his "motives", character, personality or interior life. The evangelists provide no proof of any internal evolution of Jesus' consciousness; at most they allow for conjecture.

3.- Jesus' first witnesses and companions did not care about chronology and topology. Many of the time and place references are just ways to connect one story with the next, or to make the reading more vivid and interesting.

---

If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother...  
Straining out gnats and swallowing camels!

Lk 14:26  
Mt 23:23

4.- Nor did they have any interest in their Teacher's inner development.

The evangelists made a written record of the information that existed about Jesus' teaching and activities. And they did not merely record facts; they also reflected on the faith that they wanted to transmit, and presented it with a specific and personal intention, according to a conscious plan. They arranged Jesus' actions and sayings according to their own project; they sketched out a framework to follow in order to create a coherent narrative. The evangelists put the texts in a certain order to meet the needs of their audience; they interpreted them in the light of the Easter events, they added to them and adapted them as they saw fit. This explains why the different Gospels, while talking about one and the same Jesus and while sharing certain elements, have very different theological focuses.

Mark was the first to write his Gospel, shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. His language is rustic and unliterary, but at the same time vivid and concrete.

Matthew and Luke wrote their Gospels after the destruction of Jerusalem, and made use of Mark's Gospel, plus a collection of Jesus' sayings. They may also have had some material of their own which allowed them to make some original contributions. Matthew wrote for a Jewish Christian audience, while Luke addressed his Gospel to believers of a pagan, Greek and more cultured background.

All three -Matthew, Mark and Luke- provide a shared vision of Jesus, which is why theirs are known as the "synoptic" Gospels.

John's Gospel was written in a Jewish-Greek setting, and is completely different from the other three, in both literary and theological terms. With regard to historical reality, it is farther from the concrete facts. It was the last of the four Gospels, written around the year 100 A.D.

### **The evangelists' intention**

The Gospels do not provide strictly historical information about Jesus, nor do they attempt to describe his personal development. From the beginning to the end, their intention is to announce Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the Lord, the Son of God, in the light of the resurrection. The evangelists' aim was not just informative and narrative, but mainly didactic and practical.

The Gospels are marked by the communities' different faith experiences. They look at Jesus with the eyes of faith. They are committed and committing testimonies of faith, written not by disinterested observers, but by convinced believers. Their intention is to call people to faith in Jesus Christ, and so they interpret the facts. They go so far as to express their faith through narrated stories. The stories thus become preaching in the widest sense of the word. That is why they include exaggerations; they present the facts in a vivid, compelling, challenging, almost aggressive way. The Gospels, like the evangelists them-

Vat. II  
D.V. III, 11, 12



selves, are full of suppositions. They supposed, for example, that the end of time was at hand, that the Bible stories were strictly historical, the women were worth less than men.

It is important not to assign absolute value to the Gospels as written documents. A Christian should not be a person who believes in the Gospels, but a person who believes in Christ. The Gospels, which are the medium by which faith is communicated and grows, must be interpreted, analyzed, and taken as a whole. Jesus is to be found in the totality of his written message: each verse alludes and refers to the whole message.

It is true that we read and understand the Gospel little by little, part by part. But we will never come to understand it unless we keep the whole message in mind, and the place that each one of the parts occupies within it.

We cannot expect each one of its expressions to reveal the entire message, even though all of its parts are revelation. The "Gospel" is a collection of writings, and all of them play an important role in the overall meaning.

The Gospel is not faithfully served when it is broken up into isolated fragments, or when individual verses are used to justify a position that ignores the rest of the whole. When a verse is taken to illustrate a point or refer to a certain aspect of the message, it should be taken in reference to the whole and to its context. Context does not mean just historical or circumstan-

Vat. II  
D.V. III 12

tial setting, or literary features; it also includes context in faith and in the overall message. And the overall message does not just mean Jesus' sayings and actions; more important is how they are interpreted. We are not, after all, the first to read and interpret the Gospel, nor are we the first to believe in Jesus.

Our faith is directly and vitally related to the faith of all those who have believed before us.

For the evangelists, Jesus is not just a figure from the past. For them, Jesus is a person who lives on and is of vital importance to those who hear his message. Jesus is the man who lived and acted in Galilee and Jerusalem, but more importantly, he is the man who lives and acts in the early community and in each person who hears or reads the Gospel. Jesus is not just the topic of the evangelists' information; he is the one they want to proclaim, to whom they want to direct the faith, the love, the confidence and the hope of Christians. For the evangelists, and for all those who believe in the effectiveness of Jesus' words, the Gospels are more than just a memory: they are a kind of sacrament by which Jesus himself acts in the heart of those who listen.



## **JESUS AND HIS CIRCUMSTANCES**

### **Preface:**

Each person lives in a specific and unique situation. Each person is marked by her environment, which includes education, and the spiritual, ethical, religious and ideological atmosphere in which she develops. People always live in a certain time, in a specific historical setting. They have to deal with concrete national, social, political and cultural circumstances. In short, they live in their own "world", which inevitably shapes their existence.

Jesus also lived in his own world, and was shaped by it, just as we are. In order to understand Jesus better, it is important to take a look at his world and

his circumstances, and his attitude toward them. Some important points to consider, if only briefly, are:

- 1.- His education, and the culture of his times.
- 2.- His spiritual, religious and ethical environment.
- 3.- The social environment.
- 4.- The national and political circumstances.
- 5.- The context of war.
- 6.- His economic situation.
- 7.- The ideological environment.

All of these elements influence a person's development, his way of thinking, speaking and acting. Each person, in turn, influences all these elements that make up the world where he lives.

#### **Jesus' education**

People find themselves and discover their vocation under the influence of a community of people. Jesus, who started his life from the beginning when he was not yet fully developed, had to be educated, like any other person. Education is a necessary and decisive process in a person's life.

Jesus was educated exclusively in the Jewish culture, in the way that simple, religious people of his time were educated.

Jewish culture and mentality are reflected in every last passage of the Gospel. Jesus' words and deeds reveal his way of thinking, his Jewish upbringing. Great inventors, composers and artists are never so great that they can forsake their past and their experiences. In Beethoven's concertos and symphonies we can recognize chords from Mozart. Bach's music reinterprets themes from Vivaldi. The same thing is true of Jesus. He takes the message of the Old Testament, although in a different way, and like the prophets of old, he speaks of the God of our fathers.

Mt 5:18; 7:11

A person's originality and creativity are seen in the way she takes up the past, interprets it and projects on it part of her unique personality.

Jesus certainly knew how to read, write, and he was a master at speaking in public. There is no evidence to think that he attended any special school, or studied under any prominent teacher. His education and culture were small-town and home-grown. He went to the ordinary celebrations and explanations at the Nazareth Synagogue. Jesus' teaching and his attitude in general don't suggest any specialized knowledge of Scripture. Jesus was recognized by his countrymen as a perfectly ordinary man; no one expected him to have any special knowledge.

Mk 6,3

Mt 13:54

Jesus' originality and depth did not come from his education, or from his own personal study, or from any systematic knowledge. It came from his heart (his personal being), from his relationship with God and his neighbors, and from his bold freedom. It has been suggested that Jesus in his early years received an



Egyptian education, but there are good reasons to believe that this is not the case:

- There is no convincing evidence that Jesus ever traveled to foreign countries; the story of the flight to Egypt is grounded in theology, not history.

- There was no school of Egyptian teaching in Israel.

- There is no indication in the Gospel that Jesus had even the slightest knowledge of Egyptian culture.

- In his way of thinking, speaking and acting, Jesus gave no hint of any Egyptian influence.

- The same holds true for Roman and Greek culture. The religious and political circumstances of the times favored opposition to all things foreign. Jews as a rule were satisfied and proud of their own culture.

## **JESUS' CONTEXT**

### **The Sadducees**

This was the wealthy ruling class. They favored and defended the existing order. Their conservative theology imposed resignation on the people. They didn't expect the coming of the Messiah or believe in resurrection. They were upper-class and looked down on ordinary people.

Ezk 40:46

The Sadducees considered themselves the legitimate bearers of the priesthood of Ezekiel, which was also claimed by the Qumran monks. They were aristocrats, indulgent toward Greek culture, and in-

volved in the country's political life, mainly through the institutions of the High Priest and the Sanhedrin. For political reasons they sought support abroad, especially from the Romans, who were their adversaries. In the religious sphere, they had control over worship, the Temple and the Sanhedrin. They were not well-loved by the people.

The Sadducees' faith went hand in hand with their social position: they hewed closely to the Pentateuch and saw the prophets as suspect. The rest of the sacred books they simply dismissed. They insisted on demonstrating their fidelity to the God of their fathers and of the Covenant, thereby justifying their lifestyle. They denied the resurrection and professed a belief in immediate material retribution. As they saw it, they had wealth and power because they were just and God blessed them.

The High Priest, together with the Sadducees and the Sanhedrin, bore the greatest responsibility for the death of Jesus.

### **The priests**

There were about seven thousand of them, and they were in charge of offering the sacrifices in the Temple. Since they were so numerous, they were divided into twenty-four teams that took turns serving in the Temple. The first morning of the week they drew lots to see who would carry out the religious functions. Aside from this, they had no duties, except sitting occasionally as advisers in the village tribunal, mainly when the case demanded the presence of a priest. They were poor. Their income came from the part of

Jn 11:49-50

Lk 1:9

Mt 8:4

the sacrifice that they were allowed to take, plus tithes. In order to get by, they usually had another trade: carpenter, stonecutter, merchant, etc. They were close to the people because of their economic situation and because they worked side by side with them. The priesthood was hereditary, as long as two conditions were met: their descendents had to have a Jewish mother and be physically and mentally normal.

Lk 10:31

Ex 19:6; Is  
61:6

Mt 12:5

Jesus recognized the priests' authority, and even showed them high esteem; on the other hand, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, they are seen as inconsistent with their dignity, their office and their proximity to the people. Priestly dignity and prerogatives were something that all religious people aspired to. Jesus recognized in the priests a freedom that transcended the written law.

Jesus did not belong to the established priestly order. He was not a priest under the old law, and received no priestly training. He was not a professional theologian either; he did not formulate any theories or systems.

Lk 13:29

What he did do was preach, in very simple terms, the immanent coming of the Kingdom of God, using comparisons, parables and images.

### **The Pharisees**

This was a group that offered religious opposition to the mentality of the Sadducees, and political opposition to the foreign occupation. They adhered to the law as one of the highest values of Israel and they practiced it scrupulously down to the smallest detail.

The members of this group were mostly ordinary people, and lacked the scribes' formal studies. They were the religious men of their time, and considered themselves the true Israel. They set themselves apart from others with their religious attitude, because they did not live like the common people who neither knew nor practiced the law. Their humble extraction and the fact that they shared the people's faith gave them great influence over the populace. They represented the people's party. They were moralists who reduced any problem to a question of ritual practice.

Jesus commended the Pharisees' faithful observance of the law. He recognized them as "the healthy" and "the virtuous"; they are the ones who have remained in the Father's house faithfully fulfilling their duties. Their actions are commendable, as long as the most important things are not neglected.

Mt 9:12; 5:20  
Mk 2:17

Lk 15:13ff

Jesus however did not preach a new law or espouse a new pious asceticism. He did not care about moral or legal casuistry, or questions of interpretation of the law. He preached a new law regarding the law: love without borders or limits. He reduced the law and its observance to man, and not man to the law.

Mk 2:27

Although many of the confrontations of Jesus with the Pharisees that appear in the Gospel do not seem to be strictly historical, they do reflect the clear opposition of Jesus, the disciples and the early Church to the positions typified by the Pharisees.

### **The Essenes**

The members of this group can be considered the monks of their time. They lived in the desert, apart from the world, where they devoted themselves to prayer, the study of the law, and work (livestock, pottery, trade). They called themselves the "pure" and the "first fruits of the true Israel", and avoided contact with the "sons of darkness". One of their rules stated: *"No one afflicted with human impurity may enter the assembly of God. He who has been struck in the flesh, whose hand and feet have been immobilized, who is lame, blind, deaf or mute, who has a visible mark on his flesh, and the weak old man who can no longer stand in the assembly of God, may not enter and hold a place in the heart of the community of the men of the Name, because in its center are the holy angels."* They expressed hostility to the Temple priesthood, and considered the Temple itself to be impure. Their lifestyle took on the nature of resistance and anti-imperial protest.

Flavius Josephus depicts them as follows:

*"The Essenes are Jews by birth, and are united by ties of affection that are stronger than those of other sects. They reject pleasure, value continence, and consider the domination of passion to be a virtue. They remain celibate, and choose the sons of others while they are still malleable and receptive to teaching. They care for them as if they were their own, and instruct them in their customs. They do not deny the propriety of marriage, nor do they wish to do away with human procreation, but they are wary of female lust, convinced that no woman is faithful to one man."*

*They scorn riches and consider it praiseworthy to hold their goods in common. Among them there is none richer than the others because their law calls on all who enter the sect to turn over their property to the common ownership of the order, so that in the community there is neither poverty nor wealth; on the contrary, everything goes into the brothers' communal property.*

*The administrators of the common goods are elected to the post, and each one is appointed by the rest for the different services.*

*They do not all live in one city, but many live together in community in each city. If a member of the sect travels to another place, they offer him everything they have as if he were one of theirs, they look on him as an intimate companion, even though they may never have seen him before. For this reason they take nothing with them when they travel to distant places, except their weapons to protect themselves from thieves.*

*Their piety is extraordinary. They do not speak of profane matters before the sun rises, but recite certain prayers passed down from their fathers, as if praying for the sun to rise.*

*Then the baker puts a piece of bread before them, and the cook fills a single dish. A priest blesses the food, because it is forbidden to taste food without first giving thanks to God.*

*They do nothing without the consent of their directors. They are not free except in two things: to help the needy and to console the afflicted, because they are allowed to*

*help others who deserve it as they see fit, and to maintain the poor. But they may not give anything to their relatives without the permission of their superiors.*

*They know how to check their anger and control their passions: they are faithful and peace-loving. They study the writings of the ancients with enthusiasm, especially everything that is conducive to their souls and bodies, and they examine the medicinal properties of roots and stones.*

*Those that wish to enter the sect are not admitted immediately, but are ordered to live the sect's lifestyle for a year outside the community. They are given an ax, a tunic and a white robe. When the community is assured that they have proven continent, they are allowed to advance in their style of life and participate in the waters of purification. But they are not yet received in their house. The strength of their character is put to the test for two more years; then, if they are deemed worthy, they are taken in. They make numerous vows to practice a great number of virtues. Those caught sinning are expelled from their company, and the condemned die a miserable death, because they are bound by their vows, and due to the customs they have acquired, they are not free to receive food and drink from others; they are thus forced to feed on grass, so that their body wastes away from hunger until they finally die.*

*The teaching of the Essenes is as follows: bodies are corruptible and their matter is not permanent; their souls are immortal, they come from a most subtle air and enter the body, where they remain as if imprisoned, attracted by natural allure. When they are freed from the snares*

*of the flesh, they rejoice as if they had escaped from endless captivity. Good souls (in this they coincide with the opinion of the Greeks) have their dwelling-place beyond the ocean... bad souls go to a dark and stormy place full of eternal punishment.*

*There is another order of Essenes that agrees with those described above in terms of behavior, customs and laws, but they differ with regard to marriage. They say that man was born for succession and that if all men avoided it, the human race would die out, etc."*

(Flavius Josephus. The War of the Jews, Book II Chap. 8)

Jesus was not an Essene or an ascetic monk. Jesus never retired from the world, or kept himself apart from others, or sent anyone off to the desert to attain perfection. He admired John the Baptist, but he was not like John the Baptist. He did not found an order with a monastic rule, promises or vows, with ascetic prescriptions, special clothing or traditions. Jesus' disciples were people of the world, in the world and for the world.

### **The scribes**

These were men who were well versed in the Scriptures, sometimes called doctors of the law or teachers. Their honorific title was Rabbi. They engaged professionally in the interpretation of Scripture. Many of them combined their study of the law with another trade. Saint Paul wove tents and also carried out his apostolate, so as not to be a burden to the community. Some scribes took advantage of the people's generosity.

Mt 11:7

Lk 5:33

Mt 5:14

Mt 22:35;  
Lk 5:17

Mk 12:40



One class of doctors emerged that soon assumed the role of political authorities.

Jesus was not a scribe. He read and interpreted the law, but the way any devout person would, not as a professional. He did not belong to any school of thought, and was not looking for any kind of title. Jesus was disgusted by the pretentiousness of learned men and their insincere doctrine. It was never his intention to turn his disciples into a group of scribes. When they called him Rabbi, it was as an honorific title to show esteem and veneration, not to identify him with a specific group of teachers. Jesus was not a Scripture scholar, and he did not hold Scripture as absolute, even though he assumed that the author had been Moses and the great prophets. Jesus went more by the spirit of the law than by the written law.

### **The Zealots**

In Jesus' time there was a party of sociopolitical revolutionaries inspired by religious principles. Their aim was to impose the kingdom of God by the sword. They believed the world needed to change radically, and that they were the chosen instrument of that change.

The Zealots represented an expression of the people's yearnings. In this group we find the malcontents and the impoverished who, moved by their faith, the "faith of Israel", rebelled against the occupiers and their collaborators. They wanted to use the sword to build the kingdom and bring about the liberation that God had promised. They wanted to impose a new order by force of arms.

Jesus was not a sociopolitical religious revolutionary, although his message could be considered revolutionary, if by revolution we mean the radical transformation of existing conditions or a given situation. Jesus proved to be a magnetic figure for the Zealots, and could have rallied their support had he wanted to. But Jesus placed his hope on a change of heart brought about by God's initiative and by a last-minute breakthrough of the kingdom, not by violence.

Jesus always spoke out in favor of non-violence.

- He did not oppose the payment of taxes; *to Caesar what belongs to Caesar*; but never give Caesar what belongs to God!
- He made no call to national war; he accepted invitations from collaborationists and pointed to rival Samaritans, who were hated as much as the pagans, as examples to follow. He also worked miracles on their behalf.
- He made no call for factional warfare; he did not divide people by social class, religion or political inclination.
- Instead of destroying the enemy, he called for love of the enemy.
- Instead of revenge, limitless forgiveness.
- Instead of force, meekness.
- Instead of war, peace and unity.

Mk 12:13

Mk 2:14;  
Lk 10:33

Mt 5:44;  
6:14

Mt 18:21

Mt 11:29

Lk 1:79;  
Jn 16:33

Jesus did not belong to any of the established groups of his time. He did not join any party. His faith in the immanent coming of the kingdom inspired him to act according to his own criteria; it gave him

tremendous freedom of action and a remarkable originality.

## THE SOCIAL SETTING

### Women and Jesus

The historian Josephus wrote: "women are, in all aspects, less valuable than men."

When a boy was born, the mother was considered impure for forty days; if it was a girl, eighty.

Lv 12:2ff

In Jesus' times, women had no right to speak or appear in public. This was also true of the religious sphere. Women were not allowed in the Temple past the Court of the Women. With regard to religious obligations, they were on the same terms as slaves. They were not required, for example, to recite the "shema" at daybreak and sundown, because like slaves, they were not masters of their own time.

A man's spite is  
preferable to a  
woman's kind-  
ness. Si 42:14

No wickedness  
comes anywhere  
near the  
wickedness of a  
woman. Si 25:19

Sin began with a  
woman and  
thanks to her we  
all must die.  
Si 25:24  
1 tM 2,13-15

For the Jews of Jesus' time, women were occasions of sin more than anything else. They were to be kept behind closed doors. Well-mannered men avoided situations in which they were alone with a woman. A woman who dallied in the street, or who spun there, could be sent away without receiving the payment stipulated in the marriage contract.

When a married woman went out of her home, she had to cover her face so that her features could not be recognized. Once a rabbi was speaking badly of his wife in the street. She came up to him, but he never recognized her.

Women had no more importance than an instrument or a slave. They counted as objects and depended totally on their owners. Husbands and fathers enjoyed unlimited rights over their wife and daughters. No distinction was made between the acquisition of a wife and a slave. *"A woman was acquired through money, documents or intercourse; a slave, though money, documents and taking possession."*

Flavius Josephus

Women received no education or instruction; they were considered inept. Their upbringing was limited to learning household chores. Women had no civil or religious rights; they could not give testimony in court, and their word was not deemed worthy of credit in ordinary affairs.

Jesus adopted an attitude toward women that was diametrically opposed to the mores of his society. The Gospels show Jesus as extraordinarily free in this regard; there are many stories that tell of encounters of Jesus with women, especially in Luke's Gospel. Jesus was aware that he had come to help everyone, with a special attention to women. The time of salvation was manifested in Jesus' openness to women. Jesus said that women were not an occasion of sin for men, but a companion. Women formed part of his audience, and Jesus established friendships with them. Some women followed him and waited on him. This caused great scandal. A Jew of the 2nd century named Marcion stated that such things were brought out as accusations against Jesus at his trial.

Jn 4:7

Mk 10:8

Lk 11:27ff

Lk 10:38-42  
Mk 15:40;  
Lk 8:1-3

The world where Jesus lived tried to defend morality by isolating women, because sexual desire

Mt 5:8

was believed to be uncontrollable. Jesus accepted women among his disciples, because he trusted his disciples to control their sexual impulses. Concupiscence was the hallmark of the old time, and people had to defend themselves from it as best they could. The new time is characterized by purity, which imposes its discipline even on what we look at. In no other social sphere did the new order penetrate as deeply into everyday life as it did in the role of women.

Ga 3:28

*"In Christ Jesus there are no more distinctions between male and female."* This is an astonishing statement coming from a man who was born Jewish and educated in the culture of Israel. But Paul wrote it, and he undoubtedly received it from the disciples, as reflecting the sentiments of Jesus.

The kingdom of heaven demanded greater dignity for women.

### **Children**

In the world where Jesus lived, children were counted among the "things of little value", just as women were. They were valued only inasmuch as they represented future adults.

Mk 10:14

Mt 19:3

Jesus however found in children the most beautiful and essential quality for belonging to the kingdom of God. The attitude of a child, who trusts his father absolutely, became the ideal of Christian life. Jesus thought that children were closer to God than adults were. These observations of Jesus' did not come from the literature of his times, or from his community,

which shared the patriarchal mindset of the culture. They came from the very heart of Jesus' message.

### **The sick**

The sick were the most marginalized of people; only a person possessed by a demon could be considered worse off than a sick person. In Jesus' times, illnesses were seen as the fruit and manifestation of sin. The possibility of contagion, for example, from lepers made it all the more necessary to enforce their segregation. The sick had fallen into disgrace before God. They were useless beings, with no social purpose, who were allowed to live only because it was forbidden to take a human life.

Job's afflictions made it clear that illness was the worst fate that could befall a person.

Jesus was extraordinarily benevolent with the sick. He gave them health, faith, hope, and love. He assured them of the forgiveness of their sins and invited them to take on an attitude of gratitude and trust in God. He assured them that God felt their suffering and that he would console them as a mother consoles her little child.

### **The possessed**

In Jesus' times, a person suffering from mental or psychological illnesses, like hysteria, epilepsy, rabies and others, was considered possessed by the devil.

The percentage of people with these illnesses was probably no greater than it is today, but back then there were no mental health centers. Their presence

J. Jeremias;  
T. of the N.T.

Jn 9:2

Jb 3:3

Jn 5:14;  
Mt 12:22

Mt 5:5; Is 66:13

underscored the power of the demon, which frightened people.

These people lived under the weight of a complex demonology. Their condition was seen as a punishment from God to pay for real or imagined sins.

Mt 9:32

Jesus felt a profound compassion for the possessed. He revealed himself to them as a true liberator and savior, because he expelled the demon and cured them. It only makes sense that the medicine and the cure should match the diagnosis; health corresponds to the disease. If what the patient has is a demon, then the cure is to cast it out.

The cures of the different demoniacs have a meaning and convey a theological message that is independent of the interpretation originally given to the illness.

The casting out of demons makes it clear:

Mt 12:22

- That Jesus has the upper hand in the struggle against the devil; he is greater and stronger.

Mt 8:16

- That he has the power to forgive sins and to put down demons.

Lk 11:20

- That the kingdom of heaven has arrived.

Mt 12:22;  
8:16, 28ff  
Mk 5:3; 1:26

All of these interventions show that the rule of God has arrived and that the person of Jesus is its instrument to defeat the devil.

Jesus did not come to turn the world over to the devil, but to take it away from him. He did not come to punish people, but to free them and forgive them.

Whoever thinks that evil or the devil is stronger than Jesus, doesn't believe in Jesus but in the devil.

**The poor**

Poor people: the "anavim".

In the Hebrew mindset, the poor were not just those who lacked the basic things of life; they were also the oppressed, the marginalized, the weak, the patient and meek, the helpless and vulnerable. Those who had suffered a cruel fate, the sick, the weak, orphans and widows, those marked by the guilt of others-these were also counted among the "anavim", or poor. All were deserving of help. The poor could cry out to God in the certainty that they would find justice and compassion in him. Since their cause was before God, they were expected to be patient, humble, meek. The prophets and the psalms identified them as the true Israel. Some people expected the Messiah to come with these same characteristics, "*humble and riding on a donkey*".

Zc 9:9

The poor were those who had prospered little in life, those who had come out on the losing end, those deprived of their freedom, rights and dignity through no fault of their own.

What distinguished them essentially was their attitude before God. They expected him to come to their aid, and they counted on his justice and mercy.



Mt 5:3

They felt they had no right to make demands on God, and were willing to do his will.

It was to these poor that Jesus was referring with the eight beatitudes, where he described and blessed them. And because they reflected a spiritual attitude more than a socioeconomic condition, Matthew called them the "*poor in spirit*".

### **The poor people**

There were also the "other poor", who did not necessarily share the attitudes of the "anavim", but who were marginalized by their poverty and its consequences: the lack of culture, religious culture especially. They were people who neglected their religious obligations and had to work at whatever was available in order to survive or overcome their poverty. There were certain occupations that were considered base, associated with this class of people: shepherds, moneychangers, and above all prostitutes.

These people were marginalized for religious reasons, because they did not observe the law or care about their religious duties. They were "impure sinners", third-class citizens. These poor were doubly burdened: the rest of society looked down on them, and before God they had no chance of salvation because they were sinners.

Jesus loved God, the law, and religious worship. He was a man of prayer, and had a special sense for judging the things that had to do with God and people. Jesus was never accused of being an ordinary sinner, a collaborationist, or an irreligious or ignorant person.

Jesus scandalized his contemporaries by sitting down with "*publicans and sinners*", but not by being a publican or sinner.

Mk 2:15;  
Mt 9:11

All of these people who were considered unworthy, and who considered themselves unworthy before God, were invited by Jesus to the kingdom of heaven, with an astounding benevolence that unlike his society in general, conveyed acceptance and affection. All were "poor" in the eyes of God, like those that had no claim to stand before him or to expect anything from him, those that felt only fear and doubt, the weary and those laboring under a heavy burden.

Mt 11:28

For Jesus, the poor were the oppressed in the broadest sense of the word. They were the broken-hearted; the imprisoned, even when the cause was their own guilt, or their own conscience; the afflicted; the dispirited; those whose only thread of hope was God's mercy.

Jesus' acceptance of publicans and sinners served to proclaim God's acceptance of them; it was evidence of the Father's redeeming love.

This caused a great scandal among the religious people of Jesus' time: in his preaching of God, and in his own attitude, Jesus opened the doors of the kingdom to the unworthy, the irreligious, the poor, the publicans and the prostitutes. It seemed to Jesus' contemporaries that his attitude went against God's justice and holiness.

In Matthew's Gospel, the poor are clearly set in opposition to the attitude of the Pharisees, and all those who put their hope in their own righteousness. In the Lucan tradition, and in the early Church that found itself severely oppressed, the poor are those who lack the basic necessities and need consolation.

Jesus addressed the Good News both to the "deserving poor" and the "other poor", and his preaching was a sign that the time of grace was at hand. The poor, inasmuch as they looked to Divine Providence for all their needs and put their trust in God, were the ideal and the example of Christian life.

Lk 4:18;  
Mt 11:5

### **Jesus, a poor man**

In economic terms we can state that Jesus was simply a poor man:

- a) He was born to a poor family.
- b) He lived modestly.
- c) He had a poor man's occupation.
- d) His preaching was addressed to people in general, but especially to the lower classes.
- e) He always took the side of the poor.
- f) His followers were generally poor people.

### **But Jesus did not live in misery**

Lk 19: 1ff

Mt 6,25

- He never begged for alms, either as an adult or in his childhood.
- Both he and his followers had enough to eat, and could rely on benefactors who had the means to help them.
- Neither food nor clothing were matters of concern for Jesus.

- Jesus recommended giving alms to the poor, and he had the means himself to help the needy.
- He accepted what was offered to him. One of his disciples, Judas, was in charge of administering the donations they received.
- Jesus wore a seamless tunic of prized quality, woven in one piece from top to bottom.
- He accepted a token of affection that was worth a great price, and dismissed the criticism.
- Jesus and most of his disciples had their own house. (Peter, Matthew, Martha and Mary)
- James and John had men who worked for them.

Jn 12:5; Mt 26:8-13

Jn 12:6; 13:29

Jn 19:23

Jn 12:3ff

Mk 9:28;  
Mt 8:14; 13:36

Mk 1:19-20

#### **Jesus did not make a cult of poverty**

Jesus did not consider need to be a virtue, or make a cult of poverty. Indigence for Jesus was an evil. He taught that every day we must ask for our bread, but we must also make an effort to obtain it. He did not hope to obtain his bread by a miracle, but by daily work.

Mt 6:11

Lk 6:20 ff

Jesus was on the side of the poor and sick in order to free them from their poverty and sickness. For Jesus, poverty, disease and ignorance are misery, not happiness. The beatitudes refer to specific people who suffer, not to suffering in the abstract.

Mt 4:4

God is just and holy, and therefore desires holiness and justice for his people. He loves the poor in order to lift them out of their poverty and love them all the more in their justice and holiness, not to stop loving them once they have left poverty behind. It is not

because of their poverty that God loves the poor, as if his justice and goodness did not come to bear.

Mt 4:4

For Jesus, the fundamental issue is not socioeconomic. People's needs are not just material. "*Man does not live on bread alone*," even though one is sometimes tempted to reduce the entire issue to bread.

Mk 12:42;  
Mt 5:13ff

The poverty that Jesus applauded, that he lived himself and demanded of his disciples, cannot be reduced to a specific lack of money or material things, or indifference to them. In addition to this, there are other more profound and significant elements involved: the poverty of the heart and the self when you turn to God and deposit your trust in him. The "poor" are clearly not opposed so much to those who "have" certain things, but to the self-satisfied, the proud, those who have focused their interest outside the values of the kingdom, those who believe that the most important thing is money and that everything else is secondary. The poverty that Jesus proclaims is freedom of the heart, and the wealth that Jesus condemns is slavery to worldly things.

There could very well be some poor people whose attitude toward things and people is not in accord with the Gospel. But this is not usually the case because poverty usually leads to humility, while wealth favors self-sufficiency. As a rule, material poverty goes hand in hand with poverty of the spirit. This is why a genuine poverty of spirit tends to manifest itself in a visible and material way.

Inner poverty is a call that Christ makes to his disciples, a universal demand of Christianity. "*None of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions.*" This giving up means putting Jesus before all other things and situations in life. Each Christian should respond to this call permanently, day after day, according to her circumstances. It is not a programmed response, but will vary depending on the person's function, culture, temperament, age, health, social circumstances and job. Each Christian must personally and consciously discern the proper response to this Gospel requirement. It is a question of projecting the absoluteness of God and Jesus onto the relativity of worldly things. The call is universal, the response must be sought in each individual case, in faith and prayer.

Lk 14:33

### **The rich**

Who are the rich?

In the Gospel, the rich are characterized by:

- Having much more than they need.
- Loving money and devoting themselves to acquiring it greedily.
- Living in the present and planning the future around money.
- Believing in God but worshipping their riches.
- Putting their safety and trust in worldly things.
- Seeing religiosity as functional, a question of social prestige.
- Thinking only of themselves and forgetting about the poor.

Lk 12:18

Lk 12:13-15

Lk 12:19

Lk 16:13

Lk 12:19

Mk 12:41

Lk 16:25

Jn 19:8

Lk 16:19ff

Mt 19:22

The rich are opposed to the poor not so much because of what they have, as because of their attitude toward what they have: they feel self-sufficient, proud, indifferent to the indigent; they worry only about their material interests and care nothing for the values of the kingdom.

Wealth is not just an issue that impinges in the disinherited of the earth, it is more a process in which the rich person becomes trapped.

In absolute terms, the attitudes that characterize the rich might very well be found as well in people who barely have enough to survive, because evil does not lie in the material things themselves, but in the heart's attachment to them, in the trust put in one's possessions and in the indifference to others.

The kingdom of God that Jesus announces is for all people, and makes no distinctions among them:

Mt 12:15ff;22:16

Jn 1:47;Lk 19:5

Lk 19:8

- Social rank was of no consequence for Jesus.
- Jesus did not hate the rich.
- He paid special attention to them, spent time and ate with them, accepted them as disciples, even among his closest followers.
- Jesus freed the rich from the oppression of their riches.
- He did not ask everyone to give up their possessions in the same way.
- Neither poverty nor wealth, nor any social status at all—free or slave, child or old person, Pharisee or Zealot, man or woman—were an impediment

to being Jesus' disciple. The early Church, like Jesus, was open to all people, and invited them all to convert.

### Slaves

In Israel, in the times of Jesus, slaves were not very numerous, nor were there many owners who could afford them. A slave was worth 5000 denarii, and one denarius represented a day's wage.

Slavery among the Israelites was forbidden; nevertheless, an Israelite could fall slave to a countryman. The law protected female slaves in their situation of inferiority.

Foreign slaves were available in Tyre, Gaza and Akki. Phoenicians bought and sold them; Israelites were forbidden to traffic in slaves.

In Jesus' time, slavery was still practiced. Jesus had no problem with including slaves as characters in his parables, and never came out explicitly against slavery. He did however indicate the path that would lead to the abolition of slavery

- The equality of all people.
- Divine fatherhood.
- Human brotherhood.
- The value of serving and not being served.
- In the kingdom of God, already present, the last shall be first.
- He himself acted like a slave, washing his disciples' feet.

Ga 3:28

Ex 21:1-6; Lv  
19:20

Ex 21:7-11,  
1 M 3:41

Mt 24:45ff;  
Lk 12:42ff

Mt 20:27

Lk 14:10

Mt 5:24

Mt 20:28  
Mk10:45  
Mt 19:30

Jn 13:1ff



## **POLITICAL CONTEXT**

### **Political dependence**

Since 64 B.C., Palestine had been conquered for Rome by Pompey. Rome's policy was to bring all the subjected countries into a unified political system. Rome came to be the decision-making center for all the activities of the Empire. In order to maintain its domination over the conquered nations, over Palestine in this case, it relied on Jewish collaborators backed up by the occupying forces. For the Jews, this occupation of the Holy Land of Israel was a desecration that went against God's will.

The Gospel mentions a number of important figures on the religious and political stage:

- Herod the Great, who called himself "King of the Jews, and friend and ally of the Romans," governed the Jews from 37 to 4 B.C. Herod was an Arab, and the Jews were fully aware of this. His Judaism was a mere convention. He curried favor with both the Jews and the Romans. He rebuilt the great Temple of Jerusalem, even as he built other temples in honor of Rome and Augustus.

- Herod Antipas (4 B.C. to 30 A.D.) reigned in Galilee and Peraea in Jesus' times. Like his father, Herod the Great, he knew how to stay in Rome's good graces. In order to marry his sister-in-law, he cast off his wife, the daughter of the Nabatean king Aretas IV.

Herod was curious to meet Jesus, and refused to judge him, in order to avoid problems with the Jews.

- Pontius Pilate (26 A.D. to 36 A.D.), prefect and governor of the Jews sent from Rome, was a harsh ruler who refused to negotiate with the Jews. He tried to put them down by force when they would not accept his economic conditions and rebelled against his rash attempt to introduce emperor-worship into Palestine.

In the case of Jesus, Pilate seemed to waver and showed a weak character, perhaps because Jesus was not really an important issue for him. He condemned him to death out of fear of losing the Caesar's friendship.

Jesus did not care a great deal about the political problems of his time, perhaps because he expected the world to end soon. It is likely that he saw these signs as one more reason for God to intervene urgently in the life of the people of Israel.

Jesus even dealt benevolently with the occupiers. For instance, he cured the servant of the centurion, whose faith he then held up as a model. He recognized Pilate's authority as coming from God.

He paid taxes, and agreed that they should be paid, which was a scandalous stance for a devout Jew to take. The Roman soldiers used to force the Jews to walk with them for a mile, carrying their pack. It was a way to humiliate the Jews and lord Roman authority over them. Jesus recommended accompanying and helping the soldiers willingly, walking two miles when only one was demanded.

Lk 7:1-10  
Jn 19:10ff

Mk 12:13ff

Mt 5:41

Lk 13:1ff

When he was asked about the Galileans who had been executed by Roman soldiers, he did not condemn the occupation, but called his listeners to penitence even as they felt outrage at the Romans' insolent disregard of the law.

The Gospel clearly shows Jesus with an attitude of acceptance in the face of the Roman invaders.

### CONTEXT OF WAR

Jesus lived in a time of peace within a greater environment of war, destruction, fires, famine and death. The exploitation of the weak by the strong was the rule.

Jn 4:9

Even within the people of Israel, the internal divisions were clearly drawn. There were always groups set against each other, one town against its neighbor. The apostles are surprised to see Jesus conversing with the Samaritan woman, not just because she was a woman, *but also because the Jews did not speak to the Samaritans.*

In Flavius Josephus' view, the destruction of Jerusalem, and especially of the Temple, owed more to division and civil war among the Jews than to the will of Titus (War of the Jews, Book III, Chap. 8).

The rifts among the Jews were not just about territorial rivalries; they went much deeper. They were conflicts over ideology and religion, principles and attitudes.

During the first half of the first century, Palestine was in a constant state of upheaval, with rivalries between parties, disputes among sects and political differences. In this tense climate *"Jesus of Nazareth was executed on the eve of the Passover because he practiced sorcery and led Israel astray,"* in the words of Jewish tradition (Babylonian Talmud, T. Sanhedrin, 43 b).

Jesus considered it urgent to break the circle of the like-minded, of those who are "with me", and open up to everyone, even those personally opposed to my ideas and way of thinking, my attitudes or my purposes. Jesus could see no reasonable grounds for division. He made an unequivocal call to love one's enemies and to be willing to forgive up to seventy times seven. Love of one's enemy is Jesus' most effective exhortation in favor of unity and for laying the groundwork for healthy understanding and acceptance among people.

Mt 18:21-22

For this same reason, Jesus insisted that we must not judge others. It was not that he was promoting an uncritical stance, or turning a blind eye to real differences. The important thing was to avoid division.

Mt 7:1

Both Jews and Romans fanned the flames of their mutual hostility on the streets of Jerusalem. Jesus grew up, was educated and preached in the midst of these tensions and specters of war. He forgave and preached God's unlimited forgiveness and mercy, and the need to forgive one another in order to address God as Father and obtain his forgiveness. If not for the warlike context, the exploitation and abuse, Jesus

Lk 11:4

would not have insisted so much on the need to forgive as God does.

It is evident that Jesus did not try to change the system, the status quo, but he did make a concerted effort to ease the tensions, bridge the divisions and provide the means for approaching the opponent, the enemy.

This does not mean that Christians should settle for things as they are, resign themselves, or wait for God to save the world. Motivated by Christ and the kingdom, Christians should struggle with all their might in favor of solidarity, unity, peace, freedom, and all human values, with the same reasons, sentiments and attitudes that motivated Christ.

## **ECONOMIC CONTEXT**

### **Economic dependence**

The Roman occupation triggered a grave crisis in the production system in Palestine. The common lands were taken over by the landowners and the tax burden impoverished the population day by day. Farmers were forced to sell their lands to pay their taxes. Exploitation led to misery and begging. Cities were full of people who worked for wages.

Jerusalem plays a key role in situating Jesus in his historical setting. It had some 35,000 inhabitants;

some set the figure at 50,000. Unlike the rest of the cities of Syria, it was located in a region with few natural resources to support its economic activities. It was extremely poor. The olive groves of the mountains of Judea supplied wood, olives and oil. Everything needed for clothing and feeding the population, had to be imported. Water was especially scarce. There was only one spring, on the south side of the city, the Pool of Siloam, which was dry in Jesus' time.

In spite of its unfavorable location, Jerusalem was a bustling city. Trade was the chief activity. The city's income came from the donations to the Temple, and from the sale of animals for ritual slaughter. On each pilgrimage, foreigners had to pay a tithe of their harvest. Capitalists found Jerusalem a thriving place that stimulated economic activity.

Food was not especially abundant, because the city was surrounded by mountains that did not lend themselves to farming. At times the city suffered famine. It had to feed its own inhabitants, plus the multitudes of pilgrims who came three times a year for the religious festivities. (The number of pilgrims at Passover could surpass half a million.)

Jerusalem was a center of begging. It was considered especially praiseworthy to give alms in the Holy City, and this attracted even more beggars. There was no shortage of thieves and bandits, idlers and social parasites. Jerusalem concentrated the dregs of the nation, wrote Josephus.

Mt 6:24;  
Lk 16:13

Jesus was well aware of the city's economic context. He did not condemn money or trading. His group of followers included an administrator. His parables and sermons often revolve around business and commercial transactions. Money, like anything else, is an enemy when it becomes an idol and takes God's place. Jesus spoke out against people who were so busy with worldly things that they had no time for the values of the kingdom. Evil comes from a lack of response to the Gospel, not from worldly realities. Money and worldly affairs become an idol when they stop being the means and turn into the end itself of our lives.

Lk 14:15;  
Mt 22:2ff

Mk 6:3

Jesus worked for his living for most of his life. He was a craftsman, an artisan, a carpenter. The fact that he was called "the carpenter" is not without significance. For almost thirty years he devoted himself to making things; to them he devoted his attention, his efforts, and the fruits of his labor. For Jesus, all these things were valuable, and not just because he made them. They had real, objective value; they were worth the fruit of his work and his effort. Jesus lived off his work; he valued his own effort.

To interpret Holy  
Scripture, "due at-  
tention must be  
paid to the cus-  
tomary and charac-  
teristic styles of  
thinking that  
prevailed at the  
time of the sacred  
writer"  
Vat II, DV 3,12

## COSMOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Each period of history and each culture has a world vision that is a product of its past. A world vision comes out of many experiences and many ways of interpreting them. It becomes the frame of reference for understanding events. It is part of a people's intellectual legacy and forms part of their cultural development. No world vision therefore is definitive.

It is easy to see that the world vision is not elaborated by each individual; but rather passed on and transmitted along with the information it entails, because when we convey information, we also convey the way to interpret it. A world vision can thus be understood as a system of ideas, of assessments, of norms, of customs that are in use in a society and therefore, are present to the society's members. And because they are present, they are the categories that are used, the ideas and concepts that people turn to. They need no demonstration or justification. They are principles or forces that determine individuals' lives. When we come to this world, we do not just encounter things, we also encounter ideas. What we call world vision, also includes ideas about God, fate, life. It is the world we are given.

Jesus was not isolated from his world, or its environment, or its past. His world vision was something he received. In his world vision, which we discover in the Gospel and in ancient literature, we find certain mental constructs that are very different from ours, and that nevertheless are essential for understanding Jesus' message.

1.- Jesus thought the Universe was made up of three levels.

Lk 16:20-25

- The first, the highest, was God's abode. It was the heavens, beyond the clouds and the stars. It represented the prototype of order, of goodness, of perfection. This is why in the Our Father we ask that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Mt 6:10



Mt 5:45

- The second level was the earth, and in it, human beings. It was the surface of the earth, under the heavens. The earth was not a planet, but rather is huge flat disc, the firm base that bordered on the abyss. Above the earth were the heavenly heights, where the wind blew, limited by the vault of the firmament. Above the firmament was the sea of the heavens, "the waters above", from which the rain fell. The stars hung from the firmament, and the sun and the moon were heavenly bodies that appeared and disappeared in direct obedience to God's will.

Ep 4:9;  
1 P 3:19  
Mt 12:40

- The third level, which was below the earth, was the underworld, the abode of the dead. Very little was known of the world of the dead, except that they existed in a sleep-like state in a wide open and peaceful place.

Mt 19:8ff

2.- As for the origins of the world and human beings, Jesus believed that creation had been a relatively recent, historical event, as told in the Book of Genesis.

- The past had been a function of the present.
- The present was seen as absolutely connected to the end of the world, which was expected to occur in the near future.
- The future was determined by decisions made in the present concerning conversion, God's calling and the grace of the Kingdom.

3.- Jesus made no distinction between the "natural" and "supernatural" worlds. He did not conceive of any kind of autonomy for the world, or for life, society or

politics. In Jesus' view, God acted naturally in nature, in society and in politics. The world belonged to God, because God was its author. But it also belonged to the human race, and was for its benefit, because God had given the world to humankind.

Ps 115:16;  
Gn 2:15

For Jesus, the world was not God, but it had something of God: his presence, his love, his holiness and his glory.

Mt 6:25

God could act, and in fact did act, by performing miracles through him

4.- The everyday world, which depended on people, was for all practical purposes under the control of the devil. Demoniacs, evil, illness, injustice, war, suffering, and lack of religion, were proof that this world was under the devil's rule.

5.- Jesus lived in a particularly apocalyptic environment. He looked to the end of the world as something immanent and spoke of it with a wealth of signs and descriptive details.

Mk 13:7-24;  
Mt 24:7ff

6.- Jesus carried out his mission within a theocratic society where authority came from God, and in Israel's case, was to be exercised by sacred ministers. In Israel, religion was identified with politics, which caused no end of conflicts with Rome. Divine precepts were the basis of civil laws. And society itself was conceived in terms of religion and worship. For Rome, Israel's religiosity and monotheistic faith made it an obstinate, stubborn people.

Lk 23:7

These are some of the features that made up Jesus' world vision, which formed the backdrop to his attitude and message. Jesus did not intend to change this world vision. He simply assimilated it, like the language in which he thought and had to express himself. It is important to keep this in mind in order to thoroughly understand his message and way of acting.

Because our culture is so different, we no longer have the cosmological categories that marked Jesus' way of thinking and expressing himself. Our own world vision colors the way we understand the Gospel. When we read it, we project our culture onto it; we package it in our convictions and then receive a message from it. This message, which originally came out of Jesus' culture, must be adapted to our culture, so that it can breathe life into our circumstances.

## HIDDEN LIFE

Jesus' public life was deeply rooted in his hidden life. Jesus could not have improvised his way of being. He had to grow up, just like any person, because he was truly a man, and since all people carry their experience with them, Jesus must have also carried his hidden life with him, as a formative part of his being.

### **How did Jesus come to be Jesus?**

The Incarnation is not just the event by which Jesus took on a human body, but rather the process by which Jesus took up the task of becoming a person, i.e., a man, because the only way to become a man is by being a human person. (We use the word 'person' here

in its psychological sense, not in its metaphysical, Trinitarian sense.)

Jesus discovered himself little by little, in relationship with his parents, his home, his world, his times.

Jesus was not a man in general; he was "this man". He belonged to a people, and lived in a specific time and specific circumstances. The conditions of his life were unique, and made Jesus unique. He wished to take up the task that he was presented with in the world, and from the perspective of his being and his circumstances, he approached the world and carried out his mission.

**Jesus wanted to be what he was**

Jesus gradually learned to understand his life from God's perspective. In this stage of his hidden life, the most important thing that Jesus did was to construct himself and his personality from God's perspective. God's will was that he should exist in this world and be who he was.

One of the fundamental points of the events of Jesus' hidden life is how God gave a direction to his life, his consciousness and his experiences. Jesus would not have come to be what he was without this orientation of his entire being toward God.

**Why was Jesus the way he was?**

The answer to this question can be found in the immediate circumstances in which he lived. Jesus was not prefabricated; his world shaped him gradually as he grew.

In a second sense, this question can be asked on a deeper, more personal level. In this case, the answer is because it was Jesus in those particular circumstances.

Finally, we can identify God as the primary source sustaining Jesus' humanity: God had Jesus be Jesus in his particular circumstances.

One especially valuable way to understand Jesus is from the perspective of our own life. If we really appreciated our own experience as a source of knowledge, our understanding would be more enlightening and less theoretical, and the study of Jesus would lead to a recognition of ourselves. When people live their own experiences deeply, they are more capable of understanding Jesus.

Jesus, just like us, underwent many things that he was unaware of, but that did not make them any less important as part of his personal development. The pre-natal stage of his life established an intimate relationship with his mother, in terms of physical growth. His birth represented a rupture and a liberation, and he began his existence as an individual. This rupture and liberation from the womb, when it takes place at the proper time, is as life-giving as the union with the mother in the intrauterine stage. Birth separates the child from the mother. The challenge consists of making sure this separation is real and complete, while at the same time giving the child proper guidance. The child must be taught how to live, because it starts out utterly helpless.

Jesus had to get used to his individual existence: he had to learn to walk instead of being carried; he had to learn to feed himself, instead of being fed; he had to learn to act according to his own ideas, instead of being taken by the hand.

From a genetic perspective, parenthood consists of engendering and giving life. But from a more human perspective, which considers all of a person's many facets, parenthood implies care, continuity and responsibility in the child's development. We cannot speak of real human parenthood if there is no care or responsibility for the new person's development, regardless of genetic parenthood. Human parenthood is naturally based more on consciousness, freedom and responsibility than on the marital relation that procreated the new life. The genetic relationship can even be inhuman when the whole person is not nurtured. A paternal relationship that involves long-term nurturing, protection and responsibility, on the other hand, is the real mark of a genuine father or mother.

Parents are so necessary and important because they form the bridge between the child and the world. The shock of entering the world is so great that in the absence of parents, it would be fatal. The world is so hostile that without parents, a child would have no idea of how to fend for itself. Absolutely everything is unknown; that is why children are forever asking questions. And parents are the ones to give the first answers. These answers, often inaccurate, are the only "real" ones for children, because they are the only ones that they can understand.

Parents create the nurturing setting that children need. Parents are authority, protection and loving self-sacrifice. It was only because Jesus had the personal experience of a fine father that he could call God "Father".

From this perspective, the issue of Joseph's parenthood takes on special importance. The Church has always known that Jesus was not an orphan; he did not lack a father figure. In fact, this figure was perhaps the key element in the development of Jesus' understanding of his relationship with God. Joseph, far from stifling Jesus' trust in God, was the one who inspired and nurtured it. God, in his proximity, does not destroy Joseph or take his place; on the contrary, he makes Joseph more autonomous and more himself.

Jesus learned from Joseph everything a boy learns from his father: how to work, how to fulfill his religious obligations, how to be sociable and humble, how to serve and not be served. Joseph is "projected" in Jesus...

Responsibility for education is an ongoing confirmation of human parenthood, and even more, the actual realization of human parenthood, because the important thing for the human person is not just to come into the world, but to learn how to live there.

The evangelists clearly took care to conceal the figure of Joseph. It is simply not convincing that they would know more details about the Annunciation to Mary than about Joseph's influence in Jesus' upbringing. Moreover, the argument that Joseph died when



Lk 11:7

Jesus was young, cannot be easily sustained. Jesus' spiritual attitude, his teachings and parables, suggest that Joseph's father figure left an indelible mark on his existence. Jesus would not have spoken about the father who breaks bread for his children, of the head of the family who sleeps in the same bed with his children, of the Prodigal Son, if he had lacked a father figure.

Lk 2:52;  
Heb 5:8-10

Christ Jesus  
worked with  
human hands, he  
thought with a  
human mind,  
acted with human  
choice, and loved  
with a human  
heart. Born of the  
Virgin Mary, he  
has truly been  
made one of us,  
like us in all  
things except sin.  
Vatican II,  
G.S. 22,2

Jesus learned from Mary everything a boy learns from his mother: how to walk, to talk, to eat, to take care of himself, to have friends and get along with others, to understand the Scriptures according to the categories of the time, to understand his own mission on the basis of the Scriptures and his own deep and extraordinarily contemplative reflection and prayer.

#### **Jesus grew**

Jesus grew in wisdom and grace. He slowly penetrated God's mystery and the mystery of his own person.

To grow in wisdom means to make the great values of Israel more and more personal and internally motivated.

To grow in grace before God means that every day, Jesus was the object of God's complete love, that God was pleased with him. Just as we can say that a father loves his child more and more, without implying that at the end he has something that he lacked at the beginning, in the same way we can say that Jesus gradually became, and revealed himself to be, the center of God's affection.

To grow in grace before men means that Jesus day by day made himself beloved of people.

Jesus Christ depended on others not just for the satisfaction of his material needs, but above all, and more profoundly, on a spiritual level. Like all children, by discovering others he discovered his own existence and unique value. He learned to give of himself to others, and by giving of himself, he revealed himself to others and to himself. By receiving others and giving of himself to them, Jesus lived what he was. Jesus grew, and became a person psychologically.

Jesus increased his knowledge, his freedom and his love. Jesus Christ is the response to the Father and to us, and he made himself by responding. He is the response to salvific action, and he made himself by saving us. He himself is the Father's response. His entire being is the expression of the Father, and in his life, his whole person is the "Yes" of the Father, the fulfillment of all his promises. Jesus Christ gradually learned, without compromising his freedom, to be everything he already was from the beginning, and he lived it in his hidden life as the incarnated God. In his response, Jesus took on the meaning of his being, his life and his actions.

Jesus little by little learned to be more aware, to be more present to himself, to know himself better. If he posed the question, "*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*" it was because he had asked himself the same question many times, and had an answer.

Mt 16:13;  
Mk 8:27  
Lk 9:18

Jesus Christ, as the Incarnate God, learned to take his place in relation to other people and the universe. He, in the scope of his history, did not make reality, but accepted it, and by accepting it, transformed it, because a person can only transform something when he in some way accepts it.

Jesus gradually learned to love the Father above any personal satisfaction. His center of gravity was his response to the Father, in freedom and in love.

Jesus Christ came to be what he was by committing himself, by receiving and loving others. Jesus learned to be not just for himself and for the Father, but also for others. He learned to take others in, to communicate, and to receive the communication of others.

Lk 2:51

During his hidden life, his mother must have had a very significant influence. She taught him to store up things in his heart and to meditate on them. He knew that both new and old things can come out of the heart. Jesus made himself richer with the riches of others, but without taking anything away from them. By seeing what others were and accepting them, he came to know himself and to accept others. Jesus learned that love for Yahweh with all one's heart and all one's strength, had to be expressed as love of neighbor, because this commandment is simply the incarnation of the first one. Jesus learned to love everyone, and with this same love he loved the Father who is present in others. Jesus learned that the way to serve the Father is by serving others, and that is why he came to serve.

Jesus also learned that neither this world nor other people were as they should be. Not even he was as he had to be: he needed to grow, just as the world and other people needed to grow. Jesus had to learn the painful lesson of suffering others, of understanding them, being loyal and sincere to them, of admiring their values. He learned to look not just at the surface, but at the heart of things. The reality of things and the value of people are perceived by the heart. The only thing one can really know deep down is what one loves. And it is by loving that one learns what love is.

Jesus learned that in everything there is something of beauty, of goodness and of truth, but he did not stop there, dazzled, but related it always to the Father. The reference to the Father was for Jesus the greatest value that all things contained. And all this he learned in his love for others; in a certain sense they were telling him.

Mt 6:28

Love becomes real when people move beyond themselves. No love is more disinterested than that which offers itself. Human love is not an instinctive drive, but a conscious and freely chosen impulse. Love is the offering of oneself projected toward the other. Jesus gradually came to know himself and to accept himself as the Incarnate God, and that is how he offers himself to us to be known and accepted. When he made the ultimate gift, it was ultimate generosity. Jesus' ultimate gift was to give himself to the Father who is present in others. *"A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends."* Jesus learned to move beyond himself to accept and love others, and to offer himself to them.

Jn 15:13

Mt 19:8;  
Mk 10:8

Jesus learned that it is possible to love others in order to make use of them, but that this is the way to destroy others, to obliterate their dignity and their value as persons. Jesus learned to love others not for himself, but to love himself for others. He loves the Father by loving others, and by loving others he loves himself. Jesus learned, in the intimacy of his family, that love is manifested in unity. That is why the father and he are one and the same, and why he invites us to a communion of life with him, and he tells us that eternal life means being where he is. From the love of his parents, Jesus learned that love consists of the communion of life, and that is why he taught us to form a family.

He came to realize that union is not confusion, not a mixing, but a communion of persons that relates them to one another while respecting their individuality. Mixing destroys the elements; union affirms the person. Love completes a person's personality, and in love, the person is affirmed. Love of oneself comes before love for others, but it is in the other that love is found and where it has its meaning. It is thus possible to love another more than oneself. Jesus, by loving, grew in love, and by offering himself, he grew in generosity, because this offering, which is love, is rooted in the deepest part of human persons; it is their expression.

Jesus learned to love others through signs in which he, like us, wished to make himself present. But his signs, like ours, by their very virtue of being signs and not disclosing their whole meaning, can be betrayed.

Jesus is a question, and he made himself by questioning himself. He is the greatest gift, and he made himself by giving himself. He grew in his love, in his generosity, in his fidelity to the Father and to us. Jesus grew; he was a man in the process of becoming.

He, who proceeds completely from the Father, was the author of his own development. Upon becoming a man, he underwent everything that is involved in "becoming a person".

One is sometimes tempted to think that children are beings in the process of becoming adults, as if their only reason for being was to grow up. Children are there to be children, and as children, persons. Human beings are persons in all the stages of their lives. Jesus came to this world not just to grow into an adult, but also to be a child. His childhood was not just a time of preparation; one walks not just to reach a destination, but to spend one's life walking.

In the overall life of Jesus, his childhood was of capital importance for his personality. In every moment of a human life, the life as a whole is present. Life is not just a succession of parts, it is a whole.

The final point in Jesus' growth and evolution is the Jesus we know from the Gospel: a Jesus who already knows how to relate to others freely and responsibly, who thinks and acts for himself.

In order to highlight Jesus' relationship with God as a Father, we focus on the features that indicate dependence, but it is also important to keep in mind

Goethe

that a father engenders a child so that, like him, it will come to be a free and independent person. A father realizes himself as a father when he has a child who is like him- independent.

Jesus' relationship with God as a Father is based on Jesus' whole personality, not just on a relationship of origin. It is based on his dependence and independence, in other words, on the ongoing response that was his whole life, fully aware, free and responsible.

God let Jesus be Jesus. And at the same time, God as Creator and Father, is the root and source out of which Jesus became Jesus.

#### **Jesus' childhood**

Being a child means being dependent, needy, contingent on another person. As a child, Jesus proceeds not just from his Father God, but also from other human beings. This is the meaning of the genealogies that situate Jesus within the History of Salvation, and it is also the meaning of Mary's motherhood and Jesus' relationship with Joseph.

Jesus developed in Mary's womb, and from her he received his blood, his heartbeat, his way of being, and a great number of genes that throughout his hidden life, shaped him to become the Jesus that he was.

What is one's own thus comes from what belongs to others. But "one's own" is not just biological; the family, as well as human and cultural contexts, are at least as important. This means that Jesus received his way

of thinking, looking at things, praying, etc., from those who came before him. No one is so original that she can do without the past. Jesus' originality consists of interpreting the facts of History from God's perspective.

It is noteworthy that Jesus assigned such an important role to childhood in human realization: "*I tell you solemnly that unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*" For Jesus, childhood was not just a stage that is then erased without leaving a trace; on the contrary, childhood encompasses the essence of being human and being a Christian to such an extent, that whoever has lost the essence of childhood is somehow maimed. All of this suggests how happy Jesus must have been in his childhood; the memory of Jesus' childhood pervades the entire Gospel.

Mt 18:3

Jesus' childhood years permeate his message. He never would have said what he said about children if his own childhood had been an existential struggle, or if the values that make a person a human being had been missing.

Jesus did not see children in terms of their future; he did not care much about theories or educational systems for making adults out of children. Jesus valued children as children. And what are these values of childhood that Jesus found so compelling, we might ask? Childhood occupies such an important place in Jesus' preaching because it has to do with his own personal mystery: his relationship with God. His greatest dignity does not derive from his power, or his



authority, or his message, but from his relationship with God. He is, above all, "the Son", and God is his Father.

It must be remembered that Jesus' hidden life was not just his childhood, but also his adolescence, his years as a young man, his whole process of development and growth. And what conditioned Jesus was not just his childhood, but the process as such. His adolescence and youth must have been as determining as his early childhood. If not, we would find evidence in the Gospel suggesting otherwise.

What should be stored up from childhood for all of one's life is its most intimate core: the reference to another. Thus, a Christian's filial existence, lived as Jesus lived it, always refers us to God as Father. Even when one reaches adulthood, in fact in order to reach adulthood, one must maintain the filial mindset that is characteristic of the child.

#### **Children in the Jewish family**

Children were subject to contrasting sentiments in the Jewish culture. On the one hand, they were seen as one of the main signs of divine blessing, so they were loved more than in many other peoples and cultures, and surrounded by care and affection. They were rubbed with salt and wrapped in swaddling clothes at birth. If it was a boy, he was circumcised on the eighth day. If it was the first-born, it was consecrated to God after thirty days and "redeemed". It was redeemed because the first-born was in a special way Yahweh's property, and represented the entire family. Mothers nursed their children for three years. During this time,

Ex 16:4;  
Lk 2:27

Gn 17:2;  
Lk 1:59ff

Ex 1:15;  
Lk 2:22

the child was a "babe in arms". Children who could walk helped out with household chores, and were associated with women, so that "women and children" practically represented a social category. At around four years of age, a boy was given the tasseled cloak; one year later, his father taught him to read the sacred books. In some cases the boys were sent to a teacher, who taught small groups of boys. At the age of twelve, the boy was "presented", or introduced to the religious community, and received the phylacteries; the following Sabbath, he made his first reading of the law in the synagogue.

On the other hand, children were insignificant in social life, just as among other ancient peoples. Their job was to listen and learn. They were expected to "recognize" their elders at all times and serve them. In the eyes of their elders, children barely figured. Not much time was spent, for example, on taking care of them.

One of the first things they had to learn was to greet the rabbi respectfully. "Peace be with you," was the greeting among equals, but when it was a rabbi or a teacher, the child had to say, "Peace be with you, my professor or teacher."

An Israelite man had to wear a phylactery on his forehead and another tied to his left arm during morning prayers, and recite the following prayer:

*"Blessed be Yahweh, God, King of the universe, you who have sanctified us with your commandments and have ordered us to wear your phylacteries."*

Ex 13:2

2 M 7:27

Jr 44:7

Nm 15:39

Lk 2:42

The imposition of the phylacteries must have been quite an event in a boy's spiritual experience. He must have felt he was the personal bearer of Yahweh's revelation and promises.

Mt 9:20;14:36  
Lk 8:44

Some Jews wore their phylacteries all day and lengthened the ribbons with which they were tied, in order to draw attention to themselves. Jesus would later criticize this attitude, which reveals pretentiousness more than it does a love for the Lord's precepts.

There is no doubt that Jesus was brought up with all of these signs of Jewish religiosity. The continual prayer of good Israelites must have given him the experience of continual communion with God.

Jn 3:22 and  
26; 4:1

Ablutions were also very common. They were a ritual washing of hands and feet as a sign of religious purification. Jesus practiced these purification rites. In his dialogue with Simon the Pharisee, he remarks on the lack of water for normal ablutions. At the beginning of his public life he received baptism from John, and he himself administered it later. Jesus would later criticize people's obsession with these external purification rites, saying that it is not what comes from outside that makes people unclean, but the evil intentions that come out of their heart.

Mt 15:19;  
Mk 7:21

The celebration of the family rite of Passover must have made a lasting impression on children. They played an important role in the celebration, and their questions about the meaning of the actions formed part of the rite.

The solemn feasts must have been memorable, especially when they implied making the trip to Jerusalem in the midst of throngs of pilgrims. The story of young Jesus lost in the Temple reflects the strong impact that this kind of experience must have made on children.

Lk 2:41-50

We can be sure that Jesus carefully observed all the prescriptions that referred to resting on the Sabbath. And we can assume that it was this scrupulousness that led him, as an adult, to put their value into proper perspective.

Mk 2:27

Children always assumed an attitude of trustful openness, of willingness to learn. They had nothing to offer of their own, and limited themselves to obeying. It was their place to receive gratefully whatever they were given. Children were weak people, without pretensions, and their humility was more social than subjective.

Mt 10:15

Most of the Gospel texts that present children as models of humility and simplicity in Christian life, are referring to this aspect of childhood. In this sense, childhood is emblematic of an attitude of poverty and simplicity toward God and the proclamation of the kingdom.

## JESUS' SEXUALITY

What do we know of Jesus' sexuality?

Can we say that Jesus serves as a real model and ideal for our own sexual development and maturity?

Are there any hints in the Gospel that could help to form a reasonable judgment in this area?

What might Jesus have experienced, and what did he think about people's sexual development and their sexual life?

Catholics who are respectful of Jesus and of the Church's teachings no doubt find this a difficult issue to approach. The questions seem almost irreverent. If in general a certain modesty surrounds any discussion of human sexuality in general, this modesty increases when Jesus enters the picture. Very few theological treatises include as much as a footnote on the subject. Our reflections, therefore, will be brief. And the bibliography that we can offer is practically non-existent.

Unfortunately, we cannot find rigorously historical information in the Gospels. Jesus' hidden life becomes doubly hidden as far as his personal development and growth is concerned, and even more so in terms of his sexuality. This however does not mean that Jesus did not undergo a healthy and genuine sexual development as a specifically male human being. The evangelists take for granted that Jesus' development was the same as any other human person's, except that it was free of sin. The fact that our sexual development is often fraught with anxiety does not justify denying Jesus' own growth, or imposing a silence that only serves to keep Jesus remote from our real-life experience and to make us imagine him as an asexual being. It can be assumed that in Jesus' time a young person's sexual development was not accompanied by the same turbulence as it is

Heb 4:15

nowadays. This arises more out of the environment we find ourselves immersed in than from the nature of growth and inner vitality.

A person's sexual development does not necessarily demand that he undergo all the various difficulties that we have experienced. There is no reason to doubt Jesus' own affective and sexual development, or to imagine him as a being who is aloof from our sexuality, or from his identity as a male human being.

In his public life, Jesus showed himself as a man who expressed his love by means of a generous and fulfilling mission: the kingdom of heaven, which included service to God and neighbor. His being was completely possessed by the kingdom, which put him on a different plane. The same thing has happened to other people who devote themselves fully to a certain ideal. S. Proudhon said to Marx: in this day and age it is a luxury to want justice and love a woman.

Jesus was a man who was totally polarized by the kingdom. His celibacy cannot be construed as a disparagement of women or a slighting of human and family values. What it does mean is a radical identification with the kingdom, with his mission... For Jesus, women were not a trap, or a temptation, or deceit.

Jesus thought the kingdom should open up to all his disciples a different way of seeing and living their sexuality, so that women cease to be considered an occasion of sin and become genuine disciples and friends of his and of his disciples.

Lk 10:38;  
Jn 12:1ff

Gn 2:18-24;  
Si 36:25

The Old Testament makes a positive assessment of sexuality and interpersonal relationships. Jesus did not move away from this vision; he had no complexes regarding love, sexuality or women. He had no trouble quoting Genesis to refer to men's and women's need for a sexual complement.

Mt 5:31; 19:9;  
Mk 10:11  
  
Lk 16:18; 1 Co  
7:10-11  
  
Mt 19:1-9  
  
Lk 7:32;  
Jn 4:17-18; 8:3ff

Jesus was fully aware of interpersonal love between a man and a woman, and approved of it. Moreover, he considered it so valuable that it should last forever. The indissolubility of marriage shows just how far Jesus went in valuing human love. The marital relationship between a man and a woman was something that Jesus valued in and of itself as two people's original commitment to love and complementarity, with a clear allusion to love, whereby the two leave their parents and join together to form one flesh. Regarding love, sensitivity and sexual activity, Jesus not only is not scandalized, nor does he take the moralizing and scrupulous tack of the Pharisees, but he addresses the subject with complete equanimity, neither dodging the topic nor giving it undue importance.

Lv 15:16-18

It is important to point that that Jesus, unlike the Essenes, did not encourage or demand his disciples to reject women, or to carry out special purification rites after sexual activity.

Jesus assumes and accepts, in fact he expects and demands an attitude of responsibility and freedom toward women. Jesus' true disciples should act as he did.

In order to understand Jesus' attitude toward women and toward his own sexual development, it is helpful to imagine what it means to be a man possessed by an ideal, who devotes himself full-time and with all his heart to doing God's will. Jesus not only transcended what another person might consider to be perfectly natural with regard to human love and sexual development, he also expressed his mission in his lifestyle as a celibate, fulfilled man.

By taking on human nature, Jesus took on a being that was numerically singular, alive, specific, concrete and determined by circumstances. He assumed it as part of his process of "becoming a man", and "this man" who was Jesus, was determined by his biological, psychological and social sexuality, which led to his being specifically male. Jesus was not an abstract human being, he was a man. His sexuality, like that of all people, was not an afterthought, or something that could be left behind. His sexuality, in addition to being a biological function with all of its specific characteristics, was first and foremost a defining principle of his personal being. It was also a principle of otherness, of difference and of reference to all the other people he encountered.

Psychology has discovered a close relationship between sexuality and love, tenderness, gentleness, trust, mercy, self-esteem and self-confidence. Only people who are sure of themselves can open up to others with an attitude of service, generosity and respect. In the value they find in others, they discover, understand and project the value of their own person. Sexuality gives rise to a way of being that is tender,



gentle, affectionate, trusting and merciful; in fact, these characteristics are the expression of sexuality.

Sexuality is one of our strongest drives; it motivates us to discover our own particular personality. Jesus, like all people, was driven by his sexuality to discover his particular way of relating to God, to women and to other people in general.

Jesus' experience of God, the author of the kingdom that Jesus announced, and his tremendous freedom in dealing with the status quo, led him to seek out women of tarnished reputation and announce to them the time of grace. His relationship with them was not distant or superficial, but intimate and committed. While recognizing that "because of their sins they deserved the last place", he declared that by accepting the kingdom, they would enter even before the saints, the righteous, the dutiful, and those who count on their good works.

Mt 21:31

It is also important to point out that although Jesus assigned sexuality its full value, he did not believe it has significance in eternal life: "*there men will be like the angels in heaven.*"

Mt 22:30;  
Mk 12:25

## JESUS' DECISION

Life is not the same for a person as for an animal. An animal fulfills its purpose by existing in a certain place and time. People are different. Living is not the same as existing. Living means being a problem for oneself, having alternatives to choose from, and finally deciding on a response. For people, living means directing their lives. There are specific moments when a person takes her life and points it in a certain direction. This direction is what gives meaning and purpose to the insignificant actions of everyday life; and each one of these actions helps to determine a life's overall direction.

People do not have their road mapped out for them; their lives are not like a river with a set course to follow. They have instincts, but they are not determined by them. Their lives do not run on fixed rails. For human beings, living means deciding. And what God wants is for people to decide freely. God wants people to be free.

The distinctive feature of human life, therefore, is that each person has to decide on the direction his own life will take. Although people are strongly conditioned by their circumstances, their possibilities and their specific personality, it cannot be denied that they make decisions of their own free will.

Jesus, being an authentic human being, had to make decisions that gave his life a certain direction.

We can state that Jesus became what he came to be, said what he said and did what he did, because he decided to in his heart, because his life depended on his decisions, because he consciously, responsibly and freely opted for certain alternatives.

When Jesus was an adult, after many years spent working an ordinary job as a carpenter or artisan, and having been marked by his intense experience of God and his perception of the world he lived in, he decided to dedicate himself full-time to the project that gave meaning to his existence: announcing the kingdom of God, and by announcing it, fulfilling it.

We are used to identifying Jesus with his mission, and it is hard for us to even imagine that Jesus could

Mk 6:3; Mt 13:55

have done anything other than what he did. We have identified the author with his work. But there is always an original moment when authors have to make a decision about what their work will be. The work, even if it is the author's whole life, does not exist yet, and the author has to make a decision about it: whether to create it or not, be in it or not, make it one way or another.

This is what Jesus had to do at the end of his hidden life. And this decision changed his way of life. This decision determined his public life, his itinerant preaching, his mission, his message, his experiences, his relationships and his death.

Jesus' freedom does not contradict the sense of obedience he had throughout his life. On the contrary, we could say that his obedience presupposed his freedom. And even though we look at Jesus' life as the fulfillment of a mission, this does not mean that he did not have to make real decisions about his overall life, about specific events and his way of being.

Aside from the many decisions that Jesus had to make and that undoubtedly gave his life a certain direction and meaning, there are some that must have been especially important. For now we are going to look at just one: the one that changed his life completely, when he started his public life, a decision that was certainly present in all the other decisions that contributed to his life project.

With his decision, Jesus undertook God's plan and accepted his being and his mission. He agreed to be

the Messiah and Savior-Redeemer because he put up his life for whatever needed to be done, even dying, in order to announce the kingdom and save people.

We can see that Jesus' decision, which he made at a specific moment and that he had to uphold and confirm day after day with all the actions that constituted the announcement of the kingdom, was not just a key element of the mystery of salvation, but also the heart and soul of what Jesus was and was meant to be, of what Jesus did and was meant to do. This decision colored, as it were, each and every one of the other actions that contributed to the fulfillment of the kingdom. And at the same time, all the actions by which the kingdom was actually fulfilled, referred to the original decision as their source.

The kingdom, which includes the salvation and redemption of all human beings, was the core message and action of Jesus' being and work.

Just as a change in life presupposes a decision on the part of the person, and just as the decision is strengthened by the level of consciousness, freedom and responsibility with which it is made, so the kingdom presupposes a decision with an advanced level of consciousness, freedom and responsibility.

When God confers a mission, even when it is as fundamental to a person as being a human, he does not take away the person's freedom. Rather he assumes it, confirms it and sustains it. It is important to realize that the deepest meaning of freedom is not

opposing God, but just the opposite: opting for God more fully and living in communion with him.

Jesus' decision is presented as something definitive and clear in the story of the temptation.

The Temptation of Christ as told in the Gospel offers an echo of the inner conflict that Jesus' vocation could have caused as he faced his decision.

Mt 3:13ff;  
Mk 1:9-15;  
Lk 4:1-3

Beyond the literary language and genres used to express the temptation in the Gospel, we can discern that the key aspect of the temptation was the choice among various possible directions that his life could take. This is the fundamental message of these verses.

Jesus responds to the temptation by making a clear choice: to devote himself unconditionally and absolutely to the mission of the kingdom, with all the consequences that that would bring.

Jesus' decisions are not previous to his nature; in other words, it was not by deciding to announce the kingdom that he became the Son of God. But they are not unrelated or independent of his nature either. It would be wrong to think that they reveal or clarify nothing about his nature.

Jesus' life, like that of any person, had to be perfectly coherent with his identity. When the vocation falls outside the realm of the ordinary, the question becomes even more urgent: Who am I in the face of this task? Is this a task that I could carry out? Jesus had to discover his identity and his task step by step, gradual-

ly. This task, seen from God's perspective, we are going to call "vocation" or "divine mission".

Mt 3,13

There is always the danger that people called by God to carry out a special mission will begin to believe they are different from everyone else. For Christ, the temptation was expressed in these words: *"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into bread..."* In the desert, Jesus asked himself if he was really the Messiah of Israel, called to announce the kingdom and carry out the vocation of God's people.

The temptation that the devil proposed consisted of surpassing Moses and the prophets in signs and miracles, and thus demonstrating to himself and others who he was and what the task was that he had to carry out.

Jn 10:25 and  
38; 14:11

In reality, Jesus did not respond to this question until he announced the kingdom, and until his life was finished. If he was aware of being greater than Abraham or the prophets, he found it out on the basis of the kingdom and his relationship with the task he felt himself called to fulfill. The question about himself would be a conclusion to the question about the authenticity of the kingdom. Jesus did not use his condition of Son of God as a starting point for proving the authenticity of his message and of the kingdom that he was bringing about; his method was the other way around: on the basis of the authenticity of the kingdom and the consistency of his life and message, he hoped that the question about his person would be cleared up.

Since Jesus did not have a ready-made answer to the question about who he was, the devil tempted him on this point. If Jesus had felt absolutely sure of himself, the question would not have made any sense and there would have been no real crisis or temptation. Jesus eventually answered the question about the kingdom by offering his person absolutely, and in the same way he would answer the question about himself. "I am the Son of God because I announce the Kingdom"; and we can say that he announced the kingdom because he was the Son of God. The devil put the question this way: "if you are the Son of God...", but Jesus refused to offer perceptible evidence. Jesus was the Son of God on the basis of the faith he had in his mission and the faith he had in himself; he did not want to base his claim on a cheap trick that could be seen as "putting God to the test". We can say that Jesus answered affirmatively, but refused to give proof. Jesus did not want to answer this question with any other light than that of his faith and his attitude of trust and abandonment in God.

His trust and self-confidence were not based on a demonstration of wonder-working, but on the encounter with the Spirit of God in the desert. "*If you are the Son of God...*" echoed the proclamation of divine sonship at the time of his baptism: "*You are my Son, the Beloved.*"

It is important to note that the question about the mission of the kingdom and about his personal identity was an issue that the Spirit had led him to. The devil poses the problem, but it was the Spirit who led him to the confrontation.

Mk 1:11

Mk 1,12;  
Lk 4, 1



The aim of the devil, or the negative pole of the temptation, was to turn Jesus away from the mission of the kingdom and away from self-doubt by hinting that he was not anything special, and had nothing special to carry out in the world. The positive pole was to answer the question affirmatively, but in the faith and trust in the kingdom and his identity as the Son of God. Jesus' self-awareness came from his calling or from his mission to proclaim the kingdom.

When we say that Jesus was the Son of God by nature, what we want to do is point out the depth of Jesus' relationship with God, but we should not think that the generation of Jesus in relation to the Father was like an ordinary human generation.

Some of the differences are listed below:

- The generation of Jesus, by which he is the Son of God, is not of a physical nature, but of a spiritual and intradivine nature, and therefore goes beyond our complete understanding.

- Jesus proceeds from the Father at all times, and not just at the beginning of his worldly existence. From the beginning and at this moment, God is begetting Jesus.

- Jesus proceeds from the Father totally and utterly in his entire being, and not just in his divine condition, but also in his human condition, in that which proceeds from Mary. So Jesus is the Son of God not just by being God like the Father, but also by being human like us.

- Jesus proceeds from God in all of his actions, in his words and in his message, in his life and in his death, in such a way that no part of Jesus is outside his condition of Son of God.

On this basis we can understand how Jesus with his decision to proclaim the kingdom was becoming the Son of God, not in the sense that before that moment he was not God's Son, but in the sense that with his decisions he was realizing his condition of Son of God, which he had had from the beginning.

With his decision, Jesus did not "earn the right" or "decide" to be the Son of God; he simply realized or carried out his condition of Son of God.

When Jesus decided to proclaim the kingdom, with all the consequences that this implied, such as death, and being the creator, redeemer and glorifier of all people; when he decided to proclaim the kingdom, and in this way to become God's revelation, all he was doing was to uniting or fulfilling the union between his divine condition and his human nature. His thinking, his intentions, his decisions, and his actions were not foreign to his condition of Son of God.

"In one nature and the other, we confess that he is God's own Son, not adopted, with neither confusion nor separation, one and the same is Son of God and of man, born of the mother according to his humanity, the Father's own Son in both one and the other!"  
St. Leo III (Dz 314a)



## JESUS' MESSAGE

### **Person and message**

Jesus came to say something to the world; he brought a message to give to humanity. It was a message that Jesus formulated step by step in the face of concrete circumstances, an answer to the questions that both the people and the situations of his time posed to him. Jesus' message was not something that he had received or put together ahead of time; it was a message revealed in the experience of the life he was living. And the message was incarnated in the way in which Jesus communicated it. This way of communicating depended in turn on the occasions and circumstances. As in any dialogue, Jesus' message depended on the questions asked by the people who spoke with him.

Jn 1:18

Jesus' message was not a discourse written down ahead of time, previous to his person. It is just a way of speaking to emphasize the transcendence of his message when we say that Jesus came to proclaim to the world what he had heard from his Father.

In absolute terms, Jesus' most fundamental message was his person. Jesus transmitted his way of seeing and valuing the world, his way of believing and hoping, through his words. Jesus' message was the message of a person immersed in people and circumstances.

If Jesus is separated from his message, both are mutilated. The message separated from Jesus is not especially important. Jesus could have pronounced eight other beatitudes, and he undoubtedly told more parables than the ones we know about. The important thing is the Spirit of Jesus, his way of thinking and feeling, which survives through the testimony of those who heard him and the earliest interpretations made under the influence of his Spirit.

Mk 1:24; Lk 21:31

It would also be wrong to think that the message was limited to a set of improvised answers. The message had a soul and a spirit, a spinal column and a uniting theme. Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God. That was the heart of his message.

### **The use of language**

The revelation that Jesus brought to the world is not an extraterrestrial message; it is not other-worldly. Jesus extracted his message from the reality of life, of his life in particular, from his heart, his circumstances

and the world of his time. Jesus' life, in the context of his circumstances, and not just as biological life, but as a conscious, free, responsible and unique human life, is the closest tie in his union with the Father. The hypostatic union is the union of God with Jesus' human nature. The Father spoke to him through his circumstances, his life, his world. And what Jesus had to say he said with words from his world, his culture and his times. His words were the conventional bearers of what he wanted to say; they were signs. And as all signs are necessarily relative, they must be understood and interpreted in their context. This is why it is so important to know Jesus' context in order to understand his message.

What Jesus wanted to say must be distilled both from the text, which is incarnated in literary forms, and from the overall context. This applies to the interpretation of Jesus' words, and to the evangelists' words. The distinction that Saint Paul makes between the spirit and the letter of the Scripture, applies to the Gospel as well.

II Co 3:6

In Hebrew and Aramaic expressions, exaggeration or hyperbole is common. They must not be taken literally; usually they are a "way of speaking", as they are in all languages.

### **The Kingdom**

The main theme of Jesus' preaching and the core of his message was the kingdom of heaven.

Saint Mark presents the fundamental content of Jesus' message in the following way:

Mk 1:15

*The time has come,  
and the kingdom of God is close at hand.  
Repent, and believe the Good News.*

Mt 4:15

Matthew spoke of the "kingdom of heaven" instead of the kingdom of God in order to follow Jewish custom and avoid pronouncing the name of God unnecessarily.

Jesus did not explain systematically what he understood the kingdom to be. It must be deduced from his overall message taken in context. Jesus assumed his listeners had a fairly clear idea. Everyone looked forward to and spoke of the kingdom of God, although different groups interpreted it in different ways. The Pharisees thought it would come about through perfect fulfillment of the law; the Zealots understood it as a political theocracy that would be established after an armed uprising. Jesus did not agree with either of these conceptions. He proclaimed it as something different.

For Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is closely associated with the hope of salvation and the final, eschatological judgment. When Paul and John proclaimed the Gospel, they left out the Jewish expression "kingdom", and spoke instead of salvation, justification and life. They took Jesus' message to be a gift of God that meets people's need for peace, freedom, justice and life.

Jesus' answer to the need people have for God, for his salvation, for his love and grace, for a new world and liberation from all evil and personal suffering, is

what Jesus proclaimed as the kingdom of heaven present in the world.

This need that people have is not just an explanation of the divine gift, but a kind of appetite for God's grace. Grace and the kingdom, in order to truly fulfill their purpose, must not be something remote from people's needs.

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of heaven as something close at hand, something near to us. *The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand.* This is the hour that so many people have awaited.

Mk 1:14;  
Mt 4:17; 10:7  
Lk 10:9-11

*Happy the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.*

Lk 10:23

In the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus said:  
This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen. *The time has come: the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor.*

Lk 4:21;  
Mt 11:5  
Is 35:5ff  
29:18ff;  
61:1ff

All of this happened through the words and actions of Jesus; thus, *Happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.*

Mt 11:6

The scandal came because how could such an important message be proclaimed and fulfilled by such an insignificant person? Perhaps at first nothing could be said against Jesus, but nothing could be said in his



Mk 3:21	<p>favor either. Neither Jesus, nor his disciples, nor the people around them, among which were many of an unsavory reputation, offered any kind of guarantee. People did not accept him because things were not clear. Even his closest relatives concluded he was out of his mind.</p> <p>For Jesus, things were different. His way of thinking about the kingdom led him to act the way he did.</p> <p>Jesus did not offer a logical or systematic discourse about the kingdom. He spoke in parables not to obscure the meaning of the kingdom, but to highlight some of its aspects.</p>
Mt 13:11	
Mk 4:32	<p>- The kingdom of God undergoes the same process as a mustard seed, which starts out being the smallest and most insignificant of seeds, but ends up becoming a great tree.</p>
Mt 13:33	<p>- The kingdom is also like a bit of yeast that is enough to leaven three measures of flour.</p>
Mk 4: 1ff	<p>- The kingdom of God comes concealed, often in failure and death, like a seed that is sown, dies and finally bears fruit.</p>
Lk 17: 20-21	<p>- The kingdom of God does not come like an observable fact. People will not be able to point it out here or there. The kingdom of God is within you and in your midst. It is something that is already present.</p>

- The kingdom of heaven is like a hidden treasure, or a fine pearl than a man finds unexpectedly. The man is filled with joy, sells everything he owns and buys it.

Mt 13: 44-46

- But it is also like a net that brings in all kinds of fish.

Mt 13: 47

- As the fig tree announces the coming of spring by putting out leaves, so the signs of the time announce the coming of the kingdom.

Mt 24:32

- The kingdom of heaven is identified in a certain way with the Jesus' person and action. That is why those who do not respond are foolish. And happy are those who accept him.

Mt 11:17  
Lk 10:32;  
Mt 13:16

For Jesus, the kingdom of heaven is not a stage the world goes through. It is not a part of its natural process, or its fruit. It is not the result of an evolutionary process. It is not the work of human beings. On the contrary, it is the work of God. It is eschatological and transcends history. It will become a reality not by the moral effort of human beings, but exclusively through God's doing. God will put an end to the world and history, and will bring about a new world, the world of eternal happiness.

Jesus did not proclaim a better world; he proclaimed a new world. The kingdom was a gift; it was grace. That is why it was something that was received, something that had to be asked for, and something that came from heaven.

Mt 6:9-10;  
Lk 6:11

Is 61:2-3;  
51:1ff

For Jesus, the kingdom of heaven was not primarily judgment, but grace for everyone. God's love for all. God will put an end to disease, suffering and death; he will do away with poverty and oppression. A new world, liberation for the poor, the troubled, those bearing the burden of guilt; a message of forgiveness, of justice, of freedom, of brotherhood and love.

Mt 24:15; Dn 12:1  
Mt 24:42; Lk 12:31

The kingdom of heaven was not a notion that Jesus made up. His contemporaries awaited the end of the world in more or less the same terms. There were descriptions of the eschatological event in Jewish apocalyptic literature. The book of Daniel is the oldest example of this kind of literature. Jesus took part in the eschatological expectation of his contemporaries. He declared that the kingdom of God would come and that people should be prepared to face the coming judgment.

We can describe the kingdom as follows:

The kingdom is God's time and work; his lordship as Father of all people. It is grace, forgiveness and love; happiness and peace.

The kingdom is a new relationship of humankind with God. It has a deeply eschatological and religious meaning.

We can also say that the kingdom of heaven is humanity in the process of being transformed by the message, life and strength of Jesus, who teaches along the highways and byways. The kingdom is thus essentially linked Jesus' message, life and person. There is

no true proclamation of the kingdom without Jesus, his message and his history.

Jesus visualized the kingdom as a recovery of the world from the power of the devil (by defeating him and casting him out), after which the world would be under God's direct care and direction.

After the resurrection it became clear that God exercises this care and lordship of the world through his Son, made Lord and Messiah.

Jesus' miracles are signs that announce the kingdom. They show that Jesus did not just proclaim the message; he lived it and incarnated it. He is the message.

**The immanent and eschatological kingdom**

+ Jesus expected that the gifts and occurrences associated with the kingdom would come to pass soon, in the immediate future, and said that the dawning of the new age could be perceived in the signs and wonders that he performed, particularly in his power to cast out demons. Jesus declared that the kingdom of heaven had already begun with his message, his preaching and his action. And it was like the yeast or the seed that start out small.

+ He imagined the end of the world as something immanent, linked to the kingdom of God. The Son of Man would come on the clouds of heaven, the dead would rise and the day of judgment would be at hand. For the just, the time of happiness would begin, while the damned would be turned over to hell.

Mt 24:34

Mk 3:15

Mk 13:26

1 Th 4:15ff

+ The early Christian community understood the kingdom of God in the same terms as Jesus. It also expected the coming of the kingdom in the immediate future. Paul believed he would live to see the end of this world and the resurrection of the dead. This hope constituted the core of all New Testament preaching.

+ But Jesus' hope, and that of the early Christian community, in the immanent coming of the kingdom and the end of the world, was not fulfilled. The world is still here and history goes on.

What conclusion must be drawn? Are we to keep Jesus' preaching and abandon his eschatological expectations? Should his preaching of the kingdom be reduced to a kind of social gospel? Does Jesus' preaching have a message and a meaning only from the perspective of eschatological expectation? Does the delay in the immanent end affect faith in the person of Jesus?

The eschatological pronouncements and mythical images:

+ Express the idea that human beings are not the owners of the world, or of their own life, that the world they live in is full of enigmas and mysteries, including human life itself.

+ The eschatology expresses a way of understanding human existence.

It implies that the world and life have their foundation and limits in God, who is beyond everything we can control and calculate.

+ It refers to the possibility that human beings can be lost, and to God's explicit desire to save them.

+ When it refers to Satan as the sovereign of this world, it is expressing a profound intuition: that evil does not happen here and there, but that all particular evils constitute a single power that emerges from people's actions and creates an environment and a structure that oppress all people. Experience shows that our own actions are often incomprehensible to us. The consequences and the effects of our sins become a power that takes us over and from which we cannot free ourselves. The language is a figure of speech, but it is our way of expressing our knowledge and intuition that evil, for which each human being is individually responsible, has become a power that mysteriously enslaves all members of the human race.

+ The end of time proclaimed by Jesus continues to illuminate the present. The message of this occurrence has the same importance whether it happens tomorrow or in the distant future.

+ The world and the life of human beings will not last forever. Human life has an end; it will not end in nothing, however, but in God. God's cause will prevail and he will have the last word. The end belongs to God just as the beginning does; and by being the beginning of the world he is also the end.

+ It is important to configure the present, both individually and socially, as well as history and human life, in the light of God's will and judgment, in the light of the end.

+ The consummation will not come about through social (spiritual or technical) evolution, or through social revolution (armed or peaceful). Its fulfillment comes from God's action, which cannot be foreseen or examined.

+ God's action includes the action of people, on both the individual and social level. The first place corresponds to God, but cooperation is indispensable, and it is up to people.

+ The kingdom of God must not be seen in exclusively earthly terms, but not as something purely spiritual either. It is not just temporal, and not just eternal.

+ People should not take their concrete images of the world and society they live in as final. Neither the world nor the self should be people's first and last considerations. The issue of the kingdom is the overriding issue, and demands a reinterpretation of life, a new attitude toward life.

+ Conversion is still an urgent matter, even though the end is not at hand. Those who ask how much longer they can live without God, lose the present and the future. They lose God, and having lost God, they lose themselves.

Lk 15:24

+ People should not settle for a behavior without moral implications, i.e., for living without a conscience or responsibility. They cannot renounce their personal decision and responsibility for society, its structures and institutions. They are called to get involved. They must get involved because everything is at stake: life and death, the present and the future.

The early Church little by little came to the realization that Jesus' preaching about the immanent end of the world was not being fulfilled, but it also came to appreciate the truth and the importance of the consequences and conclusions that Jesus taught and incarnated in his own life. The message gradually revealed itself to be more "truthful" than the occurrence that underlay it. The truth flowed from Jesus, and from life, and from God, not from the expected event.

#### **Fundamental ideas of Jesus' message**

Some fundamental ideas can be identified in Jesus' message:

- God is not just the Creator, and human beings' relationship with God is not just that of a creature with its creator. God is a loving Father for all human beings.

Mk 14:36

- Since God is Father, all people are brothers and sisters. The fraternity of human beings is based on God's paternity.

Mt 12:50; 23:8-9

- People should treat one another, even their enemies, with mutual respect and love.

Mt 5:43; Lk 6:27; Jn 5:13



Jn 14:15; 15:17

- Love is the focal point of Christ's teaching and practice. It should give meaning to all other human virtues, especially justice. They are all derived from, or can be reduced to, the ultimate measure of love.

- Conversion consists of accepting God's love as grace that comes with the kingdom, accepting Jesus as God's expression, accepting oneself and recognizing one's own need; in a word, accepting the message in its entirety.

Conversion was not a pre-requisite. It was something that happened little by little as people assimilated Jesus' word, participated in his mission, meditated on his way of acting. In this sense, conversion was not a single act, but something associated with following. All of Jesus' doctrine, and his message can be understood and lived as a call to conversion.

That is how Saint Mark frames the issue at the beginning of his Gospel:

Mk 1:15

*The time has come, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.*

Note: One does not approach Jesus through a deductive, academic process, but rather through life experience, where truths are perceived existentially, and flow naturally from life. The revelation is given in Jesus' heart and in his life.

### Humanity in Jesus' message

We can identify a "fundamental" anthropology in Jesus Christ, not because he proclaimed it explicitly, but because it underlies the main message:

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1.- Humanity is the greatest value in the world.  | Mt 5:26   |
| 2.- People are valuable because God loves them. God is supremely interested in people.  | Lk 15:11  |
| • People are God's children.  | Mt 5:45   |
| • God is close to people and always takes their side.   | Lk 11:11  |
| 3.- People are valuable not for their actions, but for their intentions, their heart, their behavior. The defining factor is not what they do or produce, either for good or for bad; the defining factor is God's grace given now. | Mt 15:19  |
| 4.- Jesus tries to change not just people's way of acting, but their heart, which is the source of their decisions.   |           |
| 5.- People are not just historical or temporal, held to the earth. They are also transcendent, i.e., oriented to eternal life.  | Mt 25:31  |
| 6.- For their eternal realization, their relationships with others are critical. People are not saved alone. Their relationships must be based on truth.  | Mt 25:31  |
| 7.- Eternal life is of greater value than worldly life; eternal life is a kind of promised land. <i>What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, if he loses himself in the process?</i>                                      | Mt 16:26  |
| 8.- The world, history and circumstances depend on God, not just on people.   | Mt 6:25   |
| 9.- The world is a place where God can make himself present to people.  | Jn 1:14ff |

	10.- The material world is a sign of God's love and of God himself. God can be discovered in nature; everything speaks of God.
Mt 13:22	11.- The world is not people's enemy, although it can at times be a danger for their salvation.
Lk 10:18; Jn 16:32	12.- The present world is no longer under the sway of the devil's forces. The kingdom of heaven takes back the world and its people from the power of the enemy, and puts it in the care and protection of God.
Mk 3:15	13.- The end of the world is an immanent occurrence.
Mt 10:23; 16:28; 24:34	14.- God offers his saving grace to everyone.
Lk 6:36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God makes no distinction among people, he is the God of everyone.</li> <li>• Although he does take the side of those who are at a disadvantage.</li> </ul>
Mt 9:12; Mk 2:17	15.- The law of life is not death, but offering oneself to others. People are more when they give of themselves; they are fulfilled by giving. Anyone who loses his life will find it, will save it.
Jn 12:24; Mt 10:39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death is a passing to a different life, at God's side,</li> <li>• or for those who are lost, without God.</li> </ul>
Jn 8:51; 11:26	
Jn 8:21	
Mk 12:26; Lk 3:2 Mt 25:34; 26:29	<p><b>The God of Jesus</b></p> <p>Jesus was not talking about a new God, but about the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but understood in a different way, as the Father of all people, who is particularly interested in saving sinners and the needy.</p>

In all that Jesus said and did, he was referring to the God of Israel. In the final analysis, his preaching and

actions pose a radical question: What is God, and what isn't he? What does God do and what doesn't he do on people's behalf? The fundamental issue revolves around God.

Jn 5:36

The God that Jesus preached is the Father of all people. He is the God who makes the sun shine on the good and the bad. He is the Father who pays special attention to the neediest child, even though he is the least deserving.

Mt 5:45

Lk 15:13ff

It is God understood in a different way: God who does away with all differences between people by means of love, service and forgiveness. He does not care about the natural limits separating those who are with us from those who are not with us, those who are near from those who are far, friend from foe, good from bad. He takes the side of the weak to strengthen them, of the sick to heal them, of the poor to pull them out of poverty, of the oppressed to free them, of the irreligious to attract them to him, of the immoral to transform them.

Mt 5:1ff

Jesus' overall message about the kingdom and God's will was oriented toward God as Father. And Jesus called this Father "his Father" with absolute confidence and scandalous familiarity.

Jn 5:18

Just as at the beginning it was impossible to speak of Jesus without referring to this God and Father, so later it became impossible to speak of God the Father without making reference to Jesus.

Mk 16:16; Jn 5:46

Jn 16:27

Mt 5:17

Mk 10:19; 12:29-31

The decision to believe in the one true God did not depend on certain names and titles, but on faith in the person of Jesus. People's personal relationship with Jesus determined how they would stand before God, what idea they had of him, in a word, who their God was. Jesus spoke and acted in the name of, and with the strength of, the one God of Israel.

### **God's will**

According to the Jewish way of thinking, and in the mind of the religious people of Jesus' time, what God expected of people had to do with the observance of the commandments of the Covenant, with ritual practices, with keeping the Sabbath, with precepts governing purification, food, worship and sacrifices. Jesus did not reject this way of understanding God's will, but he did not feel especially identified with it either and did not consider it of fundamental importance. Although doing God's will was the main topic of Jesus' preaching, Jesus did not bother to describe it or define it. For Jesus, God's will was something that people discovered gradually over the course of their life in the most intimate level of their being, in their heart.

For Jesus, God's will is identified with the question: What does God want from me now? It is not an abstract, theoretical question, but a very concrete one that requires a prompt, responsible answer.

For Jesus, God's will in general implies obeying the commandments, and in this regard he agreed with his contemporaries' way of thinking. But he had a unique way of understanding God's will, and obeying the commandments was just a first step. For Jesus, God's

will consisted of the coming of the kingdom and its acceptance by people, which necessarily implied accepting and believing in Jesus and his message.

In the final analysis, Jesus saw God's will as what was good for people. He identified it with justice, well-being, progress, health, with people's holiness and virtue, so that they come to be as good as God is, and to love and forgive as much as God does.

Jesus' way of understanding and interpreting God's will put him at odds with the Pharisees. *The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath.* He reduced the law and all its observances to the scale of human persons; he did not reduce people to the law. It was clear that he focused his interest on people and not on institutions, rites or worship. Jesus did not see God's will as oriented toward recognizing God in worship, the sabbath or the temple, but in people's openness to others and their willingness to love them as brothers and sisters. For Jesus, people were more important than the sabbath or anything else aside from God. As Iranaeus would later say, God's will consists of the whole progress of living human beings, and the specifically divine work consists of the configuration of humanity. In the mind of Jesus, the Father considers human beings to be the most important thing; before them, all else is subordinated.

Jesus puts love of neighbor at the same level as love of God. A love that is free to create, to ponder, to decide and to transform. In Jesus' mind, what God wants is for people to treat others as God treats them. People can and should, out of love for their neighbors,

Mk 2:27

Ad Haer. IV 20:4  
Opera autem Dei  
plasmatio hominis est  
Ibid. V, 15:1

Mt 5:20

give up their rights and privileges if necessary. That is why the righteousness of the Pharisees and Doctors of the Law was not enough to gain access to the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed.

Jesus did not identify God's will with a specific law, dogma or rule. Everything Jesus said and did made it clear that God's will is **THE COMPLETE WELL-BEING OF EACH INDIVIDUAL, AND OF ALL PEOPLE**. Not just the beatitudes, but also the healing stories underscore the fact that it is not just about the salvation of the soul, but of the whole person, now and in the future. The good that must be done, and the person to whom it must be done, cannot be determined by principles and laws. Each situation requires that I do the specific good for the person that needs me, for my "neighbor". This means always being on the side of people, willing to help those who are at a disadvantage. It means acting humanely, and promoting everything that makes people more human.

#### **Jesus' cause**

Jesus did not preach a theological theory or a new law. He did not proclaim himself directly either, or try to create a different society and world.

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, i.e., God's cause, which is identified with the cause of human beings. The important thing for Jesus was not his person but his cause. And Jesus' cause was God's cause in the world: humanity.

Jesus' message was simple. He simply used parables and images to announce the coming of God's kingdom

as something immanent. He announced that God's cause would prevail and the future would belong to him alone.

Mt 4:17

\*Not just God's permanent reign, in force since the beginning of creation, as the authorities in Jerusalem understood it, but God's reign of the last days, which Jesus saw as immanent.

Lk 9:27; 10:9

\*Not a judgment of revenge, favorable to a group of perfect individuals, as the Essenes and monks of Qumran understood it, but News of God's infinite kindness and unconditioned grace for, above all, sinners and outcasts.

Mt 21:31

\*Not a reign of God in the Pharisees' terms, obtained by strict observance of the law and a superior morality, but a reign of abundant love and grace inaugurated by God's free action.

\*Not a world with new economic, social or political structures, as our contemporaries would have wanted it, but the kingdom of God of the last days, which according to Jesus had already begun, where people, even sinners and publicans, only need to accept God's grace.

The kingdom of heaven or God's reign is not a social reality. Although it is rooted in our concrete social situation, and influences it, it is not identified with any of the world's specific social arrangements. It is identified more with God's and people's actions to improve the world as it is today than with any current or future state.



Nevertheless, God's reign is something that has everything to do with this world, with God's presence and action in this world, in each situation, in each concrete "here and now".

The fact that it is called the "kingdom of heaven" is not to divert our attention to something other-worldly that does not belong to us. The name refers to the divine nature of the kingdom, God's part in it.

It is wrong to interpret the kingdom of heaven as a reality beyond this world, but it is also wrong to see it as a certain concrete situation in this world. So it is not any kind of theocracy. The kingdom is there whenever people take responsibility for the world, for science, for culture, for politics, for nature; but especially when they take responsibility for other people, for unity, for peace, for love, for service, for justice and freedom. God's reign is not about usurping people's role; on the contrary, in God's kingdom people take their appointed place. The kingdom of heaven does not disdain the world; it values it and discerns its transcendent character and God's continuous action in it.

Mt 5:1ff

The present is not the supreme value; it directs people's gaze to God's absolute future. The future of the kingdom must not be diluted in the present.

God's reign is not limited to the original "sketch" of creation; it must be definitively instituted. What started with Jesus and through Jesus, must be consummated by God and through God.

The future directs people's gaze to the present. God's reign cannot be a promise of better times, or a satisfaction of our curiosity about the future, or a projection of our desires and fears. When considering the future, we must situate ourselves in the present. From a standpoint of hope, the world and society must be not just interpreted but changed. Jesus did not want to leave us a teaching about the end of the world; he made a call to us in the present, in the light of the end of the world.

Mt 25:15; Lk 12:39

### **The good of humanity**

For the good of humanity, Jesus assigned institutions and traditions –the law and temple-worship– a relative value.

God wants the good of humanity.

a) Thus Jesus did not hesitate to act illegally, although as a rule he observed the law.

- He did not care about ritual prescriptions: purity before God comes from purity of heart.
- He did not practice the asceticism of fasting; he was accused of gluttony and drinking.
- He held no scruples about the sabbath: people are the measure of the sabbath and of the law in general.

Mk 7:3

Mk 2:18; Mt 9:14

Jn 7:51

b) This is why in his practice, which caused great scandal, he assigned traditions and institutions a relative value.

- He gave a relative value to the law and the entire religious-social system. It was not his intention to revoke or eliminate the law; what he wanted to do was give priority to people. Love instead

of dogmatic legalism. All norms and institutions, articles and dogmas were to be submitted to a single criterion: they were there for people's benefit.

- He gave the temple and worship a relative value; reconciliation and service to others took priority over liturgy. It was not that liturgy would be eliminated, but that people should be first. Love, instead of formalism and rituals. All rites and customs, practices and ceremonies were to be submitted to a single criterion: whether or not they contributed to people's well-being.

Mt 5:23

When people's well-being is not the highest priority, then God isn't either. In the same way people cannot love God unless they love their neighbor. For all these reasons, social change is not an explicit goal; it is a fruit.

c) Jesus calls on people to love, which allows them to be devout and reasonable at the same time. Love is demonstrated in that it excludes no one, not even one's enemy; it is willing to go as far as

- service without a view to hierarchy,
- renunciation without expecting anything in return,
- forgiving without limit.

Lk 22:26; Mt 5:43

Mt 5:41

Mt 18:21 and 35

Lk 23:34

One important result of each individual's change of attitude is undoubtedly a change in society. If the individual does not change, it would be an illusion to expect changes in social, economic and political structures. But it would also be an illusion to expect in-

dividuals to change without a change in the structures...

d) Jesus showed solidarity with everyone, because God wants the best for everyone without distinction. Jesus did not care if the self-righteous were scandalized by the company he kept- with the poor, the unhappy, the incurable, the heretics and schismatics (Samaritans), the immoral (prostitutes and adulterers), political collaborationists (publicans and collaborators), social outcasts and the disadvantaged (lepers, the sick, beggars), the weakest (women and children), and in general, simple people. Just as *Jesus is the visible image of the unseen God*, the needy are the sacrament or sign by which Jesus is made present.

Col 1:15  
Lk 7:40; Mt 9:10  
Mk 2:16; Lk 15:1

e) Because God wants the best for everyone, Jesus dared to proclaim God's forgiveness, instead of the corresponding legal punishment. He personally offered God's forgiveness, thus making it possible for people to forgive one another; in fact, Jesus insisted on it.

Mt 26:28

### **Jesus' authority**

For Matthew, Jesus' teaching posed a question of capital importance: Can God's authority be seen in Jesus' authority?

Jesus' authority and his mission to teach reinforce each other. Because he has such a great authority, he also has the mission to teach all people.

Mt 8:9; 9:6;  
10:1; 21:23; 28:18  
Mt 4:23; 9:35; 13:54

The kingdom that Jesus announced was not just an event, it was also a teaching, i.e., a way of seeing the

world and all of reality; a way of thinking, of being, of acting. It is interesting to note that underlying all actions of renewal, there is a new way of knowing. That is why all practical revolutions presuppose a revolution in understanding and values, a theoretical revolution.

Mt 7:29

What was remarkable about Jesus was not so much his wisdom or the extent of his knowledge, but the originality of his interpretation. Jesus did not speak like the scribes and Pharisees; he spoke with God's authority. The comparison with the scribes and Pharisees was Matthew's way of highlighting the nature of the person of Jesus. Through Jesus' teaching, one can come to understand who Jesus is for people. In view of Jesus' authority to modify Old Testament doctrine or to teach something new, there was no getting around the question of who this person was:

*Where did he get such authority?  
Is he in league with God or the devil?  
Isn't he the carpenter's son?  
Isn't his mother the woman called Mary, and his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Jude?  
Don't all his sisters live here among us?  
Where does he get these powers?  
And they would not accept him.  
And Jesus said to them:  
"A prophet is only despised in his own country and in his own house."*

Mt 13: 54-57

In Saint Matthew's thinking, Jesus' teaching not only raised the question about the Teacher's origin and authority, but also revealed his divine condition.

In the early Church, Jesus' mission as revealer of God was extremely important. John called him "God's Word". "The Word of God" for John is Jesus of Nazareth. And the Word of God expresses God's power, wisdom, will, reason, law and judgment. "The Word" is no less than God's total expression.

Jn 1:1ff; 8:27ff

Heb 1:1ff

Christianity is not a "gnosis" of occult mysteries; however the first Christians were undoubtedly sure of knowing in Jesus everything they needed to know about God. Jesus was identified with the Truth. The truth given in Jesus is God's truth, the truth of revelation, the deepest reality, which is the origin of all other realities.

Jn 1:16-18

Jn 14:6

Jn 6:46; 3:13

Jn 14:8ff

For John, revelation is identical to its contents, i.e., to Jesus, in whom God has given himself to us in the flesh, i.e., in his human condition. In his Word, God himself speaks his name, and thus we can understand, follow and proclaim, through human concepts, God's manifestation in the man Jesus, so that we do not think of God without flesh, as Saint Iraneaus put it.

Jn 1:1ff; 14:9

Neque per nomen  
Emmanuel, sine  
carne eum Deum  
suspiciemus.  
Ad Haer. III 21:4

Through his teaching and with his teaching, together with his example, his action and his way of being, Jesus was understood and believed in faith as the perfect Revealer of the Father.

Jn 1:4ff; 1 Jn 1:1ff  
Col 1:15



## THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

### **The miracle accounts**

All peoples idealize their heroes, forge legends and fantasies, tell stories and tales. The people of Israel was no exception. It is not hard to find traces of these idealizations, legends and fantasies in the miracle stories.

It can be proven that some of the miracles have their origin in legend, but it can likewise be proven that many of them have a historical basis. We accept the possibilities of miracles, without going into a discussion of the issue. And at the same time we can conclude that Jesus' wonder-working activity was historical. We accept that Jesus worked miracles not occasionally, but frequently, although from our present-day standpoint it is difficult to determine ex-



actly what happened with each individual miracle and what its immediate motivation or meaning was.

The people of Israel did not distinguish between the natural and the supernatural orders. Everything resulted from God's action- the rain, the fruits of the earth, children, victories or defeats. The people in the Bible did not think about natural laws; in fact, they were completely ignorant of them.

God was seen especially in the most imposing and awe-inspiring phenomena. Awe was an important element in encounters with God. Miracles were a sign of power, of God's presence and of his approval of the message.

To the people of Israel, miracles were events linked to their own existence; no one questioned or doubted them. They considered it natural that God should show himself in nature.

In the Israelites' view, miracles had to do with their faith; they were linked to their history. They were events that belonged to their existence, not a parenthesis in nature. The people itself had been born of a miracle: the liberation from Egypt. Isaac and Jacob had been conceived miraculously.

A miracle is not a process that occurs exclusively in the natural sphere; it forms an essential part of the historical dimension of human life. There are only miracles in relation to people. A miracle occurs in nature and has to do with nature, but it mainly has to do with history, where human beings, with their mind

Ex 7:17ff  
Gn 21:6ff; 25:21

and their experience, try to make sense of their existence. A miracle is an event that draws attention to something out of the ordinary that defies the laws of nature, and has a religious meaning.

### **The miracles of Jesus**

In the case of Jesus, none of his contemporaries, not even his enemies, doubted his ability to perform miracles. It was evident and undeniable that Jesus worked countless miracles. What his enemies argued was that Jesus worked miracles in league with the devil and not with God, and thereby gave signs of impiety, not piety, aside from stirring up the people.

Jn 10:33

Lk 24:19

Jn 10:53

Most of Jesus' miracles were cures. Jesus had the power to regenerate what was ill, to re-shape what was deformed, to restore normal functions. Jesus had the power to re-create, reorganize, revitalize.

The laws of mechanics do not account for all the dynamic realities in the world. There are also chemical laws in the world, but they do not explain or encompass biological laws. Biology is surpassed by the emergence of consciousness, and consciousness by freedom, and freedom by the voluntary giving of oneself. It is to be expected that higher structures presuppose and depend on lower structures, but the lower ones do not require the higher ones; they are simply open to them, in the same way that the world does not require our presence, but it is open to receive us.

Miracles, far from being a reality that is foreign to this world, are really the culmination of the world. The

world is open to miracles, expects miracles, is itself a miracle, in the same way that health, life, freedom and consciousness are.

In the Gospel, miracles are something that are there, that happened unexpectedly, that defied the normal laws of existence and that are beyond our control. We should see them not as something opposed to nature but existing in it, and as a real "passive" possibility in the world. In other words, miracles can happen in the world, but the world is incapable of producing them by itself, because miracles result from a specific intervention by God.

Miracles implicitly show that events and history, as well as nature, do not have to lead to a tragic destiny for humanity. Faith affirms that before all these elements is God.

The world, nature and human beings themselves are susceptible to an immediate and direct intervention by God.

God acts in the world, but not as one cause among many, rather as the absolute in the relative, the infinite in the finite.

God himself is the foundation, origin, center and goal of the world's process.

In the Hebrew mentality, miracles had an inner link to God's work of creation.

Miracle have a religious effect, which is to cause:

- 1) admiration and awe,
- 2) an attitude of attention and reverence,
- 3) openness or inner acceptance.

People felt drawn to miracles, as Moses felt himself drawn to the burning bush.

Ex 3:1ff

Then came the acceptance of the person who performed the miracle, and very often the miracle served to prove the authenticity of his prophecy. Finally the message and the authenticity of the person performing the miracle were accepted.

It is clear that the evangelists set down the miracle stories for the same purpose:

- 1.- To inspire awe in those reading or hearing the Gospel,
  - which is why they choose the stories,
  - they highlight and consider the relevant elements,
  - they exaggerate some elements to lend them significance,
  - they take liberty to add details.

Jn 20:31

Jn 6:1-15

Mk 1:34; Mt 8:16

Mk 5:21ff; Mt 9:18ff

- 2.- Awe leads to inner openness, to receptivity and enthusiasm.

The evangelists tried to get their readers to experience the same effects that Jesus' miracles had on eyewitnesses. So their accounts were intended as an alternate way to witness the miracles and reap their fruit. For the evangelists, the most important thing was the fruit or effect of the miracle, its meaning rather than the event itself.

Jn 20:30

The first readers never doubted the possibility of miracles; they simply marveled, like those whose had witnessed them in person.

3.- The presence of the exceptional fostered an attitude of openness to God and his message. The attitude of openness to God was seen as the most important fruit of a miracle, and the miracle itself guaranteed the authenticity of the message. Miracles are another way of transmitting that message.

Lk 17:20-21

Jesus not only proclaimed the kingdom of heaven and the "eschatological end"; through his miracles he fulfilled it, so that it could be said: The kingdom of heaven is here, in the present, and shows itself in actions.

4.- In Jesus' case, miracles led to the acceptance of his person and knowledge of him,  
-due to his kindness and compassion,  
-due to his power and authority.

Mk 1:27; 4:41;  
Mt 12:23

At the same time they raised the great Christological question:

Who is Jesus? Who is he for me? In this way the miracle stories represent a unique resource for transmitting faith in Jesus.

The Gospel presents the reader not just with an account of what Jesus did, but with Jesus himself. And what Jesus did once for specific people, he can continue to do on our behalf. Each miracle reflects or announces Jesus' relationship with all human beings. In this way a specific story becomes a universal

proclamation, and what was based on a historical event became a proclamation of faith in Jesus, who kindles hope in those who read the Gospel.

Jesus performed miracles because he felt compassion for the sick and the needy. What brought about the miracle was a person's concrete need, Jesus' kindness and the faith he had that God acted in him and through him.

Lk 10:33

Jesus did not perform miracles to prove a theory or argue in favor of a doctrine, although the evangelists and the early Church saw the miracles as clear signs for drawing certain conclusions or for transmitting their faith in Christ. The evangelists linked the miracles to doctrine, or mainly, to the person of the Lord. We can say that the miracles always contain a Christological message. All the miracles in the Gospel are there to support the evangelists' and the Gospels' fundamental message.

Jn 2:23; 7:31

Jn 20: 30-31

Although it was not Jesus' intention to demonstrate anything explicitly through the miracles, nevertheless his extraordinary power in favor of the needy made it clear that the kingdom of God was at hand.

Lk 11:20

Jesus demanded faith in order to perform a miracle: he went from faith to healing, and not from healing to faith. For Jesus, miracles were patently religious signs. He spoke of God's presence and God's acting through his person. Miracles were directly linked to the proclamation of the kingdom.

Mk 9:24

Lk 4:18

Ex 7:3-9

Unbelievers are unable to discover God's handiwork in everyday events; they have eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot hear. Miracles say nothing to those who do not believe in God; in fact, they can even make them cling more stubbornly to their disbelief, as in the case of the Pharaoh and the plagues in Egypt.

Miracles are not about satisfying a desire for wonders, or an obsession with security. They are intended for believers at crucial moments of their history, to strengthen their faith or reveal the power of God, who never abandons the world.

Jesus performed miracles without discriminating between people. He was especially sensitive to human suffering, in particular to the sick and those shunned by society because of their disease.

Mt 11:2ff

Miracles were a clear sign of love and mercy. Jesus did not perform miracles because people deserved them, but to show the world God's love through his, by feeling compassion for the needy. After performing the miracles, Jesus encouraged the recipient to live a life worthy of God's blessings, especially the blessing of the kingdom.

Mt 9:33; 15:22;  
17:18

Mk 7:29;  
Lk 4:33; 11:14

It is worth noting the many miracles classified as casting out the devil. The coming of the kingdom implied, among other things, wresting humanity from the power of the devil and putting it under God's care.

Jn 5:14; 8:11

As an outcome of the miracle, Jesus expected good behavior, confidence, feelings of thankfulness and love... and from those witnessing the miracle, he ex-

pected acceptance of his person and his message, and a willingness to follow.

Jesus was never interested in performing miracles for his own benefit. On numerous occasions he explicitly rejected that possibility.

He performed miracles without wanting to draw attention to himself.

- He was not trying to "impress" anyone with his miracles.
- He did want to "take power" by using "his resources" or the "force" of his miracles.

Mt 4:1-11;  
27:42

Jesus did not feel different from his disciples on account of the miracles he performed. In his eyes, anyone who proclaimed the kingdom and had the faith that he had, could work the miracles that he worked. Miracle-working was not to be taken as a feature to distinguish or set Jesus apart from others, even though Jesus did in fact stand out and earn people's admiration as a man "*powerful in deeds and in words*".

Lk 4:1-13

Mt 12:39

Mt 10:1;  
Lk 6:7; 9:1

Lk 24:19

Jesus' intention when making these extraordinary interventions was to help people in need, but at the same time, and through these specific signs, he was announcing that the kingdom of heaven had come. Miracles had the character of revelation; they too were the Word of God and their meaning was more important than their circumstantial dimension. Miracles were not isolated events; they were interwoven in a whole fabric of events, because in the eyes



of Israel, miracles were signs from God, valid in the context of a faith received and announced.

**Christological message of the miracles**

There is a special relationship between miracles and creation, between the "origin" and the reality that emerges. Early Christianity read into the miracle stories the fact that Jesus was the creator of the universe.

Whoever performs miracles having to do with regeneration, restoration, recovery, must have a special relationship with the wasted member. In other words, they are capable of restoring it because they were somehow responsible for establishing it in the first place. They can regenerate it because they were there at its original generation.

The power to perform miracles reveals a specific relationship between Jesus and nature, and an even more specific relationship between Jesus and the concrete situations people find themselves in.

For Church Fathers like Saint Augustine, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Irenaeus and many others, Jesus' miracles effectively revealed what Jesus has done since the world was created: Jesus is capable of raising the dead because he is the one who gives life.

Jesus can change water into wine because he is the one who changes rain into the juice of the grape; he can multiply the loaves because he is the one who makes the wheat yield a hundredfold. The Church Fathers saw the miracles as an announcement that the

relationship of human beings to Jesus is that of creatures to their creator. Saint Iranaeus assigned special importance to the cure of the man born blind. *He cured him with mud to reveal the hand of the one who had made him from soil.*

Ad Haer. V, 15:2

The blind man was waiting for Jesus so that he could restore the sight he had lacked since he was born. *What the Word, the Artificer, failed to form in the maternal womb, he completed in public, so that God's works might be displayed in him and we would have no need to look for any other hand to give form to man, or any other Father... because the Lord who formed the blind man's sight is the same who, in service to the Father's will, formed the whole man.*

Jn 9:3

Ad Haer. V, 15:5

Each person refers back to the creation; each person is a creature, and as such, imperfect, unfinished. Her vocation and task is to become more and more a faithful image and likeness of God. The world is still unfinished and the work of creation goes on. Thus Jesus can work in people and complete what was somehow left unfinished.

Saint Iranaeus says that *God's supreme work is the configuration of man*, which is accomplished in life and throughout history, and which the Father effects through his Word, which is Jesus.

Ad Haer. V, 15:2

In an unfinished creation, such as the world we live in, there is nothing to stop Jesus from remaking existing beings; that is what Jesus does when he heals. Jesus acts not just as the master of reality, but as its origin and cause as well, by making new things appear, as in

the multiplication of the loaves. The world that expected life, also expected God's creating action, which was revealed in Jesus' power to work miracles.

Jesus is recognized now, on account of the miracles, as the creator: the one by whom God made all things and whose power of creation continues to be evident in miracles. He is the Lord of all things, because from the beginning of creation he was entrusted with power over the whole universe, and thus came to save what already belonged to him.

Lk 24:19

In the miracle stories, Jesus' word plays an important role. It is not a magic spell, powerful in itself, but simply the expression of his power. The disciples characterize Jesus as a man *powerful in deed and word*. In the account of creation in Genesis, God's power of creation is also revealed in his word. The relationship between God's act of creation, which created through his word, and the cures effected by the words that Jesus pronounced, reveal the power of creation inherent to both.

The Church Fathers, such as Saint Irenaeus, related Jesus' miracles not just to the creation, but also to the final resurrection, because he who has the power to restore life, Irenaeus wrote, also has the power to create it and take it to its fullness in eternal life.

*"Because the maker of the universe, God's Word, the same who formed man from the beginning, upon finding his creatures ruined by evil, cured them using all means: either in their separate parts, such as he had done when he formed them, or in their whole person, giving them*

*health and wholeness. And he made them perfect men in anticipation of the resurrection.*

*What could have moved him to heal the parts of the flesh and restore them to their original form if these parts that he healed were not to be saved?*

*If the benefit he granted them was of such short duration, it was a small favor he did to those he healed.*

*How can it be said of the flesh cured by him that it is incapable of the (eternal) Life that proceeds from him?*

*Consequently, he who heals also gives life. And he who gives life fits out his creatures with incorruption."*

Irenaeus,  
Ad Haer. V, 12:6



## FOLLOWING JESUS

### **Rabbis and their disciples**

Jesus' first relationship with his followers was like the typical relationship between a Jewish teacher of the law and his disciples. Rabbis were lay teachers and professional theologians who devoted their life's work to studying the law. They were lawmakers, judges and teachers at the same time. As teachers, they tried to help people understand God's will. The problems that came up in life and the demands of each moment required endless decisions that needed to be determined by the law. These teachers defined and safeguarded family practices, tradition and religious values.

In time, established customs arose regulating the relationship between teacher and disciple. The teaching was not only theoretical; students were expected and required to spend a great deal of time with their teacher. Real-life cases threw up questions to which the teacher responded on the basis of the specific situation.

The disciple was expected to serve his teacher. This service was considered even more important than the study of the law itself. Rabbis occupied a lofty and prestigious position in Jewish society. They were spokesmen of the law's divine authority.

Disciples were obliged to show their teachers respect, love and reverence: a sort of veneration. When they went out together, the disciples did not walk next to their teacher; they walked behind him, literally following him. This external form of accompanying the teacher became an image that described a personal relationship and a commitment.

A disciple's affiliation to a teacher was voluntary. A young man sought out his teacher primarily for religious reasons: to know the law and obey it.

The method that teachers often used was to start off with a question about a concrete situation: "What would you say...? What do you think?"

Parables and hypothetical situations were very often used. Divergent points of view made for lively sessions, and students were urged to take a stand. No one dared to contradict Moses, however, who was the

undisputed lawgiver and norm. Quotes from scripture and allusions to events in Israel's history were the surest tactics for defending points of view.

Ordinarily, teaching took place in the synagogue or the rabbi's house; in Jerusalem, in the temple.

### **Jesus and his disciples**

Like the prophets and the doctors of the law, Jesus gathered a group of disciples. Many Gospel texts present him as a teacher, who instructs his own disciples. Jesus allowed people to call him Teacher (Rabbi), and his followers, disciples.

Mk 7:17  
Mt 10:24; 19:16

Jesus was an itinerant teacher. He went from town to town; it was his characteristic way of teaching. He addressed the crowds as a preacher or a prophet.

Mt 11:17

Since he moved from one place to another, it took on special importance to physically follow him and have a close relationship with him.

Lk 3:13-15

Jesus chose his disciples so that they would be his close companions. This kind of shared or common life was an especially significant feature of the early Church. Jesus also had many other disciples who listened to his teaching, but did not follow him from one place to another.

Mk 3:14

Ac 1:20-21

Jn 19:38

Jesus' relationship with his followers was very similar to that of a rabbi with his students. We cannot know for sure to what extent Jesus adapted the rabbis' form of teaching. The Gospels suggest similarities and differences.



	These are some similarities:
Mk 6:1; Mt 8:23 Lk 22:39	• The disciples accompany Jesus, following him from one place to another.
Mk 1:31; 11:17; 14:12-16;	• They serve him, as all disciples served their rabbis.
Mt 13:10; 17:19; Mk 6:35; Mt 15:12-23	• They ask him questions and engage in dialogue with him.
Mk 3:1-6; Mk 2:23; Mk 2:15	• At times, the dialogue almost becomes a controversy.
Mt 13:3; Mk 4:2; 4:34	• Jesus devotes his time and special attention to them. He instructs them and explains things to them away from the others.
Mk 2:23-27; Mk 12:30	• Like the rabbis, he uses comparisons, allegories and parables, although his teaching has a distinctive style.
Mk 11:17; 12:25; Lk 19:47; 21:37; Jn 7:14	• He also resorts to the Old Testament to refute opinions or propose teachings.
Mk 12:32; Mt 22:36 Lk 10:25; Mt 12:38 Lk 11:45; Jn 8:4	• And he teaches in the synagogues and the temple.
	These similarities were so evident that even the scribes and Pharisees recognized him as Teacher. Nevertheless, there were also important differences:
Jn 15:16-19; Mt 9:9; Mk 1:17	• Normally, disciples chose their teacher, but in Jesus' case, he was the one to choose the disciples, calling them from among the people.
Mk 9:1; Mt 16:28; Lk 9:27	• Jesus invited his disciples to follow him and help him proclaim the kingdom, not for a certain period of time, but until the end of time.
Mt 6:7-13	

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The disciples did not just learn from Jesus; they also took an active role in preaching the kingdom.</li> </ul>  | <p>Lk 14:7-11; Mt 23:6</p>              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlike the rabbis, Jesus did not promise his disciples honorific titles or positions.</li> </ul>   | <p>Mt 21:12-19</p>                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the contrary, they had to be ready to share his fate, which, especially at the end, did not look promising at all.</li> </ul>                                       | <p>Mk 9:36; 15:41;<br/>2:15-17</p>      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus diverged notably from the rabbis' custom by devoting time to women and children. He was a "strange rabbi" who even counted women among his disciples.</li> </ul> | <p>Mk 2:14; Mt 15:24</p>                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• But what caused the greatest stir was that he also called on publicans and sinners to follow him.</li> </ul>   | <p>Mk 3:7; 5:24;<br/>10:52; Mt 8:10</p> |

It is important to point out that Jesus was not a rabbi like the others of his time, nor were his disciples like the disciples of other rabbis. The difference stems from the fact that Jesus was the eschatological Messiah. This unique characteristic made all the difference in Jesus' teaching and the demands he made on his disciples.

#### **The origins of "following"**

In the Gospel, the word "follow" is used with a descriptive meaning. At first, "follow" simply means to go after Jesus. This fact reveals the personal relationship with him. From there it takes on the meaning of "disciple": following Jesus and being his disciple become synonyms.

Lk 9:11;  
Mk 6:1; 1:54

The act of following Jesus is profoundly linked to his salvific, eschatological mission.

Lk 3:14  
Lk 9:59ff

Jesus called his disciples to follow him and cooperate in proclaiming the kingdom. To follow Jesus is to serve the kingdom in communion with Jesus. Union with Jesus originally meant accompanying him, working with him. A follower accompanies Jesus in order to work with him, and works with him in order to accompany him. A disciple must announce the eschatological kingdom, just as Jesus did.

Mk 3:14

*He appointed the twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to preach.*

Lk 10:1-17  
Mt 10:40; Lk 10:16  
Mk 9:37; Jn 13:20

Jesus gives the disciples all the power and authority they needed to proclaim the kingdom as he did. The disciples continue Jesus' work, so that receiving the disciples is the same as receiving Jesus, and receiving Jesus is the same as receiving God.

### **The Twelve**

Mk 3:13-19

The Gospel mentions twelve people called by Jesus to live in close relationship with him.

Mk 6:7-13

They would have a special, unique mission.

What was Jesus' intention when he called exactly twelve men?

Mt 19:28; Lk 22:28ff

Jesus is the Messiah that the twelve tribes of Israel were expecting. The election of the Twelve serves to point out the relationship between the coming of Jesus and the people of Israel.

The fact that there are "twelve" of them has a symbolic meaning, based on Jesus' mission in Israel.

The Twelve represent a fulfillment and also a prophecy. They will be the foundation of a new people that will accept Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus' disciples become the new Israel, to whom God has explicitly promised his kingdom:

*There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom.*

Lk 12:32

The Church, as God's people, is prefigured in the group of the twelve apostles and the disciples, which is why it takes as its own Jesus' teaching to the disciples and the demands he made of them.

Through them, the Church knows its mission and understands its destiny.

*Go and make disciples of all the nations...*

Mt 28:19

#### **The demands of the kingdom**

Jesus spoke clearly about the requirements for being his disciple.

These demands derive from the act of following Jesus in his eschatological mission.

Jesus' demands were not for ascetic purposes. They were not an end in themselves, but a means for fulfilling the mission.

It is important not to confuse the act of following Christ with the fulfillment of these demands. One is not a follower of Christ just by fulfilling them. Jesus demanded certain things of his followers because they

were means to an end. And the end was to accompany him in the proclamation of the kingdom, for which it was necessary to:

1. Free oneself from family ties and leave one's homeland.
2. Follow him at once.
3. Give up one's job.
4. Give up worldly goods.
5. Carry one's cross.
6. Form part of a group.
7. Forsake oneself.

#### **1. Family ties**

*If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple.*

Lk 14:26

Only a person who is willing to renounce human ties will be able to collaborate with the Messiah in the service of the coming kingdom. "Misein", the stern verb used in the text, means despise, hate... It is an emphatic word, chosen to make an impact, a provocative word intended to underscore the priority of the kingdom.

To understand Jesus' words correctly, the overall context of the Gospel must be considered.

Saint Matthew interprets the word, or transmits the message more clearly, by saying: Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me, or prefers them or gives them priority, cannot be my disciple.

Mt 10:37

Whoever is called by Jesus to collaborate with him may not prefer any family tie to God's calling.

It is necessary to leave one's natural setting behind to follow Jesus and proclaim the kingdom.

Mk 1:20

The act of following Christ is opposed to a family relationship when the relationship becomes an impediment.

Jesus made demands of his disciples that went beyond those of any other rabbi; the authority of his person, born of his awareness of being the eschatological Messiah, together with his kindness, made it possible, even easy, to renounce one's family.

The decision to follow Jesus should enrich and illuminate one's family relationships. When following does not mean physically accompanying Jesus, but believing in him, loving him, putting one's hope in him and working for the kingdom, then the act of following should start by illuminating one's own home life. Jesus is not opposed to family values, nor does he disavow them; he simply wants his followers to be willing to detach themselves from their family, if necessary, willing even to be disowned and disinherited if it comes to that, for the sake of following Jesus.

The apostles knew they had the right to live with their family, or take their wife with them:

1 Co 9:5 *Have we not the right to take a Christian woman around with us, like all the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?*

Mk 7:11 Jesus was not in favor of neglecting family obligations, not even for religious reasons. When he died, he charged John with the care of his mother.  
Jn 19:25

Making a commitment to Jesus to follow him and work for the kingdom, is not equivalent to renouncing or "despising" family ties. Jesus does not like his Gospel to be codified and his words taken simply as law. That goes against the elasticity of life.

Mt 19:10-12 Matthew makes a point of saying that renouncing family ties (celibacy) is a gift from God and not all are suited for it.

The decision to devote one's life exclusively to Christ is grounded in the following premise:

1 Co 7:25-38 *Time is growing short...  
the world as we know it is passing away.*

If Jesus asks his followers to forsake natural values, it is not because they are opposed to supernatural values. And if he asks his followers to give up human satisfactions: family, wife, children, property, it is not because they are opposed to the kingdom. What Jesus asks for is a tremendous freedom to fulfill his imme-

diat mission. Neither Jesus nor the evangelists understood these sacrifices as being lifetime options.

1 Co 9:5

## 2. Following at once

*Another to whom he said, "Follow me," replied, "Let me go and bury my father first." But he answered, "Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God."*

Lk 9:59ff

*Go and bury my father* is a figure of speech that means "Let me take care of my own first". To which Jesus replies with another figure of speech: *Leave the dead to bury the dead*.

Jesus is not saying that anyone who does not collaborate directly with him is "dead". What he is saying is "Let things be; you come and proclaim the kingdom."

The emphasis is on following at once, in the expectation of an immediate change.

Elijah's call to Elisha helps to understand the call of Jesus and the vocation of the disciples.

*Leaving there he came to Elisha as he was plowing. Elijah passed near to him and threw his cloak over him.*

*Elisha left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother, then I will follow you," he said.*



1 K 19:19ff

*Elijah answered, "Go, go back; for have I done anything to you?"*

*Elisha turned away, took the pair of oxen and slaughtered them, then gave to his men, who ate. He then rose, and followed Elijah and became his servant.*

The Gospel passage alludes to Elijah's call to Elisha and points to an implicit conclusion: Jesus is greater than Elijah and his mission, more important; his requirements and demands are therefore greater.

Lk 9:61f

*Another said,  
"I will follow you, sir,  
but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home."  
Jesus said to him, "Once the hand is laid on the plow,  
no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

The decision to follow Jesus is clear, but also the desire to leave it for later. Priority is given to other things.

The problem is not the leave-taking, but postponing the following.

-Laying the hand on the plow means "having been called."

-Looking back is the same as going back, preferring what was left behind.

Being fit for the kingdom means being capable of following Jesus in his mission, and also of attaining eternal life. This associates following with personal salvation.

Jesus' response must not be taken literally. There is nothing wrong with looking back; it is not opposed to the kingdom, as long as it does not imply priority over the kingdom.

What Jesus asks for is a prompt, resolute response in action. Leaving the following for later is an enemy of human fulfillment. Very often when things are left for later, they are left forever.

The demand for promptness... was a consequence of the immanence of the kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is already at hand; that is why a disciple must respond and follow at once.

Jesus passes by... and the chance of the kingdom and the call might not come again. Each encounter with Jesus is a unique opportunity, a one-of-a-kind situation. One does not answer today for tomorrow's situation. Each day demands its own response.

### **3. Giving up one's job**

In order to follow Jesus, it was necessary to give up one's own job. This was obvious: whoever went with Jesus could not keep doing the same work. Moreover, following Jesus meant dedicating oneself to what he did, making a living the way he did.

*He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the lake, for they were fishermen.  
And Jesus said to them,  
"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."  
And at once they left their nets and followed him.*

Mk 1:16-20

*Going on a little further, he saw James and his brother John; they too were in their boat, mending a net. He called them at once, and leaving their father in the boat with the men he employed, they went after him.*

For the first disciples, it was not possible to follow Jesus and keep their same job.

Lk 5:10ff

Following Jesus and finding one's own vocation are part of the same process in the synoptic Gospels. Taking part in the Messiah's mission is looked upon as a new profession.

Jesus did not consider work itself, or the family, as obstacles to the kingdom of heaven. If he demanded renunciation, it was only because of the demands of itinerant preaching. For the disciples of the early Church, it was not necessary to give up their job; on the contrary, it began to be seen as important to follow Jesus within one's own profession or trade, and from there try to serve Jesus and others.

G.S. 34

In the present day, when the Lord does not ask us to renounce worldly realities, but rather to be present and active within them as people who live their faith in Christ and love for others, work and family have become the vital medium for Christian faith.

#### **4. Give up worldly goods**

Jesus demanded that his followers renounce their family ties and follow him at all times, even when it meant giving up their life and livelihood, as well as their material possessions.

All this implied a change in lifestyle, a kind of conversion.

Mk 1:18-20;  
Lk 5:11Mk 2:14

This new way of life, required by the mission and lived in the light of the immanent kingdom, offered absolutely no security.

Poverty, or rather the detachment that Jesus asked of his followers, was a kind of inner freedom with regard to material things, just as the renunciation of the family was freedom with regard to family ties.

Jesus wanted those accompanying him in the proclamation of the kingdom, to travel light, without heavy baggage that would hold them back. Just a stout pair of sandals and a staff were all that was needed to follow him.

*And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff-  
no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses. They were to wear sandals,  
but, he added, "Do not take a spare tunic."*

Mk 6:8f

Originally, this recommendation of Jesus' was understood as a type of apostolic freedom: what you need, you will receive; concern yourselves only with sandals and a staff in order to be able to walk.

Lk 10:1ff

Matthew and Luke change the sense of Jesus' authorization. Both radicalize the demand and interpret it in terms of poverty, so that even the sandals and the staff are explicitly banned.

Mt 10:9ff;  
Lk 9:3; 10:4

Lk 9:58

Another text says:

*Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*

Foxes and birds have a home to return to, because they are not itinerant, but Jesus and his disciples will have to move from place to place.

Mk 15:40f;  
Lk 8:3; Mt 27:55;  
Mk 15:43

Poverty was not laid down as general law by Jesus. Some of his followers are explicitly identified as well-to-do. The women of Galilee put their fortunes at Jesus' service; they looked after him with their own resources and cared for him. Joseph of Arimathea is described as a wealthy man and a disciple of Jesus. The fishermen, those who "left everything" to follow Jesus, actually kept what they had... and their boats served to transport Jesus; he even preached from them. And after the Passion, the disciples went back to their work and their boats.

Jn 21:1ff

Jesus had no intention of laying down a law of poverty. He was free even with regard to poverty. He was poor because he was free. Being poor and not being free go against Jesus' message and demands.

In the final analysis, Jesus' basic demand with regard to family, possessions, place of residence and work, is to be free to follow him:

- in his mission, first of all.
- in Christian living, afterwards,
- and finally, in the fulfillment of one's particular vocation.

Jesus asked people to give up their material possessions according to each person's personal situation.

Mk 10:21

Luke writes, *So in the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions.* Giving up everything means putting the kingdom before all else.

Lk 14:33

Jesus himself did not give up everything, but he showed how to put the kingdom ahead of all else.

This is the message of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price: first is the kingdom, and everything else follows from that.

Mt 14:44-46

### **5. Carry one's cross**

Jesus asked his disciples to have a very special attitude of acceptance toward his person and his fate. Accepting Jesus implied accepting his fate, and accepting his fate meant having to accompany him, and even suffer the same fate that he did. Meeting the same end as Jesus was a real possibility for those who followed him.

In the eyes of the Jews and Romans, the disciples were Jesus' accomplices, and thus ran the same risks. The members of a movement could be called to accounts for their participation, and punished with the cross. Jesus must have been aware of this very real possibility for his disciples.

But what exactly did Jesus mean with the expression "carry your cross"? It is possible that this expression was already current before Good Friday.

The rather sadistic custom that those sentenced to death had to carry their own cross could have given rise to Jesus' expression.

In the early Church, living a Christian life brought with it a real possibility of martyrdom.

Carrying the cross could be understood as the willingness to follow Jesus in life and in death, with the possibility of dying on a cross.

Lk 17: 33

*Anyone who tries to preserve his life will lose it; and anyone who loses it will keep it safe.*

It is however more probable that the expression "carry the cross" arose after Easter and that the evangelists associate Jesus' end with that of the Christians.

The cross symbolizes all those things that cannot be changed and therefore must be borne. Following Jesus and carrying the cross means that following Jesus will bring with it many sufferings to bear.

Whoever wants to follow Jesus crucified can do it by taking up his own cross. The cross is what each person must bear. Each person has his cross; the possessive pronoun underscores the fact that it refers to the theological concept of cross, each person's particular suffering.

For my sake  
Mk 8:35

The Christian's suffering is referred and linked to the Teacher's suffering.

Carrying the cross is also interpreted as the need to renounce the self. *If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross.*

Mk 8:34

Renouncing oneself means subordinating one's own interests to those of Christ and the kingdom. This can be painful for the self, which is why "renouncing oneself" and "carrying the cross" are equivalent expressions.

Jesus does not ask his disciples to love suffering, or the cross, or penitence; he just wants them to be willing to suffer when it is necessary for the sake of proclaiming the kingdom. Jesus was not a hedonist, but he was not a stoic or a fakir either, not even an ascetic like John the Baptist or the monks of Qumran. Nor did he praise the ideal of imperviousness to suffering, as Buddha did. He wanted his disciples to follow him in a magnanimous and joyful spirit. He compared the kingdom to a wedding feast, where he played the role of the bridegroom. The disciples, in the role of the bridegroom's friends, are supposed to be joyful. Everything must be postponed joyfully, because the kingdom's happiness comes first.

Mt 9:15; 11:18-19

Mk 2:19

Mk 2:19; Mt 9:15

Mt 14:34f

### **6. Form part of a group**

It was natural that those who followed Jesus would band together in a group. The call was personal to form part of a community. What held them together was Jesus and the work for the kingdom. Each one was called by name; in their individuality, they formed part of the group.

Mk 1:16



Mk 9:38

The group came to be a vital medium for those that followed Jesus. Among the disciples, this team spirit even went too far, and took on an exclusionist bent.

Lk 22:26

The love for Jesus and the task of following him and working for the kingdom set the tone for their interactions. Jesus told them, for example, that whoever served the others, even though he occupied the lowest place, was the most important.

Mt 6:16

He told them that traditions should not be overemphasized, as they were for the Pharisees, but that his followers should be known for sanctity that went beyond customs and traditions.

Mk 16:17

Love for the Teacher and for the kingdom determined the way to love one another, and to love others. The group was recognized as the "disciples" because of their relationship with the "Teacher". People saw them as an extension of Jesus. They had authority because they were his disciples. Among them there was a clear awareness of the privilege of having been called to follow Jesus. Overcoming hard feelings, working together, love and unity were clearly demands that Jesus expected of his followers. It could thus be said that not accepting one another was an unmistakable sign of the inauthenticity of the following.

Among the disciples there were differences, not just of age, but mainly in terms of mindset. Two or three of them were Zealots, i.e., men who wanted to impose the reign of God by force of arms. Jesus did not spend time refuting their positions; he simply spoke of the

importance of love and gave an example of meekness, even when things seemed utterly lost. Unity was very important, in spite of differences. It almost seemed as if the greater the differences, the more united Jesus expected people to be.

Most of the disciples were ordinary people, not especially poor and not especially rich. But there were some who had plenty (Matthew, Joseph of Arimathea, some of the women who followed him).

The disciples were regular people, not especially good, not especially bad. There were some however who knew that they had sinned openly. Following Jesus was the fruit and the sign of an inner conversion. The willingness to convert was the starting point for following Jesus and for proclaiming the kingdom.

The disciples felt like a family whose father and mother was Jesus. They were the little ones and God was "*Abba*" (Daddy) in heaven.

Mt 23:9

It was to this community that Jesus devoted most of his time and his most sublime teachings and examples.

In the first stage of following, the importance of community and being close to Jesus was evident. Knowing him intimately, feeling oneself known intimately by Jesus, loving him with all one's heart and feeling loved by him- these were the objectives of this first moment. Individual spiritual gifts came later. It was not a case of first receiving a spiritual gift and then following Jesus. Following Jesus was the first thing, and in following him, serving others.

The beautiful image of community clearly became the image of the Church once Jesus ascended into heaven. Converting to Jesus, knowing and loving Jesus continued to be the group's unifying force. Because of their relationship with Christ, the first community began to call itself "Christians", to express in precise terms that faith, hope and love for Jesus were fundamental attitudes for all those who wanted to join the group.

The call, and then following were the elements that made up the fundamental structure of faith in Christ. Before any theoretical formulation, faith was a personal adhesion. Words and concepts were very important, but they were not the most important things.

For the disciples, the feeling of being equal was spontaneous and fundamental: they were all following Jesus, and that was what really counted.

Even authority was understood and exercised in a different way from conventional civil and religious authority. More than anyone else, authority figures among them were to follow Jesus' example, since Jesus was the highest authority in the group of followers.

Jn 13:1ff

*You know that among the pagans their so-called rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt.*

Mk 10:42-43

*This is not to happen among you.*

Oppressing people in the name of atheism is a lesser offense than oppressing them in the name of God.

*The kings lord it over them, and those who have authority over them are given the title Benefactor. This must not happen with you.*

Lk 22:25-26

All love that is true to its name must allow the loved one to be free, to grow, and it must recognize the loved one's transformation. No love should be more liberating than love for the kingdom and love for Jesus. "Love for the kingdom" is love that transforms the world out of love for Jesus.

Jesus imposes a different way of governing and presiding. Among his followers there must be no authoritarian and paternalistic attitudes. Power and authority are occasions of service.

*The greatest among you must behave as if he were the youngest,  
the leader as if he were the one who serves.*

Lk 22:26

### **7. Forsake oneself**

Jesus asks his disciples to forsake themselves, their love for themselves and their desires to stand out. Even though Jesus considered the person to be the supreme value, he wanted his disciples to stop worrying about themselves. A forsaking of one's own interests was an immediate consequence of faith in God. The way to follow him was to be humble like a child or a sinner that knows she has no right to make demands. The disciples found it easier to forsake their land and their jobs than to forsake their love for themselves. It was harder to give up the places of honor than to leave their father, mother, wife and children. It was harder to shake off their desire to be

Mt 10:39

Mk 9:35

the center of attention than to abandon all their material goods.

Jn 13:14

Forsaking oneself is a value not because it is hard, but because it is a consequence of the message itself, which brooks no excuses. The kingdom was the project of God, and of no one else. God took the initiative, with no "stand-ins". Jesus wanted the disciples to think of what they could offer the kingdom, not what the kingdom could offer them. It was not enough to give up on the place of honor and recognize that it corresponded to God; it was also necessary to occupy the lowest places and serve others.

Dignity was to be no more than a form of service, not a collection of "titles".

There can be no doubt that for Jesus, humility was the kindest and most necessary of virtues. Humility opened God's heart the way a child opens her father's heart when she asks for a helping hand. Humility is the way to correspond to God's spontaneous gift of the kingdom.

Lk 9:46ff;  
Mt 18:1-14  
Mk 9:33-37

*An argument started between them about who was the greatest. Jesus knew what thoughts were going through their minds, and he took a little child and set him by his side., and then he said to them.... "The least among you all, that is the one who is great."*

#### **The disciple in the early Church**

After the Resurrection, Jesus' followers found themselves in a completely different situation. Jesus was gone. They continued to feel that they belonged

to him; they saw themselves as his community, as the new people of Israel. It was only natural for them to interpret Jesus' words to them and to others, in a new light. They wanted to give witness to their faith and their interpretation of Jesus' person and mission.

The words that were originally addressed to the disciples, came to be applied to the whole Christian community. What was at first specific instructions for the apostles, became general teaching.

Lk 9:23

The evangelists took great pains to adapt the Lord's words to Christians' concrete and particular situation.

The Church sees its own existence prefigured in the group of the twelve, and therefore applies to itself the words addressed to the apostles. In this context, the words take on a new meaning.

All Christians are disciples,  
all must follow Jesus;  
all must carry their cross,  
and deny themselves.

### **Following Jesus, Christian life**

The example of the disciples marked the Christian way of living. The personal requirements for the eschatological mission became a message to be lived in the Church.

The concepts of "following Jesus" and "disciple" took on a new meaning in which the experience of Good Friday and, more importantly, of the Resurrection, played a decisive role.

Being a disciple and following Jesus were understood in a new way. Jesus' life history took on great importance, and was seen as something that is renewed and relived.

In the earliest stage, "following" simply meant service in the mission of redeeming the people of Israel. Salvation would come from God; but it was not clear exactly what was expected of a person who converted and wished to follow Christ in the early Church.

- The action of the Spirit of Jesus in the community gradually clarified the issue.
- The call of the disciple became a vocation oriented toward service to others and eternal life.
- In the Christian community and the heart of the disciple, the personal relationship with Jesus gave rise to faith, love, hope and confidence in the living Jesus. Following Jesus no longer meant going where Jesus went; it now took on a theological and ecclesiastical sense.

Chapter 10 of Mark's Gospel was addressed to those who followed Jesus in the Church; it concludes with the promise of repayment (and eternal life) for giving up all worldly goods and becoming a disciple.

The evangelists were trying to give those who received the message an understanding of the new meaning of "following" and "being a disciple of Jesus", on the basis of what he asked of those who accompanied him on his mission.

The story of the rich young man seems to take pains to link the idea of following with personal salvation, which suggests that the passage was written with religious instruction in mind.

The rich young man is interested in personal salvation, not in following for the sake of the kingdom.

Jesus speaks of keeping the commandments, and lists them explicitly. He even adds another to the passage from Deuteronomy: *You must not defraud.*

Mk 10:20

He accepts the relationship between keeping the commandments and eternal life.

Jesus felt love for the young man who had observed the law from his earliest days. The observance of the law is a good way to become a Christian.

However, he proposes perfection. According to Mark he says, "*There is one thing you lack.*" The perfection he refers to is not the Greek concept of fullness of being and of form. Perfect meant what was well made in all its parts. For the Hebrews, perfection consisted of harmony with God's will and with the law. The law is completed and perfected in following Jesus, in Christian living. Following is thus the perfection of the law.

Mk 10:21

For this the rich young man needed to become poor alongside the poor Christians and offer his goods or his money to meet the needs of others.

Ac 2:44; 4:32  
and 34



It was common for the wealthy to find great difficulties in becoming Christians.

The catechetical intention of this passage does not contradict or deny its possible historical basis.

Before the Resurrection, the point of following was to serve Jesus and the kingdom in communion with him. After the Resurrection, the point was to follow Christ in faith, love and self-giving, as expressed in service to others, and the creation of a different world, marked by love and unity.

Jn 14:12      Anyone who follows Jesus should work now for the same cause that Jesus worked for in his time.

Jn 15:12      The disciple should make an effort to bear abundant fruit. This is the most eloquent expression of the Church's apostolic and missionary character.

**From narration to exhortation**

-The evangelists reveal a keen desire to inspire and motivate the community's life with their preaching about following Jesus. The stories thus became occasions for specific exhortations.

-The example of Jesus' followers was intended to express what was essential to all following. This intention determined the presentation and selection of the reasons for following. This explains why the evangelists gave this material a soteriological and typological orientation (as examples for personal salvation). They try to illustrate the essentials of discipleship through the examples of the apostles.

The format is very common:

- Jesus calls.
- The person called accepts,
- trustingly.
- Faith is expressed in obedience,
- free of ties that could interfere with the fulfillment of the mission.

The call of the disciples in the Gospels is meant to make all those hearing the Gospels feel that they too are being called personally and invited to make a free decision.

The vocation narratives are chosen for the purpose of illustrating Christ's call to become part of the Christian community, and making it relevant in changed circumstances.

Lk 9:57ff

- They are brief, and before they end, they are interrupted to allow the listener to answer for herself.
- They try to anticipate objections and refute them with Jesus' own words.
- The vocation narratives are addressed to the faithful so that they can build the community, the Church.

Only later were they given another function, as a justification of a special religious lifestyle. There was a risk of reducing the message to a specific group of people.

#### **Following Jesus in John's Gospel**

For John, only faith in Jesus can form a solid basis for discipleship.

Jn 2:11; 1:35-51

Jn 6:67-71

Jn 17:7ff

Jn 6:66ff

- The disciple of Jesus is a disciple of Christ glorified.
- Faith is decisive for being a permanent disciple.
- It is what characterizes the disciples.
- Following Jesus outside the faith leads to apostasy.

For the disciple of the Resurrection, the historical time spent with Jesus automatically lost its value; it was impossible to live with him physically and follow him literally.

For Saint John, the Gospel is not about announcing him, but about following him in action.... It is about developing and applying Jesus' message, especially to the concrete situation at hand.

The Gospel needs to be

- explained (in terms of its meaning),
- developed (in terms of its extension),
- applied (in the present),
- experienced in the Church (always).

The Gospel is an action... an action carried out by living it with an attitude of discernment, which is then applied to life.

The Gospels are not magical formulas, nor can they be applied literally, because times, circumstances and culture have changed.

In the same way, we can say that following Jesus requires an attitude of discernment.

We cannot follow Jesus the way the apostles did. For one thing, as it turns out, the end of the world is not imminent, so our way of following Jesus has to be different.

"Following" is an image and a metaphor to refer to our relationship with Christ and our commitment to others and the realities of this world, in the present time.

The best, and indeed the only way to share Christ's destiny is by assuming one's own destiny, with faith, hope and love placed in him.

The reward for following, and the goal, is eternal life. But the following happens here, in this world that we cannot escape from, in a real commitment to others and to the realities of our world.

Jn 12:26;  
13:36ff  
Jn 17:15

For John

- Love and unity are indispensable.
- It is necessary to bear fruit.

*It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit,  
and then you will be my disciples.*

Jn 15:8

### **Jesus' disciples now**

In following Jesus, there is no road already mapped out, just as there are no roads mapped out on the sea; there are only bearings, directions and goals. Each person has to make her own path, as if in uncharted territory.

Being a disciple is a dynamic process. The immediate decision is as important now as it was for the first disciples. We know that following Jesus in our concrete life, in these times, and in the Church, is not the result of a single decision, but of many; it is an entire process. We become Jesus' disciples little by little, and we should take advantage of the experience of those who were disciples before we were.

Disciple means learner. But the courage to be different is also needed.

Being a disciple means being part of the Church, i.e., in solidarity with others who also believe in Christ. Being a disciple means serving others.

Being Jesus' disciple is something that a person decides at a certain point in his life, but it is also a decision that he must maintain throughout his life. Every day we must renew, perhaps not with words but in attitude, the words we once said in silence: *I will follow you, Lord, wherever you go.*

Mt 8:19

Following Jesus is a process that commits us to the Gospel and to the world we live in, because the kingdom is something that is built and proclaimed as hope for the future.

Following Jesus in this day and age does not mean abandoning the realities of this world, or escaping from the world around us. It means working to establish the kingdom of Christ in the whole world, struggling with all your strength and the best resources to free the world from evil, and give its structures the

Christian orientation that is revealed to us in the Gospel.

Following Jesus means working for what Jesus worked for, giving your life for what Jesus gave his for. Following him means trying to think, feel, love, act and be like him. It means making Jesus your main personal reference point. Following him does not mean losing yourself, but rather giving yourself to him in your entire being and everything you do. It is not about losing your original vocation to marriage, to conquering the world, to creativity, to freedom; it is about becoming more aware, more responsible, and freer for your own destiny.

A life spent following is not meant to turn the disciple into some kind of extra-terrestrial, passive and aloof from his environment. On the contrary, faith asks him to make a supernatural effort to transform the world.

True following takes place only in faith, in love and in confidence. When any of these are missing, all sacrifices are vain and futile. Sacrifices are based on choice, and have value only inasmuch as they are choices. The choice to follow Jesus is only possible with faith, confidence and love.

Jesus comes into your life as someone who says "I" and becomes someone you can address as "you". The interpersonal relationship is crucial to the following.

While others feel immersed in silence, you are capable of hearing Jesus' voice, which still resounds

in the world through the Gospel, and in your heart. That is why you can address him through the concrete world.

Jesus may come into your life with special demands. Since you are unique for him, he may have an exclusive invitation for you. There are situations that only you can change. There are people that only you can help. The world needs your faith, your hope and your love. With your love for Jesus Christ, lived in your own particular circumstances, you can begin to change the world.

## CHRISTOLOGICAL TITLES

The question about Jesus' person led the early Church to give him a series of titles. With them, they linked Jesus to his own message.

These titles present Jesus not as a heavenly being, an angel, but as a man, a man whose message made him extraordinary, but also vulnerable, tangible, weak. As the head of a group of disciples, they call him "Teacher", and as a preacher of the kingdom of God, they recognize him as a prophet, even as "the prophet" of the last days.

It was natural for Jesus' first listeners not to ask many questions about him: it was enough to know his name and that he was from Nazareth. The important thing was what he said and did. But his message



gradually lent urgency to the question about his person: Who is this man who is saying and doing such things?

For many Christians, the affirmation: "Jesus is the Son of God" constitutes the center of Christian faith.

It cannot be denied that it was the post-paschal community who gave Jesus the titles of Christ, Messiah, Son of David and Son of God. It should come as no surprise that the early community chose the Jewish culture's most relevant and expressive titles to highlight the importance of the person of Jesus to Christian faith. In the same way, the Greek community made use of concepts from Hellenistic culture, and preferred them to titles that linked Jesus too closely to the Jewish world, such as "Son of David". Given the nature of our sources, however, we cannot assume that Jesus attributed these titles to himself.

Once again we must bear in mind that the Gospels are not historiographical documents, but rather the practical proclamation of a faith. Their intention is to arouse or consolidate faith in Jesus as the "Christ". It is therefore very difficult to draw the line between history as it happened and interpretations of that history, between historical narrative and theological reflection, between pre-paschal words and post-paschal intuition.

There is no denying that the faith and theology of early Christianity left their mark particularly on the messianic titles. A rigorous examination of the topic could prove that Jesus did not apply a single one of

these titles to himself: neither Messiah, nor Son of David, nor Son of God.

After Easter the entire Jesus tradition was viewed retrospectively in a messianic light and as a result, the confession of Jesus as Messiah was incorporated into the narration of the history of Jesus. The same Gospel writers also looked back and spoke from the perspective of their paschal faith, for which the Messiahship, now understood in an entirely different way, was no longer a problem.

Lk 2:11; Mt 1:21ff

It is worth remembering that the titles in question, each in its own way, carried with them the baggage of the different, more or less political traditions and expectations of their contemporaries. Jesus did not exactly match the image of the long-awaited "Messiah", "Son of David" and "Son of Man". In fact, he seems to have rejected such titles. What is clear is that none of the usual concepts, none of the customary images or the titles that were in use at the time, exactly captured what he was proposing, his mission and his person. None of them revealed the mystery of his being. More than the human expectations of priests and theologians, of revolutionaries and ascetics, of pious and not so pious people, it is the messianic titles themselves that bear clear witness to the fact that Jesus is different.

After Easter, Jesus' person became the concrete model of the kingdom of God, i.e., of a person's relationship with her neighbor, with society and with God. God's cause can no longer be separated from his person. From the very beginning, Christianity was not

Ph 2:1-11

1 Co 1:23  
Ac 3:6  
Rm 1:4ff

interested in simply re-elaborating universally valid ideas. It revolved, with great realism, around a person, Christ Jesus. It can therefore be said: Jesus' cause, which goes on, is in the first place Jesus' person, which continues to be particularly meaningful, life-giving, valid and effective.

All faith in Christ can be condensed in this one expression: "Jesus is the Lord!" This is a confession of faith in Jesus as the decisive person.

The early Christians found no title too lofty to express the unique, decisive meaning of the man who had not aspired to any title at all. But the important thing was not the specific title in and of itself, but the fact that all the titles meant to say that Jesus, executed and now alive, continues to be the Decisive One: decisive in his preaching, in his behavior, in his destiny, in his life, in his work, in his person; decisive for people, for their relationship with God, with the world and with their neighbors; for their thinking, their actions and their suffering, for their life and their death.

Applied to Jesus, the different titles are interchangeable and complement each other. As short as each one of these formulas is, they are not part of the Creed; they are themselves the entire Creed. The only common denominator of all the different titles is the person of Jesus. It has been calculated that the New Testament uses over 50 different names to refer to the earthly and resurrected Jesus. These majestic names, some of which are still in use today, were not invented by the early Christians. They were taken from the surrounding context and applied to Jesus.

Jesus as the coming "Son of Man", the "Lord" expected at any time, the "Messiah" enthroned at the end of time, the "Son of David" and "Servant of Yahweh" that suffers for humanity and, finally, the "Lord" (Kyrios) who is present now, the "Savior", the "Son of God", the Word. These are the most important titles applied to Jesus. Some, like the mysterious apocalyptic title "Son of Man", were already out of use in the Greek-speaking communities before Paul's time. The same thing happened to the title "Son of David", because in the new setting, they were simply unintelligible or ambiguous. Others, like "Son of God" in the Hellenistic world, broadened their meaning and became enormously important. The title "Messiah", translated as *Christus*, came to form part of Jesus' name: Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, Jesus is called "Son of David" in 20 passages, "God" in 75 and "Son of Man" in 80; the titles "Lord" (Kyrios) and "Christ", on the other hand, appear 350 and 500 times respectively.

Thus, the implicit Christology, which formed the basis of Jesus' words, actions and suffering, gave rise to the explicit Christology of the New Testament. Or to put it more precisely: depending on the social, political, cultural and spiritual context, depending on the audience that was being addressed and the author's personality and thinking, a whole series of New Testament "Christologies" arose. Not just one normative image of Christ, but several, each with its own distinctive features.

These were not documents giving evidence about who Jesus was; they were just indications pointing at

him. They were not definitions, but explanations of what he meant.

The analysis of each of the titles shows that they mean something more: they define and explain Jesus' essence, nature and person on a more theological and theoretical level. They are acclamations and proclamations that do not always reflect the serenity of the liturgy or the inoffensive tone of missionary preaching, rather they are critical and polemical in the extreme. They are declarations of war against all those who take their own person, their power or their wisdom as the absolute value; the titles demand that they give God his due. All those that would adjudicate for themselves the last word, be they Jewish authorities, Greek philosophers or Roman emperors; grand or petty lords, governors, tyrants, messiahs, all are denied the status of final judge; that corresponds to Jesus.

It should be clear that it is not the titles in and of themselves that are decisive. The believer, and the community of the faithful, do not need to look for the definitive standard of their faith and their action in a title or a formula; the definitive standard is the person of Jesus.

## **JESUS' KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS**

The possibility of applying our intellect to know the world around us is an attribute of our human condition, but it is no more than that, "a possibility" of knowing, and not a store of knowledge that all people must necessarily have. Prehistoric humans appeared on earth knowing nothing, and each person is born into this world with a blank slate of knowledge. Coming to know is a slow process of experiences and learning.

Jesus, like all people and like all children, took part in this process of human knowledge. Just as being human does not imply a store of knowledge that tes-

CAt. CAt. ho 472.

Mt 8:29; 16:9-10  
17:11; 14:17

tifies to the human condition, being God in one's origin does not bring with it a store of knowledge that testifies to the divine condition. Jesus is not God because of what he knows. Knowledge is not what makes him God, nor is it a necessary consequence of his divine being. Jesus is God in spite of his ignorance and even of his mistakes. The Gospel shows that Jesus was ignorant of many things: all those that he came to learn, and all those about which he formulated genuine questions, as well as things that challenged him in his personal life.

It is true that Matthew prefers to present Jesus as he who knows all things, who does not need to ask anything, but these interpretations do not seem to have a historical foundation.

There is nothing unusual about the fact that Jesus was mistaken in his interpretation of certain facts. We should not find that shocking, because it is in the nature of things to have multiple interpretations, and it is in the nature of the human condition not to perceive the meaning and ultimate reality of things infallibly on the first try.

It is no sin to make a mistake; in fact, it has no moral connotation whatsoever since it does not imply the person's awareness, or freedom, or responsibility. Only when an error involves the will and moral awareness can we relate it, or identify it, with sin.

The truth is that we humans make mistakes all the time, and human knowing necessarily includes the possibility of error. Since all knowledge of the world,

of reality, of history and of circumstances is partial and limited, and does not absolutely exhaust reality, there will always be fields that escape consideration. A person's knowledge, in the best of cases, is right from one perspective and wrong from many others. This does not mean that it is impossible for a person to apprehend the objective truth. The affirmation is that objective truth cannot be apprehended in all its aspects. Human knowledge is always limited and open to the possibility for error. This, while not making the person more human, reflects her limitation.

A person does not become more of a person by knowing something, nor is a child less of a person for not knowing it. Knowledge perfects people and demonstrates their inclination toward knowing, but ignorance does not diminish them but rather underscores the possibility of knowing. The only beings that can be called ignorant are those that are able to know.

The process of knowledge does not diminish Jesus' divine condition. Being the true incarnate God did not give him extra-terrestrial knowledge or paranormal functions.

Divine knowledge, which is distinct from human knowledge, was incarnated in Jesus' human development. The incarnation is a message that speaks to the non-opposition between the divine and the human. So we cannot affirm Jesus' divine condition if it destroys or is incompatible with his human condition as directly and immediately revealed in the Gospel; nor can we affirm his human condition without integrating it fully into his divine condition. And since what we know



more directly, through our own life experiences and through the Gospel, is Jesus' human condition, it stands to reason that the divine condition should be affirmed on the basis of the experience of living and the information from the Gospel.

Ph 2:6ff

The divine condition in the pre-paschal Jesus is in a state of kenosis, i.e., abasement.

We should not think that Jesus, because he was God, must have had a store of knowledge about the world, existence and life, before he actually experienced these things, as if he had some kind of pre-fabricated knowledge. Jesus' divine nature is not manifested or demonstrated by his knowledge. Jesus was a human being before he realized he was one, just like any other person, and the same can be assumed with regard to his divine condition.

#### **Jesus' awareness**

The awareness that all people gradually acquire of their identity and their mission, is something that develops slowly.

If we try to discover our personal being in the light of psychological experience, we run the risk of identifying person with awareness. People perceive themselves through their awareness, and in it, our inner moods and movements are revealed to us.

The person is both the subject and the object of her awareness, but she is not awareness itself. Awareness is distinct from the person; it presupposes the person,

but the person does not presuppose awareness. In absolute terms, there can be unaware people.

Only after much acting, and after much reflection, do we acquire the awareness of being human persons.

Jesus became aware of himself, of his reality and of his circumstances, in a human way.

Jesus' awareness could not be a store of transcendent human experiences that existed prior to his experiencing them. That would disconnect awareness from experience.

The main object of knowledge is not oneself, but rather the surrounding world. Awareness is the recognition of oneself, and it is the fruit of much other knowledge to which it is linked. It awakens in the context of a community of people that help it be what it is; different, one among others, and similar, one with the rest.

Knowing things before experiencing them would not make a person more human, and it would not make Jesus God.

Self-awareness is not the necessary manifestation of a person's nature. The fact that Jesus is God from the first moment of his life does not necessarily require that he be aware of his divine condition.

It is important to avoid two extremes:

a) Affirming that Jesus was never aware of his special relationship with the Father;

b) and that Jesus was fully aware from the beginning, and at all times, of his divine condition.

Our working hypothesis is that Jesus gradually became aware of both his condition as a human being and his condition as the Son of God.

-Jesus Christ was not aware of being the "second person of the Most Holy Trinity, one in being with the Father." To affirm as much would be an anachronism and a projection onto Jesus' mind of the Church's belief as expressed in the first centuries of Church life.

-Jesus was not aware of being a human during the first years of his life. A baby is not aware of its own identity or of its human condition. To affirm otherwise implies a denial of human maturation.

-Jesus Christ gradually became aware of being a human and of being himself, over the course of his life owing to the specific succession of life experiences he had.

-For Jesus, the Sacred Scriptures and his own life experience determined the awareness he came to have of himself.

-He came to realize that he was the bearer of the kingdom; he was aware of the transcendent meaning of his words and actions, and of the redeeming quality of his passion and death.

-The resurrection was a fundamental defining event, full of revelation and fulfillment for Jesus himself.

-Jesus is God, and at the same time fully and completely human. Completely does not mean exclusively.

-Jesus' human condition is the visualization, manifestation and realization in history of his divine condition.

The God that is revealed and given to us in Jesus, is the Incarnate God, not the abstract God, nor the God of metaphysical attributes (all-knowing, invisible, immortal, pure spirit, etc.), but the God of History.

Lk 1:32, 68ff; 2:32  
Mt 1:1ff; Lk 3:23ff

If Jesus had taken one or more of the Messianic titles as his own, they could serve as a starting point for us to deduce what Jesus' awareness of himself was. However, there is no evidence that Jesus identified with any of the images evoked by these titles, or that their use expressed the awareness he had of himself and his mission. It is important to avoid identifying what the early Church affirmed with the testimony that Jesus historically gave of himself.

Jesus did not bow to the demands his contemporaries made urging him to take on the role of the Messiah. He did not declare himself in the context as the Messiah. Jesus was not the Messiah the Jewish people were longing for.

Jn 6:15

Many exegetes believe that the texts in which Jesus accepts the title or declares himself to be the Messiah,

are a reinterpretation by the early Christian community. For this reason we cannot use the title of Messiah as a window into Jesus' self-awareness.

It is not easy to reach any kind of certainty that would allow us to use the titles to clarify Jesus' awareness of himself. In general, the titles offer very tenuous insight into the subject of Jesus' self-awareness.

The titles tell us who Jesus was for the early Christian community, but not who he was for himself, because again, it cannot be affirmed that he applied these titles to himself.

We believe that Jesus' self-awareness is revealed in the authority and freedom with which he acted, and which made such an impression on his contemporaries.

The titles, despite the fact that they were taken from the cultural context of the Bible, are of secondary importance: they interpret and comment on Jesus' personality that is revealed in his attitude, his actions and his words. Jesus shared no confidences of a psychological nature; the only testimony he gave of himself was his doctrine, which he personally carried out, and the way he did it: with authority and freedom. Jesus' awareness must be sought out in the place where it really became visible: in his personal freedom. The fact that he did not appeal to any authority, or justify his declarations with the word of God, as the prophets did, was absolutely unprecedented in the Jewish world. This personal decision, together with his filial attitude toward God as his

Father, is what best characterizes and reveals Jesus' personality and awareness. This explains why it was not so much his message as his attitude that provoked the scandal, giving rise to the conflict that led to his death sentence.

Mt 11:27

We can affirm, on the basis of Jesus' attitudes and freedom as well as the immanence of the kingdom, that Jesus must have been aware of being:

- The eschatological prophet, the most important of the prophets, since he came to proclaim the end of time.
- The Teacher (revealer), who taught the road, the truths and the attitudes that counted in the end. The revealer of the true God.
- The Savior and the criterion of salvation for all people, when they accept or reject Him.
- The bearer of God's love and forgiveness, and of the gifts of the kingdom: a new heaven, a new earth and new human relationships.
- He was aware of being God's "envoy" for inaugurating the kingdom.
- Jesus became aware of being a man, like any other human person. The fact that Jesus is a divine person, in the metaphysical and theological sense, in no way keeps him from developing as a human being.

To think that Jesus was all-knowing about himself is to think that not all of him had incarnated. It is to think that history had nothing to say to him. It is to turn his questions, his learning, his attitude of seeking and

discernment into play-acting, and, what would be worse, it is to divide him by imagining him acting sometimes as Disincarnate God, and sometimes as a man.

It must be pointed out that the New Testament is more explicit when considering Jesus' knowledge and awareness than the understanding that we assume Jesus had of himself. This does not deny, but rather presupposes Jesus' progressive self-awareness.

Jesus' self-awareness seems to derive directly from his mission, and not the mission from his self-awareness.

## **JESUS' FREEDOM, VIRTUE AND HOLINESS**

The affirmation of Jesus' progress, evolution and development could cause a certain amount of uneasiness, especially when the moral order is considered. It would seem to imply that Jesus was not holy and good from the first moment. This is not only wrong in terms of the facts, but could also lead to errors, such as adoptionism.

Adoptionism consists of believing that Jesus, due to his merits, holiness and virtue, deserved to become the Son of God, without being so previously. In other words, it posits a moral connection between Christ and God, and not a substantial (ontological) relation-



ship. It was a heresy disapproved by the Church from the earliest centuries.

From the Biblical perspective, we can affirm Christ's authentic freedom. Freedom in moral terms, not just freedom to act in one way or another. Doing the Father's will makes sense when one does it voluntarily and consciously, from the heart. Freedom consists of human beings' natural identification with the good (option for the good), and not of the possibility of opting for evil, an option that actually dehumanizes them. In the same way we can say that all of Christ's acts of virtue, goodness and holiness are worthy to the extent that they presuppose an authentically and sublimely free being.

In the Gospel, Christ appears as a free being. He is presented with real options, from which he chooses the one he interprets as God's will.

Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36

Lk 22:42; Mk 1:41

Mt 26:41

The Gospel portrays Jesus as an authentic and true man, possessing a single will. And Jesus says to the Father: *Let it be as you, not I, would have it.* From these affirmations there is no conclusion to be drawn but Jesus' authentically human condition. The struggle took place in Jesus between what is and what should be; between fullness for self-giving and natural abhorrence of death; between the flesh and the spirit. *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* It must be borne in mind that Jesus found it very difficult to make certain decisions. But this reveals alternatives placed before Jesus' human will, and not two wills like two opposite dimensions.

As for the possibility that Jesus could have acted otherwise, the Gospel leaves no room for doubt. Nor can there be doubt as to the holiness, or moral goodness, with which the Gospel presents Jesus at all times.

Heb 7:26ff  
Jn 8:29-46 and 55

Jesus' sinlessness means not just that Jesus did not in fact sin, but that he could not have sinned. And not because of any limitation to his freedom, but because of the fullness of his "being free". Sinlessness does not belong directly to the Gospel's explicit message, and we could say that the Gospel hints at the possibility that Jesus could have abandoned his mission.

Mk 1:12  
Mt 4:1-11  
Lk 4:1-13

From a dogmatic point of view, the affirmation is made that there are two wills in Jesus, one corresponding to the divine nature and the other to human nature. This thesis is upheld not so much as a study of Biblical data, but rather as a consequence of the faith that affirms two natures in Christ, so that the divine nature is seen to have a divine wanting, and the human nature, a human wanting. This thesis resolved the difficulty presented by the Monothelite doctrine, which affirmed that in Jesus there was only one will, inasmuch as only one nature existed in Jesus, the divine nature, which completely absorbed or assimilated the human nature. Jesus the man therefore was lost in Jesus the God, just as the finite is lost in the infinite and human will is diluted in divine will. This however went against Biblical data and against the sense of the Church. Jesus divine nature must not suppress or diminish His human condition.

The Council of Constantinople addressed the issue of the two wills and affirmed that Christ is authenti-

And we proclaim equally two natural volitions or wills in him and two natural principles of action which undergo no division, no change, no partition, no confusion, in accordance with the teaching of the holy fathers. And the two natural wills not in opposition, as the impious heretics said, far from it, but his human will following, and not resisting or struggling, rather in fact subject to his divine and all powerful will.

III C. Constantinople,  
680-681 Dz 291.

cally God and authentically man. And that, without being divided, he continues being "one and the same," acting as true God and true man. That his acting as true man does not interfere with or impede his acting as true incarnate God, or vice versa. The two natures are thus admitted, as well as the acts that are intrinsic to each, but belonging to a single person.

The rejection of the Monothelite doctrine cannot be interpreted as a rejection of the radical elevation of all that is human in Christ. The Church Fathers never thought that the Word (God) would leave Christ's humanity in a state of pure nature. His humanity continues to be human, but assumed, i.e., united to God who in Jesus makes humanity eternally his. Nor was it their intention to state that humanity is so human and so foreign to divine nature that God cannot express himself in it. The affirmation of two wills in Christ is meant to save both his humanity and his divinity.

This formula, however, did not take into sufficient account the Biblical data about Jesus' true freedom and the dynamic character of the incarnation. The incarnation presupposes and demands the process by which all human beings develop in terms of awareness, freedom and responsibility, and not just the assumption of a certain body, with no human process involved.

We believe that the two wills in Christ need to be posited on the following observations:

They are not two wills of the same kind and of the same order.

- Divine freedom and will constitute a reality that is different from human will. We can speak of one and the other by comparison with human freedom and volition.
- Will, the condition of being conscious and free, virtue and holiness are acts or qualities that belong to the person and not to the person's "nature" (divine or human). Nature does not exist as an independent being; it is merely an abstraction.
- Jesus' divine will is not something distinct from God himself; it underlies and sustains his human volition.
- We could say that God not only lets Jesus be Jesus, but that he is the source and the foundation of Jesus' being Jesus. God underlies Jesus' dependence and independence. Jesus is "other" with respect to the Father, and at the same time he is the "Son"....

Jesus' divine will underlies his human will, and is expressed and revealed in it. But it does not transform it, or hinder it, or denaturalize it or absorb it; it does not determine or condition it. We can say that Jesus' divine will is identified with God, his Father's will. It is God's presence in him. Christ could have opted to go against God, if he hadn't been sustained by God as his Son.

To think that Christ could have sinned, and opposed God's will, i.e., not just felt temptation but actually let

Heb 7:26ff

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himself be carried away by it, would mean denying his divinity. With regard to the two wills in Jesus Christ, we would have to say that they are united, that one is the sign of the other and incarnates it. The two wills were never, nor could ever be, in opposition. Christ is not divided in his volition, just as he is not divided in his being. The two wills of Christ do not imply division or opposition.

Just as Jesus' divine being does not complete him, or complement him as a man, because there is nothing human that he lacks to be human, in the same way the divine will and the human will do not complement each other. Each is complete according to its nature.

What is intrinsic to Jesus' divine being and his divine will, is that they make his human being and the exercise of his will fully possible and real.

Mt 26:41

This does not mean that Jesus could never have felt difficulties or inner struggle (even temptation) between his will (human and sensitive) and God's will, which was also his. But this tension, which he did in fact feel, did not reflect sinfulness, but contingency, weakness, limitation, fear, insecurity.

All of him, man-God, knew he was subordinated to the Father's will, and had a vocation to fulfill. In his option for good, the truth, God's will, Christ is sustained by the Father. He has been, and in this sense is being the Son and the Emissary. Jesus is the emissary being sent....

It can thus be affirmed that there is real progress in Jesus' freedom, virtue and holiness. Granted that he was good, free and holy, by having his origin in the Father and being one with him, he becomes better, freer and holier by opting freely for his Father's will.

Jesus' holiness, although affirmed from his childhood, does not contradict progress and dynamic development in the moral order, which like all of Jesus' being, is included within the dynamic process of incarnation. This process manifests and reveals his ontological holiness, and it occurs in Jesus owing to the incarnation of the Word. It is not adoptionism, because from the first moment he is totally and absolutely God's only Son made man.

Moral, conscious and free holiness does not deny, oppose or give rise to ontological holiness; it is rather the living and visible incarnation that manifests and reveals Jesus' substantial holiness. We can say that it is the human version of the incarnate Word's divine holiness, which inasmuch as it is incarnated, is progressive, limited in its concrete manifestations and ambiguous, as all human realities are.

The truth is that not all of Jesus' contemporaries perceived his moral holiness; for some, like the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus was not only fully capable of being a sinner like anyone else, they actually accused him of being possessed by the devil and blaspheming.

Progress in moral holiness does not presuppose the possibility of sinning, since sin is not necessary in a

Lk 7:33  
Jn 7:20; 8:48-52

Mk 3:22  
Mt 9:3; Jn 10:36

human being's life, and does not make the person truly human. On the contrary, sin is a kind of diminishment of the person. In itself it has nothing positive to it. And therefore, if sin makes a person less human, and the person who sins goes against herself, we can say that she goes against her own progress; and this cannot be a demand of progress itself, but opposition to it.

We believe that Jesus did not have the possibility of sinning because he was so authentically human that he did not have the possibility of going against himself. When Jesus was not yet aware and free, he could not sin, and as he gradually became aware and free, he identified morally with the good, and reaffirmed what he already was.

Perfection in freedom consists of wanting the good to such a degree, and feeling so identified with it, that it becomes impossible to do evil. The "capability" of doing evil, is not really a capability at all, but an imperfection of the will; not strength but weakness. True freedom consists of attaining personal fulfillment, realizing one's potential, loving and dedicating oneself totally to what is good, voluntarily and without any outside pressure. There is no reason to think that Jesus could not make progress in this area.

Freedom is not indifference; if it were, the more neutral we were, the freer we would be. Freedom does not mean feeling the same attraction to good as to evil. We are in fact "inclined" toward good, and only by deficiency, toward evil. The relationship of our freedom is not the same regarding good as it is regarding evil. With good we have an essential and natural

relationship. Toward evil our inclination is defective and anti-natural. If we tend toward evil, it is always because we are deceived. Good, on the other hand, attracts us as it is. In eternal life, we will have full exercise of our freedom, when we are so completely free that we cannot sin.

What constitutes the essence of freedom is not the possibility of choosing evil, but the fact of choosing good objectively, and choosing it voluntarily and consciously. Jesus grew in the choice of good, a choice that became more and more conscious, freer and freer, and yet he was without sin inasmuch as he was totally and absolutely oriented toward the good, ontologically and existentially.

To assume that Jesus was less free because he did not have the possibility of sinning, is like saying that a man is less healthy because he cannot get sick.

The ultimate reason for Jesus' inclination to good is his substantial relationship with the Father (the hypostatic union). And the ultimate reason for his progress is the dynamic nature of incarnation.

Jesus' growth and the dynamic nature of incarnation, demands development in the moral sphere as well, which presupposes growth in understanding and wanting the goodness, truth and virtue encompassed in God's will. In this sense Jesus progressed in his explicit communication with the Father, in his love, in his conscious and free self-giving.



This could not have been given from the beginning if the exercise of this awareness and freedom had not occurred then as well; and if this awareness and absolute freedom is assumed from the first moment, then the Incarnate Word was not a child like other children. Progress in awareness, in freedom, in self-mastery and the capacity for self-giving is essential in a human being. His "conscious and free" holiness neither denies nor opposes ontological holiness; it is not its cause either, rather the opposite: the living and visible incarnation is what manifests and reveals his ontological holiness. It is the human version of Jesus' divine holiness.

Jesus Christ showed himself to be so completely free, virtuous and holy by being so authentically human; he embodies the complete fulfillment of what is human. He is the fullest realization of what is human and divine. And not by being possessed by God, but by being God himself, where the union of the human and the divine takes place substantially in his person; where the divine is found personally in what is truly human, without destroying it, but sublimating it to its highest degree of expression.

## JESUS AS PROBLEM

Among the surest facts from Jesus' life, speaking from a historical perspective, are His dealings with sinners and those who were ritually impure, as well as his violation of the Sabbath commandment, and the absolute claims he made in proclaiming a different view of God, the end of the world and the time of grace.

Mk 2:16  
Mk 2:23

Many of his contemporaries considered Jesus a libertine, *a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.*

Mt 11:19

Jesus' behavior from the beginning aroused amazement, joy and enthusiasm, but also suspicion, rejection,

Mk 2:7

tion, scandal and hate. The likes of Jesus had never been seen or heard before. For a pious Jew, Jesus' behavior and message were nothing short of scandal, even blasphemy.

The proclamation of a God whose love goes out to the sinner, cast God's own holiness and justice into doubt. All of this soon earned Jesus the animosity and hatred of local leaders. Jesus must have appeared to them as a false prophet because of his new and revolutionary teachings about God. According to Jewish law, this was punished with the death penalty.

Dt 18:20

*The prophet who presumes to say in my name a thing I have not commanded him to say, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.*

In Jesus' mind, poverty and illness were not punishments from God; God loved the poor and the sick. That explains why Jesus went out looking for people who were not interested in God, and admitted into his company, and even to his table, sinners and outcasts, the ritually impure. He conversed with all kinds of people, and had no qualms about dealing with anyone.

Jesus did not declare anyone his enemy, not even those who were seen as enemies of God. In Jesus' view, God was a friend to all people. And in the final -eschatological- moment that Jesus was inaugurating, God was willing to forgive and receive everyone into his kingdom. The only condition was to accept and believe in Jesus' announcement, and to act, from there on in, like children of God.

Jesus' behavior reflects faith in a God whose way of being did not square with the God of the scribes and Pharisees.

The way Jesus lived his life struck many, especially the religious leaders who governed the people, as simply intolerable.

His behavior was scandalous also for the way he treated women. He did not abide by the precautions handed down by tradition. He gave preference to tax collectors and sinners over the righteous. He did not seem to venerate or set much store by the Temple. He was not awed by the site or the building, although he did recognize it as the House of God that had been turned into a den of thieves. He assigned a relative value to the observance of the Sabbath rest and purification rites.

Mk 11:17

He believed he was superior to Abraham, Solomon, Moses and the prophets. He did not call himself "Messiah", but he believed he was greater than the Messiah. He did not arouse the people to rebellion, but he taught them to be free.

Mt 12:42  
Lk 11:31  
Mt 11:9

If Jesus has adhered more strictly to the norms and traditions,

if he had not kept the company of tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, the poor and the sick,

if he had limited himself to preaching principles without ever carrying them out in practice,  
he would certainly not have died the way he did.

Jesus was labeled an agitator and a rebel not so much for his doctrine, which was not analyzed in depth at the time, as for his behavior.

Mt 26:53

The Gospel clearly shows that Jesus could have avoided his death. The contingency of Jesus' passion, and the responsibility of others for his death, has not been kept sufficiently in mind. The first reflections of the evangelists and the early Church oriented subsequent thinking in a way that left little room for the responsibility of others and the possibility that the passion might not have taken place.

Mk 8:31; 10:32-34

The prophecies about the passion insinuated that the events had to occur because they were fore-ordained. To the question 'Why did Jesus die?', the answer was 'Because it was foreseen, prophesied, even by Jesus himself, and because it was God's plan.'

1 Co 15:3

- ° By now it has been widely shown, and most exegetes agree, that the prophecies of the passion as told in the Gospels are *ex eventu* predictions, as prophecies made after the facts are known. They are not really true prophecies at all, but rather announcements of events in the form of prophecies.
- ° The prophecies of the passion did not belong to the oldest documents (Document Q). The first version of Mark's Gospel did not include them.
- ° Matthew and Luke, who took Mark as their source, show considerable discrepancies with Mark's version.
- ° The prophecies assume a detailed knowledge of the passion and Passover.
- ° The resurrection narratives present the events as surprising, i.e., unexpected, not prophesied.
- ° For the evangelists, the resurrection was taken as the confirmation of Jesus' life and doctrine, of his power and authority, rather than as the fulfillment of a self-made prophecy.

It is perfectly clear that Jesus did not die because of any personal fault. This is the implicit assumption of all the passion narratives. Jesus' innocence, however, does not rule out a real conflict between Jesus and the law. There is a relationship between the crucifixion of Jesus and his previous acts.

2 Co 5:21  
1 P 2:21; 3:18

Jesus touched on issues that were untouchable for the Jews.

- He manifested power and authority in opposition to the law and Moses *-But I say-* in the counterpositions of the Sermon on the Mount. In the Jewish mentality, only God was above the law and Moses.
- He forgave violations of the law with absolute confidence and equanimity.
- He cured and performed miracles on the Sabbath, in defiance of the law. His behavior was irreverent because his way of acting put him outside of God, or above God, or equal to God.
- He sat at the same table with tax collectors and sinners, causing intolerable scandal.
- He seemed to accept and agree with the Roman occupation.

Mt 5:39

Jn 8:3ff

Jn 5:18

Mt 9:11

Mt 17:24ff

The cause of his death does not seem to have been his doctrine, or his having attributed to himself some title -Messiah, Son of God, Servant of Yahweh, etc.- but rather his actions on certain specific occasions.

Mk 14:58  
Mk 11:15-17

What he said against the Temple, and his actions there, was an attack on authority, tradition and customs. But the underlying motive of the conflict should

be sought in the overall picture of his actions, not in specific cases: he put himself above the law and took God's authority as his own.

The pretext for which Jesus was turned over to the Romans, i.e., for calling himself the Messiah, can be ruled out as the a cogent explanation of the cause of his death. Jesus almost certainly rejected the title of Messiah.

The fact that pretexts were used to condemn him points up the lack of any accusatory document backed up by the law.

The conflict was over Jesus' person, not the violation of any article of law.

Jesus did not die for siding with the weak or spending time with them, but for putting himself in God's place.

Under a law that was seen as the ultimate criterion for salvation, Jesus could not be seen as anything but a blasphemer, and yet with his power and authority, he had put himself above it. In the eyes of the authorities, Jesus deserved the death sentence. The sentence might have been like this one:

*Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Joseph, the carpenter, has incurred in inevitable contradiction with the law as currently in force. His guilt is a case of a crime against religion.*

*The Law is brought down upon him, and we sentence him to death.*

Jesus was innocent, but it was not just a case of the Jews acting in bad faith. The conflict went much deeper. Jesus failed not only in the eyes of a few inept and unjust Jews, but in terms of the law, the authority of which was questioned by his actions.

Jesus also failed in the eyes of the people: the people in fact neither converted, nor believed in him, nor changed their behavior. The people en masse turned against Jesus and rejected him. *Crucify him, crucify him! We have no king but Caesar.*

Jn 19:15; Mk 15:13  
Lk 23:21

Death as a final and irrevocable outcome, was the answer that the authority found reasonable and fair, if only as a peace-keeping measure.

The cause written in Latin, Greek and Hebrew: *Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews*, was more a mockery than the real cause. Jesus never proclaimed himself as king, or suffered others to proclaim him one.

Jn 19:19

Only in the light of the resurrection is the conflict with the law illuminated. The resurrection could only be understood as an act of God himself, which meant the confirmation of Jesus' message and life, in opposition to the judgment of the Jews.

If Jesus, rejected in the name of the law, has been resurrected by God, then the law is a flawed expression of God's will, because in the end God did not back it up.

But the message of Jesus' resurrection, executed in the name of the law, constituted a veritable scandal.

1 Co 1:23



The resurrection had the effect of annulling the law as such. The leaders of the people and the Jews were evidently disqualified and shown to be unjust.

The issue at the root of Jesus' conflict with the Jewish authorities was not his refusal to accept authority in general, but his refusal to accept the authority of the law. Either Jesus was a blasphemer, or he effectively abolished the law.

The resurrection made it clear that it was the latter. The roles were reversed: what used to be blasphemy –Jesus' power and authority– are now God's authentic manifestation. Jesus' actions, in the light of the resurrection, are no longer misguided. The resurrection is the start of the proclamation of freedom before the law.

Ga 2:19; 3:13

It must be noted that Jesus never opposed the law in general; he merely interpreted it with power and authority, and in a spirit of freedom born of his message concerning God and the kingdom. In Jesus' view, love summed up the law and the prophets.

Mt 5:17ff  
Mk 2:25  
Mt 12:30; 22:40

The community in Palestine, at first, did not see much opposition between Jesus and the law. It considered Jesus' actions as those of the "new Moses" awaited by Judaism, perfectly consistent with Mosaic law.

Dt 18:15

For Saint Paul, the opposition between Jesus and the law is not absolute. *Do we mean that faith makes the law pointless? Not at all: we are giving the law its true*

Rm 3:31

*value*; but with the death of Jesus, the law has come to an end.

Paul says, in his letter to the Galatians, that the love manifested in Jesus constitutes the fullness of the law. We can ask ourselves if Jesus clashed with the law as such or with the interpretation and manipulation made of the law at the time. And we can answer that Jesus challenged the juridical-positivist tradition of Israel, in the sense in which this tradition had come to see itself as "the law".

Ga 5:14

When speaking of the law, we are referring to the interpretation and use that Jesus' contemporaries made of it. The Pharisees believed that the law included the way of interpreting it.

With the resurrection, freedom before the law was confirmed by the God of Israel himself. With the resurrection, God says that the law is not the absolute value. By itself, the law should lead to Christian maturity, to the freedom of the children of God. And that is why, when one does not live in the freedom of God's children, the kingdom of heaven is denied and delayed.

Even given the conflict with the law, the governing bodies and the people, Jesus could still have fled from death, as on other occasions, or he could have astutely or miraculously escaped. But even when he could foresee the real possibility of his death, Jesus confronted it in a way that was coherent with his words and attitudes; and he expected to see God's action and judgment in it, because in spite of everything, he

Lk 4:28

Lk 23:34

expected it to be a judgment of mercy. *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*

Jesus faced his passion and death moved by God's will, which he understood as the inner need to be consistent and "present" in the tragedy of his life: if they reject me, let them do it to the extent that they want to reject me.

Jn 20:9

Lk 13:31-43

The passion narratives, such as the judgment, the crown of thorns, the flogging, etc., underscore the circumstantial and accidental nature of each element of the passion, although afterwards, the evangelists found ties to the Scriptures and saw the events as their fulfillment.

Mt 27:46

Jesus hoped at the end, and until the end, that God would intervene. But God didn't. The death was truly a tragedy, in both historical and theological terms. Existentially, for Jesus and the disciples, God was not on his side at the hour of his death.

The death might not have happened if people had responded differently to Jesus' message and person.

In absolute terms, the death on the cross was, in itself, neither desired by God nor necessary. But given Jesus' condition and the condition of the people of his time, it was something that could happen and did.

Jn 11:49

Jesus' death was not a judicial accident or an involuntary mistake. His executioners put him to death to safeguard their position, as well as public order and

religion, from the perceived threat that Jesus represented for them.

Jesus' behavior had little to do with social and revolutionary criticism, as they are understood today. Tax collectors were not an exploited class; they were the exploiters, as well as collaborators with the occupying forces from Rome. God's message of love was also addressed to them. In Jesus' view, God is Father to all people, his commandment derives from love for humanity, and therefore, love of God and love of neighbor are essential in his message. Neither love for God nor love for neighbor, which are reduced to a single precept, can be circumscribed by a set of casuistic laws.

Mk 2:27; 3:4

Mk 12:30ff

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## REDEMPTION

Life's experiences leave our hearts with a feeling of nostalgia, of emptiness, a desire for change. People feel tremendous disappointment with the world, with others, with themselves. Nothing is as it should be! Pain, injustice, division, war, death, all make us wish for a different order.

God begins his redemption by arousing in people the desire for salvation that they very evidently need. The prophets were the ones to express the yearning that began to grow in the hearts of the people of Israel: God's intervention was needed, and a change of heart. Only God could change everything from the inside.

- Make us yours again Lord,
- deliver us from all evil,
- defend us from our enemies.
- Forgive our sins and save us.

These were the basic sentiments that sustained their hope in redemption.

Regarding the subject of redemption, certain questions necessarily arise:

What does redemption consist of?

What is it of the passion, life and resurrection that saves us?

Was the death on the cross such a necessary event for salvation that if it had not happened, we would not have been saved?

What is it that satisfies, or pleases the Father about the passion and death?

Is God pleased with Christ's suffering, and that of human beings?

Did God positively want the suffering involved in the passion?

Was the suffering of the passion and death something predetermined by God or foretold in the Scriptures?

The idea of redemption plays a crucial role in the Sacred Scriptures. It presupposes a shipwrecked humanity, subject to misery and death, and separated from God.

The words used to signify the redemptive action mean "help", "aid", "save", "assist", and express the saving actions undertaken by God, who decides to redeem humanity moved by his love, justice and holiness.

Redeem is a term taken from commercial law that means "acquire again", buy, rescue, free; it was used to refer to the purchase of the life of a person or animal, a life that by sacred right belonged to God. It is said that God redeemed his people from servitude in Egypt, or that he has redeemed each individual. Any allusion to the purchase price is expressly omitted. Rescue is a concept from family law to refer to the recovery of a family's possessions.

These words evoke a great number of images and metaphors that represent God's saving action.

According to the Old Testament, the work of redemption belongs exclusively to God. His redeeming action is revealed in the election of the people of Israel, and in their History. Abraham, the Father of the people, was rescued by God, i.e., taken out of the land "beyond the river" where his ancestors served other gods. The people came to experience, from the day of their election, God's saving and sanctifying action, especially in the midst of war and external challenges, when their enemies were defeated. The most emblematic redeeming action was the people's liberation from slavery in Egypt. This liberation became the foretaste and model of definitive salvation.

The redemption that each Israelite experiences is applied to the numerous needs and dangers of human life.

In the eschatological time, God will free his people from all outside difficulties, he will gather together all those who are scattered among the other nations, and

Ex 13:15; Nb 3:13  
1 S 14:45

Dt 9:26; 15:15; 21:8

Jr 15:21; Ho 7:13;  
Jb 5:20

Lv 25:25

Is 29:22

Jos 25:2

Ex 14ff; Jr 23:7; Is  
43:16-19

Ps 49:8; 144:7; 17:13

Mi 2:12; Is 11:12

Jr 32:37



Ezk 36:25  
Ps 130  
Ezk 11:19; 36:26  
Jr 32:39  
Jr 31:31  
Is 65:17 and 66:18  
  
Mi 1:11  
Dn 12:1-3; 2 M 7

above all, he will restore them in their inner lives. Then he will free them from all their impurities and all their idols, he will heal them and redeem them from all their sins. He will give them a new heart and a new spirit. The people will walk in a single direction and down a single path. God will establish a new covenant with the House of Israel so that all may recognize him. Redemption will also have cosmic and universal dimensions; the idea of resurrection appears only in the latest writings of the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, the idea of redemption totally shifts to religious ground. The hope of salvation and its realization are inseparably linked to the person of Jesus. According to Jesus' message, salvation culminates in the kingdom of God. The reason Jesus speaks so insistently about the kingdom might be his living and personal relationship with God, as well as his knowledge, hope and faith in divine saving action. The human desire for redemption will only be fulfilled when the kingdom of God is established without borders.

Redemption is a new, permanent and stable relationship with God, freely established by him.

Rm 3:10ff

Rm 5:12ff

We call it a new relationship in order to set it off from the old one, that of creation, which as far as humans are concerned, and due to their shortcomings, simply has not worked.... There is no justice, holiness, law, order, recognition –praise and gratitude– obedience, equality, unity and peace. This state of things in which we are all immersed, is linked especially to the story of Adam's sin. And therefore,

though humanity's fault, the relationship that God had in mind in creation, in fact has not occurred.

What is needed is a new relationship, also established by God. A relationship that is free on God's part, given freely to humanity, who has no right to make any sort of claim to it, and that depends completely on divine initiative. We could call it God's "new option" for his creature. The first option, creation, brought us from non-existence to existence: the creation option. The second brings reality, concrete humanity as it actually exists, from one way of existing before God to another. For this reason redemption is universal and cosmic in nature, because it refers to all beings. We can refer to this new relationship with God in Biblical terms as an "old and new covenant". Redemption is thus the new covenant established by God through the blood of Jesus, i.e., through his personal sacrifice with which he faced his passion and death.

Lk 22:20

Since it is "God's option" and does not depend on human beings, the relationship is stable and definitive. Humanity and all of creation are forever redeemed, will always be creatures who have been recovered, re-acquired, and confirmed in their belonging.

The new relationship assumed the old one as its basis and foundation. The old relationship, however, is surpassed and confirmed by the new, but not destroyed.

Rm 5:19ff

Heb 7:20 ff

Jesus proclaims this new relationship is a particular way, and brings it about with his preaching and his

example. What he does is to seize humanity and the world from the kingdom of the enemy and pass them over to the kingdom of God. He rescues and redeems them with his life, his example, his word, his actions.

Jesus carried out redemption, humanity's new relationship with God, by announcing it and living it. He carries it out with his life, word and example. Redemption is the fruit of Jesus' life as much as of his death. Christ's preaching and life are redeeming.... His preaching and his life are intimately linked, essentially and circumstantially, with his death. He dies in keeping with, and as a result of, his life, his actions and his words. His death is redeeming just as his life and actions were. He lived and gave his life in order to take humanity from one kingdom, the old one, understood as the domain of the enemy, to another, understood as the domain of God who loves far beyond the response of human beings.

Redemption is a change from the relationship—justification—where friendship with God depends on works, to another where friendship with God depends on love, and where works are the consequence of his transforming love.

Redemption is the mystery of God's love that makes Christ's love and personal sacrifice the principle and source of our health, through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus is not just the Father's emissary for announcing and carrying out redemption; he himself is the redeeming God. He comes to acquire what already

belongs to him. The "price" he pays is just a metaphor; he does not need to give anything to God or to the devil to make humanity his once again. In Jesus, the redeeming God makes himself present forever and for all people. His sacrifice is effective once and for all, and for everyone.

Rm 5:4-11; 1 Co  
15:45

The redeeming death of Jesus can be considered in two aspects: one positive and one negative.

In the positive aspect, salvation is found in the attitude with which Christ faces his passion and death. Our salvation is Christ himself. In this sense, it is something pleasing to the Father.

What pleases the Father and redeems us, is not the bloodiness of Jesus' death, but his total and absolute sacrifice. Jesus' self-giving pleases the Father more than the sum of all the sins of all people. If we put in a balance the obedience of Christ on one side and the disobedience of all people on the other, Christ's obedience would weigh more.

Our redemption is in the person of Jesus, in his attitudes of love, sacrifice and obedience. His attitudes are more ours than our own sins are, because we are more ourselves when we identify with the Lord than when we betray ourselves with sin. We are more united to Jesus Christ in his obedience than we are to Adam in his disobedience. Our link to Christ in grace and life is stronger than our link to Adam in sin and death.

Mt 26:53

Jn 18:11

Mt 26:39

Jesus knew that the Father could free him from death, that he himself could escape, as he had on other occasions. But this time he accepted it, as so many martyrs would later, taking their devotion, and their testimony of faith, love and hope to the limit.

An important part of our faith consists of not just recognizing Christ's merits, but accepting that his courage weighs in our favor. We know that we have been assimilated by Christ, joined to his person and his sacrifice, so that he can share with us the fruits of his personal being and his life. And it is not just Christ who assimilated our poverty and our guilt by making himself sin for our sake; we should also assimilate his justice by making ourselves, through him, just and holy before God. In this sense, Christ's will and the objective of Christian life is to make a perfect union between him and us.

Christ gives himself "for us," i.e., on our behalf and in our place. Inasmuch as he gives himself in our place, his sacrifice is often called vicarious sacrifice. "Vicarious" means "in the place of..." The Pope, for example, is called Christ's Vicar on earth.

Ga 2:20

2 Co 5:14

The redeeming value of Christ's death is often understood as a vicarious death, i.e., Christ has not only died at our hands, but also on our behalf, for our own salvation. For us. *He loved me and sacrificed himself for my sake.* That is why Saint Paul also said that if Christ has died "for us," in a certain sense we have also died with him, and the value of his death belongs to us. *If one man has died for all, then all men should be*

*dead* and since Christ died for me, I should live for him.

The vicarious nature of his death is not so much that he dies in our place and pays for us the price of our disobedience, but that in him and at the moment of his death, we are all represented, not in bearing a punishment, but in making a perfect sacrifice. Jesus Christ's death is a vicarious sacrifice in the sense that he represents us in his sacrifice, and not so much in the sense of dying in our place as requirement and consequence of sin.

Heb 7:26ff

Christ's sacrifice also has the power of entreaty: through Jesus' death, God the Father changes his attitude to one that is more favorable to humanity. What satisfies the Father is the totality of Jesus' sacrifice, and through him not only is creation not destroyed, but it is brought to its fullness in Christ. God becomes favorable to humanity not by the blood of the sacrifice, as in the old covenant, but by the faithfulness of the sacrifice, which will constitute the new covenant.

Heb 5:7ff

Lk 22:20

It is also customary to say that Christ's sacrifice serves as atonement.

Atonement means the reparation of a fault by means of a punishment or a sacrifice.

The atonement implied in the death of Christ does not consist of God's feeling placated by a sacrifice that is proportional to the fault. The real atonement is the restoration of human nature through the sacrifice and

obedience of Christ. Christ's sacrifice unto death has truly been capable of changing everything, and each and every person, from within. The key element is not a demand by God, or just a change of appreciation, but the objective change that has been attained in all people to whom Christ has given a new life with his death, and the good that has been achieved through Jesus Christ's love and sacrifice. Jesus is the one who has loved the Father with a perfect love, and in that way has turned everything to him, and incorporated the world to his love and his sacrifice.

The negative aspect of Christ's death was a direct effect of sin. Christ died because people kill. And he died on the cross because people have learned to crucify one another and have gone so far as to crucify him. The death on the cross is the greatest sin; it crystallizes the non-acceptance of God by all people of all times. The death on the cross is linked to a history of crime, injustice and death. Because people abandoned God, they put the prophets to death and eventually crucified Jesus Christ. The death on the cross is the greatest mystery of human iniquity; it concentrates and signifies all the other crimes of humanity.

The death of Christ, like sin and like its fruit and consequence, is absolutely unacceptable to the Father. God takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner, or in human suffering, much less in the death of his beloved Son.

The Father cannot desire the rejection of Jesus Christ. The passion, as a human event, is as abhorrent

Mt 21:33ff;  
Mk 12:1ff  
Lk 20:9ff

as sin itself and as the accumulation of all sins. The Father takes no pleasure in the crown of thorns, or in the blood, or in the wounds, or in the whiplashes, or in the pierced side. All of this demonstrates the depths to which human iniquity sank, and serves to show, in a visible way, just how repetitive, cutting, definitive and mortal human sins are. To contemplate the passion is to contemplate human drama in its most tragic acts.

If the Father takes no pleasure in the death of sinners, and would prefer that they convert and live, for all the more reason he takes no pleasure in the death of the just, and of his only Son. The father experience a true "pathos", which is much more than the com-compassion and co-redemption of the Virgin Mary, because the father is affected much more profoundly than Mary is.

Ezk 33:11

We can illustrate the mystery of the cross by comparing it to the death of the martyrs. Those deaths pleased God inasmuch as they were faithful and total sacrifices, made in faith, hope and love. However, while God is pleased with the martyrs, he is displeased by those who put them to death.

Putting a martyr to death is a sin of the worst kind; in no way is it desired by God. When Stephen, for example, prays for those who are putting him to death, his attitude not only ennobles his sacrifice, it also offers salvation to those who are executing him. Jesus himself seems to understand the mystery of his death on the cross in the same way: *Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.*

Lk 23:34



Tertullian  
Apologeticum L-13

*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians,* gives rise to a greater good, not because it is death, but because it is a sacrifice unto death. The death of Christ is not a martyr's death. It is much more. But just as God takes no pleasure in the death of the martyrs, but rather in their sacrifice, he also takes no pleasure in the death of Jesus Christ.

Mt 21:33-46; Lk 20:9-10  
Mk 12:1-12  
Mt 26:28

Even though the parable of the wicked husbandmen is not meant to explain the Father's role in our redemption, it can help us to understand how Christ understood his own story and that of our salvation. He understood it mainly as a sacrifice "for many...." and obedience to the Father's will as it was manifested in the concrete situation, probably in the light of Scripture.

Is 53

In the institution of the Eucharist, it is clear that Jesus understands the suffering and death that await him, as a sacrifice.

Jn 19:36

Christ's death was predicted in Scripture. The evangelists, John particularly, seem to be interested in pointing out the relationship that exists between the events and prophecies. They express this relationship with the formula *all this happened to fulfill the words of scripture*.

We wonder if the things had to happen because they were predicted, or if they were predicted because they had to happen. In the first case, Scripture determined history, and in the second, it is history that determines Scripture.

Even though Saint John's words indicate a causal relationship, "to fulfill....", its meaning could be described more precisely as a convergence or coincidence than as a cause and effect. The sense of the phrase could perhaps be better translated as follows: "This happened, so Scripture was fulfilled." The point is that Scripture foresees history, not that history obeys Scripture. Because these things had to happen, they were foreseen and predicted. The fact that something is predicted before it happens does not mean that the prediction caused the event. The causal-type relationship serves to express the convergence of the events with Scripture, and not a metaphysical relationship that was foreign to the Hebrew mindset. Things do not happen so that Scripture will be fulfilled; it is Scripture that obeys and foresees the "responsibility" of history. If Jesus had died another way, the prophets would have had to predict another kind of death.

8.224

## THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

Jesus' death was not the last word. An undisputable fact remains: the proclamation of the kingdom did not decline with Jesus' death; instead faith, hope and love for Jesus Christ increased after his death.

Three days after the experience of Good Friday, Jesus' disciples and followers began to live differently: without fear, with tremendous joy and optimism, and they began to tell whoever would and could listen, that Jesus of Nazareth was alive, that they had had numerous experiences (appearances) of him that con-

Ac 2:22-24  
3:13-15  
3:19  
4:9-12  
5:29-32

Rm 1:4  
Ph 2:9-11  
Ac 13:33

firmed what began to be called the resurrection. At any rate, the message was based, now more than before, on the risen Jesus, alive and working in the community.

The Resurrection constitutes not just a new dimension in the knowledge that the disciples have of Jesus; it is also a fact that impinges essentially, integrally and fundamentally on the very reality of Jesus.

The message no longer consists of what Jesus said and did; that is just the starting point. It is now mostly about what Jesus himself said and did in the early community.

The community did not exactly begin with Easter. It had its origins in the group of disciples that followed Jesus, and in all the people who heard him and loved him. The message about the risen Jesus is linked to the message about his life in this world and his circumstances.

The whole Gospel is based on the conviction, and to a certain extent on the experience, that Jesus is alive and continues to say what he said then, in order to translate his original message to today's circumstances.

The purpose of the Easter proclamation is not just to remember what Jesus said, but to link what Jesus said and did with the risen Jesus, which is now the fundamental topic of the apostolic preaching.

Between what Jesus preached and the preaching about Jesus –Jesus as the topic of the preaching– the disciples saw no break or discontinuity.

The experience of following is a personal relationship with Jesus, who after the resurrection inspires, in a framework of freedom and discernment, his followers' new attitudes. It is remarkable how the evangelists freely selected, adapted and transformed the message to serve the practical purposes of preaching. The idea, as we have seen, was not to make a summary, but a Gospel. Jesus, for example, proclaimed the Gospel only among the people of Israel, and said that that was the way it should be. The apostles, on the other hand, shared the message with the gentiles and interpreted it in another context. In doing this, they were following Jesus' example and living word more than the written letter of the Gospel.

### **The appearances**

The important thing about the appearances is not the historical details but the fundamental message, which is the person of the risen Jesus. His signs and his words are all about a personal encounter with him.

Jesus, dead and risen, *showed himself alive to the apostles by many demonstrations*. The common message of the appearances is the new life of the risen Jesus, but this message takes concrete shape in episodes, events and words, and in the experience of a new encounter with Jesus.

The appearances are encounters with the living Christ. They happen by his initiative: Jesus announces

Mt 10:6; Lk 9:53  
Jn 4:9

Lk 24:31  
Jn 21:15; 20:16

Ac 1:3

Mt 26:32; Mk 16:7

them and the disciples await them. The appearances can give the impression that Jesus can make himself present at any time. He is no longer limited to a "here"; he can show up here, there, anyplace. Nor is he limited to a certain time; he can show up now, or later, at any time. He takes the initiative, he speaks, he greets with a formula that expresses the joy of the encounter: *peace be with you*.

Jn 20:19

Jesus is not encountered through systematic research or searching. He is found in the realm of faith, through an "appearance". This may or may not involve the senses; the important thing is his presence and his action.

The appearances lead the disciples to a deeper awareness of the Lord's presence, that in the early Church crystallized around the Eucharist, in common prayer and in serving the needy.

### **Resurrection and the Gospels**

Jn 20:31

The evangelists, who wrote their Gospels in the light of the resurrection, do not give us a natural portrait of Jesus. Their intention is different: they want to communicate their faith in the risen Jesus, not just precise, sterilized facts. Faith in Jesus Christ is the response to the revelation made in his person over the course of his life, death and resurrection. God had revealed himself in Jesus' actions during his life on earth. The resurrection is the new light that gives new meaning to Jesus Christ's death, life, pre-history and eternal generation as the Son of God. In this way, the disciples' faith finds its foundation and legitimization

in Jesus' life, actions, words and deeds, i.e., in everything that makes up the very person of Jesus.

Only the light of the resurrection opens the disciples' eyes so that they can interpret Jesus Christ's life more authentically. Without faith in Jesus, that life is useless, futile and meaningless. In the light of the resurrection, the act of following the pre-paschal Jesus takes on a new meaning, and points in the direction of a different kind of "following", involving creativity and responsibility, and with a great deal of room for invention. Jesus' worldly present and activity have a new, transcendent meaning.

Lk 24:16-31

The resurrection itself becomes revelation: God did not raise Jesus in order to make him his Son; he raised him because he was his Son.

The resurrection is God's faithfulness to Jesus.

It is God's last word on history,

- and also a message about the reality of death,
- and finally, a message about God.
- God exists, and governs history.
- He transforms humanity's reality and destiny, making it his own.

#### **Resurrection and message about Jesus**

The resurrection is the basis and starting point for Christology. The early community, after Easter, did not think just about the Jesus who lived on earth, but mainly about the risen Jesus, who was now their Lord and Messiah, the object of their fondest hopes until the end.



Ac 2:23; 3:15;  
4:10; 5:30; 10:39

2 Co 5:16; 1 Co 2:2

The resurrection is the source of Christology. This fact is the foundation of the faith and of the apostolic preaching: *God has raised Jesus, the one who was crucified*. For Paul, the death and resurrection form a whole that is so important, that he practically declines to consider Jesus' life on earth. Without the resurrection, Jesus' words would not have received the final seal of approval, and Jesus would have been simply one more victim of human depravity.

### **The predictions**

The predictions of the resurrection highlight not so much the prophetic gift or the clairvoyance of future events, as the inner relationship between the pre-paschal and post-paschal life. They announce ahead of time that the same historical Jesus is the one to be raised, and the preaching associates him necessarily with the Jesus of the appearances.

The predictions can be understood literally, but also reasonably as a premonition or foreboding of the risks involved in Jesus' words and actions, and the disciples were able to take these simple premonitions and turn them into out-and-out predictions.

### **The risen Lord**

After the resurrection, Jesus becomes the sole focus of all religious attitudes and activity. Worship of the Father is also worship of the Son, and vice versa. He and the Father are not two distinct centers of action, reference and worship: he is the visible and accessible image of the invisible and inaccessible God. His mediation is not just a passing or momentary service; it is intrinsic and indispensable to God's con-

dition as Father, and to the condition of humanity and the world.

Through his resurrection, Jesus is "the Lord" forever: the one through whom God exercises this lordship in the world, the one who lives, who returns, who reigns for all eternity. God has no more sovereignty than that which is realized in the sovereignty of Christ. God is the owner and the Lord of the world through Christ, or he is not at all. Absolutely everything is subject to Jesus Christ in the way and to the extent that it is subject to God. Together with the Father, he has equal claim to glory, power and lordship.

**Revelation and resurrection**

The resurrection is the full revelation not just of Jesus Christ, but of the Father who raised him. By his resurrection, Jesus does not substitute or replace God's action as Father, but manifests it and realizes it. Jesus reveals fully what has been the case from the beginning: that he is the maximum and natural expression of the living God.

After the resurrection it becomes clear that God's reference or relationship for people is Jesus Christ, and that outside of Jesus, the Father has no other word to say –he has become speechless–, which does not imply any limitation on God's part, but rather his total expression through Jesus Christ.

If Christ had not risen from the dead... If we suppose an unreal hypothesis, the meaning of the real can be rendered clearer: if Christ had not risen, our faith

Rm 4,25

1 Co 15:17ff

would be useless; we would still be mired in our sins. Because Christ rose from the dead for our justification...*If our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are the most unfortunate of all people!*

If Christ had not risen, death would have had the last, decisive word; the word of human beings would have been the one that counted. It would have meant the triumph of error over truth, hate over love, injustice over justice, sin over holiness. It would have been declared once and for all that it makes no sense to be good, because evil will end up being the ultimate criterion; that pain and death, anguish and desperation are what await people at the end, after which only "nothingness" is left, more dreadful than death itself. It would have made evident that living is absurd and that God does not exist, or that he is so far from human life that he might as well not exist; and finally, that truth, justice, holiness, even God and humanity, are no more than an absurd nightmare.

#### **First-born of creation**

The central point of the Christian faith is not some "mystery", but Jesus, about whom it is affirmed that he has risen, that he has become flesh, that he is the creator. Resurrection, incarnation and creation are expressions of faith in a God who has an intimate relationship with people at all moments of their lives, in all their situations and with all things, because he has revealed himself in his relationship with the historical Jesus and has raised him from the dead. And by his resurrection, Jesus has come to be the "first fruits" or the "first-born of all things," of all people, and "of the dead", and of all creation. And that the histori-

cal Jesus lives on with a life that is superior to earthly life while still being the same Jesus, both human and God.

Col 1:15ff  
Rv 1:5

Jesus Christ, his divine being manifested in his human being, proclaimed and revealed totally and definitively by his resurrection, is the living God's point of contact with all people and with the whole of creation.

### **The resurrection and the gift of the Spirit**

For the Hebrew people, the Spirit was God's life force, a divine and mysterious force. Saint John affirmed that this force resided fully in Jesus, and that it was his life; thus before his death there *was no Spirit* as yet, and with his death and resurrection, Jesus' Spirit was given to the apostles and disciples.

Jn 7:39

The Greek fathers interpreted Jesus' death as the first Pentecost, *when bowing his head, he gave up his Spirit*. The text probably only means that Jesus died, but it is interesting to note that from the beginning, Jesus' death was interpreted as a communication of life to people. The Holy Spirit is the gift of the risen Jesus; it comes from him and is his breath. It is Jesus' help in carrying out his mission. It is the guarantee of our own resurrection. It is the sum of all the other gifts.

Jn 19:30

Jn 7:39; 16:7-8;  
Ac 2:1ff

Rm 8:10-11  
Lk 11:13

Jesus promised to live among his disciples and this promise is fulfilled through his Spirit. The first passage that contains the promise of the Advocate is immediately followed by *I will come back to you*. Jesus comes back through his Spirit, and through his Spirit he remains with those who love him.

Jn 14,3

Jn 14:17

The Holy Spirit is God's force and life given in its fullness to Christ, and through him to people. The Holy Spirit is Christ's life in us and that is why we participate in the divine sonship; through the Holy Spirit we can address God as Jesus did: "Abba," Father. The Holy Spirit is what is divine in people, and it is intimately linked to the life we lead, and to Jesus' life. The Holy Spirit is the gift from the Father and the Son, it is what they give of themselves to people, and it is not something, but Someone, a divine person, and it is not a part of God, but all of God inasmuch as it is given to people as a gift of the Father and of Jesus.

**The resurrection as new life**

The risen Jesus lives forever in God as hope for us. Resurrection does not mean a return to earthly life, but assumption into that first and ultimate reality we call God.

The apostles agree in their testimony about the resurrection, i.e., about Jesus' different way of living. The Crucified One lives forever beside God, as hope for us. The certainty that Jesus lives and that all those who believe in him will also live as he does, and beside him, is what sustains believers. Jesus' new and eternal life is real hope for us.

**What does living mean in this case?**

- It is not a return to life in this time and space. It is not the reanimation of a dead body, but a different kind of life: imperishable, eternal, spiritual.

- It is not a continuation of life in this same time and space. The reference to "after death" involves a certain imprecision. Eternity has no before and after. It is a

new life that takes place in the realm of the invisible, the imperishable, "heaven".

- Resurrection means that when Jesus died, not everything came to an end; instead, in death and from death he passed to the first and ultimate reality, the most real of realities, which we call God.

When a person reaches the end of her life, it is not nothingness that awaits her; it is God. The believer knows that death is a passage to God, who transcends all of our concepts, who is invisible, who defies our capacity to comprehend, understand, reflect and imagine.

It is like a distinct world, like the outside world for a child in the womb.

**The Resurrection as a historical fact**

According to New Testament faith, the resurrection is a work of God in God's own dimensions. It therefore cannot be considered a historical fact in the strict sense of the word, i.e., a fact that can be demonstrated with the scientific method of historical and physical science.

The resurrection is not a miracle that suspends the laws of nature, nor can it be demonstrated in earthly terms. It does not refer to a supernatural intervention that can be located in time and space. It is not something that can be photographed and recorded. The historical event is Jesus' death, and then the Easter faith and message of the disciples; this is what can be demonstrated from a factual perspective.

Chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology... comprehend only one of the multiple aspects of reality; one should not ask of them more than they can give. The reality in question here is the reality of God.

## **FIRST REFLECTIONS ON THE ORIGIN OF JESUS**

In the light of the resurrection, the early Church came up with different interpretations of the person and life of Jesus. Some of them can be reconciled and actually complement each other; others represent distinct and independent currents of thought.

It was common in Hebrew thought, as it is now, to want to know the origins of things, because nothing is known perfectly unless it is known from the beginning.

As the faith in Jesus was transmitted, it became necessary to speak of his origin, even though the facts were scanty.



The evangelists focused on transmitting the faith in Jesus as the One in whom God manifested himself, who came from God to transmit his message, which is from God and belongs to God.

The evangelists Matthew and Luke from the beginning offer a clear answer to the question, Who is Jesus? Who should we take him to be?

Before starting their accounts of what Jesus said and did, about what happened and the way he died, they begin by saying who Jesus is in the light of the resurrection and from the perspective of faith.

The infancy narratives are a response to this question; they provide doctrinal teachings rather than historical facts.

For Mark it was not important to speak of Jesus' origin; it was enough to know some facts about his life, his passion, his death and his resurrection, to arrive at the faith in Christ as the Messiah and Son of God. According to Mark, Jesus is the Son of God. His divine reality can be discerned only by penetrating into the depth and meaning of his life, by committing oneself to following him, and by realizing that it is God who reveals himself in Jesus. Therefore, Jesus' human birth, his pre-existence, or the conception by the Spirit, have no place in his Gospel. From the point of view of the world, the revelation about Jesus occurs in his life, not in his origin. His close relatives may be unaware of the mystery, and may even belong to the group of those who did not believe in him.

Mk 3:20-35

Mark felt compelled to start his Gospel by pointing out Jesus' divine origin in his baptism: *You are my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on you*. Mark did not doubt it: Jesus, before God, is the Son. People must discover this mystery by following him from the death on the cross to the resurrection. That is the only way to uncover the meaning of Jesus, the truth of his divine sonship, the reality of his role as savior.

Mk 1:11

Saint John and Saint Paul also start off at this point. The apostles and the community before the Gospels were written down did not lend much importance to the facts of Jesus' childhood. They were not a topic of apostolic preaching.

The preaching about the person of the Lord was a direct outcome of Jesus' resurrection, passion, death and life. First was the faith in Jesus as Son of God, as Lord and Messiah, and then came the composition of the infancy narratives as a way to explain this faith and this doctrine. In this part of the Gospel more than in any other, the story is at the service of faith. And a literary genre is used whose message is more theological than historical, in order to explain, from the beginning, the kind of person being presented.

Lk 1:11ff  
Lk 1:26ff

The infancy Gospels try to tell the reader who Jesus is, in such a way as to dispel all doubts about his identity, while at the same time resolving certain conflicts that could arise in the Hebrew and Greek mentalities.

- They affirm that Jesus is, from his birth, the Messiah and the Son of God.

Lk 1:31ff

Mt 1:16

- They identify the appearance of the Messiah in Israel with the birth of Jesus.
- Jesus' conception is interpreted as the work of the Spirit, and more miraculous than all the other miraculous conceptions in the Bible. Jesus' mission determines the origin of his earthly existence. Jesus, even in his mother's womb, is God's saving presence among people. The divine sonship should not be understood as a footnote added externally to his human existence.

Lk 1:35; Mt 1:18

- Matthew and Luke affirm that Jesus is the Son of God by being a man and from the first moment of his conception. This unity of divine sonship and human existence became the starting point for Christology.

Lk 1:32; Mt 3:17;  
8:29; 14:33

Lk 1:33

Jesus' divine sonship is at the center of all the details of the infancy narratives. It is affirmed that Jesus is the Son of God in a messianic context; he must thus sit on the throne of David, his father. He is the son in an apocalyptic context: *his reign will have no end*. He is the son in the deepest sense of the word because he comes from the Spirit, and in a virgin's womb, impossible for the world. He is the one who comes from God, and freely, by his absolute freedom and love.

Matthew and Luke, at the beginning of their Gospels, respond to the question of who Jesus is and what is his relationship with God. The narrative became extraordinarily useful for announcing the faith in Jesus and for interpreting the entire Gospel.

It became the best way to explain that Jesus is the Son of God, savior of all people, Messiah, and man in the process of development, who began his life as Son of God from the moment of his conception.

- It links Jesus totally to the mystery of God from the first moment of his existence.
- The message about Jesus takes preference over the message of Jesus.
- It accounts, from the beginning, for what will be the conclusion. This way the reader has a key to understand the Gospel and assess its message.
- It presents Jesus as an exceptional and unique being; as of his birth he is like all humans.

It is worth pointing out that Jesus is the Son of God not just because he was born of God, miraculously –genetic pattern– but in his entire personal process that led to his death and resurrection. Jesus comes from God at all times, not just in his conception. What ties him to the Father is not a link based on his genetic and physical origin. Jesus is not a son whose life principle starts up at some point; he is the Son of God in his becoming man, from the beginning to the end. The Father is not Jesus' physical origin, and Jesus' link to God is not of a genetic nature.

Jesus' origin becomes a point in a confession of faith and is the starting point for understanding Christ. It is a way of interpreting Jesus in the faith, not a fact about Jesus that can be objectively demonstrated.

In the Hebrew mentality, the woman contributed nothing new or of her own to the conception of a child;

Gn 6:1ff; 16:1  
1 S 1:7

she was like the earth where a seed was sown, or like the tin where bread is baked. In a strict sense, we could say that for them, a child was only the father's; the mother was merely the child's vessel or guardian. Her chief responsibility was taking care of the children, and her value derived mainly from "the children she gave her husband"... Thus the disgrace of the sterile woman.

Qo 11:5; 2 M 7:22-23  
Ps 139

Conception was not seen as a biological phenomenon but as a gift from God, a miracle. Life per se began at birth; therefore Jesus' life, inasmuch as it was similar to that of other people, also began at birth. His divine conception, his origin, his sonship expressed who it was that was beginning to live. Jesus was the Son of God, his entire being proceeded from God and therefore he was conceived "miraculously". He was "grace" for humanity. His conception was not an element to make Jesus, as a man, different from other people.

In our modern mentality it is hard to understand that Jesus is a man like any other person if his conception was not natural and like that of everyone else.

In an essentialist mindset, equality resides in the being, not in life; a scientific mindset locates equality in the biological process, while a pragmatic mindset looks for it in actions and their effects.

In the Hebrew mindset, Jesus is like all other people because he presented himself like all people and lived like all people.

It must also be borne in mind that the message about Jesus' origin and his condition of "Son of God" does not end with the infancy narrative; the message of his life, passion, death and resurrection are still to come.

There is a certain risk in understanding Jesus only in terms of the praxis of the kingdom, just as there is a risk in understanding who Jesus is only in the light of the incarnation, with no commitment to following him.

### **Historical Facts**

The historical facts about the origin of Jesus are very meager. We can say that we know with historical certainty the name of Jesus and his parents, Joseph and Mary. While we do not know the exact date and place of his birth, we do know within a few years the time he was born and the place where he lived the first years of his life. We also have a few facts about his family culture: Jewish, observant of the law, humble background.

### **Theological Message**

The main point of the theological message is to explain God's presence in Jesus Christ. All of the representations point to this primary mystery. Jesus makes God present among people. The ways in which this origin is explained are, to a certain extent, secondary. What is important is the relationship that is established between Jesus and God, and the fact that this relationship is the only mystery of salvation for humanity.

Jn 6:29

Mk 1:11

Mark interprets Jesus' story as the place of God's revelation. He sees no need to speak of his origin as pre-existence or conception by the Spirit. It is enough for him to depict Jesus' baptism to show that he comes from God.

Luke and Matthew begin with a literary genre known as "Infancy Gospel" and interpret Jesus' person on the basis of his conception by the Spirit. They know, however, that God has revealed himself through Jesus' life, so they return to Mark's fundamental inspiration. To show God's presence in Jesus Christ, it is not enough to speak of his origin or his conception by the Spirit. His whole life is the foundation of the natural relationship between Jesus and God.

Mk 1:1;3:11

Mt 14:33; Jn 1:41

There are three explicit points made by the theological message:

- Jesus is the only Son of God.
- Jesus is the Messiah and the son of David.
- Jesus comes from God. The reason or explanation of his life is God. Nevertheless, Jesus is born and lives like a true man from his very origin.

Jn 1:9-12

Different symbolic representations are used to visualize his relationship with God. The representations give an account of Jesus' transcendent origin; they assume that Jesus is a man who is related to other people and that at the same time he comes from God.

The representations are linked to Jesus' titles: they explain them to a certain extent and lay the foundation for them.

In Luke's Gospel, the theological intention is evident: to present Jesus, from his origin, as the One in whom God gives himself to us. His central statement is:

Jesus is the Son of God, and as an explanatory sign manifested in his human existence, he was:

1. conceived by the Spirit,
2. in a miraculous
3. and virginal fashion.

Although the Catholic Church has always taken the Infancy Gospel as historical, Luke's intention is not to offer us an account of what happened. The message is deeper; it proposes to offer us the love of God who comes to save humanity through Jesus, "his Son", and the cooperation of Mary, and God intervenes in history in a miraculous fashion inasmuch as Jesus surpasses other notable figures.

Luke uses the format of the annunciation, which belongs to an old tradition:

1. The heavenly appearance.
2. The bewilderment of the person receiving the visit.
3. The Angel's announcement.
4. The protagonist's objection.
5. The confirmation by means of a sign.

This format appears in the promise of Isaac; in the vocation of Moses; in the vocation of Gideon; in the

Gn 17,18;  
Ex 3,4



Jg 13,3-6; Lk 1,5ff;  
Lk 1,26-38

promise of Samson; in the announcement of Zechariah and finally in the annunciation to Mary.

Luke does not mean to give us a historical account. He creates scenes and situations to express a truth. He constructs dialogues and in short, writes with the Church's concerns in mind and transmits to this Church the meaning of its faith. There can be no doubt that he bases his account on already-existing information in which a message concerning Mary, God and the Spirit can be perceived.

The miracle serves to demonstrate that Jesus is the Son of God, but it is not the cause of Jesus' sonship. Jesus is not the Son of God by virtue of his miraculous birth. The miracle does not make a person be the Son of God. The Spirit contributes nothing in the physical-biological realm; nor does it take the place of the father in the natural order of things. Jesus is not the Son of God by virtue of having lacked a natural father. The nature that united God and Jesus is not of flesh and blood. Jesus as Son is united to God as Father by reason of his divine condition; this is meant to express the absolute, eternal, profound and transcendent nature of Jesus' relationship with God. This same image of God as Father and Jesus as Son is a figure used to refer to the manifestation of God in Jesus and the immersion of Jesus in God.

Mary's virginity is a Christological message before it is a Mariological message. It is a sign of the transcendence of Jesus, not a biological fact about him. Its purpose is to tell us that Jesus comes totally and absolutely from God, with no merit or cause on the

part of human beings. The virginal conception is not a merit of Mary's or a consideration of her virtue; it is a means for expressing the wonder of the new creation that emerges from God and takes a concrete form with the birth of Jesus.

For Saint Luke it is important to proclaim Jesus' holiness from the moment of his conception. Jesus is the Holy One of God. In the Hebrew mentality, however, the fact of being conceived normally involved the parents in sin and ritual impurity; for this reason, all people were marked by sin from the moment of their conception. David says in Psalm 51: *You know I was born guilty, a sinner from the moment of conception.* For this same reason, the parents had to offer a lamb one year old for a holocaust, and a young pigeon or turtledove as a sacrifice for sin... *If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one for the holocaust and the other for the sacrifice for sin.* Jesus' miraculous and virginal conception served to proclaim his original holiness. Because, as Saint John seems to imply, Jesus was not born of blood, or urge of the flesh or will of man, but of God himself.

If Jesus had been born naturally of Joseph and Mary, he would not have been less the Son of God. But the sign of the virginal conception reveals Jesus' natural relationship with God from the very beginning, and it is the most appropriate for understanding and believing who God and Jesus are and how one and the other should be recognized.

Lk 1:35  
Lv 12; Is 5:2-3  
  
Ps 51:5  
Jn 9:2 and 34  
Lv 12:6-8  
  
Lv 15:16-18  
Jn 1:13

It must be pointed out that the Church's faith has been consistent and clearly defined regarding Mary's virginity and conception by the Spirit. Since the formulation of the Creed it has understood these expressions not only in their theological sense, but also as historical statements.

We believe that these expressions still have symbolic and theological value, although we should modify our understanding of the narratives understood as historical accounts.

If we recognize clearly that the contents of the Infancy Gospel represent a message of faith, and not a historical circumstantial account, it becomes easy to understand that the narrative is the wrapping and the literary genre in which the message is delivered to us. The message is independent of the wrapping, which explains the different presentations of the message, such as those found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. It is also clear that many elements that were no more than literary genre, in time have become objects of faith.

Mt 1,18ff; Lk 1,26ff

## **PRE-EXISTENCE AND INCARNATION**

### **The pre-existence of Jesus**

From the beginning of the apostolic preaching, pre-existence became a starting point for understanding Christ, and it is an element of the profession of faith. The fundamental texts belong to the Pauline tradition and were set down twenty years after the death of Jesus.

For Saint John and Saint Paul, Jesus is a reality that has been present to the eyes of God for all eternity. They affirm the pre-existence of Jesus of Nazareth as a personal, concrete reality, just as he appeared in

history, but in a dimension that transcends space and time, in the dimension of God.

For them, Jesus existed, pre-existed, prior to his presence on earth.

Jn 1:1ff; 10:30  
1 Jn 1:1-2

John identifies the Word as Jesus: Jesus is the Word of God since the beginning, beside the Father. Unlike the reflection made later, the Word is not the second person of the Holy Trinity "before the incarnation"; rather it is Jesus, from the beginning, in the bosom of the Father. Jesus came from God to lead us to God. He himself is God, and his divine power is expressed and given to us in his "becoming" man.

Jn 3:16

In early Christology, when pre-existence was discussed, the reference to the Jesus of history was kept in mind. What is known about the Word, is known in reference to the historical Jesus. The "Logos" from the beginning is oriented toward the historical Jesus and the world. It can be stated without doubt that everything that is said about the Logos and about the Son, particularly his pre-existence, should be interpreted in reference to the concrete Jesus. The good news is about the historical, concrete Jesus in this world, not about the Logos. The Logos, as a Christological notion, serves to affirm the eternal meaning and action of the historical Jesus.

This does not mean that the historical dimension was of no importance to God; on the contrary, its meaning was so great that it existed from the beginning. The Jesus that existed in God was the same that would come to exist in history.

Of all people it is said that they are present in God's eyes, that God has known them, loved them, chosen them and predestined them for eternal life, not just before they have done any merits of their own, but even before they existed. People do not pre-exist; they are simply present in the mind and heart of God, like a future project, the way a goal is present in the person who is pursuing it.

Eph 1:1ff

Rom 8:27 ff

God's love is the deepest root in people's lives. *You would not have created me if you had not loved me*, says the author of the Book of Wisdom.

Wis 11:24; Eph 1:2ff

In the case of Jesus, a genuine pre-existence is affirmed. Jesus, in the bosom of the father, is a true reality that, at the divine level, is the basis of another entire reality, which is why we can call him creator and life-giver of everything that exists.

The affirmation of Jesus' pre-existence as Son of God is meant to emphasize Jesus' full divinity, and God's relationship with the world, and the world's with God, through Jesus Christ.

#### **Meaning of pre-existence**

Jesus' pre-existence serves to affirm his absolute origin in the Father. It affirms Jesus' transcendence.

- Jesus is the Son, beside the Father, even before he appeared historically as such. He appeared as the Son because he was already the Son.
- Pre-existence indicates that Jesus enjoyed reality in God, even before becoming a man. In this way the incarnation is seen as the act by which Jesus takes on human life.

- Jesus' pre-existence is regardless of the way he was born; it affirms something that goes beyond any kind of historical proof: that Jesus comes from God. It does not disregard history; on the contrary, it affirms the transcendence of the historical dimension.

Ga 2:4; Rm 8:3  
Ph 2:6-11

For Saint John and Saint Paul, Jesus was the Son of God and the only Son, even before his historical condition.

Ep 1:1ff; Ph 2:6ff  
Jn 4:9; 13:13;  
16:28

For them, unlike Saint Luke, Jesus did not come to be the Son of God by virtue of becoming man. Jesus is "the Son" since the beginning, and his sonship is manifested and realized historically in his human life. The affirmation is not that "a Son" pre-existed that later came to be Jesus, but that Jesus is the Son that pre-existed in God.

In the synoptic tradition, Jesus does not appear as a pre-existing being. For Matthew, Jesus is an absolutely new reality, in whom God gives himself to us and communicates with us, without there being anyone in God who later came to be Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is the Son of God by virtue of having been conceived by the Holy Spirit; as of that moment, he began to exist.

The idea of pre-existence is directly related to the concept "Son of God", and particularly to the idea of mission.

If God has manifested himself as such in Jesus, it is because Jesus' communion with God is part of God's

being. Jesus is inseparable from God, but this does not mean that his communion with God, inasmuch as it is eternal, is distinct from his human, temporal and conditioned form. Jesus' existential realization confirms, in time, his eternal relationship with God.

The fundamental message of pre-existence is to affirm that Jesus' earthly life had eternal meaning, and that what was once manifested in the world as full of meaning, made visible the meaning it had in the bosom of the Father. Jesus would come to be in history what he was from the beginning in the Father. The Son of God would manifest himself as "the Son" in his earthly life, and come as an emissary to become the Savior of humankind.

It is true that Jesus' eternal sonship is known to us only and exclusively by virtue of his having presented himself during his earthly life as the Son of God, accepting the Father's will and his mission.

Jesus' pre-existence makes a direct reference to God's eternity, where there is no before and after; where time, space and change have no place; where being is independent of time-space coordinates. It is therefore an ineffable category in terms of space and time, which does not take away history's novelty and risk or determine what Jesus will come to be in his earthly condition. From the beginning of time Jesus is for the Father what he would come to be in time for people. His eternal being does not contradict his development. In a person's historical development, what one is, is what must come to be in one's development, and one comes to be what one already is. Thus



what is essential to a person's life, is not manifested until that person reaches the end, and from there it is identified with its origin.

It must be pointed out that eternal and temporal life are not two lives on the same level, nor do they contradict or exclude each other. Eternal life is life on God's level –originating, animating– while temporal life is life on the human level –originated, animated–.

The risen Jesus, who lived a human life, now lives a divine life in real reference to his earthly life, in the same way that before his history he lived a divine life, in reference to his earthly life.

"There is a risk, from a Biblical point of view, of identifying Jesus' pre-existence with his divine nature, and thinking that Jesus pre-existed inasmuch as he is the second person of the Trinity. We know that the New Testament denies the existence of a primordial and eternal divine Son independent of Jesus who has incarnated in a specific moment of history. When the New Testament refers to pre-existence, it always assumes that Jesus had some kind of human reality from the beginning of time. It is not the eternal Son of dogma that pre-exists, but Jesus, the man who inspired the Gospels. Jesus exists in a germinal sense at the beginning of the world and appears as a human at a specific moment. The pre-existence referred to by New Testament texts cannot be interpreted in the light of subsequent dogmatic affirmations."

P. Benoit

If pre-existence is interpreted in a physical sense, Jesus lacks a physical existence before becoming a

human being; if it is interpreted in a metaphysical sense, however, Jesus comes from God and belongs to his communication; God does not exist without Jesus, thus by virtue of his coming from God, Jesus transcends the field of the cosmos and history.

### **The Incarnation**

Incarnation refers to the process by which the second person of the Holy Trinity assumes human nature, i.e., become a particular and unique man.

A particular and concrete human life implies becoming a person, because this is the way a human being exists in plenitude. The nearness of God, in the case of all people, and the union with God, in Jesus' case, does not limit the human person; on the contrary, it makes him freer and more autonomous, more himself. The ideal of the human person, and of nature, is perfect harmony and communion with God.

We say that incarnation is a process and not just a specific moment; a dynamic process that extends from the beginning of life, in Mary's womb, until the resurrection. We can say, in a wider sense of the word, that incarnation is not limited to a biological process, but that it is also a process by which God communicates himself to what is distinct from him; incarnation, understood as a process by which God communicates himself to us, extends from the creation to the end of time. Since it goes from the beginning to the end, God is making human nature his own, and communicating himself to all people. *For by his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man.*

Vat. II: G.S. 22

Saint Irenaeus said that in the prophets, the Word of God, which is Jesus, was becoming accustomed to human nature, i.e., to communicating with people, until in the fullness of time it became a man among other human beings.

"Caro de Vir-  
gine sumpta  
nos sumus."

We are the  
flesh taken  
from the Virgin  
Mary.  
Tertullian

Faith in the incarnation implies a relationship between God and all people that goes beyond God's union with "one man", in the person of Jesus. The incarnation is not just a supernatural event that enables Jesus to exist individually as God-man. It is the relationship of God with all people, and with everything that makes people human, a relationship that reaches its apex in Jesus and makes salvation possible.

"Caro, cardo  
salutis."

The flesh is the  
crux of salvation.  
Tertullian  
De Resurrectione  
VIII-1

What is united forever to God is not just a particular and concrete man, one element of human nature, Jesus, but that which is human in all people. Human nature should not be understood only as the indefinite sum total of all people, but also as that which is present in all people and makes them human. The union with God is directly related to the human quality of people, and communion with God sanctifies people and encourages them to transcend. By virtue of the incarnation, and from that point on, humanity is something that belongs to God and in which God manifests himself. And everything that makes people human, for this same reason, is a connection with God. The incarnation is a mystery that touches all people, to the extent that they participate in human nature.

In this way, Jesus led humanity to its fullness; in him it opened totally to God and gave itself completely to others.

The second person of the Trinity is identified perfectly with Jesus, i.e., all of the Second Person of the Trinity is Jesus from the beginning, and only Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus, in the bosom of the Father, before living on earth, identifies perfectly with the person "he would come to be in history."

Saint Matthew and Saint Luke, when considering Jesus' origin, make no reference to pre-existence. They present Jesus as having an existence that originates in the angel's announcement and in Mary's acceptance. Jesus is a new being, like any other person who begins his life.

Lk 2:7

In Luke's account, the following elements can be identified:

The God of Israel is unique and transcendent,  
by the announcement of the angel Gabriel,  
and the acceptance of the Virgin Mary,  
he sends his creative and life-giving Spirit,  
who miraculously makes Mary conceive;  
she gives birth to a baby boy,  
who by being born of the Holy Spirit is, from the first  
moment, the Son of God.  
This baby must be named Jesus  
because he will be humanity's savior.

In this presentation, Jesus is an absolutely new being for God, just as a new child is to her father.

Luke neither assumes nor affirms any kind of pre-existence.

For Luke, Jesus is not God just like that; he is the Son of God owing to his human condition. Jesus, not so much by being the eternal Son, but by virtue of being a man, is inferior to God the Father. God continues to be unique and transcendent.

Jesus is the "Son of God" par excellence, who by his death and resurrection will come to be eternally glorified at God's side.

This Christology of Jesus' origin, which is consistent with the rest of Matthew's and Luke's Gospels, does not really speak of incarnation, because there is no one who incarnates. God the Father does not incarnate, nor does his Spirit, and the Son proceeds from the Spirit's creative action; he does not pre-exist.

In John's Gospel, the idea of pre-existence appears clearly in these words: *I came from the Father and have come into the world and now I leave the world to go to the Father.*

Jn 16:28

*It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come... that he had come from God and was returning to God...*

Jn 13

And another text says: *God's love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son so that we could have life through him.*

1 Jn 4:9

The words "God has sent his Son to save the world" constitute one of the fundamental truths of Christian faith. In the tradition transmitted independently by John and Paul, the Son enjoys pre-existence before being sent. He lives in God the way wisdom lived in him, according to Jewish tradition. This sending of the Son is the incarnation. It is not a process by which the Word comes to take on human form. The process is bigger than that and culminates in the moment of the death-resurrection. That is why it is not said that God made his Son a man; rather, God has sent his Son: *God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son.*

Jn 3:16

Paul presents the incarnation as an introductory mystery to the passion and death. John focuses on the coming of the Son; Easter is the culmination of this coming. Incarnation and death-resurrection constitute the mystery of Jesus. Believers are those that confess that Jesus comes from the Father, and those that affirm that it is God himself who sends him.

Jn 17:3-21

In this respect, the Gospel offers us a guiding light: Psalm 82:6 calls those who hear and fulfill God's Word "gods". It is only logical to call Jesus the Son of God from the moment in which God sanctifies him and sends him to fulfill a mission in the world. In other words, Jesus is the Son because he fulfills God's work on earth.

Jn 10:31-39

This assumes that at first Jesus can be called the Son of God according to the model of the prophets, because he is the man who hears the Word of God and announces it to others. His power is delegated and his action comes from above. Jesus hears God's will and

Jn 10:36; 5:43;  
13:20; 15:35

proclaims it. The difference from the prophets is that Jesus has total and permanent divine power, and can carry out the definitive salvation. But he has this power from God and in dependence on his Father. This is what it means to be a Son.

Jesus does not speak of the heavens where he has seen the face of God, nor does he discover the secrets of nature or the degrees of being.

R. Bultman  
Theol. of the  
N.T. p. 412

Jesus comes from the Father and is, therefore, the same God who sends him. This is why he can present himself to people as the bread of life, light of the world, the door, the road, the truth and life, the resurrection and the true vine.

Jn 12:48; 6:38

John did not set out to shed light on the figure of Jesus on the basis of his biological origin. What is essential to Jesus' work as revealer of God can be condensed in these features: As emissary from heaven he carries out God's work on earth; he teaches what the Father orders, fulfills what the Father wants. For John, the incarnation consists of the Father's sending his own Son. The incarnation is more revelatory than metaphysical. The affirmation "Jesus is the Son of God" cannot be interpreted, Biblically, as a metaphysical fact.

Jesus comes from God and so can be seen as his proxy, his instrument and his action on earth. Jesus' function, however, is not impersonal and temporary. He is not a means used to achieve the objective; he is not simply a spokesman for God's demands and promises. He is not a road to pass through. The danger

is that Jesus could fade into the background behind his function. For John, it is extremely important to take one more step. Jesus and God are permanently united: Jesus' relationship with God pre-exists and subsists.

The focus, however, is not on any kind of essentialist speculation about Jesus or the divine being. The important thing is to discover that God approaches us, to find him in the person of Jesus and to lay the foundations of our existence on him.

Believing in the Incarnation means everything that we can now say about God and hope from God, is to be found in Jesus' human condition, by which "this Jesus is God for us". This means that God's being is revealed in Jesus' humanity. God's being should not be sought behind, above or below Jesus the man. His divinity appears in his being a man. Scripture presents Jesus saying: *To have seen me is to have seen the Father...* Jesus' human figure is God's revelation. Expressions like this: "Jesus, in addition to being a man, is also God," take away from the Incarnation its deepest meaning. For us, Jesus would not be a revelation of God if, in addition to Jesus the man, we needed a revelation of his nature... The mystery is located, therefore, not behind or below Jesus the man, but in his very humanity. Jesus the man is God's presence.

Jn 14:9

It does not matter if we say that Jesus is of the same nature as the Father and profess the entire Creed of the Church, if our lives are not determined and directed by our faith, trust and love for Jesus.



Moreover, if Jesus really directs our lives, he should also direct our way of thinking, our criteria and the interpretation of our experiences, which is what gives immediate direction to our lives.

N.B. When we say that there is only one person in Jesus, the divine person, what we are affirming is that there is but one subject, one self, not two selves: one divine and another human.

The expression that in Jesus the divine person is incarnated and becomes a historical man, means, in contemporary usage, that he becomes a human person. This does not contradict the affirmation -and the fact- that there is just one subject in Jesus. Jesus' human personality in his historical development, is the expression of the divine person.

- It is not about a conversion: The divine person does not turn into a human person.
- Nor is it a union: the divine person does not join a human person, which would imply two beings, albeit united.
- It is not an assimilation, which would imply that the divine person absorbs the human person.

The best way to think of it is an authentic and lasting expression of the divine person who expresses and realizes himself as a human person in Jesus of Nazareth, which suggests that the deepest substratum -the originating subject- of the human person of Jesus is the divine person.

Note that the human person –the one that is directly perceived in the Gospel, the one that Jesus’ contemporaries knew– and the divine person –affirmed by faith– are not two persons on the same level and with the same meaning. The human person –his human condition– is the one who reveals, and the divine person –the divine condition– is what is revealed. Through Jesus’ human person, his divine person is revealed.

In the first and second centuries, the Trinitarian mystery had not yet been formulated, nor had the concept of person within the Trinity. Discourse about divine persons did not refer to the idea of a psychological person, and thus there was no confusion between divine and human persons.

In traditional Christology, it is not common to talk about the human person of Jesus. In fact, it is explicitly stated that his human person does not exist as a metaphysical entity, only the divine person.

We speak of the human person of Jesus not in a dogmatic or metaphysical sense, but in a historical, existential, psychological sense. The human person of Jesus is the one the disciples followed, the one they called by name and who answered them, even though ultimately, Jesus’ divine person was sustaining this perceptible reality.

We do not affirm two persons in Jesus, one human and the other divine; this is clearly condemned by the Church. Nor do we say that there are two subjects in him. What we affirm is the divine person, impercep-

tible in itself, accessible only through the human person. His divine-personal being, origin and source, sustains and gives rise to his personal-human being, the only one that is directly perceptible.

The only way to be a man is by being a human person. By affirming that God has become man in Jesus, we are saying that God, without ceasing to be God, has come to be a person like us.

## **JESUS CHRIST, CREATOR, SAVIOR AND JUDGE**

What is meant by saying that Jesus Christ is the creator?

This affirmation is of a theological, not a cosmological nature. It is not trying to say that the historical origin of the world is known, or the physical nature of created beings, or that which falls in the nature of time and space. The affirmation refers to that which gives rise to time and space without being encompassed by them. When we say that Jesus Christ is the creator and savior, we are affirming that the world and humanity have their foundation, in terms of origin, in Jesus Christ, inasmuch as he is the end and savior of all of created reality. We are expressing the world's total relationship with Jesus.

If Jesus is really God-savior, he does not fulfill the role only for each person in the "here and now"; he is the savior, from the beginning to the end, of all reality.

The experience of God the creator is an experience that relates all that one is to God, as the source and origin of being and of life. To discover Jesus in the origin of life, it is not necessary to look for him in the first stage of the process of evolution, but rather in the last, and to discover the unity that permeates the world, life, history and God's action.

Jesus, with his creative influence, initiates physical reality, but his presence and action do not belong to the physical world, but to the spiritual and metaphysical sphere. His presence and action cannot be measured or proven in the physical sphere; it is a reality that can only be experienced in the spiritual sphere of faith. Creative action does not belong to the physical sphere; it is not a moment or a place. It is the influence of God who brings forth and sustains being on the metaphysical level; and on this same level, Jesus Christ is present as he who brings being to its fullness, from its origin.

The question of how Jesus can be the creator of the universe before becoming Jesus in the historical dimension, is a chronological problem, which we could express as follows: Jesus cannot be the cause of existing being before he himself exists. This position is supported by the following assumptions:

- That Jesus is a cause of the same sort as earthly causes.

- That creative action is an action that is detectable and provable in the physical-experimental sphere.
- That the historical -temporal- sphere and the metaphysical sphere are mutually exclusive.
- That Christ's causal influence in the world is of a physical nature.

These points demand an in-depth examination.

- When we speak of Christ's creative action, we are referring to the causal influence that sets physical reality in motion with its causalities included. It is the cause of causes, and not just one cause among others. To distinguish it from the others we could call this causal influence the Transcendent Causality.
- For this reason, Jesus' causality is not subject to proof in the physical-temporal sphere, because it is the originating principle, not an originated element.
- Jesus' transcendent causality puts the historical and physical sphere into motion and sustains it. Thus it does not exclude it, but serves as its basis.
- We know the transcendent causal influence by analogy with the physical-historical sphere. But this does not mean that Jesus' causal influence over history and the world is of a physical nature. Jesus, as transcendent cause, sustains the action of physical causes.

We know, moreover, that in Jesus' case we can speak of an authentic pre-existence, although not in

Jn 1:1ff; 3:19; 8:24ff  
9:39; 10:30; 13:3  
16:28; Ph 2:5

Ep 1:10; Heb 1:2

Col 1:16

the sense of Jesus' being a physical reality in God before he was in history, but an authentic existence of Jesus nonetheless in the spiritual sphere, not the physical, whose personal being, which in time would become historical, was in God from the beginning.

Jesus brings communion with God to its fullness because it is the goal of the divine plan; he is effectively present from the beginning because between the origin and the end there is true unity. There is also unity in the world, which is the medium in which life is given. There is unity in God's plan and design, which brings everything to be through his only Son.

Jesus' creative action is distinct from his historical intervention; nevertheless, his historical intervention is not an isolated period of the history of salvation. His association with physical reality does not touch only on the mystery of incarnation, but on the mystery of physical reality as well, from its origins to its end. Thus Jesus is confessed as Creator in its origins, and Judge at its end.

In the Greek fathers' mentality, Jesus has a real association with creation even before his genesis. There is not just a relationship of salvation between Jesus and the world; Jesus is also the active, operating expression of God the Creator. And he comes to be the Savior of the world because in the beginning he was its Creator. The line of knowledge and of revelation does not go from creation to salvation, but just the opposite, from salvation to creation. In other words, for Jesus to really save the world and all people, his saving influence was necessary from the very first

moment the world and humanity began to exist. It is not a case of just referring the world to Christ, but also of interpreting the world in terms of Christ.

*God creates in order to save, and he who saves is the same who creates. For there is one salvation and one God... and the steps which lead man to God are not a few.*

Irenaeus  
Ad Haer. IV 9:3

Jesus is God's possibility of coming out of himself, and he comes out in what is human, in the concrete life of Jesus. But this possibility of God's to come out of himself and save humanity is also the possibility that God has to create humanity and to regenerate it.

Between the physical and historical world and Jesus there is a reciprocal relationship that does not exist with either of the other two divine persons. Only the Word, from the beginning, has a historical and physical character, just as matter and life have a Christ-like character, because Jesus had to become a physical, living, historical reality. The Word of God has always been "the one who was to be incarnated" – "Incarnandus" – and the world, *his own domain*. He has been the source and the author of life, *because all that came to be had life in him*. God's creative Word is revealed for the world as redeeming and saving Word

Jn 1:11

Jn 1:4

### **Jesus Christ as Judge**

The association that creation and especially humanity, have with Jesus, when we refer to the origin, is expressed with the Christological title of "Jesus the Creator", and when we refer to the end, and the full-



ness of being, the expression we use is the title "Jesus the Judge".

In the Hebrew mentality there is no concept of essence or nature that determines a being from its origin, as there is in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy.

According to the Greek philosophers, a being is determined from the beginning by its essence. For example, a human being, from the first moment of her existence, is a rational animal, and nothing in her historical process makes her more or less human; it is only possible for her to realize her potential.

The essence is something like a being's greatest perfection, and a being, upon existing in a concrete form, is degraded. The essence of the human being, or the idea of the human being, is more perfect than any concrete realization, thus the historical process makes things decrease.

Gn 2:5-15

To the Hebrew way of thinking, on the other hand, creation is not finished yet. God expects people to cooperate and work.

Gn 2:19-23

Names are not something accidental; they are intrinsic to a being, and humans are called to give all things their name, with which creation is completed. Creation would be left incomplete if humans did not give things their name.

Gn 2:22ff  
Gn 5:1-3

From the man's rib, God makes the woman. And both, man and woman, are the parents of all humanity.

Creation includes not just the formation of the man, but also of the woman, who emerges from the man, and all humanity, that emerges from both.

The origin is merely a birth, and what determines a being is its history. Thus the Biblical mentality is more historical than essentialist, and time is understood as an ascendant process, aimed at a goal and an end, and not as a perpetual return. The Greeks imagined time as a descending spiral that always repeats itself; in the Biblical mentality, it is an ascendant, unrepeatable line.

In the Hebrew way of thinking, the end takes on great importance. Everything becomes fully what it is at the end. The end is somehow contained in the origin. But the being is not revealed or discovered until the end. Thus nothing is perfectly known unless it is known from the beginning, but it is not known completely until the end. The end is not opposed to the beginning, but it will complete it and bring it to fullness. Thus no created reality is completely known until its end is known.

Whatever has an origin can have many ends, but only its real end reveals its identity, its being. The end determines and constitutes the being, and along with the end, the historical process as well. The Hebrew way of thinking, in its conception of being and of humanity, encompasses an eschatological vision. This explains why the Hebrew mentality sees human beings as unfinished beings that do not become completely human until the end. Saint Ignatius of Antioch said that if humans were made to see God, they would only

Saint Irenaeus,  
Ad Haer. IV, 11:1;  
V, 15:2;  
Opera autem Dei  
plasmatio hominis

become fully human when they came to see God. And Saint Irenaeus said that God had made humans to grow and develop, and thus they would become his perfect image and likeness; God's real creative work is fashioning humanity in history.

Rm 1:4

It can thus be understood that the resurrection is a constitutive and not just a revelatory element of Jesus' divine condition, and that only in the light of the resurrection, and through the resurrection, do we come to know who Jesus really is from his beginning.

From this eschatological conception of being it follows that the end reveals the beginning in a particular way: the beginning must be interpreted in the light of the end.

Rm 8:22

This vision of being and of the world has to do with creation and with Jesus Christ's ongoing activity, as well as with action of people. If Jesus brings the world to fullness and saves humanity, then Jesus had to do with creation, which will reach its end and fullness when it is saved. People do not attain their full humanity until Jesus saves them. And the world is in a process of ongoing creation and salvation due to people's actions, and also due to the action of Jesus, who will not cease to transform it until the end of time.

This dynamic vision of being and its historical process is much more consistent with the progressive evolution of beings in history than the Aristotelian and Platonic conception that considers beings as static and imperfectible.

Luke affirms that the Son of Man's decision in the final judgment will depend on the attitude that people take toward Jesus. In this way, the relationship established between the Son of Man and Jesus sets Jesus up as the Eschatological Judge. It establishes Jesus not just as "*the one who was to come*" as the promised Messiah, but also "*he who comes*" to judge the world.

Lk 12:8ff, 40;  
17:24, 26, 30;  
Mt 10:32-33;  
Mk 8:38.  
Lk 13:35;  
Mt 11:3; 3:11-12.

Jesus of Nazareth will appear some day as the Son of Man-Judge, and this future continues to be that of the concrete man who walks the roads, not of a mythical figure created by fantasy.

As the dynamic culmination of the History of Salvation, the Sacred Scripture presents Jesus Christ as the Judge of the universe. The image needs to be demythologized and disassociated from prisoners, crimes, accusations, penalties and punishment. These elements that come to mind with the idea of judgment, are not the ones that really matter. Nevertheless, the image can help us discover what is really worthwhile in life, what is decisive in God's eyes, and in the end...

Mt 25: 31; 16:27

The one who assesses and declares the final value of our life is Jesus Christ. Jesus of Nazareth, dead and risen, has received the authority to judge, because he is the Creator and Savior of humankind... and because the world is to be judged and evaluated in accordance with that which has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Mt 25:31ff; 16:27  
Jn 5:22

The Lord is my  
judge.  
1 Co 4:4ff

Since Jesus is the Revealer of God, the Redeemer and Salvation, it is up to him to judge people. And as we understand it, judgment is not so much a dramatic scene as the value-based assessment of a person's life.

Mt 13:29; 14:49;  
21:40; 22:11;24:29

Irenaeus, Ad Haer.  
V, 12:6

The parables that speak of the harvest, of the wheat and the weeds, of the wedding banquet, of the dragnet, of the wicket husbandmen, all make clear a single fundamental truth: the evaluation of our lives according to Gospel standards. The judge who will have the last word about each person, is the same man who during his life on earth preached words of love and forgiveness, and who has been forgiving us throughout our own life. What sense would his words of forgiveness have had if in the end his final word is not merciful? Saint Irenaeus brings together the Incarnation of the Word of God and the final judgment and says that *"it was fitting that those who were to be judged should see the Judge, and know who would judge them and give them the gift of glory."*

Irenaeus, Ad Haer.  
III, 9:1

Faith in the Lord's final coming as Judge of the living and the dead, was one of the main points of the apostolic preaching, and the more fervent the eschatological sense of the early Church, the more eagerly it was awaited. Thus the Book of Revelation ends with the nostalgia-filled exclamation "Come, Lord Jesus," and finish the work that you began at the time of creation, that you re-established with your death and resurrection, that you maintained with your presence and activity, and that you will bring to fullness with your final word.

## THE CHRISTOLOGICAL DOGMAS

### Introduction

From the beginnings of Christianity, faith in Jesus looked for forms of expression that were appropriate to the culture of the times. The experience of the risen Lord and of the salvation he had brought, was formulated in different ways. The history of early Christianity cannot be imagined without the efforts that different groups of people made to give expression to their faith. This diversity of expressions was influenced by myriad cultural, political, social and religious factors. Christianity has its roots among the Jews of Palestine, the Jews of the Diaspora, Greeks and Romans. They all left their mark on Christian thought. John and Paul expressed their faith by making use of certain Greek categories, either because they had assimilated that culture or because their philosophy seemed to them to be a useful tool for their purposes.

The presentation of faith in Jesus in a culturally advanced society demanded an effort to reflect deeply on its meaning in terms of the society's way of thinking, so that it would come across as intelligible.

After the resurrection, Jesus came to be understood as the decisive factor in any Christian's life; divine attributes were discovered in him, and he was interpreted as the living God's maximum and definitive expression. Of the different titles that people proposed for him, "Son of God" was the one that best expressed his relationship to God and his identity. This affirmation gradually came to be understood in a natural, not figurative sense.

Conserving this truth in the face of the multiplicity of interpretations that arose regarding the person of Jesus, was the task of the so-called "Christological struggles" that took place during the first centuries of the Christian era. The Christological dogmas are expressions that the Church devises to set its doctrine up against that of other groups whose interpretations it disapproves of, and to assure the correctness of its own faith. They can be seen as the mature fruit of a long doctrinal debate about the person of Jesus. Their formulation was adjusted and fine-tuned within the sociocultural parameters and philosophical and theological categories of the time in which they were developed. This means that their contents might not be immediately accessible to a Christian wondering about Jesus today, in a different context thirteen centuries later.

In this chapter we will try to give an idea of the origins and development of the Christological struggles, and the dogmatic conclusions as they were promulgated in the Councils of Nicaea, Ephesus, Chalcedon, and the second and third of Constantinople. We also want to give a cursory explanation of the meaning and transcendence of these dogmas in the context of our culture. For this purpose, we have called up representative participants in the struggles and put into their mouths an account of the events, an exposition of the doctrine and the meaning of the dogmatic conclusions. It is simply a device to make it easier to read and understand the material, and to spark interest in the doctrinal development of Christology. For the sake of precision, we have added a few explanatory and evaluative notes.

### **1.- Precedents in Sacred Scripture**

Polycarp, disciple of Saint John the Evangelist; the year 150

What a privilege it was to have a Teacher like John, the disciple that Jesus loved! No, he was not my teacher; he insisted that "there is only one Teacher". He was my guide along the Way, Truth and Life that are identified with a certain person: Jesus Christ, God's eternal Word who pitched his tent in our midst.

John wrote his Gospel to convey this Truth to us, and to instruct us against doctrines that adulterated it. In spite of the heights of divine Truth to which he had access, he knew how to get his message across to his readers, both educated and ignorant alike. I, who was educated in Greek culture, was absolutely



dumbfounded, because he managed to adapt the Hebrew terms to my Greek mindset. This concealed a serious risk: the words he used to speak to us could be understood exclusively in their Greek meaning. And yet the Holy Spirit does not fail to assist the Church and keep it from all error.

There are always people who resist the Spirit's assistance, or weaken it to the point of neutralizing or eliminating it. From its earliest days, the Church has had to combat those who would deny Jesus Christ's humanity or divinity. Unfortunately, these two schools of thought were developed on the theological foundations laid by John, my Teacher, and the teachings of Paul of Tarsus; both however were misinterpreted.

The problems arose when people began thinking about the person of Jesus; on the one hand, there was the meaning of his life, passion, death, resurrection, his saving mission and his doctrine. And on the other hand, there is his human condition, because he appeared as a man, like us in everything but sin, as Saint Paul said.

Problems also arose concerning our belief in Jesus as God, and in the God of the Bible as the One God.

In his Gospel and letters, John bases his reflection on the idea that Jesus is the Logos made flesh. If you analyze his writings carefully, it is easy to detect this format: WORD-FLESH -*Logos-Sarx*-. The Word is Jesus, who existed with God from the "beginning", i.e., before creation. My Teacher John was adamant about the fact that Jesus became flesh, i.e., he became com-

pletely like one of us: weak, fragile, subject to change, and death; and that God's Word *appeared in the world*. Jesus is the Eternal Son of God who dwells *among men, in order to be way, truth, life, bread and living water*. John showed us the figure of Jesus in all his divinity and transcendence. But, from this Christology it was just a small step to adoptionism, that pernicious heresy in which Jesus' humanity is "absorbed" as it were, or extinguished by his divine nature. Sadly, the heretics derived their notions from John.

Jn 1:1-2

Jn 1:14; 1 Jn 4:9

By conversing with some Roman converts who were direct disciples of Paul of Tarsus, I became aware of the way they were instructed in the faith of Our Lord Jesus Christ, especially concerning his divinity and humanity. It was not hard to detect the basic outlines of Saint Paul's thinking on this matter.

Saint Paul was not interested in a metaphysical consideration of Christ; he never defined the problem in terms of the personal unity of "Divinity-Humanity". The important thing for him was to distinguish between the two forms under which Jesus presents himself: in the flesh, in his earthly life, and through the Spirit, in the Church.

Ph 12:7

The Spirit is the "glorious" state of the risen Jesus Christ. Years after Saint Paul, the terms flesh and spirit came to mean Jesus' "*humanity*" and "*divinity*". I found proof of this doctrine in the letter Paul wrote to the Romans:

*...about the Son of God,  
born of the line of David  
according to the flesh -sarx-*

Rm 1:4

*proclaimed Son of God  
according to the spirit of holiness -pneuma-  
Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Here we can see that "*Sarx*" reflects the form of "*Servant*" and "*Pneuma*", the form of "*Lord*". Saint Paul announced the risen Christ, the sole mediator and savior for all people. What a shame that this Christology was also so easy to misconstrue! In fact, it was used to separate Jesus' humanity, so strongly affirmed, from his divinity, and thus to propose that Jesus the man was "adopted" by God. These theories have become fashionable among the Fathers of the School of Antioch.<sup>1</sup>

The unilateral emphasis of either of these two interpretations of Jesus has led to two mistaken visions of his person, which today continue to echo everywhere under a variety of guises and with different nuances. It would not be fair to blame John or Paul for these errors. The Holy Scripture is the Word of God, but also the word of specific men who expressed themselves in the language and ways of thinking of their time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Fathers of Antioch were theologians who interpreted the Bible with a strong literal and historical bent.

<sup>2</sup> When this is forgotten, it is easy to fall prey to absolute formulations and fundamentalist attitudes. There is almost always some truth in errors. When this truth is mutilated because its totality and unity are not borne in mind, heresy arises, which is a partial affirmation of the truth. The history of the Christological dogmas is, to a great extent, the history of the struggle to conserve the truth in its unity and totality.

## **2.- The road to Nicaea**

Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria (328 to 370 A.D.)

Having heard all manner of opinions about the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I believe it is necessary to give an account, at the end of my days, of everything I heard and experienced in the struggle to defend the truth, so that others may also know it and, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, recognize Jesus as Lord and praise him.

All people have the need to understand what we believe. And this striving to understand has given rise to different doctrines. In the face of so many doctrines, the Church has felt the need to define and defend its teachings. This is how the dogmas were born. They should not be taken as an imposition of doctrine, but as the authentic and authorized teaching of the Church in the face of certain errors that she has detected.

On the basis of the apostolic teaching, the catechumens were taught, and the Christians preached that Christ was the Savior, the Son of the Living God, and that he had been a man like us.

The central point of Christian faith, which is the person of Jesus Christ, from the beginning sparked different lines of reflection. The Jews found it difficult to accept that Jesus was God or the Son of God, in the full sense. The Greeks had trouble with the resurrection, as well as the human reality of Jesus. For Jews and Greeks both, Jesus was a scandal, but for different reasons. This is why I think that the first step of

Christian life is admiration before Jesus, which helps to overcome the scandal.

The errors arose on two fronts: some emphasized Jesus Christ's divinity to the point of diminishing or even denying his humanity; others, on the contrary, saw Jesus as a mere man, and denied or relativized his divine condition. It seems odd that the first difficulties arose not on account of the confession of Jesus' divinity, but of the refusal to accept his human condition. Arius (+ 336), a priest from Alexandria, taught that the Divine Word, the Son of God, was not consubstantial with the Father, who only united with Christ's body in such a way as to act as its soul. In Arius' view, Jesus Christ was no more than one creature among others that God employed as an agent of creation.<sup>3</sup>

Apollinarius (310-377), Bishop of Laodicea, felt inclined toward this doctrine and tried to clarify it. In his view, the problem was solved by simply saying that the Logos was what fully infused life into Christ, but that it was not his soul, but rather what made him rational, spiritual and God. Thus the Logos took on a human body with that body's own sensitive soul. Then, to justify his theory, Apollinarius pointed to Saint

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<sup>3</sup> Arius was actually grappling with a serious problem: the idea that God might suffer contradicts the notion of a God whose perfection, understood in philosophical terms, implies invulnerability. The all-highest God cannot suffer, and Christ has suffered, therefore, Christ cannot be the all-highest: he must belong to a lower station.

God cannot suffer. What was needed was an acceptance of the facts of faith about God without trying to force them into philosophical concepts.

John's text "*The Word became flesh*"; too bad he did not understand the word "*flesh*" in its original Hebrew sense, which refers to the total person in his weakness and fragility, but in its Greek sense: the animated body as opposed to the spirit. No wonder he concluded that the Word became flesh, but it did not become a man. To top things off, Apollinarius added that if Christ had a rational soul, he would not be without sin and therefore, he could not have saved us. His deep concern is evident: he wanted to maintain the truth of salvation. What a shame that he confused everything! I became the enemy of the doctrines that they preached, but I must confess that at times I took the debate personally, perhaps because I belonged to the opposing school. May the Lord forgive me.

I believe I was sufficiently clear in what I wrote, in spite of subsequent interpretations:

*"The Logos has become Flesh -Man- in order to make us God in him. Christ's flesh, by virtue of being united with the Logos, has been saved and redeemed. All of us have been saved with him, since we are one with him."*

I opposed Apollinarius and his teacher Arius when their doctrines began spreading. Arius continued to press his argument: According to the Gospels, Christ manifested pain and inner turmoil; he progresses, prays, is unaware, fears, finds himself abandoned... All of this is incompatible with Arius' idea of God. Then he concluded that in Christ it was impossible to find God himself in his fullness. I tried to show them that what they found scandalous about Jesus diminished his divine condition. I knew that the fundamental

Greek Apologist Fathers  
Ep. ad Adelphium 4 and  
"Against Arians" II: 61

problem was a serious misconception on Arius' part: the identification of the Logos with Christ's soul, and that is why he said:

De unione, 15

*"We do not confess two natures,  
but the one nature of the incarnate Logos."*

Today I must admit that in my eagerness to assure Christ's unity at all costs, I made the mistake of arguing against Arius that Christ's weaknesses had not affected his whole being. Afterwards I realized my error, and never again tried to argue along those lines.

Arius accepted calling Christ God, but in a subordinate sense, just as he had accepted calling him a man while denying him a human soul. That is why I insisted that:

Greek Apologist  
Fathers  
"Against Arians" II:70

*"For us men it would be just as meaningless if Jesus were not the Son of God by nature as it would be if it were not real flesh that he took on."*

For me, the crucial matter is to point out that it was necessary for the Logos to take on our flesh in order to join human nature to God and his eternal life. If Jesus were not authentically God, he could not have joined us to God. The essential, fundamental idea is to know that Christ freed us from death and sin so that we may enter into the eternal life of communion with God.

Arius and his followers kept on spreading their doctrine in all kinds of writings and sermons. Emperor Constantine, concerned,<sup>4</sup> called an Ecumenical

Council in Nicaea to clear up matters. Three hundred eighteen bishops attended, mostly from the East, and I presented my point of view to them. We all agreed that Arius' doctrine was heretical, and that its author should be condemned and excommunicated. There we wrote the so-called Symbol of Nicaea, the synthesis of our faith, which declared that the Word is One with the Father.<sup>5</sup>

From  
May 20 to July 25,  
325 A.D.

*"...We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,  
the only begotten of the Father, God of God,  
Light of Light, True God of True God,  
begotten not made, of the same substance with the  
Father through whom all things were made...  
who for us men and our salvation descended,  
was incarnate, and was made man,  
suffered and rose again the third day  
ascended into heaven,  
and comes to judge the living and the dead..."*

Dz 125

Apollinarius, my old friend, was condemned shortly thereafter by Pope Damasus in Alexandria, when I was the patriarch of that place.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Emperor Constantine the Great, a catechumen, was protector of the Church and in his desire to maintain the unity of the Empire, he felt he had the right to intervene in its affairs.

<sup>5</sup> Since then, the symbol of Nicaea, completed later with the symbol of Constantinople, became the only profession of Christian faith.

<sup>6</sup> The purpose of Apollinarius' condemnation was to emphasize the fact that Jesus was like us in all things but sin; and the affirmation of a substantial difference is rejected.

Heb 2:14-17



Ds 159

To put the matter to rest and quiet those Arians who were still persisting, Pope Damasus made a severe condemnation in the Roman Council:

*"We exclude from the Church those who say that the Word of God was in human flesh in place of the man's rational and intelligent soul. On the contrary, we affirm that the same Son and Word of God took on and saved our soul -rational and intelligent- but without sin."*

Arius' doctrine was without a doubt one of the most devastating ever to afflict the Church. It spread like a weed everywhere. Arius found protection in a bishop of Alexandria who later ordained him a priest. That gave him greater authority to continue holding sway over his followers even after his mysterious death.

His disciples, roused to a fanatic frenzy and full of resentment, drove Pope Liberius out of Rome, killed or deposed many orthodox bishops and threw all the Catholics out of the Church....

But it all ended up contributing to the good of those who love the Lord, as Saint Paul teaches, and the martyrs' blood spilled by the Arians doubtlessly reinforced the truth and stimulated the growth and edification of the Church.

For us, it is crucial that salvation be an act of human will that accepts God's gift. Salvation is a "gift" that must be earned; it is received, made and cultivated, all at the same time.

### 3.- The events at Ephesus<sup>7</sup>

In obedience to His Holiness, Pope Celestine, and to maintain the integrity and honor of the Church, our Mother and Teacher, I, Cyril (380-444), at the age of 62, will relate what I think are the most important things the Christian people should know about what was said and proclaimed at the Council of Ephesus. In this way I hope to safeguard the doctrine about our Lord Jesus Christ and ward off all error.<sup>8</sup>

Christianity has its roots in Judaism. Our Lord Jesus Christ emerged from the people of Israel, like a new branch that grows out of a tree trunk, the "tree of Jesse", which was believed to have withered. Even though he was the Messiah, he was nevertheless rejected by the Jews. Faith in Jesus struck them as irreconcilable with faith in Yahweh, the one and only God. It was an even greater madness to imagine a crucified God. Thus, those who did not want to reject

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<sup>7</sup> After the affirmation at Nicaea that Jesus is perfectly God and perfectly man, it was inevitable that the question should arise: How? It is not enough to affirm God and man, they must be affirmed at the same time. The problem that ensued was how to affirm that Christ is perfectly God and perfectly man without affirming that there are somehow two persons involved. Either both are affirmed, but not at the same time, not as "one"; or they are affirmed at the same time, but one at the expense of the other. The underlying problem is the unity of Jesus' person and the duality of his nature.

<sup>8</sup> Cyril was the soul of the Council of Ephesus in 431, where the doctrine of Mary's divine maternity was proclaimed. Deposed from his episcopal seat by Emperor Theodosius II, he was soon restored to his see and until his death (444) he dominated all of Eastern Christendom.

him completely, found it more reasonable to think of Jesus as just a man who was adopted by God as his son. In the second century, this theory spread under various guises: for some, Christ was no more than a kind of ghost that had taken on a pseudo-body; others maintained that Christ was not crucified, but that Simon of Cyrene took his place on Calvary. For many, Christ was not God; he was merely an extraordinary man that God had anointed in the baptism received from John in the River Jordan.

From those who read the Gospel meticulously, an interpretation emerged that a celestial being went in and out of Jesus; some affirmed that in Jesus the eternal Son of God and the adopted son coexisted.<sup>9</sup> Thus they divided Jesus into two parts, or persons. These doctrines were promoted by Alexandria and Antioch. In this fourth century, in which God called me to live, these theories found fertile ground thanks to a Patriarch of Constantinople named Nestorius (390-451 approximately), with whom I personally had many dealings.<sup>10</sup>

Nestorius was a good, well-intentioned man who

<sup>9</sup> The School of Antioch was known for its literal reading of the Sacred Scripture. This emphasis led the school to affirm Christ's humanity. The question it faced was how Jesus the man can be the Son of God, by which they gave priority to his humanity. This leads us to posit a division within Christ himself: on the one hand his humanity, and on the other his divinity.

<sup>10</sup> Nestorius was the Patriarch of Antioch. He was a faultless theologian, and a man of lofty spirituality, with a strong moral character, intrepid and resolute, but who lacked the political shrewdness needed for his complex task.

tried hard to live a Christian life, and who sincerely sought the truth. Nevertheless, I think it never occurred to him that he might not be the only one who was right. Influenced by certain doctrines, or not having assimilated what Saint Paul called "the madness of the Cross", Nestorius reached the point of declaring that Jesus is not the Son of God.

He insisted that Jesus was just a man who was adopted by God. He tried to explain his position by recourse to an attractive and ingenious argument: in his view, the union between God and Jesus is "moral" and "accidental"; a more intimate union than the one that obtained between God and the great prophets, but in the final analysis, he maintained that Jesus' reality was different from God's. This was true, but only partially.

Pope Celestine heard about Nestorius' speculations, and had me study the matter thoroughly and try to counter Nestorius' errors. I wrote several letters to Nestorius advising him that he was causing scandal and bewilderment, and asking for explanations, because at the same time he was speaking out against me all over Constantinople.

His answer to me was ironic in tone:

*"There is nothing healthier than Christian moderation. And that is what moves me to write to you today. As for the two of us, and in spite of the fact that you have issued a series of things that go against brotherly love, I greet you magnanimously and charitably. Experience will show if this letter can bring me any fruit."*

Greek Apologist  
Fathers

*Greetings to you and your community from all those who are with me, and from myself."*

Nestorius was clearly a diplomat who knew how to act without losing his head. His doctrine continued to spread with such success that the Pope, concerned, called a Synod in Alexandria to discuss the issues. There I promulgated twelve affirmations against Nestorius' errors. Nestorius, confident of the rectitude of his position, simply sent back another twelve against me.<sup>11</sup> As if that were not enough, Nestorius had begun to propagate the implications that resulted from his doctrine: that only the human person of Christ died on the Cross and thus redeemed the human race; that Mary was only the Mother of the human Christ and cannot be called the Mother of God.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For Cyril, the crucial point was to confess that Jesus is truly God. If Christ had been just a man, he would not have been able to save us. With his incarnation, he united our nature to the divinity and made it divine so as to transmit salvation and eternal life to us. Conceiving of Jesus only in his human nature struck Cyril as the ultimate impiety: only the Son of God made man is the author of our redemption. Oddly, he seemed not to see as much danger in a thesis that deformed or diminished Christ's human nature.

<sup>12</sup> Nestorius had criticized the title "Mother of God" popularly attributed to Mary. Nonetheless, as a pastor of souls, he had allowed this expression to be used in a pious and orthodox sense. But it was necessary to set forth that the divine nature could not be born, or be incarnated, or suffer on the Cross, or die. Thus he advised referring to Mary with the title "Mother of Christ", which everyone could agree on. This conception was fitting and logical from the point of view of Antiochian theology, but the dry and rationalist theological reasoning did not satisfy the great majority of the faithful.

The Holy Spirit can also speak through the common people, and on this occasion all of Constantinople lifted its voice in protest against this doctrine. The people could tell that a concrete truth that bore upon their salvation was in danger:

if Christ is God, then Mary is the Mother of God.

This is important because our salvation occurs in communion with God, and communion with God occurs in Mary's womb.

If Christ were not God, if Jesus the man was not substantially -hypostatically- united to the eternal Son of the Father, then our humanity was not touched by God and therefore, was not redeemed in our own flesh.

Jesus is the Son of God; the union man-God is so strong that in Jesus himself everything that God is and wants to be for humanity is united to everything that we humans are and need from God as our Savior. Mary is the Mother of God, and denying Mary's divine motherhood would be like denying God's incarnation. The son that Mary conceived in her womb is really and truly the Son of the eternal Father, because God has seen fit to save humanity by uniting us with him and making himself like us. Thanks be given, Lord, because you enlightened a whole people about the faith of their redemption!

Thanks be to you as well, Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ and Mother of all people... in you humanity accepted the Savior of all!<sup>13</sup>

To be fair, I must admit that Nestorius came to concede that Mary could be called the Mother of God, but under certain circumstances, some of which were reasonable. Sadly, in his preaching he did not exercise the same prudence. In the face of widespread confusion, the intervention of Pope Celestine II was not long in coming, and he sent Nestorius a letter saying that if he did not retract, he would find himself outside of the Church.

*"You slip on your own verbiage. You tangle true things with dark things. Then you mix up the two, and confess what you just denied, and you try to deny what you have confessed.... Therefore, know surely that our decision is this: if you do not preach what the Roman Church and all the Catholic Church and that of Constantinople until your arrival, have always preached, and if you do not publicly reject in writing this unhealthy novelty that insists on separating what the Scripture has united, you will be excluded from the Catholic Communion"*<sup>14</sup>.

Acta Conc.  
Oecum.  
I II P 12

<sup>13</sup> Cyril knew what he was doing when he declared that using the word "Mother of God" was the criterion for the true Christian faith. This idea fit in with the logic of his theological conception. It also assured him the support of the people in the upcoming debates. The victory that he would obtain over Nestorius regarding Christological doctrine can be considered historically as the first great triumph of popular Marian faith.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Celestine II, Westerner that he was, to a certain extent was aloof from the theological propositions under debate; moreover, as Nestorius rather aptly put it, he was "too simple to be able to appreciate the nuanced meanings of the doctrinal truths". But Cyril's party had taken pains to present the Pope with such a gross caricature of Nestorius' Christological thesis that Celestine did not hesitate to take a stand against "that declared blasphemous".

Nestorius had hardened his position too much for this document to upset him in the least. Things got more and more complicated, and the emperor himself, Theodosius II, called an Ecumenical Council for June 30, 431. Two hundred Eastern bishops attended. I presided over this Council and was the Papal legate. I do not doubt the emperor's honest concern, but there were also political considerations behind his intervention. It is not in the Empire's interest for the official Church to have two factions: political unity presupposes unity of the faith.

Nestorius was invited, but since he was late in arriving, we exposed the ambiguities and dangers of his doctrines, and decided unanimously to condemn him and depose him as patriarch. I recognize that there was little justice on my part, but I still believe that had Nestorius been present, the result would have been the same, or perhaps worse...<sup>15</sup>. Because I deposed him as patriarch, more animosity and spite was directed at me, especially from his followers. It must have been painful and humiliating for a man who knew his own intelligence, as Nestorius did. May God have him in his glory!

The Council of Ephesus clearly had a great influence on the other councils. My participation helped to point out Nestorius' fundamental error.

I maintained that Christ must be attributed with human characteristics in his divine being, and vice

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<sup>15</sup> Cyril did not even wait for the call to the Synod; arguing his mandate from Rome, he gathered his bishops in the Council, and rushed through the condemnation of Nestorius as a heretic.



versa: in Christ the man, divine characteristics must be recognized. This went against Nestorius' position; he said that the acts of Jesus-God are not the same as those of Jesus-Man, and vice versa.<sup>16</sup>

Dz 117

Dz 111a

There were those who saw certain dangers in my doctrine. Before long discussions broke out that looked for subtleties in all things. What I spoke of was the only and natural Son of God, and I stressed the fact that there is but one Christ and one Son. Emperor Justinian, a man who was concerned about questions of faith, wrote a letter to Pope John II in which he set forth the disputes and dangers that he detected. The Pope, in order to inform and forewarn the people, made his reply to the emperor known:

*Emperor Justinian, our son, made it known that debate has broken out on three points:*

- *Whether Christ, our God, can be called one of the Trinity.*
- *Whether Christ, as God, who cannot suffer, did in fact suffer.*
- *Whether Mary, ever Virgin, Mother of the Lord God Jesus Christ, should be properly and truly called progenitor of God and Mother of God the Word, incarnated in her.*

*In these points we have approved the Emperor's Catholic faith, and we have evidently shown that it is so,*

communicatio  
idiomatum  
Dz 201

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<sup>16</sup> Given the unity of the person, Jesus-God can be attributed with what corresponds to man, and Jesus-Man can be attributed with what corresponds to God. This can be called communication of properties or attributes.

*with examples from the prophets, the apostles and the Church Fathers.*

- 1) That Christ is the second person of the Trinity.*
- 2) That God suffered in the flesh.*
- 3) And that Mary is really and truly the Mother of God.*

Dz 201

But not even these clear affirmations were enough to placate those who maintained that in Jesus there was but one nature, strangely enough almost all anti-Nestorians. It is important to point out that in the first centuries of Christianity it was not Christ's divinity that was challenged, but rather his human condition.

#### **4. Consequences of Ephesus.**

The Robber Council (449)

Cyril (380-444). I never thought that it would be one of my friends who would point the accusing finger at the doctrinal "dangers" that were supposedly hidden in my anti-Nestorian formulations, and would go so far as to make them the foundation of a new heresy, no less grave than Nestorius'. Eutyches<sup>17</sup> and I were old friends, but our friendship came to a halt when he began to take very seriously certain ideas that came into his head, and maintained them with the same stubbornness with which he decided to enter the monastery. This character trait of his always worried me, especially considering the fact that Eutyches was not a man of especially lucid understanding.

I must admit that I was glad to see Eutyches take the monk's habit because in the monastery, I thought,

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<sup>17</sup> Eutyches was the superior of a monastery in Constantinople. He was obsessed with a fanatic fear of Nestorianism and a blind, stubborn faith in Cyril's formulas, which he took out of context.

his ideas, no matter how outrageous they were, would not go beyond the monastery walls. How wrong I was.

I, already an old man, with neither the strength nor the inclination to continue doing battle, remained a detached observer of the events, and prayed to God that no more division would come to the Church. Sometimes God simply asks us to be there, available and "useless", in an attitude of prayer and listening. This is a hard thing to accept, especially when one feels a keen desire to intervene...

Eutyches was a zealous anti-Nestorian. Monophysitism was the only solution that he could think of to crush Nestorianism. I never had a more faithful, and at the same time a more faithless friend. Obstinate and blind in preserving my formulas, he took them out of their original context. This is one of the clearest examples of how loyalty to the "formulas", verging on the fanatic, can betray true doctrine and turn into heresy. A love of the truth can also lead to errors that accumulate and reinforce one another. But come what may, there is always someone who upholds the truth.

#### **5.- Synod of Ephesus (449)**

-Leo I, Supreme Pontiff (440-461)

It grieves me deeply that Cyril's account had to be interrupted due to his sudden death just a few days ago. The account has reached the point where I, as Pope, have a role to play, and I wish to bring it to its conclusion. It is just as well that Cyril did not live to see the outrages committed by Eutyches and Dioscorus, Cyril's successor in the Patriarchate of

On my orders, Flavian, an old friend of Cyril's, called a Synod so that Eutyches could explain his doctrine. When he was summoned to declare, surrounded by patriotic monks and the imperial guard, Eutyches simply recited what he had always said: "*Two natures before the union; after the union, a single flesh,*" in the belief that with this formula he was being faithful to Sacred Scripture, the Council of Nicaea, the Council of Ephesus and Cyril. The thirty bishops attending the Synod agreed to condemn Eutyches, excommunicate him and depose him as superior of the monastery.

González, Faus.  
La Humanidad  
Nueva II  
Ed. Sal Terrae, p. 469

Latin Apologist  
Fathers;  
54, 714-18

299

into the Sacred Scripture if he could not even understand the first words of the Creed?

In view of all this, I did not hesitate to confirm the condemnation, and I immediately wrote an instruction, which I sent directly to him, thinking that I had closed the book on the struggle against Monophysitism.

This is what I wrote in the document that I sent:  
*"So the proper character of both natures was maintained and came together in a single person. Lowliness was taken up by majesty, weakness by strength, mortality by eternity. To pay off the debt of our state, invulnerable nature was united to a nature that could suffer. Thus, in a way that corresponded to the remedies we needed, one and the same mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus, could both on the one hand die and on the other be incapable of death. Thus was true God born in the undiminished and perfect nature of a true man, complete in what is his and complete in what is ours...."*  
 -Leo, Bishop of Rome

Dz 143,144

Eutyches refused to accept the sentence and found support in Dioscorus, Cyril's successor. Both appealed to Theodosius II, and managed to sway him to call a Synod in Ephesus without my consent.... There, Dioscorus usurped the presidency by pushing aside the legates that I had sent to regulate the sessions. Eutyches took advantage of the situation to solemnly proclaim his formulation of a single nature, and was subsequently elevated to the dignity of bishop. Flavian, my faithful friend who had been ordained a

Bishop by my own hand, was deposed from his office, exiled, mistreated, and may God preserve him in his glory, because he died two days later. Everything seemed to indicate that the scoundrels would get away with their wickedness. It was without a doubt one of the darkest chapters in the history of the Church, which is holy because it has Jesus Christ as its foundation and head, but at the same time is sinful because its members are human beings and prone to division. No wonder some of the Fathers have called the Church "Saint and Sinner".

Praise to you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because you preserve the Church in its chastity, in spite of those Christians who would prostitute her!

**6.- The Council of Chalcedon<sup>18</sup>**

One year after having been named Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, I, Marcian (450-457), saw the need to personally call an Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon, in order to preserve the unity of the Christian Church against discord, misunderstanding and divisions that were tearing her apart from the inside.

I took the liberty of suggesting the Council to Pope Leo, who was incensed by what he called the "Robber Council of Ephesus" perpetrated by Dioscorus and Eutyches.

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<sup>18</sup> The problem that faced Chalcedon was the following: if "we believe that Jesus is perfectly God" (Nicaea), and "perfectly man" (Constantinople I), and that in Jesus there is full unity between God and man, in such a way that he is "one and the same" (Ephesus), a single personal reality; if we believe this, the difficulty resides in understanding how two complete realities (the natures) can constitute a single personal being.

The Pope approved my proposal and was pleased to find me interested in preserving the peace. Of all the Bishops who were invited, 600 attended from the East, 5 from the West and only 2 from Africa- a glaring disproportion. I was informed of the course of events by the two Papal legates.

The first session included the most heated debate. The discussion turned to Dioscorus, justified by some, condemned by others. In the third session, the Bishops reached a consensus to condemn him.

In the fourth session there was a great deal of tension, especially among the Fathers from Alexandria, who were disciples of Cyril. When the "document to Flavian", written by Pope Leo, was read to the assembly, they had clearly lost sight of the problem in its entirety; it was not about authority but about faithfulness to the Gospel and the original message of revelation about the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

La Humanidad  
Nueva II, p. 448

González Faus puts it this way: "One and the same, but not a single nature; this is the paradox of Chalcedon."

The philosophical difficulty could be expressed as follows: that which was already complete -by virtue of its being so- could not receive anything more or be added to another reality that was also complete. And so it was not clear how the two natures could constitute a single personal being. This could be valid if the natures were physical realities, if they were of the same kind, and if they had equal functions.

Jesus' divine nature is what there is of the divine in Jesus, and that is God; and human nature is what there is of the human in Jesus, and that is Jesus. God and Jesus, the divine and the human, are not complementary realities, nor do they oppose each other. They are "the divine reality" given and expressed in Jesus' human reality.

Finally, however, thanks to the Church's universal or "catholic" character, both the school of Antioch and the school of Alexandria<sup>19</sup> contributed to the formulation approved by this council; both Cyril and Pope Leo. After some adjustments in which everyone had to compromise on the accidental aspects and reaffirm the essential aspects, all present enthusiastically accepted the confession of faith of Chalcedon, after condemning Eutyches and Monophysitism and banishing Dioscorus. Once and for all, the Church dogmatically defined the existence of two natures in Christ: one divine and the other human. This was one of the greatest victories for faith, and it is worth taking a close look at its formulation:

**"Following the saintly fathers, we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Against Nestorius	Taken from a letter from John of Antioch to Cyril.
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**The same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity,**

Against Eutyches	From a letter by Saint Leo, Pope.
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**The same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body;**

Against Nestorius and Apollinarius	From a letter by John of Antioch.
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<sup>19</sup> The great message of the school of Alexandria was: "God himself has lived our life," which points to the importance of the divinity of Christ. Antioch emphasizes the fact that this same life of ours is the one that Jesus Christ, God and man, lived, whereby the Jesus' complete humanity is affirmed.



Heb 5:15

**Consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity,**  
Against Arius

**The same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin,**  
Against Nestorius

**begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity,**  
Against Arius

**and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer as regards his humanity;**  
Against Nestorius

**one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten,**  
From the letter by John of  
Antioch to Cyril

**acknowledged in two natures**

This formulation is the novelty of the Council of Chalcedon, on the basis of which the distinction between "physis" -nature- and "hypostasis" -subsistence- is established, these two words having been taken as synonyms before. The two natures, because they are different, constitute the sole subsistence, the incarnate Logos.

**Which undergo no confusion,**  
Against Theodoret and Andrew of Samosata

**No change,**  
Against the Arians,  
who argued that, by virtue of being subject to change,  
Jesus Christ could not be God; or against mythological  
explanations, which claimed that God left off being  
God and "would become a man".

**No division, no separation,**  
Against Nestorius,  
the duality of subsistence or ontological subjects is  
rejected.

**At no point was the difference between the natures  
taken away through the union,**

Against Eutyches and Nestorius	From Cyril's second letter to Nestorius
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**But rather the property of both natures is  
preserved**

Against Nestorius	From Pope Leo and from a letter by Flavian to the Pope.
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**And comes together into a single person and a  
single subsistent being; he is not split or divided into  
two persons,**

Against Nestorius	From a letter by Theodoret to the Eastern monks.
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**But is one and the same only-begotten Son, God,  
Word, Lord Jesus Christ,  
just as the prophets taught from the beginning about  
him,**

Dz 301-302

**and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us,  
and as the creed of the fathers handed it down to us.**

The definition reached in Chalcedon, in fact, was not entirely new. It could be better viewed as a mosaic of implicit quotes, not as a new symbol of the faith. Except the end, almost all of the texts are taken from Cyril's second letter, Pope Leo's "Tomum ad Flavianum", and finally, from the profession of faith composed by Flavian at the Synod of Constantinople (448) in the trial against Eutyches<sup>20</sup>. In this way, Church doctrine about the incarnation was clearly established, as well as the appropriate vocabulary for expressing it, at least for that time..., vocabulary always being a relative value. Many errors in the interpretation of Church doctrine arise when the terms used are taken literally, because not even when they are understood adequately do these terms manage to pin down the divine mystery in its entirety. God is always greater than anything we could ever think or express about him. Grant us, Lord, that we may always recognize this! Amen.

### **7.- Second Council of Constantinople<sup>21</sup>**

**Pope Vigilius (537-555)**

Much false witness has been borne against me, and justice has not been done to me or to the Church at large. It would not bother me if only my name were

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<sup>20</sup> This symbol is representative of the Western mentality and the thinking of the school of Antioch.

<sup>21</sup> The formulation approved in Chalcedon lent itself to diverse interpretations. In order to avoid them, the Council of Constantinople would emphasize the assimilation between "hypostasis" and "prosopon" on the one hand, and between "physis" -nature- and "ousia" -essence- on the other.

Ds 424 and 426  
Ds 428

slandered, but the name of the Church was besmirched as well, so much so that some began to doubt whether she was the true bride of Christ. That is why I consider it necessary to give an account of what happened at the Council of Constantinople, 16 years after the start of my Pontificate.

Perhaps the Council of Chalcedon put an end to open struggle, which was heated and tragic, but even afterward, debate continued, but in a more subtle way. I know that there were Nestorians who were secretly glad that, as they saw it, the Council returned to the old formulas that were similar to those held by the school of Antioch.

The Monophysites, for their part, put up open resistance in Palestine and Egypt, even though Eutyches and Dioscorus had already died. So a new round of discussions started up, and they have lasted to the present day, to the 7th century. Seven centuries of misunderstanding about the mystery of Jesus! But also seven centuries of constant searching in which the Spirit of God has guided those who wish to understand the truth of this mystery and safeguard it from falsification!

As incredible as it may seem, there were still Bishops of Alexandria that considered the Council of Chalcedon to be contrary to that of Ephesus. The Nestorians took advantage of the situation to emphasize their doctrines and affirm the duality of persons in Christ. The fact that over 100 years after the condemnation of Nestorius his way of thinking still had followers, shows that the issues had not been

sufficiently settled. I am sure that many of these discussions were no more than verbal sparring, aggravated by political passions. Both agreed that Christ's humanity and divinity were complete, and impossible to either confuse or to separate. But when it came time to explain, both held that the concepts of nature and subsistence were the same, even though the Council of Chalcedon had made a distinction between the two. Unfortunately, it never gave an explicit explanation of what that distinction was. You might say the oversight was minor, but it had grave consequences.

Emperor Justinian (527-565), who could see the signs of his empire's decadence, could not stand to see the faith split into different confessional factions. So many opinions were circulating in the Churches of the East and the West that they ran the risk of degenerating into sects. Justinian, who found the situation uncomfortable, decided to make politics with theology: he called a council to set things straight between Antiochenes and Monophysites.

The groups could not be reconciled, in spite of long discussions. Justinian called a council to condemn the most prominent representatives of the school of Antioch and to placate the ill-tempered and dissident Monophysites. I did not agree with this measure, but the Emperor did not heed my words. The first step was to issue a decree condemning the Antiochenes. Several Bishops signed it, but I refused. This was obviously an obstacle to Justinian's plans, so he kept me captive in Constantinople to keep me from blocking the assembly. Once the assembly was held, he

released me, but only after obtaining my promise to hold an Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (553 A.D.), in which I refused to take part. Preparations for the council were hurried and confused, and the council itself rushed through its proceedings. One hundred sixty Bishops attended, of which only six were from Antioch. The Fathers from Alexandria took advantage of the disproportion to condemn the few Antiochene representatives, headed by one Theodore of Mopsuestia whose "Three chapters" were condemned on "suspicions of Nestorianism"<sup>22</sup>. The situation for me was extremely compromising. Among those condemned by the council were some followers of people who had been rehabilitated by the Council of Chalcedon, so I limited myself to condemning only certain propositions without naming names, which irritated many, including the Emperor.... In the end I believe that the council did the right thing by upholding the affirmations of Chalcedon. The duality of natures in Jesus meant nothing more than the full truth of his human being and his divine being, a truth that some had lost sight of.

Dz 224

Dz 217 and 219

The distinction between the natures does not imply, therefore, any duplicity in Jesus; rather the guarantee of the duplicity is the unity itself. Thus there is no alienation of God and humanity, as if they were two addends of the same magnitude; there is only an expression that Jesus as a human being is more than just human.

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<sup>22</sup> It appears certain that the Pope in the end approved the final anathemas in which the "impious" Theodore of Mopsuestia was condemned.

My position was not the one the Emperor was expecting, so he had me put in prison once again. The situation was desperate. The people were confused and the positions, polarized. The Church could not remain leaderless, subject to the will of political powers. If I had not managed to get out of prison, a new Pope might have been named in accordance with the Emperor's policies and other Nestorian ideas, which would have led to the Church's ruin: it would have been placed at the service of an empire and not at the service of God.... I reconsidered Theodore's propositions, and indeed, I found in his position certain incisive and illuminating theses about the fullness of Our Lord Jesus Christ's humanity, but there were others that struck me as dangerous.

My approval of the condemnations against Theodore and his followers was enough to have me released from prison, which solved some problems and brought about others.

#### **8.- Third Council of Constantinople (680-681)**

-Leo II, Pontiff of Rome (681-683)

In homage and memory of His Holiness Leo I, when the responsibility fell to me to be Peter's successor, I chose the name Leo II. Leo I and I do not share only the name, but also a particular circumstance: both he and I held ecumenical councils of transcendent importance for the whole Church. He handled the thorny situation of Chalcedon with great skill, and won the battle against Monophysitism for the Church. My situation was no less difficult. When I was elevated to the pontificate, a council was being held in Constantinople, called by my predecessor Pope Agatho, who

sat for only three years on the throne of Peter (from 678 to 681). It was my task to face the consequences of the council and find solutions to urgent problems.

In the preceding council held in Constantinople it had been made clear that the duality of natures in Jesus meant the full truth of his human being and of his divine being, that the unity of subsistence meant only the unity of the single Christ. But many had been left dissatisfied, especially members of the school of Antioch, who objected to the condemnation of Theodore of Mopsuestia handed down by my predecessor Vigilius, who called him an "impious Nestorian". There also still remained some Monophysites<sup>23</sup> who were preaching the consequences that derived from Eutyches' doctrine regarding Jesus' will: if there is only one nature in Jesus, there is also only one will. What they were really trying to avoid was the need to refer to two ways of acting in Jesus, which presupposed admitting two wills in him. The strength of Sergius, the Bishop of Constantinople, and other Monophysites, came from the approval that Pope Honorius (625-638) had given to their thinking. If the truth be told, my predecessor allowed people to refrain from speaking of two wills, but not because he accepted that there was only one, but because he rejected the speculative formulation of this issue and the deductive presupposition of Monophysitism, which believes that the only way to make room for divinity in Jesus is by relegating his humanity. This is the way Pope Honorius put it:

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<sup>23</sup> These Monophysites were Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople and Cyrus, Bishop of Alexandria.



Dz 487

*"If we are to imagine and speak of one or two operations, these are things that are better left alone, or left to the grammarians."*

A prudent piece of advice. The risk that theology will degenerate into empty words is real. The trouble was that Honorius gave cause for the discussions to go on<sup>24</sup>.

He apparently assumed that will implied opposition to God, and so he believed that will does not belong to our nature, but to our condition as sinners, whereby Jesus clearly could not have had a human will. This reasoning was no less mistaken than Sergius'. The Patriarch, to no one's surprise, was not satisfied, and obtained from the emperor a reply more to his liking, accusing all those who confessed duality of will of Nestorianism. When Martin I acceded to the pontificate (649-653), he condemned both the position of Sergius and the Emperor, and that of Pope Honorius, although he did not accuse the Pope of heresy, but of "negligence"<sup>25</sup>

These discussions have gone on up to the days of my own pontificate (682), but I believe that the Council in Constantinople has finally produced clear expres-

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<sup>24</sup> Honorius did not really clarify his position well enough. He wavered about the formulas. It appears that in his view, the will did not belong to human nature but to guilt, meaning that the will is opposed to God. Thus Jesus could not have a human will. Later the Pope looked for formulas that were less categorical, but even they did not satisfy Sergius.

<sup>25</sup> The condemnation took place at a local council held in the Lateran.

sions on the issues. This council confirmed the clarifications made in the local Lateran Council that Martin I presided over; there it was affirmed that there are two wills in Christ "in accordance with the natures". This means that between the two of them there is the same lack of homogeneity as between the two natures, making it impossible to align them and add them up. This obviously implied the condemnation of Sergius and of all those who with him maintained that there was a single will:

*"This same holy and universal synod, here present, faithfully accepts and welcomes with open hands the report of Agathos, most holy and most blessed pope of old Rome, that came to our most reverend and most faithful emperor Constantine, which rejected by name those who proclaimed and taught, as has been already explained, one will and one principle of action in the incarnate dispensation of Christ our true God..."*

Ds 553-554

Some kind of recognition had to be given to Constantine, the Christian Emperor who lent so much support to the Church and who urged the ecclesiastical authorities to hold the Third Council of Constantinople.

The real intention of affirming "two wills" was to safeguard Jesus' human will, and on a deeper level, his humanity. In Christ there cannot be a new decision center struggling against the divine will; rather Jesus is referred to the father's will in all of his humanity and in all of his human will.

Today I can clearly see the value of the council. God's Spirit was with those attending so that they would come to an understanding of statements made in Chalcedon: the maximum union with God assumes the maximum human affirmation, which is why we can speak of "two wills" without there being opposition between them.

*"His all holy and blameless animate flesh was not destroyed in being made divine but remained in its own limit and category, so his human will as well was not destroyed by being made divine, but rather was preserved..."*

Dz 556

Thanks be to God that this council was held. It is very likely that had it not been held, the formulations made in Chalcedon would never have been clarified. The intuitions that Chalcedon could only make out dimly were given straightforward expression in Constantinople: Jesus is more perfectly human than we are because he has been assumed by God as his own humanity.

This is the only way, in Jesus of Nazareth, that God is our Savior. And this should be a cause of joy for everyone.

#### **9.- Fundamental affirmations of Chalcedon**

The Council of Chalcedon produced the most finished synthesis of the Christological struggles that took place before it. It is true that some problems were left unresolved. It was up to the subsequent Councils of Constantinople (II and III) to take on new issues on

the basis of the formulations set forth in Chalcedon, by interpreting its fundamental affirmations.

In the final analysis, all the discussions had the same ultimate purpose of safeguarding the absolute value of Jesus in the life of Christians: Jesus is God and man at the same time, and that is why he was able to save us.

What do we mean when we say that Jesus is God and man?

- We are not trying to put the two attributes, divinity and humanity, on the same level,
- nor are we positing a subject that "takes on" two natures,
- nor are we affirming Jesus' divine nature the same way that his human nature is affirmed.

What we are affirming is:

- In Jesus two realities subsist, one finite and the other infinite; one absolute and the other relative; but both constitute him in a single being.
- In Jesus, the human dimension is the true expression of God himself. Jesus' humanity is God's humanity, with the same truth with which I can say that my humanity is mine.
- The ultimate subject of Jesus the man is God.
- What belongs to God belongs to the human being ("Jesus' flesh is God's flesh" wrote Saint Irenaeus).

- God does not destroy, or drown out the human nature; he affirms it. The divine and the human are not confused or mixed or diluted in Jesus.
- One and the same being is perfectly God and man, but this does not mean that God and man can be the same; it is in their irreducibility that they constitute full unity. This is only possible due to the difference between God and man, but they constitute, in their difference, an authentic unity.

Moreover, the maximum degree of Jesus' humanity is not what makes him God. Jesus is not God by being an extraordinary man; rather he is perfectly human by being God.

Jesus' humanity finds and has in him the fullness of its foundation: he is perfectly human because he is God.

And he is God and man because he proceeds from the Father, because he is the Son.

*The way to reach Jesus' divinity is his humanity.*

#### **10.- Limitations of ancient dogmatics**

- Reflection was done in an abstract, metaphysical way, with little reference to the Bible.
- No consideration is given to the historical-evolutionary aspect of development or to the concrete circumstances of Jesus' human condition.

St. Thomas Aquinas  
S. Th. III, 14, 1,1

- No consideration is given to Jesus' life, passion, death and resurrection. Jesus' human nature is seen as a reality outside the scope of history.
- In fact, Jesus' human condition is ignored; it is affirmed, but not heeded.
- The universal collective dimension is neglected. The incarnation is something that happens between God and humanity, and not between God and an individual person.
- Little consideration is given to the Gospel as Jesus' doctrine and example.
- Finally, we believe that Jesus cannot be "appropriated" conceptually; the way we associate ourselves with him is through experience and life. The Greeks were preoccupied with defining Jesus' nature and essence, with little interest in his relevance for our concrete existence. The early Christian community was interested in understanding the role that Jesus has played among people, who come to the awareness that he is possessed by God's power, and that this is what he wants to proclaim to the world.

N.B. Unfortunately, ancient dogmatics for a long time was seen as virtually the only way to approach Christology. In Church tradition, the councils were often used as a source for understanding the faith, almost independently of the New Testament, and for all practical purposes autonomous of, and sometimes even disconnected from their historical context. In extreme cases they were seen as a resource that was even more important than Sacred Scripture.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, the subject of faith in Jesus as God and man was not an abstract issue debated in schools of philosophy or in theological institutes. It was a question that involved God and Christianity. If Jesus is not "true God from true God", then we do not know God in human terms. If Jesus is a creature like any other, then God remains as distant as Aristotle's unmoved mover. Such a God could have been merciful and kind enough to have sent a savior, but in that case it would not cost him anything personally. The salvation of humanity would not be God, but some other thing; and in reality, God would not be the Savior. Only if Jesus is God from God do we know that it is in God, in his nature, to redeem creation that he put into existence. Only if Jesus is from God do we know what God is like, because in Jesus we see God translated into human terms, which are the only terms that we can understand.

## JESUS' DIVINITY

The formulas of the first Christological councils served to express, in metaphysical terms, the convictions of those who had made Jesus the center of their religious life, the object of their hope, and the absolute criterion determining the conduct of their life. Jesus is "*God like the Father*," "*one in being with the Father*," "*of the same nature as the Father*"; all of these phrases were ways to understand and express the eternal meaning of Jesus' relationship with God and with human beings. Later the formula was canonized, and became a sort of saving, almost magical expression, as it gradually became disconnected from its life-giving experience of faith.

In our time, believing in Jesus' divinity for many people means accepting an affirmation that says nothing to them, and makes no difference to the way they live their lives.



If we want to ask ourselves today what our faith in Jesus' divinity means, we will have to lay special emphasis on its relevance for ordinary life, without abandoning the formula.

Jesus' divinity is a confession that refers to the value of Jesus' life –a validity and value that are permanent– and to our relationship with him –a universal value–. It is the same as saying that Jesus' life is worth as much as God's life, and it has value for each and every one of us to the degree that we associate ourselves with him.

Believing in Jesus' divinity means accepting Jesus as the absolute and determining factor. The proclamation that the Church makes of Jesus' divinity is first and foremost an invitation to decide...; and for each person to give Jesus the same importance that the Church gives him in its faith. It is not a call to accept a statement; it is a call to accept a meaning. Whoever gives Jesus the absolute, decisive and fundamental place in his personal life, is accepting that Jesus is God.

Individuals have the obligation and the responsibility to make a free decision regarding the person of Jesus as he is presented in the Gospel.

The essence of faith, which is responsible action by a person, implies that the decision must be free and that each person must make it in his own personal solitude. His personal decision will lead him to a community of confession and belief, to a faith community. And this community will help to nurture his

faith. The community that nurtures faith must never supplant each believer's personal decision and responsibility.

It makes no sense to declare that Jesus is God and then to go on living with an attitude that is closed to the Gospel.

Believing that Jesus is God means:

- Making Jesus the decisive and ultimate criterion of our own life.
- Making Jesus the central and ultimate reference of our religious attitude.
- Recognizing that Jesus is the one who will have the ultimate say in evaluating our life, as Redeemer and Judge. It is up to Jesus to evaluate each person's life, on a personal level, and before the community and the world, not just in the community and the world. The evaluation is not given only in the living of our own life, but also as a total evaluation in history.
- Knowing that what we believe, recognize, love and worship in God is to be found in Jesus and, likewise, what God has accepted, loved, chosen and forgiven in us, is also to be found in Jesus.

The specifically Christian element consists of recognizing in our life that Jesus is God and not just making a confession of faith. It is not about making a theoretical statement; it is about choosing an option that has practical implications.

Believing in the divinity of Jesus is an act of authentic faith. It is not something that emerges from an experience of manifest reality, nor is it an inevitable conclusion of certain premises. Faith in Jesus' divinity is an act that transcends people's perceptive capacity.

Mt 16:13

Jesus' divinity is not a fact that can be experienced directly; it does not belong to the realm of the phenomenological. It is an interpretation of the person of Jesus, revealed directly by God. *"It was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven."* With this expression, Saint Matthew identifies the source of faith in Jesus; although the specific event and Peter's confession can have different interpretations.

Faith in Jesus is not something we perceive but something we accept; faith is an interpretation of what is perceived through the senses. And this perceived reality -the person of Jesus- can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Christian faith is a way of interpreting Jesus' life, person and mysteries. That is why we can say that believing that Jesus Christ is God, is an act of complete freedom. Nothing forces us to believe in him. In fact, there is no conclusive argument. Jesus' divinity is not an evident fact.

Mk 3:21; Mt 9:34

What is a fact is that many of Jesus' contemporaries saw what Jesus did and heard what he said, and yet they not only did not interpret his person along the lines of faith, but they wrote him off as a demon-possessed madman.

Believers may find reasons or motivations for justifying their faith, but not for demonstrating it. The proofs of Jesus' divinity are really more like reasons that support faith, once it is given; they are not premises that lead necessarily to faith. If you decide on faith, it will modify your stance in the world and your attitudes toward others and toward God. It will become the foundation of your values, of your confidence and hopes. Faith in Jesus will be a light that will illuminate all of your thoughts, your decisions, your values, your personal relationships, your activities.

Faith in Jesus' divinity is a gift of grace; the grace of believing freely is received by accepting the life, message and person of Jesus, along with his saving action.

In a certain sense, the way this reality is expressed is not especially important, since our expressions are never a perfect fit as far as reality is concerned. And what does the actual saving is the reality that has been given to us in Jesus, more than the way we put this reality into words.

If a person accepts Jesus, and accepts him the way he is and was, she is implicitly accepting this thing we call Jesus' divinity. It is like when a person jumps off a cliff; the chasm receives her as she is, not as she imagined herself to be. After all, what determines truth is reality, not the idea we have of it.

Faith, as content, cannot be identified with a certain expression, because reality affirmed by faith surpasses our capacity to express it.

The reasons supporting faith in Jesus' divinity are the following:

- Jesus had an authority that surpassed that of Moses and the prophets, and that corresponded only to God; that is why he made absolute demands.
- He had the power to perform miracles. The eschatological kingdom of God came through Jesus and in Jesus. The saving events of the end of time occurred in Jesus. They were events that showed who Jesus was. If it through the finger of God that I cast out devils, then know that the kingdom of God has overtaken you.
- Jesus has made it clear that in his love and mercy, in his forgiveness of sinners and love for the outcast, the kingdom of God was already there, as was God himself.
- He forgave sins. The Jews were convinced that only God could forgive sins.
- Jesus is God by virtue of having been conceived miraculously, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in a virgin woman.
- His honor and glory give witness to his identity. Jesus, by passing through life, passion and death, "is seated at the right hand of the Father," which means equality with God.

Lk 11:20

Mk 16:19

The underlying and ultimate reason for believing in Jesus' divinity, is the interpretation that the Evangelists have made of him –the New Testament– and from there, the interpretation that the Church has

made of him over the centuries and in the context of different cultures.

Calling Jesus God and one in being with the Father can only refer to the extent to which Jesus is involved in God and God in Jesus. In the context of faith, the only context where the phrase "Jesus is God" makes any sense, the expression is not so much metaphysical –essentialist– as historical. God has revealed himself to us, given himself to us, and has joined us to himself, in Jesus of Nazareth, and that is why Jesus is God.

Nowhere in the New Testament is any attempt made to affirm Jesus' divinity in an essential sense, nor does the Gospel try to identify Jesus with God. According to exegetes, the passage in Saint John: "*The Father and I are one*," is not meant in an essentialist sense, but in a referential sense.

Jn 10:30

In the conclusion to John's Gospel, when Jesus is addressed as "*My Lord and my God*," he is being associated with God and with the believer, but the expression is not affirming that God and Jesus are one and the same. It is not being said that God is Jesus, but it is being said that Jesus is God. In other words, Jesus is the expression, the gift, the communication of God. The Father-Son relationship is a good way to express the otherness, the relationship and the dependence. This is why the custom of calling Jesus the "Son of God", a more Biblical and existential formula, has been preferred over the more metaphysical and less historical formula of affirming simply that Jesus is God.

Jn 20:28;

Jn 20:28;  
Rm 9:15  
Heb 1:8

The acclamation of Jesus as God is a response for adoring and worshipping God that has been revealed to people in Jesus. The confession of Jesus' divinity is a recognition of God's sovereignty and lordship, in Jesus and through Jesus.

All of Jesus' titles are different ways of affirming a single message: that God has revealed himself fully to us in Christ, and that Christ is not just a sign alluding to God, but he who makes him present, as that which God himself wants to be and can be for people: their salvation, their God. The New Testament passages that speak of Jesus as God are not trying to offer a definition, but rather an expression of the function that Christ fulfills for us. To describe the reality of Christ, the Church, both the early Church and the modern Church, made up names and titles for Christ, all of them necessary and inadequate. The title of "God", which must be seen in connection with all the other titles that express Jesus' historical reality, is the basis for assuming the paradox that a particular man is God and, above all, that God is this man and not another, that he reveals himself and communicates through Jesus. Jesus' supreme title could very well be "Jesus is God", but that does not mean that it is the only title, or even the ultimate title, or the last word in expressing and understanding, in religious and theological terms, the mystery of Jesus.

Jesus is not God in the abstract. The God that is given and revealed to us in Jesus is the Incarnate God, associated with the singularity of human beings, with their circumstances and their history, the God of the covenant associated with the world.

It is important to avoid the following interpretations:

- Identifying the subject Jesus with the predicate God, as in the formula "I am so-and-so." This is a Monophysite interpretation, i.e., it points to the same unique reality. Jesus should not be equated with God.
- A representative interpretation should also be avoided, in the sense of Jesus' being the one who stands in for God. In this interpretation, Jesus replaces or substitutes God among people. Jesus does not stand in for God among people, and he does not stand in for people before God.
- Another angle that is not recommended is seeing Jesus as a simple participant in what God is, or giving him a functional identity in view of the role he plays among human beings.

The formula "Jesus is God" plants the person in front of Jesus and indicates the root of the mystery and uniqueness of Jesus: his unity with God makes it possible for him to be for us what God is. The living and true God; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is unthinkable without Jesus, and Jesus in turn is unthinkable without God. There is a risk that a person might think that he knows who Jesus is by stating that Jesus is God and man at the same time: one person in two natures. It would be sort of like knowing that water is a compound made up of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen, when in real-life experience, we know water by being thirsty.

The confession of Jesus' divinity should not be a theoretical statement, like a formula in chemistry or



algebra. It should be an affirmation that expresses in words the witness that we bear to Jesus in our lives. It makes no sense to declare his divinity if there are no feelings or attitude of adoration in our heart.

In the case of Jesus, and in the case of God, reflection is not what leads to faith. What leads to faith in Jesus is admiration, the call to follow him and our response, together with praise and worship. In the case of Jesus, a person needs to respond first, and then ask questions.

The basis of Jesus' filial relationship and his divine condition is not biological or genetic; it involves his whole person. So in order to know just how much Jesus is God, we need the whole Gospel, as well as a personal encounter with him.

Jesus is God because he is the complete, absolute and only expression of God.

The fact that God gives himself totally to people through Jesus, and that he gives himself to Jesus in what is human..., that is what makes Jesus God.

God's giving himself to Jesus eternally, totally, definitively, absolutely and ultimately, is what in the end constitutes divine fatherhood toward Jesus.

And the fact that Jesus is the Son of God by nature means that part of God's being, from the beginning, is to express himself and give himself to Jesus through what is human; and that part of Jesus' being is to be God's perfect and natural expression.

## **A LIFE IN TUNE WITH THE GOSPEL**

Both Jesus' way of acting and his teachings inspired, and sometimes even demanded, a very particular way of life. It did not take long before the requirements for following Jesus became specific ways of living. Following Jesus meant making him and his teachings the standard by which one's whole life was determined. The Christian way of acting and living derived from Jesus' fundamental teachings and, most importantly, from his way of acting.

Learning from Jesus became the Christian's basic task. The words that the evangelist puts in Jesus' mouth: "*Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,*" while not an actual quote, do express the ideal of the Christian life.

Mt 11:29

Mt 24:3

During the life of Jesus, the disciples were anxious to know when the world would come to an end and what would happen. They asked Jesus: "*Tell us, when is this going to happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world?*" But very quickly, in the early Church, this question was replaced by another: Lord, how are we Christians to live in this world?

As people came to understand that Jesus' message did not only demand a way to await the future but also, and perhaps more importantly, a way to live the present, they looked to the Gospel for guidelines to live by.

Jesus' message did not suddenly lead to a new society that was unlike those that already existed. Jesus' message slowly seeped into Jewish and pagan life, amidst all the errors, deficiencies and limitations that characterized each culture. The message was assimilated through a cultural filter and at the same time, the culture was being transformed by the message.

The Christian way of life, inspired by Jesus and the Gospel, contrasted with the pagan way of life, or with the life of a person who did not accept Jesus' teaching and had not made Jesus the standard to live by.

To be a true Christian, the faithful were not required to retreat from the world; on the contrary, what was needed was a stronger presence in the world. Being a disciple did not mean abhorring the world, but

loving it in a different way, loving it so as to transform it, loving it for others.

Christians were expected to love more than pagans did and surpass the natural limits of love.

Mt 6:32

They were also expected to surpass, in righteousness, authenticity, humility and freedom, the justice–holiness– of the Pharisees.

Mt 5:20;18:10;  
16:6

**The determining factor**

The coming of the kingdom of heaven is the coming of God as salvation for all people. Jesus Christ is God the Savior's greatest sign. The news of the coming kingdom is absolutely associated with the person of Jesus who proclaims it and brings it about. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the disciples understood that converting and believing in the Gospel was the same as making Jesus the determining factor in their own life, and the act of following was one's personal relationship with Jesus. Faith, love and confidence in him were indispensable elements for being a Christian. And a Christianity with no personal relationship with Jesus would be merely an ideology, a dead and empty philosophy.

In the early Church, the disciples were eager to come to know Jesus more and more, and to cultivate their personal relationship with him. For this they went to hear the apostles teach, they participated in the breaking of the bread, they looked after the neediest, and they tried to put Jesus' teachings into practice.

Ac 2:42

What was specific to Christian life, more than any other characteristic, was making Jesus "the Lord" of one's own life.

### **Confidence**

Expectation of the kingdom led at first to a relativizing of earthly realities; some Christians went so far as to spurn them as unworthy of their attention.

Earthly realities and human needs would be satisfied by God's care for his children.

*"Set your heart on God's kingdom first, and on his righteousness—justice— and all these other things will be given to you as well." These other things, will be the gifts that come with the kingdom. Thus the demands of life should not be cause for worry; God will see to what we need. "That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and how you are to clothe it. Surely life means more than food, and the body more than clothing! Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they are? Can any of you, for all his worrying, add one single cubit to his span of life? And why worry about clothing? Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his regalia was robed like one of these. Now if that is how God clothes the grass in the field which is there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will he not much more look after you, you men of little faith? So do not worry; do not say, 'What are we to eat? What are we to drink? How are we to be clothed?' It is the pagans who set their hearts on all these*

*things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all." Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness -i.e., the justice, the holiness that the kingdom of God asks for- and all these other things will be given you as well."*

Mt 6:25-33

The can be no doubt that the teachings of this wonderful Gospel passage come from the proclamation of the kingdom. The goodness and love of God, who is the Father of all people and not just their Creator, encourage Jesus' followers to live a life of boundless confidence.

This doctrine of confidence, of not worrying, is based on a faith and a world-vision that go beyond the immediate end; faith in God and a Father who is full of love and caring for his children. It is also based on the idea that the world is not alone; it is not a destructive machine, and people are not abandoned and exiled in the world. People worry when they feel alone and abandoned. Anxiety is an emotion we feel in the face of nothingness, emptiness and death.

Atheists have every reason to feel anxiety, because they believe they are alone. Pagans have every reason to ward off risks. Jesus does not want his followers to be passive and inactive, but he does want them to be confident, because the world is not the only reality that exists. Neither the world, nor the people in the world, are dispensable. Faith in God as Father brings out a corresponding attitude in people; they should live as God's children and as brothers and sisters to each other.

Mt 13:22

Worry is a state of mind that stifles the spirit and interferes with God's action; it even gets in the way of people's own activities. Jesus said that the worries of life smother God's word and keep it from bearing fruit.

Those who truly believe in Jesus and his message should not live in constant distress; they should live with their thoughts on God, trusting in him. Trying to assure one's place before God actually goes against faith in God.

Lk 11:13;  
Mt 7:11

Faith in God's love as a Father leads to an attitude of confidence. It is important to believe that God surpasses all examples of human goodness, that he is better than the best parents imaginable. God should be a reality that is so close to us that he orients and enlightens every moment of our life, even the hardest ones. His love should be evident in every step we take, in the flowers along the roadside, in the birds overhead, in human love.

### **Faith**

The proclamation of the kingdom by Jesus demanded faith in God, the same God of the people of Israel but understood in a different light. The basic principle was God's infinite goodness, his love and grace. Jesus identified the God he spoke of with the God that all of us have inside, i.e., with the true God who acts in our hearts. God must be good because he tells me so in my heart, and that is how everyone experiences him, as a God who is good above all things. It is not that sentiment trumps reason, but

sentiment can orient reason so that it can apprehend intellectually what the heart feels.

Jesus spoke of a God whose goodness broke all bounds, and he reflected this goodness of God in his attitude, in his concern for the smallest and those living in misery, in his feelings of tenderness and love. The people who listened to Jesus turned the argument around: God must be good because Jesus is. Such goodness could come from nowhere but a true God. Jesus made faith in God easy, as it were. Jesus in his kindness revealed a kind God.

Faith in God necessarily implied faith in love. There was no use in believing in a kind God if that kindness had nothing to do with each one of the people that Jesus dealt with. Nobody is interested in God's love unless that love touches each one of us, whether we deserve it or not. Jesus' attitude also reflected God's interpersonal love. Everyone could say: if Jesus looks after me, listens to me and understands me, how could God fail to listen to me, understand me and look after me? We could never assimilate what Jesus says, that God loves us, if we did not somehow assimilate God's love in what Jesus says.

### **Freedom**

The proclamation of the kingdom of heaven brought with it the proclamation of freedom. This freedom arises out of an interior disposition more than from an exterior change. It was the freedom of God's children, which first of all took the form of freedom before the law and before sin. Before the law, because the law became a principle that inspired ac-



tion, not a principle of moral coercion. People would act in response to the values embodied in the law, not out of fear of penalties for non-observance.

It was also freedom before sin, not in the sense of being able to do whatever one felt like, but freedom in the face of sins committed, freedom that arose out of the forgiveness that makes each person a new creature.

Jesus' freedom stands out especially with regard to established religion, the State, nationalist feelings, customs and traditions.

Jesus' freedom grew out of his convictions. His faith was the root of his freedom. The God of Jesus would not have looked so different from the God of the Jews if Jesus had not acted so freely.

For Jesus, freedom was a gift that one could not disown, because it was given in creation along with life. It was a necessary requirement of the kingdom, and at the same time its fruit. Freedom arose from the heart. To become free, one had to act freely. When a person does not know or accept that she is free, she acts like a slave and ends up being one.

Jesus lived in freedom and taught how to live in freedom, more as a requirement and an experience than as a conclusion or a postulate. The topic of freedom does not appear in Jesus' discourse. Freedom was a medium by which the kingdom came about. Everyone could respond to Jesus' message and his call, or they could ignore them.

All people have to learn to be free and to conquer their freedom. Our nature, our conditioning and our limitations make us especially prone to slavery. We need to learn to be free. Freedom is a call that comes to us as adults, from life itself and from God. Nobody can take another person's place in the conquest of one's own freedom.

It may be that as the immanence of the kingdom was lost, the requirement of freedom was too. The Gospel gradually became a "law" itself, imposing new obligations. The old priesthood and religious institution were replaced by another. Gospel life lost some of its original freedom and found itself encumbered by norms and customs. One of the tasks of Christian life and following Jesus, is to fight for freedom, and not just regarding the state and social structures, but for freedom of the heart.

Freedom is a requirement for following Jesus and imitating the Lord. It is impossible to be a child of the kingdom, and a child of God, unless one is free. Freedom is Jesus' basic requirement. All of the demands for following Jesus can be summarized in the demand that the follower act freely with regard to his place of origin, family, work, property and even life.

When we turn our freedom over to God, we do not lose it. Like all of God's gifts, freedom is most firmly in hand when it is given away, because when we recognize God in his gifts, we possess them more fully. The way to offer our life to God is by living it in his service, not by mutilating it or destroying it. It is the same with freedom, only when we exercise it do we offer it to

God. Freedom is an indispensable requirement that must be present in all acts of service to others and all acts of love for God, because love and service are worthwhile only when they are done freely.

### **Prayer**

Jesus insisted on the importance of prayer. There were few things to which he devoted more time, few things he exemplified more than the importance of prayer in the life of the true disciple. Before a person started working for the kingdom, she had to pray for it, because the kingdom was a gift of God, and God was its author.

Mt 6:5; 14:23ff  
Lk 6:12; 11:1ff

The true model of prayer was Jesus himself, and to pray as Jesus did, the idea was to try to reproduce his feelings, attitudes and convictions, not just to repeat his words. Jesus taught that what makes prayer valuable is not the words but the sentiments of the heart. Praying as Jesus did meant saying Jesus' words with Jesus' sentiments.

Mt 6:5

Prayer was a moment of encounter with God, with others, with the world and with oneself; that is why it was indispensable for the proclamation of the kingdom.

People who follow a routine, who live as if they were programmed, who have everything in a fixed place, feel no need to concentrate, and they feel no pressing need to pray. Other people, however, feel the need to discover God's will every day. They do not resort to fixed formulas but rather seek out a new and different God; for this reason they need to renew their prayer

constantly. What is new and different is not really God, of course, but the message about God and the experience they have of him.

### **Service**

The fundamental symbol of God is the human being, and the fundamental symbol of Jesus is the neighbor in need. Thus, service to God and the kingdom should focus on serving people who are at a disadvantage, humiliated, enslaved, either in their heart or in their social position.

The kingdom of God demands that Christians look after each human being unconditionally, especially those who are in some kind of trouble, either personally or structurally. This means they must strive to improve the structures and meet the needs of specific neighbors.

For those who believe in Jesus, the inspiration and orientation of their entire being should be aimed at promoting justice and the public good, and combating evil and suffering in all forms. Our faith in Jesus and the kingdom is a faith that works and takes action.

The task of transforming the world and creating a more humane society is in the hands of people as part of their history. The kingdom, in its transcendent dimension, comes from God, but this does not exempt us from solving our own problems. Promoting welfare, truth and virtue; defeating all kinds of suffering and evil wherever they are found through recourse to any possible scientific and technical means available,

these constitute the commitment of all those who believe in Jesus Christ and his message.

When Christians are in the position to transform society and make it better, this becomes a high-priority obligation that derives from the Gospel of Christ. Christian salvation, which is salvation of the whole person, also needs to include ecological, social and political aspects, although it should not be limited to them.

We must not forget, however, that even though we have our part to do, the kingdom comes from God and not from people. The world may well offer people everything they need to live, and to live well, but it does not offer them salvation. People need to learn from their faith to expect the kingdom of heaven, not the kingdom of the earth.

What is specifically Christian is faith in Jesus as Lord and Messiah; in practical terms, Christianity is defined by the exercise of love for those who need it most. In this way, attention is paid to what has been neglected, and the whole is taken into account, because as Christians, we are not allowed to limit ourselves to just a part, even if it is the largest and best part. With a sort of divine concern, we must take care of the needy, so that no one is left behind.

What sets the people of the kingdom, those who believe in Jesus and his message, apart from pagans, is that they think that this earthly reality is not the ultimate reality. Even though they devote all of their efforts to this world, they do it knowing that the world

is oriented toward the future, toward God, and that in the world that they are building now, God will be more present than before.

### **Humility**

The kingdom of heaven requires humility, because God is the author of the kingdom, because the kingdom is a gift that people do not deserve, because God is pleased to help the small. Humility is the mature fruit of the truth about humans and God's goodness.

People who are proud and self-satisfied, in any sphere but especially in the moral sphere, in their intimate relationship with God, are far from the kingdom.

Mt 18:1ff

Christian humility is not about underestimating the extraordinary treasures that God has entrusted into our hands. Humility, or to make it simpler, truth, means being deeply convinced that we are not ourselves the source of all of these gifts.

*"What do you have that has not been given to you?"* asks Saint Paul. We can plant seeds and water them, but we cannot make the seed grow and live. We should put all of our being and all of our talents at the service of the kingdom, but with simplicity and without taking ourselves too seriously. *"When you have done all you have been told to do, say, 'We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty.'"*

1 Co 4:7

Lk 17:10

Jesus teaches that between a person of impeccable morality who fulfills all of his duties, and a sinner who

Lk 18:10

recognizes his own sinfulness, the latter is closer to the kingdom in the sense of justice, truth and holiness.

Humility demands a certain degree of reflection into the nature of the kingdom and into one's own life experience. To be humble, a person has to go beyond appearances.

### **Love**

Jn 15:13  
1 Co 13:1ff

The sentiment that Jesus instilled most in his disciples, the one that really won their hearts, was undoubtedly love. For Jesus, love was the greatest thing a person could do in life. For the sake of love, people should be ready and willing to give up everything, even their own life. On the other hand, when a person has everything to give except love, it is all worthless.

Love was the fundamental link that would lead people to unity, peace and service to others. Only when people love each other do they "become" brothers and sisters, and children of God. And because they become children of God, they make God their Father. They act in such a way that they deserve to have God as Father.

### **Joy**

The joy that Jesus felt does not appear explicitly in the Gospel. Nowhere does it say that Jesus laughed at some unexpected situation. The joy of Jesus' message does not come from comical antics or merriment. It comes from the soul of the message itself. The Gospel presents the joy of the man who finds a treasure in a field, and goes and sells everything he has in order to acquire the field, or the joy that fills the heart of the merchant who finds a pearl of great value and goes and

sells everything he owns to buy it. The presence of Jesus and the kingdom is cause for great joy, not fear.

Mt 13:44

Those who really believe Jesus' message feel joy at "the good news". Everything that Jesus says is cause for great joy: God's goodness, the kingdom that is close at hand, the time of grace, liberation from the power of the devil, peace, forgiveness of sins.

The ability to forgive comes from the joy of experiencing forgiveness. Jesus' famous sermon is characterized by the word "happy" *"Happy are you, the poor, those who mourn, those who are persecuted!"*

Mt 5:1ff

Jesus' message caused such joy that the need to do penance was lifted, because it was time for the wedding celebration. Later the time would come to do penance.

Mt 9:15

Even in death we will be in the hands of the Father, without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls to the ground.

Mt 10:29;  
Lk 12:6

The joy of the Gospel is associated with other sentiments such as enthusiasm, which leads the disciples to put Jesus' message into practice and to participate with him in the joyful proclamation of the kingdom.

Jesus tells his disciples, *"Happy are you because you are present at this time of joy that the people of the old covenant awaited for so long."* The joy is not presented as liberation from present calamities, but –happy are you because you see and understand that the kingdom has come through my messianic work–. It is not about

Mt 13:16  
Lk 10:23



Invisible etenim Filii  
Pater, visibile autem  
Patris Filius.  
Ad Haer. IV, 6:6.

Ph 1:23

seeing in Jesus anything other than Jesus; all that is needed is to see him and understand him. This beatitude has a declarative value with perhaps also a touch of controversy: Happy are you who accept me and follow me, unlike those who do not accept or follow me. The joy does not come so much from seeing Jesus as from seeing him with understanding, accepting him and following him.

For his disciples, Jesus was the real cause of joy, as he should be for all Christians. The person of Jesus is absolutely linked to the salvation of all people and each person in particular, and that is why he is cause for joy.

Even in eternal life, God's glory will be manifested in the person of Jesus, and people will be happy to communicate with God through Jesus, who is the visualization of God and his glorifying Word.

*"The Father is the invisible of the Son, but the Son the visible of the Father,"* wrote Saint Irenaeus. In Jesus, God has made himself the visible cause for joy, and Jesus' glorifying mission is linked to his mission of revelation.

Everything is directly linked to the Jesus that we are awaiting, the Jesus we believe in, to God's transcendence and his communication through Jesus.

For Saint Paul as well, the hope of the future life was cause for great joy, because he hoped to *"be with Christ."*

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## GLOSSARY OF CHRISTOLOGY

**ADOPTIONISM.** *Concerned with the faith in one God and with the challenge of tritheism (admission of three gods), the defenders of adoptionism maintained that Jesus is a man like anyone else, with no eternal divine sonship; his only special trait is that he possesses God's Spirit in a unique way and was "adopted" as a son by God the Father. Its main proponent was Paul of Samosata (3rd century).*

**ANCHORITE.** Monk who retreats from the world and other people to live a life of prayer.

**ANTHROPOCENTRISM.** System or mentality that places human beings in the center of doctrines and scales of value: human beings, the measure of all things.

**ANTHROPOMORPHISM** (anthropomorphic). "Humanization of God": talking and conceiving of God in "humanized" forms and images (for example, God's face, hand) or through expressions of human activities and sentiments, for example, God's repentance, joy, anger.

**APOCALYPSE.** Literary genre that cloaks its revelations in visions of the future, especially of the end of the world, with cosmological descriptions.

**APOCALYPTIC.** General designation for a literary genre and religious doctrine of late Judaism (Book of Daniel) and even of Christianity (for example, Mk 13:2; 2 Th 2:1-12). The apocalyptic genre typically makes use of images, visions, parables and symbolic numbers for describing the immanence and "revelation" of the end of the world, or else of the coming Messiah and judge of the world.

**APOCRYPHAL.** In Catholic usage, this term designates books that have been presented as revealed, but that have been excluded from the canon by Church tradition.

**APOLLINARIUS OF LAODICEA.** (310-390). Bishop of Laodicea in 361, defender of the Council of Nicaea and of the Church against Emperor Julian. He maintained a doctrine that denied Christ's human soul, and

therefore did not consider him authentically human. He was condemned by Pope Damasus in the year 377, on the insistence of Athanasius and Basil.

**APOLOGIA.** Defense of a certain doctrine by refuting objections or manifesting the harmony between faith and reason or between faith and the aspirations of the human heart. Treatise or discourse concerned with defending the truths of faith.

**ARCHEOLOGY.** Science that produces a better understanding of the past by studying objects and monuments that are uncovered.

**ARIANISM.** Heresy of the 4th century professed by Arius and his disciples; it denied the divinity of the Word, considering it a secondary or subordinate creature. It was condemned by the Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 325.

**ARIUS.** A priest of Alexandria, he taught a heretical doctrine regarding Christ's divinity. Condemned by the Council of Nicaea in 325, exiled to Illyria, rehabilitated by his disciples at the Council of Jerusalem, he died mysteriously the day he was to be solemnly reintroduced into the Church of Constantinople in the year 336.

**ARTICLE OF FAITH.** The revealed truth contained in each one of the articles of a symbol.

**ARTICLE OF THE SYMBOL.** One of the dogmatic propositions contained in the symbols of the Christian faith, especially the symbol of the apostles.



**ASCETIC.** Person who practices intensive asceticism and lives an austere life.

**ASCETICISM.** Set of exercises for attaining spiritual peace and communion with God. In the Christian sense, methodical effort, exercise of sustained will through grace, for the purpose of controlling one's tendencies and developing virtuous activities, so as to become the master of one's own actions and pleasing to God.

**ATHANASIUS (Saint).** Patriarch of Alexandria (298-373) who by the force of his personality and intelligence contributed to the Council of Nicaea's condemnation of the Arian heresy (325).

**BEELZEBUB.** Philistine god of Egron, probably identified with Baalzebul (prince of Baal) of Ugarit. In Jesus' times, the Jews used the name to refer to the prince of the devils.

**BETHANY.** Village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, 3 km from Jerusalem. Famous as the home of Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary, where Jesus stayed on several occasions. Place where John baptized on the eastern bank of the Jordan (Jn 1:28).

**BETHLEHEM.** Canaanite city 7 km to the south of Jerusalem. Conquered by the Jewish clan of Ephrata, it was the homeland of outstanding members of the tribe of Judah: Boaz, Jesse, King David, and Jesus, the Messiah (Mi 5:1-3). Constantine had a five-nave basilica built in the place where Jesus was born; it is still standing.

**BETHSAIDA.** Village located on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Home of the apostles Peter, Andrew and Philip. The desert region to the east was the site of the multiplication of the loaves. Of this small city only ruins are left. Pool of Bethesda, located north of Jerusalem, where Jesus cured a lame man (Jn 5).

**BIBLE.** Singular noun that comes from the Greek "ta biblia", meaning "the books". It refers to the collection of sacred books written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Christian Bible includes the Old and New Testaments, 73 books according to the Catholic canon.

**BIBLICAL ARCHEOLOGY.** Science of Biblical antiquities; it contributes to a better understanding of Bible events and texts by situating them in their geographical, historical and cultural contexts.

**CANON.** From the first centuries A.D. the word refers to Church (as opposed to civil) rules and laws, governing issues of faith and discipline.

**CANON OF SCRIPTURES.** The official list of books considered by the Church to be inspired by God.

**CASUISTICS.** Resolution of particularly difficult cases, in the moral, legal, social, liturgical spheres, etc.

**CHALCEDON.** City in Bithynia, on the Bosphorus, across from Constantinople.

**CHALCEDON, COUNCIL OF.** Held in that city in 451, called by the Emperor Marcian to straighten out the situation created by the Robber Council of Ephesus, to condemn the heresy of Eutyches and to define Christological doctrine. It promulgated an important formula of faith which defined the unity of the person or hypostasis of Christ in two natures, perfect man and perfect God, without confusion or change, without division or separation.

**CHARISMA.** (fr. Greek Kharisma, gift). In the New Testament, it designates, in general, a free and irrevocable gift given to people in Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. In a strict sense, it is a special gift of God given to a person, or a group of people, for the good of the community (1 Co 12:1-12).

**CHRIST.** Latinized form of the Greek term "Xristos", meaning "the Anointed One", which in turn is a translation of the Hebrew word "mashiaj" (Messiah).

**CHRIST-CENTERED.** The word describes a theology and spirituality that have Jesus Christ as their center. Its basis and strength reside in the totality and fullness of the revelation by which God communicates himself to people through Christ, and in which people come to know the true God and communicate with him thanks to Christ and through him. Christ-centered theology and spirituality do not displace, but rather presuppose the relationship with the three-person God and with the Mother of Jesus.

**CHRISTOLOGY.** The theological doctrine about the person of Jesus Christ. It examines the meaning and

interpretation of Jesus' person, message and work. As early as in the New Testament itself we find different interpretations, and Christologies, in the different evangelists and in Saint Paul. The treatise on Jesus' redeeming work is usually called soteriology.

**CIRCUMINCESSION.** The word refers to the reciprocal presence, of each in the others, of the three divine persons of the Trinity. It also serves to translate the presence of the Word in humanity through the hypostatic union; there is circumincession of the two natures of Christ in the unity of his person.

**COMMUNICATION OF IDIOMS** (*communicatio idiomatum*). Since a divine person is subject and possessor of both divine and human nature, properties and attributes of either divine or human nature can be applied to him. The communication of idioms is a consequence of the dogmatic formula of the "hypostatic union" and, therefore, of classic Chalcedonian Christology.

**CONSTANTINE the Great.** Roman emperor from 306 to 337. As a catechumen he protected the Church, in spite of his meddling in Church business. In Milan he promulgated an edict establishing the freedom of worship for Christians (313). He moved the imperial seat from Rome to Byzantium, a city that he renamed Constantinople (324).

**CONSTANTINOPLE, SECOND COUNCIL OF.** Council called by the Emperor Justinian to condemn the "Three Chapters", excerpts from works by Nestorian fathers: Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret, Ibas.

Pope Vigilius, taken to Constantinople, refused to follow the Council, but he later reversed himself.

**CONSTANTINOPLE, THIRD COUNCIL OF (680-681).** Called by Emperor Constantine IV Pogonatus to put an end to the Monothelistic controversy. At the Council the adherents of Monothelism were condemned, including Pope Honorius (638), accused of negligence. The Council published a dogmatic decree that defined the two wills and the two operations in Christ.

**CONSUBSTANTIAL.** Theological, not Biblical term, adopted by the Council of Nicaea (325) to define the perfect unity and the identity, not only specific but also "numerical" of substance, essence and nature between the Father and the Son. Later it was extended to the Holy Spirit as well: the three divine persons, truly distinct as persons, are consubstantial (one nature and three persons).

**COUNCIL.** Regular assembly of Bishops.

**CYPRIAN.** Bishop of Carthage who died a martyr in 258. He concerned himself with the Christians who had wavered under persecution, and with the validity of baptism of heretics, on which issue he differed with Pope Stephen. He insisted on the unity of the Church as guaranteed by the consensus of the Bishops.

**DAMASUS (Saint).** Spanish Pope from 366 to 384. Pope Damasus faced serious problems in the Church:

the anti-pope Ursinus; the slander spread by Isaac; the Arian, Macedonian and Apollinarian heresies. He held a number of councils in Rome and opened many places of worship.

**DEMYTHOLOGIZE.** Submit a text to critical scrutiny that attempts to separate the intangible truth that it proposes from the literary forms and images it uses to formulate this truth.

**DIOSCORUS I.** Patriarch of Alexandria (444-451), deposed by the Council of Chalcedon as a proponent of Monophysitism, after having orchestrated the "Robber Council of Ephesus", together with Eutyches. He died in the desert in 451.

**DIVINE PERSON.** Subsistent relationship in God, i.e., relationship identified with the divine being. What constitutes the Father as Father is the fact of having begotten the Son. In theological language, person corresponds to two Greek terms, "prosopon," or character such as those represented in Greek theater; and "hypostasis," subsistence. The concept of divine person is not identified with the human person; divine persons are not psychological persons, i.e., distinct centers of consciousness, freedom and responsibility.

**DOCETIC.** Gnostic adherent of Docetism.

**DOCETISM.** Primitive heresies that denied the reality of the incarnation and maintained that Christ only seemed to have a human body.

**DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH.** Title given officially by tradition or by decision of the Holy See to Church writers who stand out both for their holiness and for the importance and orthodoxy of their work.

**DOGMA.** Truth of faith, contained in revelation, proposed in the Church and by the Church, either through ordinary and universal teaching (dogma of faith) or through extraordinary teaching (dogma of defined faith).

**DUALISM.** Doctrine in which reality is made up of two opposite principles (one good, spiritual; the other bad, material) that are irreconcilable (dualist systems: Docetism, Gnosis, Manichaeism).

**ECUMENICAL COUNCIL.** Universal assembly of Bishops, along with major superiors of the religious orders, united among themselves and united to the Bishop of Rome, who presides over the assembly either personally or through his legates. The Ecumenical Council united to the Pope is the highest authority in the Church and decides on the most important issues involving the Church's faith and life.

**EPHESUS.** Port city in Asia Minor, in Ionia, on the Aegean Sea, evangelized by Paul and Apollo during the Apostle's third missionary journey.

**EPHESUS, COUNCIL OF (431).** Third Ecumenical Council called by Emperor Theodosius II to settle the controversy regarding Nestorius, who tended to admit two persons in Christ. Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria, with the support of Pope Celestine I,

presided over and opened the Council before the arrival of Nestorius' followers, who formed an opposition Council. Nestorius was condemned and the doctrine defining Mary as the Mother of God (Theotokos) was approved.

**EPHESUS, ROBBER COUNCIL OF.** Council called by Emperor Theodosius II in 449 to deal with the issue of Eutyches, condemned in 448. Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria and adherent of Monophysitism, rehabilitated Eutyches and the orthodox Bishops were deposed. Pope Leo the Great rose up against this assembly, which he called a Den of Thieves.

**EPIPHANY.** Appearance, manifestation of God or Christ in the world, or the act of their letting themselves be seen or of showing themselves. (The appearances of God are also called theophanies; those of Christ, christophanies.)

**ESCHATOLOGY.** Etymologically, doctrine about the final things. Collection of teachings about the individual's other life, about the end of the world and about the fate of humanity and the universe after the Last Judgment.

**ESSENES.** Members of a sect that lived a partly cenobitic life. Pliny wrote that they lived on top of Ein Gedi, on the Dead Sea, which has been confirmed by the excavations at Qumran. The manuscripts found there in 1947 shed light on the doctrine and life of this sect.



**EUTYCHES.** Archimandrite of a monastery in Constantinople in the 5th century. He fought the Nestorian heresy and is attributed with the opposing heresy (Monophysitism). He was deposed in 448, rehabilitated at the Synod of Ephesus, but definitively condemned at the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451. Emperor Marcian exiled him to Egypt.

**EXEGESIS** (in Greek, explanation). Scientific commentary on the Bible, using all the disciplines that can help to clarify a text.

**GLORIFICATION CHRISTOLOGY.** Post-paschal doctrine that arose in Judeo-Christianity, and interprets Jesus' Resurrection as glorification (Ps 2:7; 110:1; Mk 14:62; Ph 2:9; Heb 2:32-36; 7:55-56; Jn 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34).

**GNOSIS.** A religious movement dating back before the time of Christ that was a serious rival to Christianity and tried to penetrate Christian communities. It is a doctrine with a distinct spiritualist-dualist bent, oriented toward salvation, which ascribes good to God and the spirits, and evil to matter and the body. Through "knowledge" (gnosis), people can free themselves from the stain and impurity that come from contact with matter. Redemption is obtained through knowledge, not by the incarnation and death on the Cross of the Son of God.

**HERESY.** Willful denial of one or several affirmations of faith.

**HERETIC.** Author or propagator of a heresy. Only a person who has fallen into juridically demonstrable heresy does not fully belong to the Church (Dz 714, 2286).

**HERMENEUTICS.** Collection of general and particular rules for determining the true sense of the Scriptures and their correct interpretation.

**HETERODOX.** Opposite of orthodox, refers to a person who does not agree with the precise expression of faith.

**HISTORICAL.** Belonging to history, understood in the two senses of the word: reality of the past, or study of the past. Applied to human beings, it refers to the human condition that only acquires its finished state by taking part in the development of humanity and making existential decisions.

**HISTORY OF FORMS** (Formgeschichte). The evangelists, before they actually sat down to write the Gospels, already had a certain amount of material available to them in the form of small literary fragments (sayings, words, stories, etc.). The history of the forms attempts to determine in each case the literary genres that appear, and to discover in which "life situation" (Sitz im Leben) these forms arose.

**HOMOIOUSIANS.** Name given to the Eastern Bishops who were hostile to Arianism, but uneasy with the doctrine of consubstantiality proclaimed in Nicaea in 325, and so adhered to the formula: The Son is

similar to the Father in being (homoi ousios). Also known as Semi-Arians.

**HOMOI-OUSIOS.** Greek term meaning "of similar essence" or "similar in being". Applied to Christ, it means that Jesus is not the eternal Son of the Father or one in being with the eternal Father, but only similar to the eternal Father. It denies the identity of nature.

**HOMO-OUSIOS.** Greek term meaning "same in essence", identity of nature. Applied to Jesus, it means that Jesus is the eternal Son of the Father and one in being with the Father (consubstantialis: of the same substance): God from God, Light from Light.

**HONORIUS I.** Pope from 625 to 638, known especially for his clumsy intervention in the Monothelite controversy, which earned him a condemnation for "negligence" at the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 680).

**HYPOSTATIC UNION.** Literally: union in a person (hypostasis). The divine and human natures are united, without confusion, without mixing and without alteration (against Eutyches) in a single divine person, that of the eternal Logos, without separation or division (against Nestorius). The overly static focus on the God-man (hypostatic union) makes it easy to overlook the historicity and authenticity of Jesus' humanity.

**INSPIRATION.** Special influence and assistance from God for the authors of the sacred books of the Old and

New Testaments, making God the ultimate "author" of these books without underestimating the freedom and literary peculiarities of the human authors. It guarantees the freedom from error or inerrancy of revealed truths (2 Tm 3:16; 2 P 1:21).

**JERUSALEM.** Capital of Palestine, political and religious center of Israel from the time of King David, who took it over (1 S 5:6-10). Jerusalem, often called "Zion" by the prophets, forms the core of the Jewish religion, is their center of pilgrimage, the place where the community is founded, location of the Temple where God encounters his people, sanctuary of religious practice, and city that bears witness to God's predilection for his chosen people.

**JESUS.** The proper name "Jesus" comes from the Hebrew term "Jeho-shuah" (abbreviated: Josuah or Jeshuah = Yahweh is the redeemer, Yahweh redeems): We find it frequently in the Old Testament (Gn 46:17; Nb 13:16; 1 Ch 7:30; 24:11; 2 Ch 31:15; Ezr 2:2; Ne 3:19; 9:4; 12:8, 24, etc.) and in the New Testament (Lk 3:29; Col 4:11). To distinguish him from others of the same name, the son of Mary (Lk 1:31) was called "Jesus of Nazareth".

**JEWS.** Originally inhabitants of the Kingdom of Judah. After the return from exile, a common term for Israelites. In the New Testament the term is used in opposition to Gentiles and Christians and sometimes means the Chosen People, and sometimes Jesus' adversaries.

**JOACHIM JEREMIAS.** Biblical theologian, exegete, Protestant. His theological positions, his studies and his books are fully recognized and esteemed by the Catholic Church.

**JUDEA.** Southern province of Palestine; capital: Jerusalem. In the New Testament, the name refers to both this territory as distinct from Galilee and Samaria, and to the entire province governed by Roman procurators (Lk 3:1).

**JUSTINIAN.** Emperor of Constantinople from 527 to 565. Directly intervened in the theological controversies over the incarnation. Repressed Monophysitism and imposed Neo-Chalcedonianism, which he pushed through at the Council of Constantinople in 553. He had certain theological doctrines condemned in the face of opposition from Pope Vigilius.

**KERYGMA.** Greek word meaning proclamation, message. First proclamation of the Good News (Gospel) by the Apostles to call non-believers to conversion, faith and baptism. The proclamation of the kerygma is the essential task of evangelization. Contents of the first preaching of the faith.

**KYRIOS.** Greek word, translation of the Hebrew word "Yahweh". In the New Testament, the title "Kyrios" (Lord), which was used in the Roman emperor cult, was applied to Jesus Christ as the glorious Lord who is worthy of worship (1 Co 12:3; 16:22).

**LEGATE.** Formerly, a prelate appointed by the Pope to govern one of the provinces of the states of the Church.

**LEO THE GREAT (Saint).** Pope from 440 to 461. His action was decisive in the Christological controversy that was flamed back into life in the East by Eutyches. The doctrine contained in his dogmatic letter to Flavian (449) directly inspired the definition of the Council of Chalcedon (451).

**LEVITE.** Member of the tribe of Levi, consecrated for liturgical functions (Dt 10:8). In a restricted sense, descendant of the minor branches of the tribe of Levi, with the exception of the Aaronites (Nb 3:5-9).

**LIBERIUS.** Pope from 352 to 366. defender of Saint Athanasius and the doctrine of the Council of Nicaea against the Arian Emperor Constantius, he was exiled to Thrace in the year 355. Upon his return to the West he fought against Arianism.

**LITERARY GENRES.** Stylistic peculiarities of the Biblical books (historical accounts, edifying narratives, legal and juridical texts, religious lyric poetry, epistolary literature, midrash, etc.) used to express religious truths.

**LOGION.** Refers to a brief phrase of the Scriptures. Here the word is understood to mean brief aphorisms pronounced by Jesus.

**LOGOS.** (In Greek: word, reason, treatise, science). In Greek philosophy, the Logos is God was source of

ideas. In the Bible, the term refers to Jesus as pre-existent (Jn 1:1-2), and to Christ Incarnate (Rv 19:13).

**MARCION.** Ancient Roman Christian historian (140). Head of a heterodox church. (Heretic). He opposed the God of the Old Testament to the God revealed by Christ in the New Testament.

**METAPHYSICS.** Term of Greek origin. It now refers to a field of philosophical research that studies being, its main bases, values and ultimate causes.

**MIDRASH.** Edifying commentaries on the Sacred Scripture written by rabbis.

**MIRACLE** (from Latin "Mirari", admire, wonder). Perceivable event, outside of the normal course of things, produced by God in a religious context as a sign of his presence and of the supernatural.

**MODALISM.** An interpretation regarding Christ that, out of concern for the dogma of the unity and oneness of God, affirms that God manifests himself outwardly (creation, redemption and sanctification) in three different ways. The trinity of persons is apparent only or is reduced to these modes of action. Christ is simply a mode of manifestation of the one God, not the second Divine Person. See the terms adoptionism, Monarchianism, Patripassianism.

**MONOTHELITISM.** Doctrine that affirms that there is only one will in Christ, the divine will. Monothelitism, proposed in the 7th century by Patriarch Sergius on Constantinople in the hope of

attracting the Monophysites back to the fold, was condemned by the Lateran Council in 649 and the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 681.

**NESTORIUS.** Monk and priest of Antioch, elevated by Emperor Theodosius II to the patriarchal seat of Constantinople. His teaching provoked scandal, and the intervention of Cyril of Alexandria and of Pope Celestine, who condemned him in the year 430. The Council of Ephesus (431) declared one of his doctrinal letters heretical and deposed him. He was exiled to Arabia and died in Libya in 451.

**NICAEA.** City in Asia Minor where two Ecumenical Councils were held. The first Council of Nicaea met in 325, called by Emperor Constantine to condemn and depose Arius. This Council produced a profession of faith, the symbol of Nicaea, that declares that the Son of God is one in being with the Father. The second Council was held in the year 787, against the iconoclasts.

**OUSIA.** In Greek, it originally meant property, or the wealth that was transmittable from father to son. In philosophy it refers to that which by which something is what it is. Translated into Latin and English as "Substance". In the symbol of Nicaea (325), Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is said to be begotten from the "Ousia" of the Father. The symbol of Constantinople (382) fine tunes this doctrine by saying that the Son is "homousios" (consubstantial, of one being) with the Father, i.e., that the Son has the same being as the Father.



**PAROUSIA.** Name given by the early Church to the triumphal coming of the Lord in his messianic majesty at the end of time.

**PATRIARCH.** Title given since the 6th century to the Bishops of the 5 great sees of Christianity: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, and later extended to other important sees.

**PERICOPE.** A fragment of Scripture about a certain topic; thematic unit.

**PHARISEES.** The name comes from Aramaic and means the "Separate Ones", because they shunned all those whose lifestyle was not as rigorous as theirs. They strove to base their way of living on the Law. In the time of Christ, they had no political aspirations, only religious.

**PHYLACTERIES.** Ribbons that, according to Rabbinical tradition, all men of Israel must wear during morning prayers. They were used to tie a square box containing four passages of the Mosaic Law (Ex 13:1-10; 11-16; Dt 6:4-9; 11:13-21) written on parchment. One phylactery was tied around the head that that it would fall over the forehead, and another to the left arm. This custom was a literal interpretation of the commandment given metaphorically in Dt 6:8: "You shall fasten them (the words of this law) on your hand as a sign and on your forehead as a circlet."

**PRAXIS.** That which refers to practice, as opposed to theory. Orthopraxis refers to correct action, just as orthodoxy refers to correct doctrine.

**PREDICATES OF JESUS.** To clarify the mystery of the person of Jesus, both the apostolic preaching and writings of the New Testament applied different predicates (titles of honor and dignity) to him, taken either from Biblical language (Old Testament) and non-Biblical (Greek and Roman). The predicates of Jesus mark the road of early Christian thinking and faith. The most important are: Prophet, Teacher (Rabbi), Son of David, Messiah, King (of the Jews or else of Israel), Son of Man, Lamb of God, High Priest, Mediator, Savior, Lord (Kyrios), King, Judge, Holy One of God, Son of God, Logos.

**PRE-EXISTENCE** (of Christ). Term that refers to Jesus of Nazareth's eternal meaning and presence. It is the concrete relationship of the historical Jesus to the eternal God, to his communication and revelation, with the world and everything that is not God. It is an attribute that corresponds only to Jesus; it is not said that the Father and the Holy Spirit pre-exist. It is not an attribute that corresponds to the Second Person of the Trinity, but to Jesus of Nazareth; by virtue of his being the Second Person, his concrete historical being has eternal significance. The idea of pre-existence, which in the New Testament is linked to the mission of the Son of God, has an important function in assuring and expressing Christ's divinity.

**PRIMITIVE COMMUNITY** (of Jerusalem). The primitive community of Jerusalem, also called the mother community, possesses a theologically unique and normative character for the Church.

**PROSOPON.** Greek term that originally meant mask, role to play, face. In the Trinitarian and Christological debates it took on the sense of hypostasis, person.

**QUMRAN.** Convent located northwest of the Dead Sea, famous for the discovery of certain manuscripts in 1947. Important pre-Christian testimonies of the Old Testament text and the Essenes' spiritual world.

**RABBI.** In Hebrew Teacher. Title of honor given in Israel to the doctors of the Law. Now, minister of the Jewish religion.

**SADDUCEES.** Official representatives of the priesthood, they were the defenders of doctrinal conservatism and of the political "status quo". They disdained any books that were not the Torah, any moral or cult regulations that were not the law, any beliefs that were not doctrines from the Pentateuch, any attitude other than submission to the established powers. They were often reproached for their laxity and Hellenist tendencies.

**SAMARIA.** City and capital of the Kingdom of Israel after the separation of the 10 tribes. Province of Palestine located between Judea and Galilee. The fall of the city in 721 B.C. marked the end of the Northern Kingdom's independence, as it became an Assyrian colony invaded by pagans.

**SAMARITANS.** Name used to refer to the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom after the fall of Samaria. The Samaritans, faithful observers of the Law of Moses, were considered enemies and heretics by the

inhabitants of the Southern Kingdom. Jesus showed them benevolence. They were the object of the first apostolic mission directed at non-Jews.

**SANHEDRIN.** Supreme administrative authority of the Jewish people. It was made up of 70 members grouped in three classes: the elders, the high priests and the scribes.

**SCRIBES.** From the time of Ezra, this name was used to refer to the experts and interpreters of the Law. Their activity consisted of casuistically interpreting the precepts of the Law, teaching it and applying it in judicial practice, for example, in the Sanhedrin, where they formed one of the three groups.

**SEPTUAGINT (LXX).** Greek version of the Bible produced in Alexandria from 250 B.C. to 150 B.C. Its name comes from the legend passed down by the Letter of Aristeas, which says that the translation was done by a team of 72 wise men in 72 days.

**SERGIUS OF CONSTANTINOPLE.** Patriarch of Constantinople from 610 to 638. He was the inspiration behind the Monothelite doctrine, which he formulated in an attempt to put an end to Monophysitism and to win the Monophysites back over to the Church. Supported by the Emperor Heraclius, he attracted many followers in the East and tried to secure the adhesion of Pope Honorius. His action finally resulted in an imperial edict imposing Monothelitism.

**SHEOL.** The abode of the dead, imagined to be a pit in the depths of the earth (Dt 32:22) where darkness

reigns. Those who have left the world go there and never come back.

**SOTER.** Greek word, translated as savior, used in the Roman emperor cult and in the New Testament as one of the predicates of Jesus.

**SOTERIOLOGY.** Doctrine dealing with the salvation achieved by Jesus Christ and its meaning for all of creation.

**SUBSTANCE.** What exists in itself and not in the other and constitutes the foundation for that which "exists in". The opposite of accident. Substantial: that which is one's own, that which persists. Accidental: that which can change or disappear.

**SYMBOL OF THE FAITH.** Abbreviated formula containing the main articles of faith; symbol of the apostles, Nicene-Constantinopolitan symbol, the symbol known as Saint Athanasius' symbol.

**SYNOPTIC.** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels because of the correspondence among them, which permits an overall vision of their common elements.

**TALMUD.** Teachings about the Scriptures, transmitted first orally and set down in writing in the 2nd century B.C. They were the object of commentaries in the rabbinical schools of Palestine (Galilee) and Babylon. Talmud refers to the complete collection of these teachings and their commentaries.

**THEOCRACY.** Government whose authority comes from God, and is exercised by his ministers. Characterized by a perfect union between religion and politics; divine precepts are equivalent to civil laws. Society is structured in accord with religious values.

**THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA.** Bishop of Mopsuestia (Syria) in 393, he died in 428. He was a remarkable pastor and exegete. The audacity of this theology brought his orthodoxy into question. On the basis of interpolated texts, his work was one of the "Three Chapters" that were condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 553.

**THEODORET OF CYRUS.** Bishop of Cyrus en 423. Main theologian and exegete of Antioch in the 5th century. He fought against Cyril of Alexandria regarding Nestorianism and defended the theology of Antioch in subsequent controversies. He denounced the Monophysitism of Eutyches. Deposed by the Robber Council of Ephesus (449), rehabilitated by Chalcedon (451), he was condemned in 553 by Emperor Justinian for the "Three Chapters," considered to be contaminated with Nestorianism. He died in 466.

**THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA.** In Alexandria in Egypt, a catechetical school arose at the end of the 2nd century; its theological work was characterized by the following traits: notable interest in the metaphysical-philosophical contents of Christian preaching; dependence on Platonic philosophy; idealistic intellectual orientation; allegorical method of interpreting the Sacred Scriptures. In Christology it stressed divinity to such a degree that it was almost

impossible not to find traces and seeds of Monophysitism (Alexandrine Christology). Main representatives: Pantaenus + ca. 200; Clement + ca. 215; Origen + 254; Heraclas + 248; Dionysius ca. 265.

**THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL OF ANTIOCH.** The Theological School of Antioch, in Syria, was characterized (as opposed to the School of Alexandria) by the logical-grammatical method of interpretation of the Sacred Scripture and by its strong tendency to highlight Jesus' humanity. Main representatives: Lucian + 312; Diodore of Tarsus + before 394; John Chrysostom + 407; Theodore of Mopsuestia + 428; Theodoret + ca. 460.

**THEOTOKOS.** In Greek, Mother of God. Title given to Mary, symbol of faith of the Church, solemnly defined by the Council of Ephesus in 431 in response to the denials of the Nestorians.

**THREE CHAPTERS.** Name given in the 6th century to the works of three theologians of Antioch who were suspected of heresy in the eyes of the Monophysites (the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia on the incarnation, the writings of Theodoret of Cyrus against the Council of Ephesus and against Saint Cyril, and the letter of Ibas to Maris). They were condemned by the Council of Constantinople (553), which produced divisions in the Church.

**TITLES (of Jesus).** Titles of Jesus refers to the predicates that the New Testament applies to Jesus. Titular Christology (subsequent) is preceded by pre-titular,

or non-titular Christology from the earlier tradition (that of Jesus' historical activity).

**TORAH.** The Hebrew word for law, especially the Law of Moses or of Yahweh. TORAH is also used to refer to the Pentateuch.

**VIGILIUS.** Pope from 537 to 555. First he opposed Emperor Justinian's policy in the matter of the "Three Chapters". The Council of 553 condemned him as "negligent", but he refused to accept the judgment until a year later, when he was sick and in prison, notwithstanding the outspoken opposition of the West.

**ZEALOTS.** Members of a fanatical nationalist-religious movement that unleashed the insurrection against Rome in the year 66 A.D.