

FAITH IN THE THREE-PERSON GOD



Juan Manuel García de Alba, S. J.

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Special Thanks

It has been my pleasure to work with Atty. Fernando Morales Milán, whom I have known and esteemed since he was a child, and who collaborated painstakingly on the technical aspects of the production of this book.

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García de Alba, S.J.
Av. La Paz 2435, Tel. 3630-1093
C.P. 44100, Guadalajara, Jalisco.

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To His Eminence Cardinal

Juan Sandoval Íñiguez

With acknowledgment and gratitude for his love and unconditional service to Christ and his universal Church, particularly in the Archdiocese of Guadalajara, and no less for his support as indefatigable Pastor, understanding Father, and friend in the Lord.

And to all those whom this book can help to live more deeply their Christian faith.

With ecclesiastical approval

Nihil Obstat

M.I. Canon Antonio González Cornejo

Imprimatur

Juan Cardinal Sandoval Iñiguez,
Archbishop of Guadalajara

September 7, 2011.



PRESENTATION

It is truly a pleasure for me to present this book of theology, "FAITH IN THE THREE-PERSON GOD," written by Father Juan Manuel García de Alba, S.J. This is a book about the fundamental mysteries of our faith as expressed in the Creed.

The author makes an effort to present the compendium of our faith in a clear and simple manner. His treatise, while not absolutely original, is unusual. It takes as its starting point the faith in which we were baptized and that we already possess, by the grace of God. He undertakes a wide-ranging Biblical analysis and works up to the high point that was reached in the Trinitarian and Christological councils in the first centuries of the Christian era. He highlights the profound relationship between each human person and God in Three Persons, but especially the Catholic

Christian's relationship with God the Father of Jesus and our Father; with Jesus Christ the Lord of all times, places and persons; and with the Holy Spirit, the gift bestowed on each member of the Body of Christ that is the Church.

He focuses especially on the person of Jesus, not merely as a historical fact known to the disciples and apostles, but as faithful following that leads us to recognize the Father in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He also underscores the importance of the resurrection and the early apostolic preaching.

Following the lead of Pope Benedict XVI, he links the last articles of the Creed with the action of the Holy Spirit, who, in spite of our shortcomings, sanctifies, unites, drives and renews the Church as it awaits the final encounter with the merciful Christ.

I wish to congratulate the author for the effort he makes to put Catholic Christian faith in dialogue with the life and culture of today's believers, so that they can consolidate their knowledge on a foundation of mature faith and know the joy of believing and announcing the God revealed by Jesus Christ, the Lord.

+ JUAN CARD. SANDOVAL IÑIGUEZ,
Archbishop of Guadalajara.

October 8, 2011

Abbreviations

The abbreviations for the books of the Bible are those used in the Jerusalem Bible, published by Doubleday and Company.

Siglas

CEC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CGP	Creed of God's People
CSDC	Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church
Dz-H	Denzinger Heinrich, Peter Hünemann The Sources of Catholic Dogma
GP	Greek Patristics
LP	Latin Patristics
Vat	Vatican
Cc	Council
Cf	Compare
Ch	Chapter
f	following
Ibid	Ibidem
n	Number(s)
N.B.	Nota Bene
p	page(s)

Works by Authors

Augustine of Hippo

Confe	Confessions
De Trin	De Trinitate

Thomas Aquinas

S Th	Summa Theologica
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Irenaeus

Adv Haer	Against Heresies
Demos	Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching

Tertullian

An	De anima
Apol	Apologetics
Bapt	De baptismo
Carn	De carne Christi
Marc	Adversus Marcionem
Praes	De praescriptione hereticorum
Prax	Adversus Praxean —The Trinity—
Pud	De pudicitia
Res	De resurrectione mortuorum
Test	De testimonio animae
Val	Adversus valentinianos
Virg	De virginibus velandis

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INTRODUCTION

“The reward for our faith is understanding.” Intelligere vero a Deo
donum fidei munus est.
Hilary, *De Trinitate XI*,
23.

Can it be possible, in the 21st century, to really know God? To talk about him truthfully? To have a personal experience of his love, of his way of being, of his interest in me? Who is the God that we believe in? What is his relationship with us, and in what way does he make a difference in our life? Some feel that God is an illusion from bygone times that has fallen out of fashion. We live a fast-paced life now, and have no time to think about him. It would seem that some people do not even need him.

To know anything about God with certainty, the first thing required is an attitude of faith, that is, an openness of the heart. Faith in God enters

Faith, like freedom and love, grows when it is expressed.

through the heart, not through reason. This does not mean that it is all about feelings; faith is also the attitude needed for God first to be loved and then to be understood. As St. Hilary said, "*The reward of our faith is understanding.*" Reason can be seen more as a justification than as a demonstration. The point is to give reason to our faith, even to give it to ourselves. But when we reflect on our faith, when we express it, we believe better.

It is regrettable that the Trinitarian message is considered the highest level of speculative theology and that many people feel it is better not to think about God this way, when it should be seen as the best way to bring God close to humankind in his revelatory, creative, salvific and glorifying action. God reveals himself to us progressively, because in the same progressive way he continues to create us, justify us and glorify us. And for this same reason our knowledge of God is progressive, necessarily linked to our mental and spiritual capacity, and even to our culture and our accumulated knowledge.

Ac 10:34.
1 Co 15:3; Mt 28:19.
Mk 16:19.

The Trinitarian mystery, before it was ever delineated and defined, was lived in prayer, in praise, in Christian rituals and customs. Christological and Trinitarian teaching was the foundation of apostolic teaching and a requirement for baptism.

It is quite likely that some of the early Christians found this akin to pagan polytheism; others thought that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were three aspects of a single divinity. This way

of interpreting the divinity to defend the oneness of God was called “modalism,” and represented a real danger in the early Church. Others thought that Jesus of Nazareth, who was proclaimed Son of God, had been a man like any other on whom the Spirit came down like a divine force. And if some came to affirm Jesus’ divinity, wasn’t it clear that he was also distinct from God, whom he called Father? Arius and his followers, in their desire to defend divine oneness, argued that Jesus was the closest and most similar thing to God, so much so that he could even be called God, but not in the same way as the Father, because Jesus was like him, but “in himself and in truth” was not God. In the early centuries of the Church, the personal condition of the Holy Spirit was not very clear.

It is clear that all these ways of thinking enriched the Church greatly, and forced it, so to speak, to deepen its faith, to express it, to define it. The definitions of faith, before they were ever articles that we must believe, were defenses of faith. The Church Fathers wanted to defend what the Christian community already believed against points of view that did not coincide with this body of faith and with the body of the Church. These were dissenting voices, often those of great men known for their outstanding merits and virtues, such as Origen and Tertullian, but also for certain defects and errors, the same as some great saints.

God’s revelation is not limited to the Hebrew world and mindset of the Old Testament; it has also been given to us in the New Testament, in Je-

sus of Nazareth. The development of Trinitarian faith has come to us primarily through the Greco-Roman world and mindset, and can be understood as 2,000 years of action by the Holy Spirit in the Church and in culture in general. The Trinitarian mystery falls within the ascendant process of revelation: *“At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son,”* not as something added on but as the necessary and explicit manifestation of complete salvation.

Heb 1:1f.

We will set forth the faith of the Catholic Church using its own language, in an attempt to understand the symbolic and philosophical context that provided the framework for its expressions, but we will also reflect on Dios in terms of what is closest to him, which is us.

It should be noted that the attitude in all of our reflections will not be apologetic or demonstrative. We will avoid philosophical arguments. Rather, we will try to understand and deepen our faith to the extent that the Lord allows us to. Tertullian said that *“the truth, when it is presented, persuades; when it is imposed, it dissuades.”*

Tertullian,
Val 1:4.

When we try to understand our faith, we are not trying to stop believing, or to suppress in ourselves the capacity for wonder. We are looking for whatever helps us to believe better, but without going so far as to think that the pale light of theology and reason could ever compete with the sun shining in all its strength and heat.

It should be noted that faith in God is multi-dimensional: there is faith “by which I believe,” which is the human person’s openness to God – attitude. There is also faith “in what I believe,” which is the content of our faith —the content of truth. Another dimension, faith directed toward God, is my loving and trusting surrender to this God I believe in— the direct object of faith. We might say that this is the most important aspect of faith, faith as interrelation. It is the faith of the apostles who ask Jesus, “*Increase our faith,*” or of the father of the epileptic boy who says, “*I do have faith. Help the little faith I have!*”

Lk 17:5.
Mk 9:24.

The core of our reflection is the One and Living God who reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The point of departure for our study is not a philosophical question, although our study will involve deep reflection; the basis is our own life and experience, and Christian faith as an expression of revelation. It is important to emphasize that our reflections will be based on God’s word revealed, our life experiences and an already existing relationship with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is our History of Salvation. How does God save me?

The purpose of this book is to understand and deepen the faith in which we were baptized. In other words, we are not simply trying to know God in and of himself, but God in his relationship with me, and with each one of us, and of ourselves with others; in short, God in our History of Salvation.

FOREWORD

Each one of us has the experience of being a child with respect to our father, of being a subject who is both similar to and different from our parents and all other human beings. All children are an image and likeness of their father, as Abel and Cain were of their father Adam. We are similar, Gn 1:27. but not the same. This likeness, but not sameness, reflects the proportion and above all the disproportion of the human person with respect to God.

The only way we have of knowing God is by referring to him in terms of the human person as a rational being. We run the risk, however, of opposing or identifying the human person with the divine being: they are not entirely opposite realities, but they are not the same either.

The incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity is without a doubt the most eloquent expression of this truth. Jesus embodied and embodies the perfect harmony between divine being and human being. God does not proceed by opposition, but by relationship, by unification and by synthesis. We might think that the most wonderful initiative of the divine being is that he revealed himself to us in many different ways throughout the History of Salvation, and finally in the definitive and fullest way in Jesus Christ, but this is not the most wonderful and greatest sign of his love: he also inserted us into divine life by way of Jesus and his Spirit.

Heb 1:1.

We can attribute personal being to God because human beings are persons, which is not to say that this makes him a person but that we comprehend him as a person, because the way we know God is from our own personhood. We have no eyes to see God but our own, and no perspective but that which results from our situation, i.e., from our limited being. We know God from a human perspective, because that is what we are, and from Jesus Christ, in whose personal image humankind was created.

Of all beings, we are the only ones with direct experience of being persons. And before being persons, we are in the world in such a way that we experience life. All living beings, even the most primordial life in the sea, live a life that comes from God, but only human beings are "*nefes*," which in Hebrew means living being, the only kind with God's life or breath. This implies

a relationship in the sense of divine kinship, of “*image and likeness*,” in parallel to Adam’s likeness to his children and human beings’ to God. In this sense we can say that each and every human being is of divine lineage.

Gn 1:27; 5:3f;
Lk 3:23; Mt 1:1.
Ac 17:28-29.

Humankind made in God’s image and likeness also means that human beings are God’s only interlocutor. God and human beings can understand each other, love each other, and come together, as if Adam had said to God, or God to Adam: You and I can understand each other, love each other and come together. What God has proposed by creating humankind is not to create a rational animal, but an interlocutor, and to make an alliance with them. “*I will be your God and you shall be my people*.” The God of the new alliance is the Three-Person God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and his people are we who have been baptized in his name.

Lv 26:12.

CHAPTER I

GOD MANIFESTS HIMSELF

Objective: Realize that God reveals himself progressively, in order to communicate himself more and more fully.

1.1 The idea of God

Christians, like countless people throughout history, believe in God. But not in just any God. In the God of Jesus. And we also believe that God has made himself present to us and gives himself to us in Jesus Christ. And so, when we speak of God, we mean more than the God of philosophical deductions; we mean the God of the Bible, the God of the History of Salvation. Human knowledge evolves and progresses not only with regard to natural sciences, but also with respect to God.

- When speaking about God, not everyone means the same thing. The way we imagine him in our mind makes a big difference.

- To many people the word God means something empty; it is a word with no content, referring to no experience.
- To others, the word God instills fear, commands respect. The word makes many feel as if they were being examined.
- To others, God is the symbol of a cultural construct, even of religious exploitation.
- To those who have had a personal experience of God —and this goes for Christian believers, Muslim believers, Hindu believers— God means reconciliation with others and with oneself. God is love of life. It is a name that means trust and hope even in the face of death, failure and evil.
- To almost everyone, God is associated with everything that is positive and lasting in life. God comes to be seen as the deepest and ultimate projection of human life.

Tertullian,
Apol. 17,4.

Undoubtedly, God is linked to human reason, because only humans talk about, or think about, or believe in God. But he is not linked only to reason, but also to human intuition and sensitivity. Tertullian said that the human person was “*naturaliter cristianus*”; we could say that humans are “*naturaliter*” believers and that therefore even non-believers somehow “touch base” God: “God willing,” “Thank God,” or in response to some kind of shock, “Oh my God!” Their perception of God might be more about their own limitation than the grandeur of personal dignity. Whatever

shape it takes, the idea of God is a typically human phenomenon.

1.2 God and culture

Since humans find themselves inserted in a concrete world and a specific culture, their idea — and image— of God will be taken from their culture, will reflect their culture, and be nourished by it. Revelation, the commandments and God's will also be comprehended and understood in the light of culture. Conscience is part of a process that tends to be progressive. This has always been the case, in the Old Testament and the New, and in the present day. —Certain things that we find outrageous now used to be considered God's will in earlier times.— Thus God's will, along with his way of being with us, are not something that we have comprehended fully. God is better than anything we can ever think or experience about him.

God has so much to do with the life of each person that he cannot remain silent forever; there comes a time when God makes himself heard, or felt, or present. The actual word used to describe the experience matters little. God is the deepest dimension of life, of conscience, of freedom, of responsibility and of the human person. God can be everywhere, can be found everywhere and in all circumstances of life. God actually does not need a place to be. Space and time are categories that do not encompass God: they are not opposed to him, but they do not contain him. The space and time that best comprehend the uncontain-

able and incomprehensible God are ours, i.e., our heart and our life.

The idea of God that human beings have is an evolving idea. It is an idea because what people do with reality is make an idea of it and project themselves onto this idea. The fact that it is an idea does not mean that it does not arise from something real. It is an evolving idea because people gradually form a more precise, more perfect image of God, of themselves and of the world.

Heb 1:1f.

God, however, is above anything that human beings can think or say about him. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of our existence and our life there is reason to say something of the life of the existing God. God must be experienced more than demonstrated. One can only come to know a person deeply by spending time with her.

The first reference of God is the human being, made *"in his image and likeness"* but not the same. Because *"God is not a man"*; his thinking, conscience, freedom, power, love and mercy surpass by far that of any human being. And yet, if we are to understand any communication from God, it must be through our language and culture. Of course, we run the risk of attributing to God what belongs to our culture and language and thus we are necessarily obliged to distinguish between what we attribute to God and what is inherent to humankind, and to keep thinking about our faith and deepening it. As St. Augustine said, *"when it comes to God, what we do not know is more than what we do know."*

Gn 1:26.
Nb 23:19; Ho 11:9.
1 S 15:29.

Augustine,
De Trin VII, 4, 9;
6, 11.

For Christians, Jesus is God himself who speaks through him, and in him he manifests himself to humankind. Moreover, in Jesus the invisible God does not just make himself visible; through Jesus God makes all things, seen and unseen. Jesus is God's strength and power that creates, saves and makes what it is up to God to make, not in the sense that he takes his place, but in the sense that he reveals him, manifests him and expresses him perfectly. In Jesus God has given himself to us with all his strength. Jesus is the presence of the transcendent God in history. Without underestimating the value of the concrete and particular, believing in Jesus of Nazareth means believing that his importance surpasses that of a particular life of 33 years and that the most absolute human values have been given to us to the fullest in the concrete reality of Jesus.

Activities

- How do you respond to these statements?

People believe in God because they are weak, insecure, and ignorant. Once they accept themselves and master culture and knowledge, they will quit believing in God.

People gradually adapt religion to their culture.

Religion occurs within a cultural context.

All religions must be understood within their cultural context.

1.3 God and life

Even if we were to understand life as a part or a form of the cosmos, i.e., as a product of matter,

this would not prove the non-existence of God; on the contrary, it would invite us to believe in God with greater creative power. Evolution, order, the laws of natural selection, progression, etc., continue to provide reasons for reaffirming faith. But even though faith was revealed to us originally within a framework of mythological and non-scientific knowledge, and even though it must be projected onto current knowledge, religious faith does not depend on scientific knowledge.

The “why” and “what for” of the entire process —matter, life and personal existence— call for an individual decision. It is not a question of mathematical results or scientific evidence; everything is linked to the way I understand myself and accept myself, in faith or in lack of faith. The real problem is not God’s existence, but ours; not God’s presence, but ours. Does my existence speak of anyone besides my ancestors? Who cares whether I live or not? Does my life have a value in itself, or only inasmuch as others value it? Does the fact of living imply any kind of commitment? Does my time-bound life have any timeless meaning?

God manifests himself as the infinite amidst the finite, the absolute amidst the relative, the divine amidst the human, the one amidst the multiple, the person amidst the social.

God is not an immovable motor, an architect or a mechanic. He does not act from on high or from outside, setting the world in motion as if he were just one more cause, albeit the first one. He

acts from the inside, making the world possible and real, directing it, respecting it, and consummating it.

God is the creator in order to give life. We can remove life from creation, but then there would be no possibility left of discovering any kind of link between God and creation. Creation calls for a more personal kind of communication. God is the creator in order to be Father.

The Bible is not primarily interested in presenting the creation as the starting point of being; it is much more about God's care for humankind and consequently, God's care for creation as the provider of humankind's needs. Both God's care for human beings and God's care for creation are in accordance with his nature, which is divine, transcendent, causally creative, foundational, nurturing, enabling and motivating; not merely a cause that replaces, converges or adds on. What human beings fail to do for themselves and for the world, is not going to be filled in by God. In this world, which God has bestowed on humankind, God will not intervene directly in anything, because he is not the world's agent. Human beings themselves, along with life and the world, are subordinated to human freedom and responsibility, making it necessary for God to refrain from intervening in everything so that he can make way for freedom, without which there is no responsibility. Ps 115:16.

When we speak of God's fatherhood, of the eternal generation of Jesus and the filiation of all human beings, we are referring to a figure in order

to highlight the personal dimension of a relationship. It is always a way of speaking. God is not Father in the human way; his way of being Father surpasses and at the same time gives rise to human generation, just as his way of being creator surpasses the way of being one more cause in the world.

Life is what interests God when it comes to humanity; God wants people alive in all their fullness. That is why he wants them free, healthy, upright and holy. What God cares about the most is life, but not in an abstract sense. He cares about the life of concrete individuals, the life of people on the street. *“Your life will be bound securely in the bundle of the living, with the Lord your God.”* Your life is one more life among the lives of all the people who walk the streets, and whom God loves dearly.

Ex 3:7.
Lv 11:44; 19:2;
20:26.
1 S 25:29.
Your dignity, your
rights and your life
are bound up with
the life and rights of
others.

When we speak of God and humankind, love is linked to life. *“Had you hated anything, you would not have formed it,”* says the Book of Wisdom, and many psalms speak of God’s eternal and creating love. Life is our first and fundamental experience of God’s love and God’s way of being.

Ws 11:24.
Ps 136; 145; 103:13.

Life for us includes the idea of time: it is necessarily temporal. It is linked to our being; life is what we are, what happens to us; we are ourselves in passing. But life, in God’s terms, does not only not include time, it denies it. Life for God is not time, but eternity; it is his deepest attribute and his most intimate way of being. God is life that does not pass, that does not change, that lasts. God’s life is God; it is not something

that he has, or that he enjoys. God cannot be other than a living God. God and divine life are one and the same. Thus in God there is no more than a single life, with which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live forever.

Activities

- How does the Book of Genesis depict the donation of life? – The myth and the revelation contained in the myth.
- Briefly explain what you consider to be the most important difference between the God of revelation and the God of philosophy.
- In your opinion, what are the most important questions that are answered by this chapter?
- Write a prayer in which you express the revelation that you find between your life and the living God.

Example:

Lord, I understand that the world of matter and physical laws would seem to lead to the appearance of substances and chemical laws, and this would lead to the world of life and biological laws, and this would lead to the world of consciousness, freedom, love and sacrifice. I believe that this world was made for you to appear in it, for both you and me to be here. The world did not require my presence, but it was open to receive me. I believe that the same thing happened to you, when the Virgin Mary received you in her womb, and the manger received you wrapped in swaddling clothes, and the cross received you naked and bruised. The one who does require

your presence and alludes to you, is me. Make me understand that I cannot understand myself without you.

- Choose a psalm that speaks of the creation and opens you to God. For example, Psalm 8.

1.4 The Living God

The Trinitarian structure of the profession of the apostolic faith suggests that the Father be addressed first, and in this first moment of reflection about God we will also look at the attributes and divinity of the Father. Because the God we believe in is not a reality that is foreign to our profession of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Talking about God means talking about him whom the Scriptures and Jesus himself call Father. Jesus' Father, in the first place, and consequently the Father of all people, who sends his Son and gives himself to us in his Spirit.

The God who is revealed in the Bible is not a magnetic or a centrifugal force. He is a living and life-giving God. The precise way this happens falls within a mythical-poetical and biological conception of the time. If we understand Genesis as providing information not so much about the origins of the human race, but rather about how human beings are to value and interpret their own life, then the message takes on a more personal tone: I live because God wants me to live, here and now; I did not arise out of chaos, but out of order. My parents were the natural origin by which God willed my existence from among an almost infinite set of possibilities, and

had the circumstances been different, I would be someone else, and not who I am. Of course, I can interpret my life as good or bad luck in a game of chance, and in this sense faith is not something that is imposed on me, but an option that modifies the value and meaning of my life. I am inasmuch as I live. Life, my life, is the form of my being. If life ends for me, I am finished. That is why faith and the Trinitarian mystery are so deeply and intimately related to my life; because it has to do not only with a past, historical event, but also with the event that is me, my life, and with a future eschatological event of which my life is merely a pledge, a sample, the beginning. There is passage from one world to another, from one life to another, from the sphere of time-bound space to the sphere of the timeless and non-spatial.

Between mission and Trinitarian life there is an authentic connection, as there is between our filiation and Jesus'. God's way of interacting with us already is God's reality just as he is in himself: tripersonal. There is no difference between God's way of communicating with people and people's way of communicating with God. According to the testimony of Scripture, God's self-communication is Trinitarian. God the Father communicates through his Son, but it is the same Father that manifests himself in the Son: through him the Father tells us what he is like and what he is not like, and nevertheless, Jesus is not the Father, nor does he fulfill a passing role as a sort of envoy, medium or messenger whose mission is temporary. His mission in time matches his eternal condition as Son of God.

The first thing that needs to be affirmed about the God we believe in and the God who has revealed himself to us is that he is a living God, that he accounts for life, that he communicates life, that he is passionately interested in life. Life is before the idea of being. For living beings a God that “is” but does not live is the same as if he did not exist. In order to perceive that something exists, even though it is inanimate existence, one must be fully alive —conscious.

The first attribute of God as he relates to people is life. God is the one who prepares life, who gives life, who guards and defends life, and who also brings it to fullness. The God we believe in is not so much a God who sustains things, the God of cosmology; he is a God who sustains human beings and thus all living things. Those who profess a God as a force or a law or a postulate of the inanimate universe do not believe in God; only those who profess a living, life-giving God do, and this implies a God who is somehow like a father or a mother. For reasons that are easy to explain, reflection and even prayer have tended toward the philosophical. But people’s most pressing problem is not being, but living. The problem of the Biblical person would be: “*To what context should the living man relate?*”

A.J. Heschel.

The difference between metaphysical and Biblical thought is that the former refers people to absolute being, i.e., God as being in and of himself, while the latter links people to God’s living, to a transcendence called the living God. The ultimate and fundamental reality is not being, but

life. Materialistic thinking would say: because there is matter, life arose. Biblical thinking, on the other hand, would say: for life to arise, there first had to be matter, and endless days of waiting. Ontological thinking tries to understand living in terms of being; Biblical thinking tries to understand being in terms of living, or to be more precise, in terms of love. Gn 1:1f.

The question that living human beings must necessarily ask themselves is whether their original, fundamental and ultimate reference point is a living God. And understanding God as a living being and a source of life will put them one short step from calling him father or mother. If the ultimate and original reality were being, or nature, or a law, the living of human beings would have nothing living to look to.

It must be noted that eternal life and time-bound life are not on the same level, nor are they opposed or mutually exclusive. Eternal life is life at the level of the founding, life-giving God, and time-bound life is life on the level of human beings, founded and given life by God.

The Father is not simply God in general, and his first attribute is not his relationship with the cosmos as something created by him. His most basic attribute is life, which is the bond that links us to him as a Father. Thus, in the Creed, the direct object of the verb believe is the Father: *"I believe in God the Father."* It is only through human life that we can come to God as Father. The relationship with him as creator is a relationship that points to a much deeper bond that forms in life.

God is the creator so that he can manifest himself subsequently as Father.

Human life is, so to speak, the medium by which we all come into communion with God: communion of revelation, faith, sacrifice, prayer, experience, and everything that has to do with God and humankind. Life is the divine and human element that connects us. But to be more exact, life is not something that God has as an add-on, and the same applies to us: life is what we are. And God's life is what God is: Life.

Life in God is one. There is not one life that the Father lives, and another life that the Son lives, and a third life for the Holy Spirit. The distinction of persons does not extend to a distinction of lives. In God there is Trinitarian life with oneness of respectivity, i.e., none of the three persons can exist and be what it is without referring to the other divine persons. God's life is Trinitarian life.

Dz-H 570, 4780.

God's life, by being the life of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, is life that is communicated, life that God had wanted to communicate to people in a dynamic and ascendant way.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 20,7.

This is why Irenaeus said "*the glory of God is a living man.*" And human life in communion with God.

Activities

- After reading this chapter, think of a concrete reality from today's world that is opposed to the God of life.

- Find a Bible concordance and look up the word life as it relates to Jesus in the Gospel according to John.
- Make a brief summary of each section.
- What expression or text do you think is worth memorizing?
- How is communication presented in the Book of Genesis?
- A prayer

Blessed be the Lord, you who had the Holy Scripture written down so that we could learn from it. Help us to hear it, to read it, to consider it, to learn it and to meditate on it in such a way that we assimilate it, so that through your word we may embrace and maintain the hope of eternal life, which is given to us through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

CHAPTER II

GOD COMMUNICATES

Objective: To know the God that reveals himself on the History of our Salvation.

2.1 Personal God

How can we know that God is personal?

In prayer, people enter into communication with the personal God. This personality of God's is something that we experience from our condition as human beings, i.e., we perceive God as a being who hears, feels, loves, wishes, etc., and this perception comes from our own way of being persons. It is not possible for us to apprehend God other than through the window of our own experience.

How do we know that God is like a person? The concept of person, in our ordinary language, comes from our consciousness and experience,

and these in turn come from our human relationships, because we become persons in the company of others. Our experience and our personal being are grounded in God's personal being, but this does not mean that God is a person the way we are. God is a person in a much higher way; we could even say in a "suprapersonal" or "transpersonal" way.

People cannot stand back from God in order to talk about him, or see him, or have any kind of experience about him. The concept of person is a symbol. On the other hand, a God who is the foundation of the person cannot himself be apersonal. God can be nothing less than a person. We talk to God, and we feel that he talks to us, as a human person, but he is not a human person. Our experience is tied to the temporality of our own life, to our corporality, to our culture, to our social context and to our circumstances. We know that in this world, being a person is the most sublime way to exist.

God is like a human person, but he is not a human person. For believers, God is the absolute "You," and they show their faith by addressing God directly, as You. Faith is linked to prayer and that is why believing is addressing God as You. Nobody talks to divine essence, substance or nature; we can talk ABOUT these things, but not TO them.

The three-person God is the ultimate foundation of our personal being. In God there is no personal being other than his three-person being. Christians believe that the only way God has of

being personal is being the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the words of the Greek fathers of the first centuries, all personal communication with God happens with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, which means that in our personal communication with God a relationship is established with the three persons, or to put it in theoretical language: communication with God is communication with what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have in common, which, without being another person, is the personal God, the divine You, and in that You the three persons are included. The reality of the living, intimate God is the personal being of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God is a person just as he is holy, just, and the Lord; all of his attributes are identified with his person, with his being. God is not a certain way and also good; goodness is his way of being. God is identified with his attributes. When we say that God is a personal being, we are referring to his essence, but also to his way of being three persons.

God is not first God and then three persons, nor is he first three persons and then God. Tripersonal being belongs to his divine nature, which we come to know only in the History of Salvation.

All Trinitarian affirmations are in themselves affirmations of salvation. God's unity is also unity of event and unity of revelation: as the Son of God, Jesus is the real revelation of the one true

God, and this event makes itself present and operative among us through the Spirit. Faith and love are fruits of the Spirit.

God is a being who respects, who invites, who loves, who forgives, who gives of himself, who lives and gives life, and all of this as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Father is God in the fullest sense, just as the Son and the Holy Spirit are; they are not three gods but three persons, and what makes them a single entity is all of their attributes, because they have them all in common. Taking it to a deeper level, we can say that the essence, nature or substance is one and the same for each of the divine persons.

The persons distinguish themselves by their relationship, such as the Father's with the Son. Relationship is what makes them three persons. In other words, the Father is not the Son, and neither of them is the Holy Spirit. The interpersonal relationship is what explains the diversity of the divine persons; but is we take the three persons as our point of departure, it is also what accounts for the divine unity, because they are always united and they are inseparable.

Jn 10:30.
Mk 12:29; Jn 5:26.
Mt 19:17; Jn 17:3.

The fathers of the early Church, taking the History of Salvation as their starting point and not necessarily Aristotelian metaphysics, came to know God as three persons and one God, without denying the unity, which is already expressed in John's Gospel. Jesus refers us to the Father as the one and only God, living, good and true.

In the early centuries of the Church it was understood perfectly that God was the Father and that Jesus was the Son, that both were distinct and yet fully united, as if they were one thing, that Jesus was the Father's expression of love and that both Jesus and the Father were all love, reciprocal love, but also love directed to and destined for each one of us. Reflection about the Holy Spirit came a little later, also on the basis of Biblical material, but a language was needed, along with appropriate concepts, to be able to speak deliberately about him.

When missionary activity centered on the person of Jesus and the communication of his message and saving work, it was also necessary to talk about the action of the Holy Spirit, even before his nature could be determined more precisely.

The early community became aware first of the function of the Holy Spirit, then of his nature and finally of his personal being.

Activities

- Among simple people, what do you think are their experiences of God? Simple, everyday experiences.

2.2 God and the History of Salvation

The greatness of human beings lies not so much in their being the center of everything, or even in being the owners of themselves, i.e., conscious, responsible and free; it lies in their being tran-

scendent even though they do not know the goal of their transcendence. It lies in their needing Someone who is beyond them, Someone who reaches out to them. That is what constitutes their greatness and not their limitation.

The fact that they are called to open up to God and give a response invites them to reflect on the true God, on God as he is in himself, not on the truth by which I apprehend him, which will always be limited and progressive. But he will necessarily be God with us, for us, because of us and from us. God reveals himself in his salvation.

Thomas Aquinas,
De ente et essentia
c 6.

We will always think about God in the Trinitarian context, because the Trinity refers to God's communicability, and conversely to faith, which is people's openness to God. God is not only the one who exists —*ipsum esse subsistens*— and who makes everything exist; he is also primarily the one who makes himself known in his revelation and communication. Jesus belongs to the definition of God. God is the one who reveals himself and communicates. It is important to note that together with Jesus, as the head of a single body, is the Father, who reveals himself as the Father of Jesus and our Father, and the Holy Spirit, who lives in us as in his temple and has been given to us; in relationship with the three persons, we also belong to our notion of God and to our faith in him. Because the God we believe in is linked to our salvation as communion with him.

It is true that we can know God with the light of reason —we are intelligent and free even in our understanding— but revelation allows us to

know him greater clarity and certainty. He made us persons so that we would fulfill ourselves gradually, and contribute creatively to our own fulfillment, and also so that he could communicate with us little by little. If we are more or less capable of knowing ourselves and loving ourselves, we are also more or less capable of knowing and loving God. There is a certain parallelism between God's life and ours, between God's way of acting and ours, although there is also an immense difference. *"If you, then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good,"* how much more God! If there were no point of contact between reality and our knowledge, we would not be able to know anything about God or about anything at all.

Rm 1:20f.

Heb 1:1.

Mt 7:11.

And God wants, more than to be understood by us, to be loved. To be loved as the only one in himself and for us, and thus he says: *"Listen, Israel, Yahweh is your God, Yahweh alone, you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength."*

Mt 22:37; Mk 12:28f;
Dt 6:4.

As people, we know ourselves in depth not by taking psychological tests or undergoing clinical analyses, but through love. The same thing happens with God: we know him when we love him. God makes himself known to those who love him. Wanting to love God is already knowing him in a way.

God's tripersonal mystery is not just verbal or conceptual revelation. It is mystery grounded in facts, in the fact of salvation. God is not just a

mystery in his being, but also in his acting, full of love and mercy. About God we can say that he is in a continuous relationship of creation, redemption, salvation and glorification with each one of us, and that this relationship is established by the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. In other words, in the History of Salvation and in our own history, the Father is involved as the origin of everything, the Son as the emissary, and the Holy Spirit as the sanctifying and glorifying gift.

We know God through our living, reflective and personal being, but mainly through the History of Salvation, i.e., through what he has done for us. This is what is often called the “economy of salvation” or “divine economy”; it refers to the succession of actions through which God reveals himself and gives himself to us for our salvation.

οἰκονομία.

Through what God is for us we know what God is in himself.

We can say something with certainty about God’s way of being from the way he acts toward us; if he were one way and acted another, he would be incoherent. His way of acting necessarily corresponds to his way of being. Invoking a principle of unity and coherence, we speak of what God is and how he is only on the basis of what he does for us and with us.

The mystery that faith is interested in is not primarily the mystery of what God is in himself, but of how God shows himself and acts toward people. There must be a correspondence between

God's way of being —immanent Trinity— and the way he has revealed himself to us and saved us —economic Trinity—. But we must also bear in mind that God's eternity surpasses what we can know of him in space and in time, in the culture in which we live and in our limited understanding. God is more than we can express, believe and hope. I Jn 3:2.

Our knowledge of God must be a way to deepen our faith; in fact, our way of believing, of loving, of serving and of abandoning ourselves to the encounter with God and with Jesus must have an impact on the way we encounter others. We encounter God in Christ, and we encounter Christ in others, particularly in the neediest. Trinitarian faith demands from us a Trinitarian, concrete faith.

The Trinitarian mystery underlies and is present in all the mysteries of the Christian faith: in the mystery of reality... or creation, in the mystery of incarnation and redemption, in the mystery of resurrection and glorification; but also in the mystery of life... of conscience, of freedom, of love and of sacrifice and of everything that has to do with the person... and in a very special way, in the mystery of our final communion with God.

The Trinity is a mystery of salvation that pervades and must be present in all prayer, in all theological treatises, in all catechesis, message or celebration of salvation. It is a value worth noting that the Eucharistic celebration has never lost its Trinitarian character.

- I Cor 28:9. “*Know yourself*” was the imperative of Greek humanism. “*Know your God*” is the imperative for the Biblically minded, for whom there is no self-knowledge without knowledge of the living God. For St. Paul, “*Knowing Christ and the dimension of his love*” is the imperative of Christian faith. Knowing ourselves leads us to a greater understanding of Christ, who is human like us.
- Ep 3:17-19. Knowing Christ leads us inevitably to a greater understanding and appreciation of ourselves. Full knowledge of Christ assumes knowledge of Trinitarian faith.

Activities

- Make a parallelism between the History of Salvation and the parable of the wicked vineyard workers.
- Choose an event and describe how it can be understood as God’s saving action.
- In the form of prayer

Mt 21:33f.

Our Father, we know that by communicating with us and letting us communicate with you, you make us more conscious, free and authentic, that in the human person there is perfect harmony and communion with you, that salvation is union with you and that you saved us by taking what we are and giving us what you are in Jesus Christ, our Lord; and that through the strength of the Holy Spirit, you join us to yourself in Jesus, that the temporal life we are living is the key to eternal life. Grant us in our human condition, that is, in our weakness, the gift of reproducing the image of Jesus, in this life and in eternal life.

CHAPTER III

HOW TO TALK ABOUT GOD?

Objective: To consider the limitations and characteristics of our understanding of God.

3.1 Personal God

The fact that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God is the basis for the analogy of God that we draw in our language, and also for our affinity in our relationships. In other words, it enables us to know and say something about God on the basis of human experience.

In a certain sense it makes little difference how God's reality is expressed, since our expressions never capture reality perfectly. And what actually saves us is the reality that has been given to us in Jesus, more than any expression that we manage to formulate about that reality. As St. Thomas Aquinas said: *"The object of our faith is*

St. Th II-II, q 1a 2 ad 2: "Actus autem credentis non terminatur ad enuntiabile, sed ad rem."

the reality of God and not the expression that we make of it." John XXIII, on the occasion of opening the Second Vatican Council, said: "*One thing is the substance of the "depositum fidei," that is, of the truths contained in our beloved doctrine, and another thing is the way they are expressed.*" The content of faith cannot be equated with a certain expression, because the reality affirmed by faith surpasses our capacity to express it. Faith relates to truth, to reality, more than to any specific way of expressing it.

AAS (1962), 792.

CEC 170.

We can define faith as *human beings' openness to God*; when God speaks, the openness consists of accepting his word; when he gives us a command or shows his will, openness consists of obeying; when God calls, openness consists of following. If we understand or accept human beings as essentially transcendent beings, their transcendence consists of their openness to God. It is evident that in their way of understanding themselves and understanding God there will necessarily be many limitations, and the understanding of themselves and of God will be subject to all the limitations that derive from knowledge, will and culture. Because neither religion nor theological thought can exist without images, symbols and feelings.

Gn 12:1-4; Jn 1:43.

We can only talk about God with anthropomorphisms, metaphors and images because our concepts simply cannot do the job. When we say God is sitting, that he is above or below, that he is arrayed or furious, these are symbols used to refer to an ineffable God.

Knowledge of the Triune God cannot be the object of natural knowledge; it falls entirely within the message revealed in the New Testament. And the images and psychological comparisons that occur to us cannot be absolutely firm ground on which to build a Trinitarian theology. There is a certain beauty, for example, in saying that the Father is the one who loves, the Son is the beloved, and the Holy Spirit is the love, but there is also a large dose of inaccuracy, because just as the Father loves, so do the Son and the Holy Spirit; all three are the object of love and love itself. Plus, the formulation suggests a love that is fulfilled and enclosed within God himself, and that the bond of unity is love, i.e., the Holy Spirit, when we know that it is actually the Father, inasmuch as the other two persons proceed from him.

It may seem somewhat foolhardy to try to pull an image of the Trinity out of human beings' mind or innermost being. Faith in the Trinity opens us to an encounter with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit inside of ourselves, who are the sanctuary of the Trinity, but this encounter takes place on the level of faith. St. Augustine strove more than anyone to find the traces of the Triune God in the soul.

Augustine, De Trin
VIII 10, 14; IX 1,1f.

When people ponder the message about God, meditate on it and live it humbly, they achieve, with the help of grace, a kind of higher understanding that surpasses the limitations of language. St. Augustine was so aware of the limitations of language that he often repeated: *"We say three persons to keep from being silent, not to say*

Augustine, De Trin V,
9,10; VIII, 6, 11.

what the Trinity actually is.” And it cannot be denied that, even with limitations, we believe better when we express our faith, just as we love better when we express our love. Faith, like love, by its very nature should be expressed, should give evidence of its existence, because when it is imposed, it is destroyed. Love, truth and faith imply freedom.

Activities

• Think about the following Trinitarian comparisons made by St. Augustine:

De Trin VIII, 1014
Cf IX, 2,2.

- Lover, beloved and love,

De Trin IX, 3,3.

- Mind, knowledge and love,

X, 11,17.

- Memory, understanding and will,

XI, 2,2.

- Reality, vision and intention,

XII, 15,25.

- Memory, vision —comprehension—, will,

- Knowledge, thought and love,

XIII, 20,26.

- Presence of God, knowledge of God, love of God,

XIV, 12,15.

- Memoria Dei, intelligentia Dei, amor Dei.

3.2 Analogy

How can we say and understand anything about God?

Everything we say about God is metaphorical, because the language cannot be other than symbolic, but that does not make it unimportant or unreal; we can invoke him truly as “*Our Father*.” By calling him Father we are also affirming that the reality closest to God is human reality. And our God, whom we call Father, is more than fa-

ther and mother: his being surpasses masculine and feminine.

By saying that God is personal, because the Scriptures always present him as a personal being, we must say right off that he is not a person like us in all his aspects, because our concept of person includes individuality, i.e., limitation: I am not what the other is, and I need others in order to be a person and to know myself as such, because I undergo constant evolution and development. Such limitation cannot be attributed to God. The boundary between him and us is our limitation, not his. But individuality also means perfection: I am different from others; I have an identity than cannot be communicated.

All things necessarily have something similar and at the same time, something diverse, which makes it possible to compare them, enumerate them or organize them. The word *analogy* refers to this similarity and dissimilarity. Its Greek roots are: *ana*, which means upward or forward, and *logos*, which means word, thought, reason, proportion. ἀνά-λόγον.

Analogy is the similarity in certain aspects of different things. Analogy refers to the common and diverse, the similar and dissimilar, in all beings. Since God is not a direct object of our sensory experience, we can know him only by what somehow resembles our experience. We know him only inasmuch as he adapts to us, but at the same time we must recognize that if he is God, he must be different from us.

An analogy is a perfect similarity between two different things, for example: God relates to people the same way fathers relate to their children. Thus we can use the same terms but not in the same way. We can say that analogy is the fundamental structure of all beings in relation to knowledge, to knowing. *“Light is to vision what the good is to the will.”* The will does not work without the good, just as vision does not work without light. In mathematics we could express an analogy as follows: two is to three as four is to six. Old age is related to life as sunset is to the day. And we can say that we should turn our old age into something as beautiful as a sunset.

Plato, The Republic,
VI, 508c.

Because our words are not enough to say everything, even less so when it comes to talking about God, we are forced to resort to images, similes, metaphors and antitheses. They all manage to say something, but there are none that say it all. Antitheses and paradoxes highlight God’s way of being: *“If you, then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good...”* How much more God, who is infinitely greater than you. Even contradiction can serve to express part of the mystery: *“What race deserves honor? The human race. What race deserves contempt? The human race.”* In the same way we can talk about presence in absence, or the spiritualized body.

Mt 7:11.

Si 10:19.

The fact is that everything we say about God must be understood as analogy: the Catholic Church recognizes and defends this principle. And the Lateran Council affirmed that any likeness between the Creator and his creature, how-

Dz-H 3283, 3546,
3887.

ever great, will always be much less than the unlikeness.

“Between the Creator and the creature so great a likeness cannot be noted without the necessity of noting a greater dissimilarity between them.”

Lateran IV, Dz-H
806. (432?)

Even the words Father, Son, substance, essence, nature, person, and everything that is said about them and about God are used as analogies. Analogies are a call to the intelligence for those who wish to understand, but they also offer refuge to those who do not wish to believe.

In Aristotelian philosophy, equality is a question of essence while difference is a question of embodiment. All human beings are equal because we share the same essence or nature, but we are different because we embody it differently. According to Plato and Aristotle, essence is first and concrete embodiments come later. Now we know that the multiplicity of beings happens first, and only later, with thought, can we propose any kind of abstraction. Thus the human essence as such does not exist: it is a mental abstraction. What exists are concrete human beings.

God’s fatherhood is so different from ordinary people’s, not just in its embodiment, but even in its essence, and the same can be said of God and people.

Analogies force us to use our intelligence, to look for the point of comparison and not stretch it too far, so as not to believe that the Scripture says what it does not say. Our language about God is always symbolic, metaphorical, paradoxical and

sometimes poetical. For that reason we should love and respect our language but not idolize it. Our expressions are expressions, nothing more.

They consist of three steps:

1. Affirmation: we say, for example, that God is a person, or Father.

2. Negation: we say that he is not a person like us, or just any father.

3. Then reasoning takes us past the experience to adoration: he is more than father and mother, and we invoke him: *"Our Father, who art in heaven."*

Ps 27:10.
Mt 6:9.

Cf Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 31,33. With all comparisons and examples it happens that, while they are worthy of consideration, they are not helpful and can even cloud our thinking *"unless one takes one piece of the image and discards another,"* and yet it is only through words that we can understand the process of thinking, and we need to pay closer attention to what is thought than what is said. We must avoid heeding the letter more than what is meant to be expressed. Words reflect ideas, and ideas reflect realities. The aim is to get to the reality, and not get lost in words.

The transcendence of human beings also makes itself known in their mind and in their language, because by means of concrete images and comparisons they speak of spiritual realities. Matter has the peculiarity of referring us to the spirit, or to be more exact, human beings are such that in matter they find seeds of the spirit. The appeal of parables is that they speak of transcendent realities with experiences from everyday life, and that

the words we use to refer to the ordinary are the same ones that help us discover the extraordinary.

“We long, even if it be by means of many names, even if it be obscurely, to comprehend that which touches on God.”

John Chrysostom,
Homily II,
1 On Jn 1:1.

In Holy Scripture, God is always a Subject, never an object; when we objectify God, we are sure to falsify him. The prophets had no interest in understanding the divine essence, but rather the mystery of his relationship with people. They experienced and stated what God wanted, not what God was. We too can gain some kind of understanding of God only in the context of our human condition and situation.

Activity

- In your own words, explain what an analogy is.
- Invent some similes or metaphors that use analogy.
- Jesus spoke of very deep matters using simple comparisons. Could you give a few examples?

3.3 Time and eternity

The Bible is not a treatise on the nature of time. But the whole biblical vision of the world bears witness to an implicit conception of temporality that takes in all concrete structures. We are situated in a world undergoing constant creation, an unfinished world, a creation that tends toward its endpoint.

Time measures this creation with the yardstick of realization. Biblical time is creative duration—duration for realization. It is irreversible time, and the Bible totally ignores those myths of eternal return that characterize Greek, Hindu and Chinese thinking.

Time and eternity are completely different realities: eternity is not unlimited time, and time is not a part of eternity. As spatial-temporal creatures, we have trouble imagining anything outside of time. Time is a created reality, as is space, and neither one includes God. *"In the beginning,"* when there was no time, God created time, which began to elapse as creation took place. Time depends on God; God does not depend on time. Eternity is inherent to God; time is inherent to human beings. And just as God assumes the human condition and makes it his own in Jesus of Nazareth, he makes time his own, and in Jesus he made history his own, as well as everything that is authentically human; and in this way time and everything it implies were *"grafted,"* as St. Paul would say, on to God. St. Augustine observed: *"We could not pass to things eternal from the condition of having a beginning, unless we were transferred, by union of the eternal to ourselves through our own beginning, to his own eternity."*

Cf Rm 11:16f.
Augustine,
De Trin IV, 18, 24.

When we say that God is eternal, we not only say that he has no beginning or end, but also that eternity is something else altogether, a different channel, a different orbit, a different order. If we keep that in mind, many questions no longer make sense. What was the Father like before be-

getting the Son? Was the Father left alone when the Second Person was sent to the world? Where was the Father when Jesus felt forsaken? Did the incarnation effect a transcendent change in God's very being? When Jesus was born and died, was the Second Person of the Trinity born and did he die? Where was the Spirit before it was poured out? etc. Such questions gave rise to many of the Trinitarian heresies in the early Church.

Our concept of freedom includes time, because it is in time that we make decisions, and we can always point to a before and an after. In God, freedom is absolute, and he is transcendently free: there is no before and after. God has always wanted what he wants. Like every concept applied to God, freedom is also an analogy, and the difference is greater than the likeness.

The History of Salvation is the unfolding in time of what God has always wanted. And what has happened in history has always been present for God.

Space and time also have a transcendent meaning. When the Second Person assumes human nature, he also assumes time, in which that nature is born, grows, develops and dies, and the temporal is assumed into the eternal. This means that our temporality, our personal history, is also immersed in God: *"Hidden with Christ in God."* Col 3:3. In this way, reality and time are not left empty or annihilated by the eternal God, but rather sublimated, immersed in him.

It is true that time passes, and that it is its nature to pass, but it is also true that some of what passes remains... and thus there is history, and God communicated and gives himself to us in time and in history... forever.

For us human beings, what has passed and what passes, what happened and what we do, have eternal transcendence. Our time and our life are projected into eternity, and in this way they become something else that is no longer time, but eternity. The same thing happened with the life, words, actions, death and resurrection of Jesus. What happened once, happened forever. If time had no eternal projection, it would be reasonable to expect better times for our salvation. Jesus' time was sublimated with him: St. Paul calls this time *"the fullness of time," "because however many promises God made, the Yes to them all is in Christ."*

Mt 25:34f; 5:1f;
10:42; Lk 14:14.

Heb 9:12, 26; 10:10;
Ga 4:4; Heb 9:26.
2 Co 1:20.

But this language of now and here invites us not to equate the expressions of faith with spatial-temporal representations, but to contemplate in them the mystery of Jesus in its entirety. For example, the pre-existence of Jesus is not simply influence in the present, past and future; it is also presence and eternal communion with the Father. It refers to what St. John was saying when he wrote, *"In the beginning was the Word."* This is a beginning without a beginning.

Jn 1:1.

Time, projected onto eternity, can become a trap because it makes us think that there was a time in which what actually exists did not exist in God. For example, Tertullian thought that for

God to be Lord, he first had to be the creator in order to have someone to lord over. God is always the creator; he is always fashioning us out of clay... in the womb; he is always making light and making the earth yield its fruit. Creation, redemption, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit are ever-present events for God, even though for us they take place in history. Creation, indeed everything that God does, expresses what God is forever, without modifying him. In history God manifests himself, but he does not make himself something that he was not before. For all eternity God always wants what he wants, always does what he does, always is what he is. Jb 10:9-12; Is 64:7.

This is why we can truthfully say that “nature” is none other than creation sustained or updated in the present moment; or that our salvation is applied redemption. And that in the Eucharist, and not only in the Eucharist, Christ continues to offer himself to the Father for us.

God is not first God, then the Father, subsequently the Son, and finally the Holy Spirit. The history of revelation and salvation is “history” for us but not for God. We are used to thinking in the categories of “before” and “after”, but we cannot apply them to God, who does not grow old, and for whom everything is present. *“With the Lord, a thousand years are like a day.”* The word “always” suits God better than the words “before and after.” God remains forever. His love, mercy and loyalty last forever.... *“Christ remains a priest forever.”* And the Lord says: *“I am with you always;”* 2 P 3:8. Heb 7:3,17.

Mt 28:20; *yes, to the end of time.*” And St. Paul reminds us
 1 Th 4:17. that “*we shall stay with the Lord forever.*”

This distinction between time and eternity is important when we talk about Jesus in history and this same Jesus in eternity. Jesus’ divinity in history was always an incarnate divinity, a state of
 ἐ-κένωσεν. “kenosis”; by becoming a man he limited himself in space and time. After the Resurrection, Jesus returns to the Father, continues to be the Second Person of the Trinity, but now with the glory that he had *from the beginning, seated at the right hand of the Father*. And time, along with him, is assumed into eternity, not destroyed, not disfigured, but sublimated.

Jn 17:5f.
 Jn 1:1; Mt 16:19.
 Ep 20; Heb 1:3;
 10:12.

Numerus motus
 secundum prius et
 posterius. Aristotle,
Physics, IV, 11.

For Aristotle, time is the measure of movement with respect to before and after. According to this notion, time is conceived as succession and movement. There is no time without movement. Time is relative... Beginning and end, space and time, are characteristics and limitations of created beings. Jesus of Nazareth was bound by these characteristics, which in turn had a retroactive effect, as it were, for all of eternity. —The Church Fathers looked at this as a *becoming accustomed* —Irenaeus—, or as an “Incarnundus, o induturus,” —Tertullian—. Jesus had to incarnate, or clothe himself, in the human condition.

By giving praise and *glory to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit*, by referring to a succession of time, we are actually referring to God’s eternity within the succession of our time: *as it was in the beginning, is now*, etc. Boethius (480-524) defined eternity as “*The complete, simulta-*

neous and perfect possession of everlasting life." Applying this definition to Jesus, we could say that eternity would be complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of his life in history, i.e., of his temporal life. This would correlate with the saying of the Holy Fathers: "*What he took up once, he made his own for all eternity.*"

Quod semel assumpsit, numquam dimisit.

The concepts of human nature and divine nature in Jesus can also be understood as the divine and human conditions, and in this way we can speak of his divine condition as imperishable, unchangeable, eternal, all-powerful, unbound by time and space, impassive, etc.; and of his human condition as that in which he made his divine condition known, but in a situation of kenosis, or debasement, and in all that is intrinsic to any human being. This makes it possible to understand attributes of the one person of Christ Jesus that might otherwise seem to be at odds or contradictory: for example, his divine condition makes him the creator, outside of time, timeless, but he is equally a perishable creature with both a beginning and an end, who was born and died, which does not however deny his divine condition, because the divine condition is not lost; it is simply expressed, transfigured. The essence of Jesus' human nature is to reveal —incarnate— his divine nature. "*The way to Jesus' divinity is his humanity.*" The way to the eternity of Jesus, who is "*the same yesterday, today and forever,*" is his temporality.

ἐ-κένωσεν.

Thomas Aquinas,
S Th III, 14, 1, 1.

Hb 13:8.

It is part of Jesus' human nature to be connected, in communion of nature and life, with every hu-

man being, but also and primarily to be capable of and open to a supernatural communion with God. We can likewise say that the essence of his divine nature is his ability to express himself and communicate, not in spite of his human dimension, but actually within it. In temporal terms we can say that it is intrinsic to time-bound being to be capable of, and naturally open to, communion with God in eternity. And it is intrinsic to eternal God to be able to assume the temporal dimension and make it his own.

CPD n 11, Paul VI, 1968. God is eternity; humanity is time. Jesus is *equal to the Father according to his divinity, inferior to the Father according to his humanity.*

Hb 13:8; Dz-H 325. The incarnation is in time, and adds nothing to the Trinity, where the Son has pre-existed forever. This does not mean that it has no historic meaning; rather it makes it clear that the historical meaning that it was to have at one point in time is the same that it has had forever. Faith in the eternal filiation of the Son of God does not derive from Jesus' virginal birth; on the contrary, the Holy Fathers saw the virginal conception as the consequence of God's eternal fatherhood.

Activities

- Notice the concepts of eternity and time in the following text:

4th Lateran Council XII, year 1215. *"The Father comes from no one, the Son from the Father only, and the Holy Spirit from both, without beginning, forever and without end. The Father who begets, the Son who is born, and the Holy*

Spirit who proceeds: consubstantial, co-equal, co-omnipotent, and co-eternal." Dz-H 1530-1531.

- Read St. Leo the Great Dz-H 616-619.

Note: The Canons of the First Council of Constantinople are cited as law by Celestine I and by Vigilius. PL 53, 290 A. PL 69, 176 B; Jf 937.

"Should anyone fail to say that the Father is forever, that the Son is forever and that the Holy Spirit is forever, is a heretic." Dz-H 126, 162; 165.

- Propose some exercises to abstract from time and space: Concepts of nature independent of number and space; of Adam: each and every one of us is Adam. Numerical concepts. Mathematical abstraction that retains only the quantity, the operation, the set, the process.

- Consider the *Alexandrine Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom*, used in the Church of Ethiopia:

"Again we proclaim the essence of the only-begotten, what he is, what was his descent, and what was his birth. He came without going out of his Father; he descended without giving up his essence; he emerged without being separated from the Trinity; he bent down without breaking his unity; he dwelt in a daughter of flesh without leaving his throne; he was conceived in the womb depriving any place of his fullness; he was bound in the womb without forsaking any of his higher properties; and he was born without adding anything to his higher being; he became man, absolutely without sin, and appeared as a servant while working like God."

3.4 Unfathomable and Incomprehensible

God's incomprehensibility does not fall primarily within the sphere of theoretical thought, but rather in the area of personal existence. God surpasses us, is far greater than us, and thus is unfathomable and incomprehensible, but not to an absolute degree, because then we would not be able to say anything about him, or believe in him, or love him. It is not a mystery primarily for theoretical thought, but for people's natural and supernatural urges and their communication with God. God is first and foremost a mystery in his way of acting, in the care he takes for people and in his love for them; only after this is he a mystery in his way of being, because we can know his way of being only and exclusively through his way of acting.

The word "God" must be grasped somehow; otherwise no one would know what it refers to. It presupposes some form of understanding, which does not, however, mean rational explanation. Love, fidelity and hope are understandable even though they have no reason-based explanation. Love is a feeling, not a reason. These realities are not perceived by logical thinking, but by living, interpersonal experience. We undergo an experience not unlike that of Moses: we have an intuition of his presence. I can understand what love is before experiencing it because I need it. My first perception of God is my need. By looking for him, entreating him, and hoping for him, in a certain sense I understand him.

Ex 3:1f.

What makes God incomprehensible is not that he acts in an irrational way; it is his way of making himself present whenever he wants, in unexpected and unpredictable ways. The incomprehensibility is not love or hope, but that fact that hope is fulfilled, and love takes on a concrete form as unlimited mercy. The function of love and faith is not to push reason aside or to overcome it, but to shed light on it. And reason is not meant to obscure our faith or our love, but to illuminate them. Lk 15:1f.

Before receiving any kind of revelation, people find themselves in a relationship with God that could be called transcendent. Between people and God, a bond is formed—not necessarily on a cognitive level, but rather on an existential level—: *“You created us, Lord, for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you,”* wrote St. Augustine. And the psalmist says, *“My soul is thirsting for you, my flesh is longing for you, a land parched, weary, and waterless.”* Nothing of what we have can satisfy us completely, because our heart is empty and only God can fill it. —If you made me in order to see you, I will be happy only when I see you—. Augustine, *Confe* 1,1. Ps 63:2; 42:3.

People feel a certain curiosity when it comes to God, similar to their curiosity about themselves. They naturally have some knowledge of God, but not of God’s revelation. Whether they find him or not, they enter into a profound relationship with God just by looking for him; at the same time, God has forged a link with human beings ever since he set out in search of them. When

people seek God, they do not necessarily do so consciously; in fact, they are often not aware that they are seeking him. This seeking by people is preceded by God's search. He is like an anxious mother who runs to see why her child is crying, or like the shepherd who goes where he hears the sheep bleating.

Jn 10:11.

People's life takes on a different meaning—a more important one—when they ask about God and they know that the answer relates to their own existence. Asking about God and asking about oneself are really the same thing—they overlap. Talking about God means talking about our personal existence. Only through our personal experience can we begin to outline the meaning of a personal God. Existence is more than a concept; it is an experience that involves concrete life situations. God's mystery has as its starting point our own mystery, the mystery of our life and our own existence.

But just as talking about my life requires me to use general concepts backed up by personal experiences, talking about God calls for these same concepts and experiences. My own experience of living is the platform for God to be a life experience for me. Experience, even one's own, is not merely objective; it is always interpreted experience. And there is personal responsibility involved in the problem of how to interpret one's experiences.

Language about God absolutely needs the concepts, images and life of actual people. Without them no expression about God would be possi-

ble, which is why any expression about God is necessarily limited by our knowledge, conditioning and experiences.

The three-person God is much more than we can imagine or express. *"You will know God when you understand that he cannot be understood."* No discourse can adequately express God's mystery, and yet we should not remain silent about him who is the basis and possibility of our word. The greatest problem for knowing God is thinking that we already know him. Devotion, love, faith, justice and service all transcend the acts of simple reasoning. Our human condition is not limited to understanding only; when justice and love are actually lived out, they surpass understanding.

Gregory of Nyssa
335-394. Commentary on the Song of Songs
Hom, 6

God's incomprehensibility encompasses him in all his attributes, such as his love, his mercy, his presence, his action. This means that he is much more than anything we are capable of understanding and imagining, and also that he does not depend on our understanding and imagination.

The author of Ecclesiasticus wonders: *"Who has ever seen him to give a description?"* And one of the deepest human longings is: *"Lord, show me your face."*

Si 43:31.
Ps 80:3; 27:8.
Ex 33:18; Jn 14:8.

St. Augustine maintained that any talk about the Trinity first required faith and openness of the heart before understanding could come —*crede ut inteligas*— and he justified his position by referring to a text from Isaiah that was probably

- mistranslated: *"If you do not believe, you will not be able to understand."* What the text actually says is more like *"If you do not stand by me, you will not stand at all."* However the text is translated, it is safe to say that in order to understand anything of the Trinitarian Mystery, we need to open our heart to God; that is the only way to *"understand with the heart"* in the Hebrew sense of the phrase. Now we can say, paraphrasing St. Augustine, *"ama ut inteligas,"* love so that you may understand. There is a certain correspondence between being known and knowing, between loving and being loved: we can love God because he loved us first, and we can know God because he knows us first; *"but any man who loves God is known by him."* *"Everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Anyone who fails to love can never have known God, because God is love."* When the heart does not burn, no light can illuminate the indifference. Proofs serve to safeguard certainty, not to establish it; in the final analysis they confirm what the heart already knows and intuit. Music can only be interpreted by people who have it in their soul.
- Is 7:9
Cf Augustine,
De Trin XV, 2,2.
- Dt 29:3; Mt 15:18;
Mk 7:21.
- 1 Jn 4:19;
1 Co 8:3.
- 1 Jn 4:7-8.
- Ac 20;35. If *"there is more happiness in giving than in receiving,"* there is also more happiness in believing than in demonstrating; undoubtedly, because faith is the response to God's gift that allows us to believe. Faith helps us to bring together all the disconnected notes of the concert of life.

The purpose of our freedom is not to interfere with God's action, but to make room for human self-determination, to allow for faith, love and

obedience, which without freedom would have no meaning.

Cf Col 13:1f.

Reflecting on faith is an existential attitude for human beings, who in their wholeness, in the unity of their being, cannot separate the world of reason and the world of faith. In order to truly believe, people have to somehow understand what they believe in; only a subject of reason can be a subject of faith. A common language might be too much to ask for, but people need to find at least an intermediate language, which is analogy or symbolic language.

Certain philosophical conceptions have at times been set in opposition to the Biblical message, but this should not be interpreted as a disparagement of philosophy or a destructive criticism of Aristotelianism, which unquestionably made great contributions to our understanding of the revealed message. It should rather be interpreted as a reflection on the Biblical message. It is important to note that not all philosophical positions help us to understand and live the revealed message, and also that the revealed message requires a rational disposition that can assimilate it.

When we speak of God and Jesus, and in a certain sense of everything related to God, we speak of “a mystery,” but mystery does not preclude understanding; on the contrary, to a certain extent it presupposes understanding. The incomprehensibility of God does not imply a prohibition on thinking; it is more about realizing that the more we understand of God, the more we dis-

cover how inexhaustible and transcendent he is. As a result, whatever we say about God, even if it is completely true, can always be improved or expressed in a better way, at least for our times and culture. Theological reflection aims at helping us better understand and approach the revelation and manifestation of God's greatness in our salvation, the Mystery of his love.

Rm 11:25; 16:25;
Ep 1:9.

Activities

- Comment on St. Augustine's position on faith in the Trinity: believe and love so that you may understand.
- Discuss and find the common denominator of the word "mystery" in the Letter to the Ephesians.
- Look up the word "mystery" in any theological dictionary, for example, Rahner-Vorgrimler's *Theological Dictionary*.
- How can people find God if they are not looking for him? How can people look for God if they want nothing to do with him? —Hint: through truth, virtue, authenticity, honesty, suffering, love, service.

CHAPTER IV

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Objective: To reflect on important topics of the God who reveals himself.

4.1 God in the Old Testament

All the religions of the Ancient East professed a belief that the divinity was made up of heavenly bodies: the sun, the moon and the stars; also of natural forces, especially fertility. Certain men were elevated to the category of gods: the Pharaoh, the King of Babylon, for example. Later Alexander the Great and the Caesars of Rome would imitate this eastern religious custom.

In India and Greece we see that nature was considered divine. For Plato and Aristotle, the world was the great divine animal, an animated being. This divinization of nature and the universe — pantheism— seems to have been the common re-

ligious background for ancient humanity, except Israel.

In this respect, Israel introduced a change in the history of human thought that was so bold and profoundly revolutionary that we have trouble appreciating it today. In a world in which all civilizations worshipped the sun, the moon, the stars, the elements of the earth, natural forces, deified men, we find a small people that dared to reject all of these pantheistic ideas and profess, alone, that the world is not divine, that all things and events are not divine. What are the sun and the moon? *"Lamps,"* i.e., things, not gods at all.

Gn 1:14.

In this same tenor we can run down the list of everything we find in the world. What is worldly is demythologized, desacralized, de-deified. Everything that is natural stops being an object of worship. Israel undertook a profound desacralization: the world is not God and there is no reason to worship it. The world is just the world. God is not the world.

Plato and the great Aristotle, in the 5th century before our era, still considered the world to be divine, and Plotinus, in the 3rd century of our era, rebuked Christians for not accepting the divinity of the stars. There is, however, a small people that arose out of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, that for millennia has purged its world vision of all animistic or fetishistic mentality, and developed a rational vision of the world.

It is remarkable that Israel could develop such a positive vision of the world, free of polytheism, of pantheism, of malignant forces and evil gods.

The question of whether the world is divine or not, whether nature, kings and emperors are divine, is not just a theoretical question. We know what comes of the deification of heavenly bodies, of natural forces, of kings, of the nation, of the State or the race; what comes of the deification of those who rule: the Roman Circus, or the Nazi crematoria.

The Absolute Being is nothing of what exists in the world. No human thing can be the Absolute. The Absolute Being is distinct from the world and all it contains. It is not visible. It is not perceptible. It is not the object of experimentation. It can be thought, but not sensed. It is not the sum total of the universe, or the soul of the world. It is someone who can be addressed, and who in turn addresses people. The world is not a part of the Absolute, of God, or a modification of his substance, or his reality.

The God of Israel is personal, but not in the way people are. We are much closer to him than the mineral or vegetable realm. By saying that he is personal we are saying that he is not less than we are: the Absolute is not pre-personal, or impersonal, or unconscious. He who created the world is not inferior to his most perfect works. We all agree that the person is the most wonderful way of existing.

Israel believes that it knows the God of the world, the God who created heaven and earth, and not just an ethnic or national god. The God whom Israel came to know is the one God, the creator of heaven and earth, and there can be no other. Other nations' gods are nothing, things made by the hands or thoughts of men.

Ex 20:3; Is 43:10f.

For Israel, God has no beginning or end; he is a living God who neither dies nor is born.

Unlike pagan gods, the God of Israel is an absolutely singular being, superior to human passions.

For Israel, humans are made in God's image and likeness, but God is not made in the image of humans. Human beings are like God... —in some regards—, but God is not like human beings.

Gn 1:27;
Ho 11:9.

While the religions of other peoples had deified the world, nature and human beings, Israel, which had de-deified the world and demythologized natural forces, did not turn God into a human-like idea; on the contrary, it developed the idea of humanity in God's likeness.

Israel sees God as eternal, and everything else as temporal, having a beginning and an end. There are only two categories: Creator and creature, temporal and eternal. God is beyond time, beyond beginning and end, and everything else is immersed in time. Time itself is not unending duration, but is limited by its own beginning and end.

In the distinction between the human and the divine, two aspects stand out, at two opposite poles: the de-deified world on the one hand, and on the other, God freed of representations that are overly human, idolatrous, although not anthropomorphic.

The idea that Israel developed of the world and of God highlights the relationship between God and the world. The radical distinction between God and the world underscores this specific relationship that is creation, expressed in Hebrew by the verb “*bara*,” to create, reserved exclusively for God. Only God is the Creator.

This relationship of creation means that Hebrew thought is totally removed from any kind of idealism that would try to diminish or undermine the consistency and reality of the physical world, and turn it into pure representation. The world, with all of its natural forces, cannot be considered divine, but it is genuine reality, valuable and good in itself.

Precisely because the world is not divine, and has not emerged from divine substance, it is not sufficient unto itself. It is not the Absolute Being. It is not sufficient unto itself because it is not God. And yet it exists, brimming with wealth, bearing constant witness to an inexhaustible fertility. But it has received its being and its wealth from Another. Hebrew cosmology, aside from denying the world’s divinity, is characterized by its profession of the idea that world has a beginning. On this point it stands in direct opposition to Aristotle’s cosmology, which posits the eternity

of the world and considers it divine. In Hebrew thinking, everything that exists, through the very fact of its existence, is good, including humanity with its evil. Everything is good in itself, and not accidentally good, but substantially and naturally good. The cosmovision of the people of Israel, and therefore of the Holy Scriptures, is extraordinarily optimistic. One particularly remarkable feature is the supremacy of human beings, God's crowning work, his interlocutor and collaborator. They converse and interact as equals in their being and their actions, without actually being equals either in their being or in their actions.

Gn 32:23f; Ex 33:12f.

Activities

- Read the article about "God" in J. B. Bauer, *An Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*. New York, Crossroad, 1981. Pose a question and summarize the answer that the author presents.
- From the Genesis narrations, find references that present humanity as God's crowning work, and add some from the New Testament.

4.2 God is the Creator

Gn 1:1. *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* This is the first sentence in the Bible, and it demands reflection: What is meant by *beginning*, *God*, *create*, *heavens and earth*?

Today all cosmologists posit a beginning for the world: a "Big Bang," a great explosion that researchers believe was the beginning of the universe. The data examined by modern cosmology

suggest that this happened some 15 billion years ago...

The word *create* refers to the relationship between God and the universe, to a basic, foundational relationship, closely related to human making, working and creating, but transcendent in the sense that it refers to something that humans cannot do. This action is God's alone. And yet we understand it from the perspective of human actions because we have no other way of understanding except from our own experience and our senses. It is important to note that this creating that God carries out did not happen only at the beginning or in the origins; God's making is ongoing. "*God rested on the seventh day,*" writes the author of Genesis to give us a lesson, but God continues to work, and cannot stop working as long as the world exists. God is linked not only to the great explosion that has been deduced as the origin, but also with the before and after and with all subsequent moments.

Gn 2:2-3; Jn 5:17.

Creation out of nothing explains what we mean by *create*, which is not "*making*" from some raw material. This "*nothing*" can be misunderstood, as if nothing were something. This is the difference between God's action and that of his creatures.

Creation is a divine action that transcends the temporal and spatial orders; its purpose is to initiate all things, including time and space.

In its origin and in God's ongoing activity, creation is not a physical action; in fact, it does not

belong to the physical order at all. Its origin is transcendent and goes beyond the physical dimension.

Heavens and earth means absolutely everything, except God himself.

And what are we to understand by the word *God*? That will be the topic of the treatise on the Trinity.

Ws 9:16. The message of the Bible tells us that God transcends the world, that he is not something that belongs to time and space, nor can he be compared with anything contained in the world. It is true that we have often resorted to God to fill in the yawning gaps in our knowledge, but that should not surprise us. It can even be seen as natural, given how limited our knowledge is and how slowly it has advanced. Science does not render God useless; rather it helps us to stop using him as a stopgap to fill in the holes in our knowledge. When science discovers reality for us, to the extent that it is reality it helps us to discover more about God. Science can be revelatory in nature, but not in the sense of new revelation: it deepens our understanding of the true revelation. On the other hand, we should not let our faith march to the rhythm of our scientific knowledge, which is reasonably unstable.

We cannot attain certain knowledge of God using scientific methods, because God surpasses all perceptible objects. At the same time, we cannot conclude on the basis of scientific evidence that God does not exist. The immensity of the uni-

verse makes us consider God's power and transcendence.

We know that the Genesis story is poetic, that it communicates a message about God and humanity. The entire Bible tells us that God is fundamentally linked to human beings, howsoever this may be understood. The way we understand ourselves will greatly depend on the way we understand God.

The history of faith reveals that it is not joined to any particular cosmological model, and that faith in God the Creator can fit into different frames of thought regarding the world's origins. The images and myths about creation are no more than that: images that correspond to a given culture or imagination, but they are not the message. It was impossible for the primitive hagiographer — the author — to speak other than with his way of thinking, even though he was directly inspired by God.

And the question of why there is something and not nothing continues to puzzle scientists. For the person of faith, the answer lies in the will of a good God, who is pleased to share his goodness, who takes pleasure in having someone to shower with benefits.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer, 14, 1.

The following propositions can serve to summarize the message of Genesis regarding faith in God the Creator:

1. God is the origin of everything that exists. Thus he is not a being like the others; if we had to invent a word, we could say that he is a Super-

being, while all the rest are just beings. He is a “super reality”: cause, origin, sense and end of all other realities. For this reason there is no other evil or demonic principle that can oppose him. He is not obliged to defeat anyone, or dominate anyone.

Gn 1:31. 2. God is good, and everything that exists is fundamentally good.

3. God’s goodness includes his ongoing goodness, his faithfulness, and also his providence.

4. Humanity is God’s crowning work. It is the closest thing to God, and what God can be closest to. Humanity is the goal—as yet unmet—of the process of creation.

Gn 1:29.

5. The entity where we can find the clearest mark of God is the human race. Human beings, despite their limitations and deficiencies, are the ones who can most clearly speak to us about God—revelation—and since we ourselves are human beings, we are therefore one of God’s words, to whom we should listen carefully in our heart.

6. God, because he is good, communicates through love; love consists of communication.

Cf CSDC 34-36.

It is important to point out that Genesis, especially the first three chapters and practically all the verses, has a universal or general perspective; it does not focus on concrete cases. Adam and Eve are all of us. That is why the Jerusalem Bible translates as follows: “*God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.*”

Gn 1:27; 2:15f.

Believing in God the Creator means accepting the universe and humanity as having meaning, as well as an original and final cause; that a fixed, static or decadent vision of the universe, humanity and the world does not coincide with scientific data, which point to a vision of a God who is the ongoing Creator of a world in constant evolution and progress.

God's creative action, like God himself, is absolutely transcendent, i.e., of a different order. God is not a cause like other causes in the world. He is absolutely different from all other causes. God provides the foundation for the normal process of nature, but he is not a part of it.

The Biblical idea of creation as intrinsic to God is linked to the idea of newness. What is created is something new, not something remade or mended. *"Yahweh is creating something new on earth."* Yahweh also makes *"a new covenant."* *"I create new heavens and a new earth."* And in the New Testament, *"Now I am making the whole of creation new."* The new moment implies quality: *"The old creation is gone, and now the new one is here."* The same goes for *"our former selves"* and *"an altogether new creature"* who *"is renewed day by day."*

Jr 31:22.
Jr 31:31.
Is 65:17; Mk 2:22.
Rv 21:5; Rm 7:6.
2 Co 5:17.
Rm 6:6; Ga 6:15.
2 Co 4:16.

Joined to the idea of creation is the notion of enhancement or improvement. God made people so that they could grow and cooperate with him in the work of creation. St. Irenaeus understands growth not only as an increase in number and size, but also of human quality. *"Image"* is an original point of departure, common to all people, while

Rm 8:29. *“likeness”* is a vocation to reproduce the image of Jesus Christ over the course of a lifetime, with the help of the Church, the sacraments and the Gospel. Thus God’s crowning work consists of the configuration of humanity.

Opera autem Dei
plasmatio hominis
est. Adv Haer V,15,2;
III,20,2.

Since God’s creation is not static or temporal, but rather eternal, it is not an action that takes place in time, nor is it limited by time. God continues to create, even in the natural order, a “*new world*.” The possibility of everything that can be truly new and created is God... The emergence of something new is the specific characteristic of creation, and of an unfinished world that calls for the care and intervention of people, a world in which God has not stopped acting. “*My Father goes on working, and so do I.*” And “*cut off from me you can do nothing.*”

Jn 5:17.
Jn 15:5.

God is the vertex and also the base; he is the “*omega*” and also the “*alpha*”. We cannot find him in the answer if we overlook him in the question. This means that creation is linked to the History of Salvation and that the Triune God is the transcendent agent, which is why Christians read Genesis with a Christological eye, i.e., discovering in the Father his plans for salvation.

Cf Jn 1:3-14.

The “first act” of the divine drama was the creation, perfectly linked to the second, which was the incarnation, and the third and fourth, which were redemption and glorification. These must not be separated; only united into a single thread do they acquire their full meaning and constitute the History of Salvation.

St. Irenaeus and Tertullian take pleasure in affirming the value of the flesh, formed from the beginning, because one day it will be taken up by the Second Person of the Trinity.

“When God made man, he was giving shape to the Word.” “When he pronounced man, he pronounced the Word” and when he said, “Let there be light,” he was announcing to the Word that one day it would be the Light of the world.

Caro autem constitit
propter formam ser-
mone Dei.
Tertullian, Res 5,6.
Jn 1:9.

In the Father we find the external origin of the Son, and with the Son, the origin of all that exists; in the Son we find the eternal mediation, and in the Spirit, God’s total giving of himself.

Cf Ep 1:3f.

Activities

- Read Ecclesiasticus: Si 16:26 to 17:14.
- Using this topic as inspiration, write a prayer to the Trinity.

4.3 God’s fatherhood in the Old Testament

It must be pointed out that the use of the title Father for God is not unusual in the Old Testament, but it is not common either. The word seemed too informal and familiar, perhaps disrespectful of the transcendence of God, whose name could not even be pronounced.

God was given the title of Father because he was the Creator.

“And yet Yahweh, you are our Father; we the clay, you the potter, we are all the work of your hand.”

Is 64:7.

Also, or primarily, because he chose his people:

Ex 4:22; Dt 14:1. *"This is what Yahweh says, Israel is my first-born son."*

He is "my creator," in the personal sense:

Ps 139:13-15. *"It was you who created my inmost self, and put me together in my mother's womb; for all these mysteries I thank you: for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works. You know me through and through, from having watched my bones take shape when I was being formed in secret, knitted together in the limbo of the womb."*

The title of Son, not in the literal but in the figurative sense, was also given to the King, the Priest and the Prophet: their missions were seen as a special bond and commitment to the God of Israel. Thus it was said of the king on the day of his enthronement that he had been begotten by God: Ps 2:7. *"You are my son, today I have become your father."* Jb 38:28. *"Who begets the dewdrops?"* The word "beget" is clearly not being used literally, as it is in the genealogies. When it comes to God, generation or filiation has nothing to do with the biological-sexual function, with procreation. God is the Creator, and as such he is also the all-powerful Father.

Adam himself, since he had no earthly father, appears in the Gospel as a son of God, because God created him: Lk 3:38. *"Son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God."*

Moses says to the people:

“Is not this your father, who gave you being, who made you, by whom you subsist?” Dt 32:6.

“He —David— will invoke me, ‘My father, my God and rock of my safety,’ and I shall make him my first-born, the Most High for kings on earth.” Ps 89:27.

God is tender and affectionate, like a real father:

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt. But the more I called to them, the further they went from me... I myself taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in my arms; yet they have not understood that I was the one looking after them. I led them with reins of kindness, with leading strings of love. I was like someone who lifts an infant close against his cheek; stooping down to him I gave him his food...” Ho 11:1-4.

It is not only his creative power that makes God the Father of all people; it is above all his constant love, fidelity, care, predilection, providence and patience.

God’s fatherhood is the ultimate foundation of human brotherhood; thus when God is no longer recognized as Father, people seek to exploit others and treat them as enemies.

“Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why then do we break faith with one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?”
“Even then did you not cry to me, ‘My father! You, the friend of my youth! Will you keep your resentment forever?” Jr 3:4-5.

In the Old Testament, we also find the image of God as a Mother, especially to highlight fidelity and affection. *“Does a woman forget her baby at the breast, or fail to cherish the son of her womb?*

Is 49:15. *Yet even if these forget, I will never forget you.” “If my father and my mother desert me, Yahweh will*

Ps 27:10. *care for me still.”* The feelings of refuge, consolation, love and fidelity are present in many psalms that evoke a mother’s love. The mother is the one who suffers pain when giving birth, who nurses, consoles, protects, cleans and heals her little one.

“Like a son comforted by his mother will I comfort you.” This motherly care gives an idea of what

Is 66:13. *God does, and is willing to do indefatigably for us. “Be like a son to the Most High, whose love for*

Si 4:10. *you will surpass your mother’s.”*

Precisely because God’s fatherhood is not earned, but rather the fruit of his most personal being and his love, we can count on him in spite of our infidelities. He will always be a Father and act as one, even though we do not deserve to be called and treated as his children... Since God is Father, he cannot stop being Father: that is what he is, with no possibility of change... —Such a change would imply being what he is not, or acquiring what he does not have—.

Lk 15:11f.

St. John describes God, as perhaps his most fundamental attribute, as love: *“God is love,”* and the object of this love is all of humanity. *“Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that we could have life through him.”*

Jn 3:16;

1 Jn 4:9; 3:1.

The fact the God is Father in and of himself, the source and origin of everything and of all life,

not a father in the biological, physical sense but rather a transcendent Father, is what also makes Jesus the transcendent Son, beyond all physical-biological generation. And since all human beings participate in this loving gift of the Father to the Son, we are all children in the Son. By way of Jesus Christ, and not just his teachings, we can all address God as our real Father. He is God the Father of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and above all the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Father.

Because God is Father, Jesus Christ is called the Son, and all people are brothers and sisters.

God is not a stern father, or a paternalistic one. He is a Father who respects his creation and his crowning work, which is the human race. He respects their decisions made in the past, which to a great extent make up history, no matter how unfortunate they may be. He also respects our present-day decisions, and he will respect those of the future. God is the Creator and Father, but he has called on his children to collaborate with him in his ongoing creation. He has given them time, with which they have forged their history with their decisions. These decisions account for the evils that we suffer and that humanity has suffered. We cannot help being shaken by the words of the atheist philosopher: "The only reason that explains Auschwitz, Treblinka and Hiroshima is that God does not exist," but that is not the only conclusion that can be drawn. Might it not be a question of God's respect for the decisions of one and many human beings?

Activities

- Why is the father figure devalued in today's culture?
- In what stage of life does the father figure take on the greatest importance: childhood, adolescence, youth, or adulthood? Make a distinction in the father's functions for boys and girls.
- What are children's primary attitudes when they have an affectionate, responsible, hard-working father?
- Why is the image of a father—real or wished for—important for having a positive idea of God?
- A prayer

Pope St. Clement.
To the Cor 63, 2-4.

"You who humble the pride of the haughty and destroy the designs of the heathens, comfort us with your love. You who from among the people have chosen those that love you through Jesus Christ, we beg you, Lord, to help and protect us. Feed the hungry and free those of us who suffer in prisons."

4.4 God is all-powerful

Ps 115:3. *God is all-powerful because he is God the Creator of everything. "Ours is the God whose will is sovereign in the heavens and on earth." "Jesus gazed at them. 'For men,' he said, 'it is impossible, but not for God: because everything is possible for God.'" God "can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine."*

Mk 10:27; Lk 1:37.
Ep 3:20.

In the Old Testament God's power was not only linked to creation but also to his superiority, over which no political, demonic, magical or numinous power can prevail.

“I have learned for myself that Yahweh is great, that our Lord surpasses all other gods. In the heavens, on the earth... Yahweh’s will is sovereign... Since Yahweh vindicates his people, and cares for those who serve him.” Ps 135:5-6.14.

People’s desire for supreme power, or absolute authority, often leads them to try to justify their actions by referring to God’s omnipotence. –In scholastic theology God’s omnipotence became the object of heated speculation about what God could and could not do—. In the name of the “all-powerful God” many injustices have been committed.

As a general rule we can say that God cannot do what goes against himself or against any of his attributes, like making another god. Nor can he do what he does not want to do. To put it metaphorically, his will trumps his actions.

It is important to point out that in Scripture God’s omnipotence is linked to creation, but not only to creation. It is also linked to the whole project of salvation, his mastery of the world, as well as to his justice and mercy.

“Being just yourself, you order all things justly, holding it unworthy of your power to condemn a man who has not deserved to be punished. Your justice has its source in strength, your sovereignty over all makes you lenient to all... You govern us with great leniency, for you have only to will, and your power is there.”

Ws 12:15-18.

“You are merciful to all because you can do all things.”

Ws 11:23.

God's power is not apparent only in his sovereignty; it is even more evident in his capacity to forgive. He is not all-powerful for the purpose of destroying and wiping out his enemy, but to forgive, to remake, to turn the enemy into a friend, the fugitive into a son. Because he is all-powerful, he is even capable of loving evildoers, those who do not believe in him, who do not obey him or recognize him. This is why the Gospel writers would later say that you should love your enemies in order to be a child of God. The powerful display their power by destroying. Titus lorded his power over the Jews by destroying the Temple of Jerusalem. God manifests his power not only by creating and restoring, but also by redeeming and saving.

Mt 5:43-45; Lk 6:27.

God is so all-powerful that he is capable of becoming a man in the Second Person of the Trinity, and in this way join himself to all people. Since God can do everything, he can lower himself and become a man. His omnipotence has to do with his creative, redeeming, sanctifying and glorifying action. God is all-powerful in all his works.

Ph 2:6.

For the New Testament, the idea of creation is grounded in God's Trinitarian dynamic, and the Church Fathers saw Jesus particularly linked, through his incarnation, to matter, time, space, and humanity. And the saving work that reaches its apex in Jesus starts with creation. Creation is the work of the Father through the Son, and for the Son. And inasmuch as it is for the Son, it is for all people.

Jn 1:1f; 1 Co 8:6.
Col 1:15-20.
Ep 1:1-4; Hb 1:1-8.

Cf 1 Co 8:6; Jn 1:3.

Activities

- Identify the features of the Israelite cosmovision for each of the following elements: God, humanity, world.
- Write the part of the Creed that corresponds to our reflections up to this point.

4.5 God is one and singular

We say that God is one in himself and of himself, because he cannot be divided into two or more persons. The same can be said of human beings, who form a whole in themselves and cannot be divided into two selves. The divine oneness is not divisible and cannot be shared. Thus the three divine Persons do not share divinity: each one possesses divinity in its fullness. Nor do they share their nature, essence and substance, or the Biblical attributes, because God is all an indivisible unity. He is a reality that is different from all the other realities that are grounded in him, but he is also reality. The difference lies in the fact that he is of himself and in himself, and outside of him there is nothing that exists of itself.

God's oneness is not like the ones that form the numbers two, three or four. It is a unique kind of oneness. God's oneness precludes the possibility of internal division, the derivation of gods, the multiplication and procreation of gods or semi-gods, in the pagan style. God's oneness is thus linked to God's singularity. Divine oneness is not about the number, because the immaterial is not quantitative. When we speak of one, what we mean to do is to deny any possibility of division,

and we are referring to something that is more qualitative.

Because God is one, he cannot be accompanied by another. He lives in the unity of the divine Persons, who are not like human Persons because they do not imply different, independent centers of consciousness, freedom, responsibility, vision, judgment and counsel. In God there is an essential unity, not a moral unity, although for us God is the foundation of all moral unity.

The oneness of life, thinking, consciousness, love, activity and being that exists among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the fundamental reason for our faith in God's oneness and singularity –essential oneness–. Jesus is God together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, but he is not another god.

The central point of the faith of the people of Israel was the singularity of God. All Israelites began their day by saying: *"Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one Yahweh."* God was not just one among others; he was the only one.

For Israel their faith in one God did not grow out of philosophical reflection or mathematical logic, and it did not require justifications. It was a question of faith. It was about making God the center of social, political, and above all personal life. Since there was only one God, people were to love him, listen to him, and serve him with all their heart, trust him and only him, without witchcraft or superstitions. Faith in the one and only God was a source of security, of freedom. —

Dt 32:39; Is 43:11;
44:6; 45:5-6, 18, 21.
Dt 6:4; 10:12f; 13:2f;
4:29.
Dt 18:10f.

This was more or less the message and call of the prophets—. The one God has made a covenant with you, and there is no divine power against you. If you practice magic, you do not believe with all your mind, nor do you love God with all your heart, because you should look for only God in everything, and trust in him above all else. Cf Dt 18:9f.

God's oneness is a basic article, the first in the faith of Israel, and in Christian faith as well. Jesus firmly believed in God's exclusive oneness: "*Because your Father in heaven is one,*" "*you must worship him alone.*" Jesus is to be worshipped and understood within the faith in one God. Christian faith is fully in line with the faith of the people of Israel and of Jesus himself, but it is the resurrection that brings to its fullness the revelation and the faith in the one, saving, Trinitarian God. Mk 12:29; Dt 6:4. Mt 23:9; Mt 4:10. Lk 4:2. Jn 17:22-23; 1 Tm 2:5.

"*God is one*" and "*there is no god but the One,*" said St. Paul. "*For us there is one God, the Father from whom all things come and for whom we exist; and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things come and through whom we exist.*" "*One Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, through all and within all.*" Ga 3:20; 1 Co 8:4. Ep 4:6.

Tertullian in the second century said that there cannot be two or more gods: "*Christian truth maintains that if God is not one, he does not exist,*" because there cannot be two infinities, or two beginnings, or two ultimate ends. Si non unus est, non est. Tertullian, Marc 1,3.

God is one because there is no other God, nor could one exist. But he is also one in his way of being and existing; he is not like other beings, nor does he exist the way everything else exists. He is the only three-person being; nothing besides God is three-person. For this reason all comparisons break down in some respects and are only partially useful.

Christians believe with all of their faith in the one God of the monotheistic religions, but thanks to the History of Salvation they also believe that this one God has approached human beings and revealed himself to be three persons, without ceding a scintilla of his oneness. And this one God continues to reveal himself to us, by giving everything in the Father, everything in the Son, and everything in the Holy Spirit, because the persons are not parts of God. Thus when he gives of himself to us in any one of the divine Persons, he gives of himself to us in the Three Persons.

Cf Augustine,
De Trin IX, 5,8.

God's unity is not the result of separate unities, nor is it some kind of compound or mixed unity, or an intentional or moral unity. The Father means the same life or nature, the same oneness, not however in a countable or numerical sense, but rather as distinct from the other persons. What is absolutely one cannot be counted because there is no other. If we maintain that God is one, he can no longer be an object of counting without falling into a contradiction, since there are no others.

All numbers, because they are multiple, relate to oneness, just as all things and persons, by being such, relate to the one God.

Divine oneness consists not only of the Father's being the origin of all that is created, but also of his being the origin of the divine persons, of the Son and Holy Spirit, who were not known as such in the Old Testament. In the Christian faith we profess one God because of what there is in common in God among the three persons. And because what there is in common is not "something," but God himself, we profess a single divine being. What is indivisible belongs to God; what is particular belongs to the persons of God.

Divine oneness is not destroyed, or divided, or denied when it is affirmed that there is one single Father, one single Son and one single communicable Spirit. The Divine Persons do not multiply when they communicate with people, nor does the Son of God when he incarnates.

References to the Trinity in divine oneness should not call up thoughts of some kind of unfolding, or of different manifestations of the same God, or of outer appearances or images or comparisons that could give rise to a modalist reflection—which posits that God is one but performs three different roles or presents himself in three different ways—.

Historically the people of Israel first became acquainted with one exclusive God, in the sense that he was their God, without affirming or denying that there might be others. Later, however,

they came to know him as one and only, denying the existence of any other, as in the preaching of the Old Testament prophets and later the Christian community. In the New Testament, however, believers know him as God in three persons. This does not mean priority of oneness over the Trinity, because the one and only God implies three persons always, and the three persons imply one and only God. God's oneness, inasmuch as it is equated with truth, love, and divine communication, already is Trinitarian oneness.

The revelation of the Trinity in God can be seen as an unexpected deepening of the divine unity and its communication. The divine persons are linked and related in such a way that the three make real—realize—divine oneness always and forever. Only when the New Testament has revealed to us the Trinitarian mystery can we find in the Old Testament some anticipations of the Trinity, but in a strict sense they lack apodictic value.

Note

When we say, for example, that "*the Father is God,*" we should by rights add, "*yes, together with the Son and the Holy Spirit,*" and the same goes for all of the three persons respectively, because as the one and only God, the three persons are distinct but not separable.

Activities

- Compare this exegesis of Tertullian's from the year 207 with a modern exegesis:

“If the number of the Trinity also offends you, as if it were not connected in the simple Unity, I ask you how it is possible for a Being who is merely and absolutely One and Singular, to speak in plural phrase, saying, ‘Let us make man in our own image, and after our own likeness’? Should he not have said, ‘Let me make man in my own image, and after my own likeness,’ since he is a unique and singular Being? In the following passage, however, ‘Behold the man has become as one of us,’ he is either deceiving or amusing us in speaking plurally, if He is One only and singular. Or was it to the angels that he spoke, as the Jews interpret the passage, because these also do not acknowledge the Son? Or was it because he was at once the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, that he spoke to himself in plural terms, making himself plural on that very account? Nay, it was because he had already his Son close at his side, as a second Person, his own Word, and a third Person also, the Spirit in the Word, that he purposely adopted the plural phrase, ‘Let us make,’ and ‘in our image,’ and ‘become as one of us.’ For with whom did he make man? And to whom did he make him like? The answer must be, the Son on the one hand, who was one day to put on human nature, and the Spirit on the other, who was to sanctify man. With these did he then speak, in the Unity of the Trinity, as with his ministers and witnesses.”

Gn 1:26.

Gn 3:22.

Tertullian,
Prax 12, 1-3.

- Misinterpreting divine oneness and singularity, some commentators have tried to set up an opposition between divine oneness and plurality, tolerance, democracy. The fact that God is one does not go against the plurality of created beings, diversity, multiplicity, tolerance... Why?

There are historical events that are associated or coincide, but that does not necessarily mean that they cause one another. Royalism, monarchy and totalitarianism may well have referred to monotheism in an attempt to justify themselves, but that does not make them right, just as the Trinity is no sure justification for trying to establish a certain kind of society, community or democracy. This serves to underscore a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the facts. God's singularity is first a revealed message and then a philosophical premise, meaning that it is not a question of changing philosophy in order to think about God in a different way. The issue should not focus on the opposition between one and multiple, but between the true God and idols, between the individual and the community –individualism against socialism–. Divine oneness is the presupposition and foundation of pluralism, and is related to everything that is intelligible and makes sense, including the multiplicity of human beings.

4.6 The God of Jesus

Cf Nb 15:32-36. Jesus did not believe in a God that was different from the God of his countrymen. He did not preach a new God; he preached the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, but understood in a new way, i.e., as the father of all people. In everything that Jesus said and did he was ultimately referring to the God of Israel.

In the end, his preaching and actions posed a radical problem: What is God like and what is

he not like? What does he do and what does he not do on behalf of people? At its deepest level, the fundamental question referred to God. Jesus was not a social or religious reformer. His announcement of the kingdom gave rise to a different, more profound understanding of God, and to a social and religious transformation that he did not directly intend. Jesus announced God's limitless love and mercy, which were already being poured out on his people. His way of understanding God and making him visible in his own personal actions led to his triumph and his death.

For Jesus, God was one and singular, and this was the Father. Only God was absolutely good and this was the Father.

Mt 23:9; 19:17. In the Gospel, God is called Father 170 times.

The only true God, source and origin of all reality and truth, of God's truth and revealed truth: this was "the Father." Jn 17:3.

The God whom Jesus Christ preached is his Father and the Father of all people. He is the God who makes the sun rise on bad men and good. He is the Father who feels special concern for his neediest children, even when they have behaved the worst. Mt 5:45. Lk 15:11f.

It is the same God of Israel, but understood in a different way, as one who uses love, service and forgiveness to do away with all differences among people. He pays no heed to natural boundaries between companions and non-companions, insiders and outsiders, friends and enemies, good and evil, and 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 excluded to invite them in, of the impious to attract them, of the immoral to transform them.

- Lk 15:11f. Jesus does not deny God's justice, but he puts more emphasis on his mercy,
- He does not deny the importance of sacrifices, but he puts more emphasis on reconciliation and love.
- Mt 12:7.
- He does not deny the transcendence of God, but he puts more emphasis on proximity.
- Mt 6:4; 6:18.
- He does not deny the importance of fasting and contrition, but he puts more emphasis on the joy of the Kingdom.
- Mt 6:16; Lk 15:7.
- He does not deny the value of sacrifice, but he puts more emphasis on the value of reconciliation.
- Mt 5:23.
- He prefers mercy to burnt offerings.
- Mt 9:13; 12:7;
Ho 6:6.
- He does not deny the importance of the law and obedience, but he puts more emphasis on the preeminence of the person.
- Mk 2:27; Mt 5:17.
- He does not deny that the first commandment is to love God, but he relates love of God to love for others.
- Mt 22:36; Lk 10:29f.
- He does not deny the value of observing the law, but he puts more emphasis on the importance of contrition.
- Lk 18:11f.
- He does not deny the value of the sacred, but he puts more emphasis on secular, everyday life.
- Mt 25:31f.
- He does not disparage the just, but he comes to call sinners.
- Mt 9:13; 18:12;
Lk 19:10.

- He does not take sin lightly, but he gives much more importance to love and mercy. Jn 8:3.

- For Jesus, the kingdom that he announced came from the Father: it was a new way of being and acting on the part of the Father, which demanded a new way of being and acting on our part. Mt 18:23f.

Jesus called the God of Israel “*his Father*” with surprising spontaneity and scandalous familiarity, and not only that, he also taught us to call him “*Father*” and he makes us feel that we really are his children. He undoubtedly linked his condition as Son with ours, although with some differences. Jn 20:17.

Faith in Jesus determined the decision to believe in the one true God with whom Jesus lived the deepest sort of relationship, understood at that time in biological terms of father and son; the relationship with the mother was not as deep, definitive and transcendent as the relationship with the father. The father was the one who gave his name to the child; the child was recognized with the name of the father. Jesus was “Bar Joseph” — Lk 6:13f. in Aramaic— “*son of Joseph*,” and Luke adds “*as it was thought*.” Lk 3:23; Jn 6:42.

The knowledge that Jesus has of God is not privileged knowledge of mysteries and hidden things; it is a knowledge from the realm of everyday life, and focused on action. It is knowledge that leads to trust, to gratitude: “*I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to* Mt 6:26; 7:11. Mt 11:25. Mt 4:10; 22:36; 25:34f. Mt 18:23f.

mere children,” to worship, love and serve, to love and forgive.

After the resurrection, it became impossible to speak of Jesus without speaking of this God as “*his Father,*” just as it is impossible to speak of God the Father without speaking of Jesus. The binomial Father-Son, with the Holy Spirit added shortly thereafter, was what constituted the Trinitarian mystery as originally revealed in its full substance in the act of salvation. Because God is good, in his love and mercy he revealed to us that in his innermost being, and without ceasing to be one in his oneness of life, love, devotion, generosity and happiness, he is with equal truthfulness the Father announced by Jesus, the Son of God made son of man for our salvation, and the Holy Spirit that incorporates us definitively into God’s life.

The personal relationship with Jesus determines how people behave in the presence of God; what kind of idea they have of him; in short, just who their God is: the God announced by Jesus or some other God in whom they place their trust.

Together with a new understanding of God comes a new idea of God’s will. According to Jewish thinking and the conscience of religious people in Jesus’ times, what God expected of people was primarily to keep the commandments, follow ritual prescriptions, observe the Sabbath, and fulfill the precepts regarding purification, food, worship and sacrifices. Jesus did not reject this way of understanding God’s will, but he did not identify with it or consider it fundamental.

Although the fulfillment of God's will was the key theme in Jesus' preaching, he did not bother to describe it or define it. For Jesus, God's will was something to be discovered gradually over a lifetime in a person's innermost being, in the heart. Conscience was the deepest root of obligation, and prayer was the way to discover what God was asking in each moment.

God's will was identified with the question 'What does God expect of me right now?' It is about responding to a concrete situation and giving a prompt and responsible answer; it is not about abstract, theoretical thinking.

For Jesus, God's will consists, in general terms, of fulfilling the commandments; in that sense he concurs with his contemporaries' point of view. But he has a special way of understanding God's will, and fulfilling the commandments is just a first step. In a more fundamental way, God's will consists of the coming of the Kingdom and its acceptance on the part of people, which necessarily implies the acceptance of, and faith in, his message and his person for the proclamation of the Kingdom. Mt 19:17.
Mk 1:17.

In the final analysis, Jesus sees God's will as total good for humanity and all human beings. He equates it with justice, well-being, progress, health, virtue and holiness. In this sense, people are called to be as good as God is, and to love and forgive as much as God does. Jesus' vision of humanity is an open vision, not tied down to a nation or a culture, or to a certain time and place. It is a vision as open as love. Tradition for tradi- Mt 7:12.

Mk 7:8. tion's sake ends up enslaving people. Holiness for
 Mt 5:20. Jesus is not an exquisite personal quality; in this
 life it a genuine commitment to others, with pref-
 Mt 25:31f. erence given to the neediest; and in eternal life, it
 Jn 17:24f. is insertion into the life of God.

His way of understanding and interpreting
 God's will ran counter to the Pharisees'. *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."*
 Mk 2:27. He reduces the law and all its observances
 to humanity, not humanity to the law. This clearly
 shows that his interest centered on human beings,
 not on institutions, rituals or worship. For Jesus,
 God's will was about recognizing God not so much
 through worship, Sabbath or the Temple, as through
 openness to others and the willingness to love them
 as brothers and sisters. For Jesus, people were more
 important than the Sabbath and anything else outside
 of God. God's will consisted, as Irenaeus would later
 say, *"of the overall progress of the living man"* and
 specifically divine action consisted of *"the configuration
 of man in Jesus' likeness."* In the mind of Jesus,
 the most important thing for the Father is human
 beings; all other things are subordinated to them.
 Adv Haer IV 20,4;
 V, 15,1.

Next to love of God, Jesus puts love of neighbor:
 a love that is free to create, to consider, to decide
 and transform. In Jesus' point of view, what God
 Lk 10:25-37. wants is for people to treat others as they know
 they are treated by God. Motivated by love for
 others, people can and should, if necessary, give
 up their rights and privileges.

Jesus is not concerned with looking like a saint;
 in fact, he does not even care if he looks like the

opposite. He keeps company with publicans and sinners, he does not always observe the Sabbath, he speaks with Samaritans, he does not condemn but rather defends the women caught committing adultery, and he consorts with disreputable people. For Jesus, God's perfection consists of his love and mercy. Looking holy was not one of Jesus' aims. He tells his disciples to exceed the holiness of the scribes and Pharisees, which consisted of observing divine laws and human precepts. Jesus equated holiness or "justice" with interest, love and service to others, especially the neediest, in the proclamation of the Kingdom.

Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34.

Mt 9:13; Rm 11:32;
Mt 5:48.

Mt 5:20.

Mt 25:31f; Jn 15:8.

The Gospel is not an ascetic method or system to attain the Kingdom. It is the announcement of the Kingdom that is already present and, consequently, people are to live according to what is proclaimed in the Kingdom. To be sure, Jesus asks us to be perfect "*just as your heavenly Father is perfect*," but Jesus understood perfection not the way the Pharisees did, as strict observance of precepts, rituals and customs, nor the Greek way, in which perfection was equivalent to well done, but rather the way he himself lived perfection. This is how St. Luke understands and explains it in the corresponding verse in his Gospel: You will be perfect with God's perfection, when you are compassionate with God's compassion: "*as your father is compassionate*." For lack of such compassion the unforgiving debtor is rebuked, while the Samaritan is praised for being compassionate.

Mt 5:48.

Mt 9:13; 12:7.

Lk 6:36.

Mt 18:32f.
Lk 10:33.

Mt 5:20. For Jesus, holiness is not a question of morality or ritual; it is about communion with God. Now we can say, on the basis of his message, that holiness is the presence and action of the Triune God in the just individual, and at the same time it is the presence and action of the just individual in and for the Triune God. Holiness is about being in tune with God.

For Jesus, God is mindful of people's merits and expects good works, but he does so as a loving Father, not as an overlord demanding his due. He could be compared to a doctor who cures and cares for his patient as if it were his own child. For Jesus, God is his Father and the father of all people.

From a historical perspective, it does not seem that Jesus made any distinction between his filiation and ours. The distinction was made by the Apostles and the early Church to emphasize that Jesus is the First-Born, the Only Begotten, the beloved Son, the Messiah, and that we are children in the Son, in communion with him, through his grace and merits, and participating in his fullness.

Jn 17:26; 1:16.

Activities

- On a piece of paper, write down the characteristics of Jesus' image of God the Father that have had the greatest impact on you.
- Write down two or three characteristics of God the Father that seem somewhat forgotten in today's world.

4.7 Faith and following

Through his words and deeds, his death and resurrection, Jesus revealed the substantial meaning of faith; subsequent expressions and explanations serve to emphasize some aspect of the content of revelation.

The Synoptics, St. John and St. Paul, and all the authors of the New Testament are “*ministers of the word*” that Jesus proclaimed and carried out. The Trinitarian mystery was originally revealed to us in the person, word and actions of Jesus, thus the importance of following in order to have a precise understanding of the person of Jesus, and through him, of the person of the Father and the person of the Holy Spirit. Faith in Jesus Christ gives rise to faith in the Trinitarian God, and Christology is the shortest path to the Trinity. The sacred writers are transmitters, interpreters and translators of a tradition that goes back to Jesus himself, obviously not in terms of the dogmatic formulation that we know now, but certainly in terms of its foundations. Theological formulations are not, as such, objects of faith; they are an attempt to express and explain in an accessible way the saving event that took place “*once and for all*” in Christ.

Lk 1:2.

Cf Hb 9:12,26.

It is important to distinguish between faith in the Trinity and the explanation of that faith. Saying that God is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is faith; saying that he is one nature and three hypostases is an explanation of the faith. Even when the essence of revelation and faith is immutable, the theological interpretation can and

should move forward steadily. No theological statement exhausts the content of faith, but the original attempts have a predominant value because they are the source of all other reflection.

Jn 1:1.
2 Th 2:6. The more we know, love and follow Jesus, the more we open ourselves to the mystery of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The doctrine on the Trinity tries to teach us by inviting us to believe who Jesus was from "*the beginning*," who he was in his earthly life and who he will be until "*the end of time*" and at "*the end of time*."

The Trinitarian Mystery is the exceptional way to highlight the eternal meaning of Jesus' human condition, of his life, his message, his suffering, his death and resurrection, of his relationship with his followers, those who believe in him and make up the Church, as well as those who place their hope in him. And through his saving action we come to know God in himself with complete truth, as revealed in Jesus Christ.

The foundation for Jesus' filial relationship and his divine condition is not biological or genetic; it involves his whole personal being. Thus in order to know to what degree Jesus is God, the whole Gospel is needed, as well as a personal encounter with him in the act of following. Those who do not follow Jesus, or who think of him only as a prophet, have no need to believe in the Trinitarian mystery. The Trinitarian faith is the culmination of following, of faith and of participation in the mystery of the risen Jesus. With the word "culmination" we wish to express how far our faith in Jesus goes and how we con-

ceive of him in the mystery of God. We do not believe there is anything greater than saying he is God with the Father, “*consubstantial*,” “*seated at his right hand*” and that he is “*The Son*.” The Trinitarian mystery is the culmination not only of Christology but also of Christian anthropology, inasmuch as it gives us the ultimate explanation of the meaning of our lives and of God’s project for each and every human being.

The disciples were characterized by following Jesus, by having shared his life and by having seen his glory... The disciples not only accepted his message by believing what he said; not only did they believe Jesus, they did much more than that: they believed IN Jesus, which means complete trust, total abandonment and turning themselves over to him. And Jesus taught them not only during his lifetime, but also, primarily, WITH his life. In the time they shared together he gradually made them authentic Christians. For all these reasons, the most important and definitive element for following Jesus was not the doctrine, or the morality, or his expectations, but his very person. They believed in Jesus, not only or exclusively in what Jesus said and did. Their following was focused on his person and his mission.

Jn 1:14; 17:5f.
Cf Ex 24:16; 33:20.

The Gospel writers did not concern themselves with the ontology of Christ; they cared more about his function as the revealer of the Father, and of Jesus as the path for coming to him, of Jesus as Messiah and Teacher, God’s envoy and Son of the Eternal Father. Explaining how this was possible

was a task that the early Church took up. Faith in Jesus led the disciples and the early Christian community to faith in the Trinity, which is why the Apostolic preaching and the Gospels cannot be understood except in Trinitarian code.

For the disciples, the experience of following Jesus during his public life was invaluable, and it was linked to faith in the Risen Lord, because this Jesus was the long-awaited prophet who was to come in the end times. Jesus' divine nature cannot be established with ultimate certainty: neither his words nor his miracles nor his figure provide absolutely convincing evidence. It is the discovery in him of "*the image of the unseen God*" that leads a believer to follow him, in faith.

Truly following Jesus occurs in the context of faith in the risen Jesus, and his disciples do not really come to know him until after the resurrection. Their first knowledge and following of Jesus was incomplete, sense-based; the second time around is based on the complete truth.

Those who do not follow Jesus on the road of faith traveled by his disciples do not really follow him... They do not believe in him, even though they may admire him for his heroism, his message or his sacrifice.

The disciples first, and subsequently Christendom, are not just a group of people who have congregated around Jesus. They have profoundly reconfigured their lives on account of him, his teachings, his hope, his faith, and his love. For them, and for us, what Jesus said and did made

apparent what God was, and is. But the sense and meaning of his message was not limited to his words and deeds: these germinated like a seed to be better understood in the future. The Trinitarian message in its deepest sense is the soul of the proclamation of the Kingdom: it synthesizes Jesus' message and summarizes Christian faith.

Jn 13:7; 16:12-15;
Lk 18:34.

Tertullian believed that Jesus' doctrine focused on affirming that the Father and the Son are two—persons— but inseparable. Benedict XVI also focuses Jesus' message on his relationship with his Father: *"We will see above all that Jesus always speaks as the Son, that the relation between Father and Son is always present as the background of his message."*

Immo totum erat
hoc quod docebat,
inseparatos duos
esse. Prax 22,2.

Jesus of Nazareth,
Chap 3, p. 63.

We are not saying that Jesus revealed the Trinitarian mystery as such, but that Trinitarian faith serves to shed light on who Jesus was and who he is in the overall revelation.

Jesus' divine condition was not apparent during his historical life, which is why very different interpretations arose among those who had contact with him. He was even taken for a madman, possessed by demons, and for this reason Paul states that *"no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' unless he is moved by the Holy Spirit."* At the same time he objects to any faith in Jesus that moves too far away from the earthly Jesus. The unity of the two is not to be found at the level of concepts: *"according to the flesh"* or *"according to the Spirit,"* between life and resurrection, God and man, human nature and divine nature, earthly and heavenly, but in the oneness of his singular personal

Mk 3:21; Jn 7:5;
10:20; 7:20.

1 Co 12:3.
Cf 1 Co 12:3.

Cf Rm 1:3f.
2 Co 5:16.

being, which is the same in his temporal being as in his glorious —eternal— being.

The Trinitarian mystery also speaks to us of our union with Jesus Christ inasmuch as his Spirit makes following and discernment possible in the present moment. This is why Jesus tells his disciples, breathing on them and alluding explicitly to the Trinity: *“As the Father sent me, so am I sending you; receive the Holy Spirit.”* The Holy Spirit comes to link us to Christ so that we can be sent by him as he is sent by the Father.

The apostles and disciples preach Jesus not as an exclusively historical event that ended with his death, but as a being who lives and acts in them, whom they now follow but in a different way, including martyrdom, and with different horizons, no longer exclusively Jewish, but universal.

Jn 20:21-22.
Mk 16:19-20.
Jn 21:19,22.
Mk 16:15; 13:10.
Mt 28:18-20.

In the disciples, the Church is interpreted and typified as the original community of believers of and in Jesus. The disciples became more faithful followers of Jesus when they found out that they not only were following Jesus of Nazareth, but also their “Lord and Messiah.” Now the Church is us, but in the unity of the faith of the disciples.

Although the faith experienced in Christian life came before the faith expressed in a creed, faith experienced today should conform to the faith as expressed in the Church’s sentiments, because the fact is that we are not the first to follow Jesus or to believe in the Trinity. In baptism we were consecrated to the Triune God, and we receive and express our faith from the Church, in the

Church and with the Church. We can say, and with reason, that faith in the Trinity emerges from the Church, although it is grounded in Jesus' message, in its meaning and value, and in the action of his Spirit.

Activities

- What would be more important to you: to believe Christ, or to believe in Christ?
- What came first for the disciples?
- Why do you think the disciples prefigure the Church?
- What text from the Gospels underscores the fact that the disciples' mission also has a Trinitarian perspective? And why?

4.8 Faith in Jesus after the resurrection

God's truth is communicated, becomes verifiable and is revealed in a special way in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. In the Trinitarian mystery, the resurrection takes on special importance; we can truthfully say that we believe in the three-person God because of the resurrection, because it "*constituted Jesus as Son of God*," and the Spirit that has been sent to us is the Spirit of Jesus communicated through his resurrection.

Rm 1:4; 8:29; 9:5.
Jn 20:22.

The resurrection is not only a constituent, definitive, special and central part of Christian faith, it is also the core topic of apostolic preaching. Without it, Jesus' life, message, passion and death have no theological meaning and Jesus would become simply one more victim of human wickedness.

1 Co 15: 14,17.

The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead means that he was taken up to God himself. The fact that he was seated at God's right hand means that he was introduced into God's eternal life and being, that together with God he has dignity and power, and that the Father's glory is literally and fully the same as the Son's, i.e., Jesus of Nazareth. And for this reason Jesus is endowed with universal, eternal lordship. But his lordship is a metaphor: he is not a lord in the way of the caesars or emperors; he is the Son of God – a crucified servant – who lived a life like ours in every way except sin, who calls us to follow him, which includes participating in his death, resurrection and glory.

Ac 2:31,36; 3:18,20;
2:30; 13:22,23;
3:13,26; 4:27,30;
2:36; 10:36; 3:15;
5:31; 5:31; 13:23;
3:14; 3:22; 13:33.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus is given different titles: Messiah or Christ, Descendant of David, Servant, Lord; Prince of Life, Savior, Prophet; Holy One and Just One; Son of God. Practically all the titles that refer to Jesus allude somehow to his resurrection. They are titles attributed to Jesus; Jesus does not attribute these titles to himself.

Following their Biblical culture, the disciples and early believers look there for the best titles, and are especially partial to "*Christ*" –Messiah—and "*Lord*." The title of "*Son of God*" is particularly associated with his messianic mission. The title of "*Lord*" alludes to God's sovereignty and according to the Bible of the Seventy that they read, it translates the name of Yahweh himself. Somewhat later this title would come to express Jesus' divine character.

Jesus did not intend to start a new religion different from that of the people of Israel; he simply wanted to take it to its fullness and fulfillment with the proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven. It was the resurrection that transformed history and led the apostles to give Jesus a whole array of Biblical titles and to think of Jesus in different categories. St. Paul writes:

*“From Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ who has been called to be an apostle,
And specially chosen to preach the Good News that God promised long ago through his prophets in the scriptures.*

This news is about the Son of God who, according to the human nature he took, was a descendant of David; it is about Jesus Christ our Lord who in the order of the spirit of holiness was proclaimed Son of God in all his power through his resurrection from the dead. Through him we received grace and our apostolic mission” —the mission to proclaim the Gospel—.

Rm 1:1-4.
Cf Ac 2:24.

The Messiahship and divine filiation are professed openly after the resurrection and projected retroactively to the temporal and eternal Jesus. With Jesus' lordship, God's definitive and eternal reign has begun. And God's Image as visualized and projected in the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus is the image of the true God, the God of truth, of God as he is in himself.

Hebrews place great importance on the end. Everything becomes what it fully is at the end. In a certain sense, the end is contained in the beginning, but it is not known completely until the end.

It is not that the end is in opposition to the beginning; rather it will complete the beginning and bring it to fullness. In this way, no created reality is known completely until its end is known.

Lk 6:44; Mt 21:43. The eschatological conception of being, in the Hebrew mindset, maintains that the end reveals reality better than the beginning, and that only in the light of the end can the beginning truly be known. *“Every tree can be told by its own fruit”*; the beginning must be interpreted in the light of the end. Thus it is not until the end, the death and resurrection, that we know who Jesus was from the beginning. *“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he.”*

This is what makes the resurrection such a foundational and central element, more than just the revelation of Jesus’ divine condition: it is only in the light of the resurrection and through the resurrection that we come to know who Jesus is from the beginning. The resurrection becomes the central, specific point of Jesus’ message, which does not attempt to be an improvement on Platonic philosophy, or a morality that surpasses the Stoics’ or the Jews’ —with their 248 precepts and 365 prohibitions— but rather the proclamation of a person who concentrates everything that is good in human cultures and transforms it into a personal relation with himself.

Jn 20:17; 8:42; 16:27-28; 17:8. Cf 1 Th 5:21. If we look at the incarnation as a coming down, that would make the resurrection a going up, as the Evangelist visualizes it when he writes: *“I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”*

The resurrection gives Jesus the fullness of life, which he communicates to us not only in order to live our life on earth: he will also communicate it to us so that we can enjoy eternal life with him at the Father's side. If he gave his life, it was to receive it again and to communicate it abundantly to all who believe in him. Jesus was raised as God's Only-Begotten Son, because he was God's Son, and because the Father himself raised him. Jesus' resurrection is not directly attributed to the Holy Spirit, unlike in the case of Christians, for whom the Spirit is the principle of resurrection and the pledge of eternal inheritance.

Jn 1:4; 3:36;
1 Jn 1:1f; 6:58;
10:28.

Jn 10:17f.

Jn 4:14; 5:26;
6:35, 47, 51, 57;
10:10; 1 Jn 5:12.
Ac 2:24, 32, 36;
3:13,17; 4:10; 5:31;
10:39-40; 13:27,30;
17:31; Rm 1:4; 6:4.
Rm 8:16-17.
Ep 1:14.

The question that the Gospel writers pose takes on much greater urgency after the resurrection: Who is this Jesus whom men crucified and God raised up? What does it mean for us that he now lives with a different, new life, but at the same time, with that same life, among us? The answer takes many forms. If Jesus has been raised, it is not an exception or an isolated case; he is "*the first fruits*" and "*the first-born of the dead*," who will also be raised, and "*the first-born of all creation*," inasmuch as the kingdom that he proclaimed has been fulfilled. He is the fulfillment of all God's promises; he is God's "Yes". The risen Jesus becomes the foundation of the new community and communicates God's Spirit that he himself possessed and promised. From then on they await the second coming and the community becomes "*the new Israel of God*" because the new life, the life of the Spirit, is already apparent in them. The Church undergoes a certain tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet.' Already, because Jesus

1 Co 15:20; Col 1:18.

2 Co 1:20.

Ga 6:16.

has brought us the Kingdom of Heaven in all its splendor; not yet, because its fullness will be in eternal life.

Thinking about, and believing in, the Trinitarian God means placing ourselves in the center of the Paschal message proclaimed as the core of the apostolic preaching.

- As for the Holy Spirit, the early Church believed that the Spirit could come down onto the apostles and disciples only after the resurrection,
- Jn 7:39. • because before that Jesus had it in its fullness,
 - Jn 16:7. • because Jesus sends it from the place of the Father,
 - Jn 14:16; 14:26. • and the Father sends it, at Christ's request,
 - Jn 16:13; 20:22. • because it comes as the representative —vicar— of Christ himself,
 - and leads us to a mature Christian faith, and to God,
 - Jn 20:22-23; Mt 10:20. • and makes it possible to carry out the mission that Jesus has entrusted to us.

The sending of the Holy Spirit is a consequence of Jesus' resurrection and ascension. For Paul, the reception of the Holy Spirit is something that is experienced; he asks the Galatians: "*Let me ask you one question: was it because you practiced the Law that you received the Spirit, or because you believed what was preached to you?*" The proclamation of the Gospel was based on the action of the Spirit. But what is proper to the Spirit is not the extraordinary, but the ordinary: to enable us to follow Jesus in our everyday lives.

The parousia of the “*last days*” is related to, and makes itself evident in, the reception of the Holy Spirit that Christians are already experiencing. As Peter puts it in his address to the crowd: “*In the days to come —it is the Lord who speaks—I will pour out my spirit on all mankind. Their sons and daughters shall professy.*” Ac 2:17; Jl 3:1.

The early Christians, and to a certain extent the whole people of Israel, do not think about the resurrection as isolated from individuals; for them, the destiny of one is the destiny of all. If Jesus has been raised, it is because the Kingdom of Heaven has come, through his person and in his person. St. Paul always thinks about the risen Jesus associated with all the people he came to save, and we are included in the destiny of the risen Jesus. Rm 5:12-21; 1 Co 15:12; Rm 8:29; Col 1:18f; Ga 6:15.

The starting point of the Trinitarian Mystery is our Lord’s resurrection and the faith of the early Church. Whoever does not believe in Jesus as the “*Son of God*” in the transcendent sense, and in the value of his message as proclaimed by the Church, has no reason or purpose to believe in the Triune God.

We cannot deny that our understanding of God has changed with the resurrection of Jesus, which serves to endorse his person and his message. After the resurrection we can state that God, without ceasing to be one, is also three persons: he is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All of God was revealed to us in the person of Jesus. Now we can say something not only about the divine persons, but also about their way of being, and their way of being eternal. What we

know with the greatest clarity about God— what he is like and what he is not like, how he wants to be treated and how he wants to treat us, what he means and how his way of being impacts our own life— we know all this and much more exclusively through Jesus of Nazareth, raised from the dead.

The resurrection has a special relationship with our own salvation, not only as redemption and justification, but also as glorification and communion with God, i.e., as insertion into Trinitarian life. We can state that the Trinitarian mystery is none other than the mystery of our salvation effected in Christ, our Lord, and that the History of Salvation, which takes place in time, is Trinitarian in itself, as we will see below.

N.B.

Before Jesus' resurrection and glorification, the Trinitarian texts can be interpreted in terms of messianic adoption, like those dealing with baptism and those found in the Synoptics; there are exegetes who think that such is the Christology of one of the evangelists, such as Mark. In the early Church, however, it was the Trinitarian faith, rather than the adoptionist vision, that was taken as the authentic interpretation of Jesus' message.

- Mt 28:19. Baptizing in the name of the three divine persons is not seen by most exegetes as having been taught by Jesus; rather it was the most common practice, although not the only one, in the early Church.
- Ac 8:16.

Activities

- Of the titles given to Jesus in the early Church, which three are the most meaningful for you?

- Transcribe the text Ac 2:14-40 and insert the following subtitles:

1. You, the Jews, killed Jesus,
2. It was foretold,
3. God called him to life,
4. With a new function,
5. In accordance with Scripture,
6. We are witnesses,
7. Convert, because “salvation is to be found in him.”

- Notice that this same structure is repeated in Ac 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43 and 13:16-41.

- A prayer:

Show compassion, Lord,
for those who do not believe in God as Father,
for those who do not believe that he loves them,
for those who do not know and love Jesus Christ,
for those of us who do love him and live as if we did not,
for those of us who do not let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit,
for those who persecute the Church,
for those who do not love their neighbors or exploit them,
for those of us who do not share what we have,
for us sinners.

“May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, give us a spirit of wisdom and perception Ep 1:17-18.

of what is revealed, to bring us to full knowledge of him. May he enlighten the eyes of our mind.”

CHAPTER V

JESUS' FATHER AND OUR FATHER

Objective: To understand the characteristics of God's fatherhood as they relate to Jesus and to us.

5.1 God in the Old Testament

Christian believe in God as a being who is one, true and living being, and we also believe that his oneness, truth and life have been revealed to us completely and definitively in Jesus Christ. Through our faith in him —more than through his doctrine, although our faith is grounded in Jesus' person, teaching, life and resurrection—we know that in God there are three Persons, not independent but distinct, not isolated but in vital communication; life, oneness and truth belong to the three divine Persons. It is one single life, oneness and truth fully possessed by each one of the divine Persons.

Why is it that the word *Father* suits God the best?

Gn 2:7; Ez 37:9.
Jn 20:22.

Life itself and the origin of life come totally and absolutely from the God that we call Father, due to the similarity to our life experience. The words *father* and *mother* establish a special relationship with life. Life and the origin of life come totally and absolutely from God. The origin of life, inasmuch as it proceeds from the Son, Jesus Christ, and from the Father, and since it is life for humankind, has been called since the earliest times breath, spirit, because breathing in and out were palpable signs of life.

God's fatherhood is a vital link between God's way of being and people's: what belongs to the Father is shared with humanity. It refers to a giving of himself, which is why we call it fatherhood. It is an essential characteristic of the Father that he communicates his life to the Son.

We say that the Father communicates fully and thus "begets" a being who proceeds from him, but is distinct from him; we call this being the Son. The difference between creating and begetting lies in the personal father-son relationship; the generation of the Son Jesus Christ is eternal and unique; creation is time-bound, of time and in time.

God is the Creator, as the origin of everything, but he is also the Father. Jesus is the Creator in the sense of being a living and life-giving presence, personal and personalizing, due to his identity as the Son. Human beings who receive their condition as creatures and Children of God the Father through Jesus are beings moved by

the Spirit, led to the Son in order to encounter the Father.

We might ask the question: What is essential to God as Father? And the answer could be formulated as follows:

- + It is the Father's essence to be the source and origin of absolutely everything, except himself — not begotten.

- + To be the beginning and the end of his ongoing, paternal action toward Jesus as the Only Son. The Father is forever and continually begetting his Son. We call him Father inasmuch as he gives life to his Son, and through him and in him, to all of humankind.

- + He is not only the foundation of visible reality but also— primarily— the Loving Father of rebellious children. Lk 15:11f; Jr 3:4.

- + As Father and creator he is the origin of everything that exists and the source of all love.

- + As Father he is the wellspring of the pouring out of his Spirit of life and holiness, which he gives in all its Fullness to his beloved Son.

- + As Father and together with Jesus, his Son, he gives us his Spirit, which is the strength and life of both bestowed on humanity. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in human beings, and this presence is not a part of God; it is God in his entirety, the only God, which is the Holy Trinity, communicated to us by the Holy Spirit.

5.2 Father of Jesus

The fact that God is Jesus' Father, in a highly exclusive sense, is not an obstacle; on the con-

trary, it enables God to reveal and communicate himself to us through his Son. Within the Trinity as well, the Father makes himself known and projects himself in his Son. And the One God is also the Son inasmuch as he receives life from the Father, and that life of God, of the Father and the Son, also comes to us human beings, because it is communicated to us through the Holy Spirit.

God is Jesus' Father in an intradivine way, and also in an in-this-world and historical way. But he is also Father of all human beings, not just inasmuch as he created us, as we have seen, but because he has joined us to Jesus, his Son, making us his children in his Son.

Ga 4:6; Rm 8:29.
Ga 2:6.

For St. Paul, what characterizes God is being the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. There is no greater or more wonderful fatherhood than that of the Father with respect to Jesus. *"I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family takes its name,"* wrote St. Paul.

Col 1:3; Ep 1:3, 17.
Ep 3:15.

St. John tells us that *"God is love"* and this term is applied to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; but in a special way, —as origin and source, and in the sense of enablement, making possible, driving, fulfilling— it epitomizes the Father, whose love is directly in the first place directed to *"his beloved Son."* In St. John's Gospel, the Father's love for Jesus is the prototype of his love for all of Jesus' followers: *"so that the love with which you loved me may be in them."*

1 Jn 4:8.
Mk 1:9-11; 9:7; 12:6;
Mt 11:25-30; Is 42:1;
Jn 10:17; 5:20; 3:35.
Jn 17:23, 26.

The greatest sign of God's love, St. John tells us, consists of the fact that *"God's love was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son."* 1 Jn 4:9; Jn 3: 16.

To us, *"he has created a place in the kingdom of the Son that he loves."*

St. John of the Cross writes in his mystical poetry:

*Whoever gives his love to you, my Son,
to him I give myself,
and him I fill
with the love I feel for you
just for making you beloved,
my Beloved.*

Romance on the Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word."

St. Irenaeus in the 2nd century said that *"by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father,"* and that *"God is Father in respect of his love."* Adv Haer V, 16,2. Adv Haer V, 17,1. Qui secundum dilectionem quidem Pater est.

In the Old and New Testaments, what characterizes the Father is love, and with love, care, providence, pedagogy, fidelity, inconditionality and compassion. It is unfortunate that we associate the idea of God the Father with some kind of craving for cruel sacrifices, even though the Scriptures themselves tell us, *"What I want is mercy, not sacrifices,"* and mercy characterizes him as a God who loves and forgives, beyond all reason, it would seem. Ho 6:6; Mt 9:13; 12:7; Lk 1:78. Cf Lk 15:13; Is 54:8; Jr 33:26; Lm 3:32; Jl 2:13.

For Jesus, God is a Father who is full of love and compassion: *"Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate."* *"Give glory to God for his mercy,"* said St. Paul to the Romans. Lk 6:36. Rm 15:9.

It is common to hear that Jesus is the Son of God “by nature” because it belongs to the Father’s divine nature to communicate himself fully to the Son, and it corresponds to the divine nature of the Son to be the Father’s total expression. “*To have seen me is to have seen the Father.*” By calling Jesus the Son of God by nature, we distinguish his sonship from filiation by adoption, or legal filiation. His natural sonship does not refer to the physical order of human sexuality, but to divine nature, as a way of saying that it is natural for God to communicate within the Trinity, and also to communicate with what is not God, through his Son and his Spirit.

Jn 14:8.

God’s main attribute as Father is his communication. He does this in one special way with the Son and the Spirit, and in multiple ways, through his Son and the Spirit, with all of creation. The Father is the starting point of the Trinity. Christian monotheism looks at God the Father as the one and only starting point of the Trinity and of the world.

The Church tries to formulate its faith with precision, and it reserves the title of Father for the first person of the Trinity. When the language was still not clearly defined, the Church fathers also gave the Son and the Holy Spirit the title of Father, but in a metaphorical sense and only with respect to humanity.

Mt 23:9; DS 125.

God, as Father, is the logical (but not temporal) starting point, not only of all creation, but of the Trinity itself; this is why the Son and the Holy Spirit proceed from him. And he is also the start-

Augustine, De Trin
IV, 20,29.

ing point of all his attributes, such as love, mercy, holiness, oneness and singularity. Divine oneness is not a result of his relationships, as certain expressions would seem to suggest: “the divine persons love each other, understand each other, compenetrates each other and unite so deeply that they form a single God.” Divine oneness is not a consequence, or a result, of psychological relations; it is simultaneity of reality, existence and eternal life. At the same time, or eternally, one and three. As he was called “Ipsum esse subsistens,” we can call him “Ipsum unum per se”: oneness in itself, as he is being itself existing by and of itself.

Activities

- Read the following text as a kind of prayer.

I also call upon you, “Lord God of Abraham, and God of Isaac, and God of Jacob and Israel,” who are the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who, through the abundance of your mercy, have shown favor to us, that we should know you, who made heaven and earth, who rule over all, who are the only and the true God, above whom there is no other God; grant, by our Lord Jesus Christ, the governing power of the Holy Spirit; give to every reader of this book to know you, that you are God alone, to be strengthened in you, and to avoid every heretical, and godless, and impious doctrine.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer III, 6,4.

- Research exegetically the meaning of: “*The Father and I are —a single entity— one.*” Why? In what? What is the meaning? Physical, metaphysical, moral, spiritual?

Jn 10:30.

Make use of the texts listed below. “*The Father and I are one.*”

- Unity of thought, harmony, desires, action, not in a metaphysical sense because even men are called gods: —as cited by Jesus—, on account of being commissioned to look out for the good of the people.
- Ps 82:6
- Jn 10:30. “We are one.” Compare with “*that they may be one as we are one.*” We can be one through oneness of feelings, of objectives, of actions, of faith, of hope and love, not in terms of substantial unity. The divine persons, each one, are the same, but not the same person.
- Jn 17:21-22.
- Cf Dz-H 806.
- Jn 10:30. John puts these words in Jesus’ mouth: “*The Father and I are one (en).*” Notice that Jesus does not say The Father and I are numerically one (*eis*), but that we are together —*en*, in Greek; this idea appears later in John: “*the Father is in me and I am in the Father*”—. The union of the Father and the Son does not cancel difference and particularity. On the contrary, union presupposes difference. Through love and reciprocal communion they are a single reality, the one God-love. The Holy Spirit is also always together with them because it is the Spirit of the Son, because it reveals the Father to us in prayer, because it issues from the Father, at the Son’s request.
- Ga 4:6; Rm 8:9.
- Cf Rm 8:16.
- Jn 15:26; Jn 14:16.

5.3 What it means that God is our Father

Calling God “Father” is characteristic of Christian life. Jesus not only called God his “Abba”; he also taught us to address him the same way. He said that God loved us as little children, that he

took us by the hand, cared for us and raised us, that we were under his watchful eye at all times. Mt 6:25-32; 7:7-11. For Jesus, God's fatherhood is an essential element of the proclamation of the Kingdom, and he understands it in a real sense —true father—not in a metaphorical sense, as with the images of shepherd, judge, rock, shield.

From the proclamation of the Kingdom it follows that we are to recognize and accept ourselves as God's children, to approach God as our Father, and all people as brothers and sisters to the point of forgiveness, if necessary. Believing that God is our Father means believing in his love for each one of us. Love is the feeling that binds us most closely to God, and anyone who lives a life of brotherly love, of human love, is living in God. Augustine said, *"You see the Trinity if you see love."* Between love and God's fatherhood there is a kind of equivalence, because God is Father due to his love for Jesus, and in him, for all people and creation itself. *"God so loved the world."* Here *world* means the sum total of all human beings; the message becomes even more personalized when John tells us that the purpose of Jesus' being sent was *"so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost."* Cf Augustine, De Trin IV, 1,2. De Trin VIII, 8, 12. Jn 3:16.

Having God as our Father means that we should live in the freedom of the children of God. The children's freedom is contrasted with the obligations of the servant and the slave; freedom with respect to the law, to sin, in an ongoing attitude of discernment to find what is most pleasing to God. Jn 8:36f. Mt 21:28f.

We should live God's life, in faith, confidence and love, as children, because children are a projection of their Father. As Jesus said, *"Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate,"* and we should forgive as we were forgiven. God's way of acting is not just an example, but an imperative for his children: we are to act as he does. *"Since God has loved us so much, we too should love one another."* God's circle of love is closed not only by loving him, but also by loving others. Paul tells us, *"Try to imitate God, as children of his that he loves."*

Lk 6:36.
Mk 11:25; Mt 18:23f.
Mt 6:14.
1 Jn 4:11.
Ep 5:1

When Jesus taught us to call God Father, he was not focusing his attention on a word, concept or attribute, but on an attitude of God toward people, and an attitude of people toward God. *"Is there a man among you who would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread?... If you, then, who are evil know how to give your children what is good..."* He insisted on a relationship with God that was like his own: the disciples were expected to pray as their Teacher did, with great trust, with confidence in God's love, with perseverance, with humility and simplicity, and even willingness to accept the unfathomable, as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. Our good actions should be the fruit of our relationship with God as Father, not a condition for that relationship, which is grounded in the Father's mercy, not in our personal response.

Mt 7:9.
Lk 11:2; Mt 7:6f. &
Mt 6:5.
Mt 26:39.
Lk 15:13.

As far as the Father is concerned, we are pre-loved, pre-known and pre-chosen in the Son, not only before our own merits or shortcomings, but

Ep 1:3f.

from the very beginning. We are joined to Christ as the body is to the Head. Through him *we enter into the inheritance* that corresponds to the children. Now, this participation in what is Christ's is not because we do what is right; it is so that we do what is right: *"to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence, determining that we should become his adopted sons, through Jesus Christ."* Ep 1:4-5.

Our reference to God as Father is an implicit reference to Jesus, not just because we use the name that he used, "Abba," but because we participate in Jesus' inherent condition of Son, and for that reason we participate in the love with which the Father loves him *"so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them."* Jn 14:21.23. Jn 17:26.

Human brotherhood would be a hollow dream without Jesus' eternal and ongoing sonship, which makes us, through him, brothers and sisters to all and children of the eternal Father.

God is rich in love, mercy and faithfulness, on account of being a Father and on account of our being children for him. The Old Testament must be read in the light of the New Testament. Because he is the Father, and we are his children, he is a model of love and mercy. *"Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,"* and Luke in the corresponding text explains what this perfection consists of: perfection in compassion: *"Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate."* Mt 5:48. Lk 6:36.

For St. Paul, divine Fatherhood does not only lay the foundation for human brotherhood, but

also for the equality of all human beings. We are all equal, because we are all children in the Son. *"There are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus."*
Ga 3:27-29.

It is true that the image of father has been degraded and many people have never experienced a positive father figure, but that is no reason to give up; what we need to do is to enrich our language about God. Even though people live nowadays in a culture that is no longer patriarchal and that seriously threatens the family, it nevertheless carries inside the seed of sonship and of fatherhood, and it can be said that at least in some cases this culture feels so acutely the need for that kind of fatherhood, because it is so lacking. A teenager who lacked a father figure said: the time that I feel my father's presence the most is when I most need him. And the psalmist said, *"My soul is thirsting for God, like a land parched, weary and waterless"*; in the same way, children without a family feel the need more intensely than those that have one.
Ps 63:1; 42:3.

° God is our Father, but he is not overbearing: he respects our freedom. He does not force anyone; he invites. He does not destroy freedom; he grounds it and confirms it.

° He does not impose his way of thinking or his will.
Lk 15:11f.

° He is not paternalistic: he gives us bread, but he does not bake it for us; he gives us water, but not already bottled; he gives us a house, but he does not sweep it for us; he gives us health, but

not medicines. His way of acting in this world is utterly different from ours.

° He is not just one more cause among others.

° He does not insist on being the center of attention. He does not push us aside; he gives us our place and respects our decisions and actions.

° He is not our substitute. He does not sweep away what is poorly done, and he does not replace us. He is in us and acts with us, but not in our place.

° He is not anxious or nervous. He has all the time in the world to wait. Lk 15:11f.

° He does not do magic. He does make things appear out of thin air if we do not look for them and find them.

° In our life he does not care to take on a role that is not his, and his only role is to be God the Father.

° He is not an absentee father; he is there to help us be ourselves.

Activities

- Describe an experience in which you have felt that you are God's child.
- Personal experience is important for spiritual experience but God goes beyond our experiences. Confront this in Ps 27:11; Is 49:15; Ps 103:13.
- Read the following texts from St. Paul: Rm 9:15-18; 12:1; 2 Co 1:3.
- What do you need to work on in order to have the right image of God the Father?

Is 66:13; 49:14-15.

God is the foundation of all fatherhood and of all motherhood. Express some of the truths of our faith in terms of motherhood and decide whether it would be suitable, pastoral and educational to use them. —The objective is to promote healthy judgment, and to point out the errors and shortcomings of any type of fatherhood or motherhood in their concrete, human, historical, social, ethnic and cultural manifestations.

- From this text by Tertullian, extract the ideas that coincide and those that clash with the Christian faith.

“Now we believe that Christ did ever act in the name of God the Father; that He actually from the beginning held intercourse with Adam; actually communed with patriarchs and prophets; was the Son of the Creator; was His Word; whom God made His Son by emitting Him from His own self, and thenceforth set Him over every dispensation and (administration of) His will, making Him a little lower than the angels, as is written in David, in which lowering of His condition He received from the Father a dispensation in those very respects which you blame as human; from the very beginning learning, even then, (that state of a) man which He was destined in the end to become. It is He who descends, He who interrogates, He who demands, He who swears. With regard, however, to the Father, the very gospel which is common to us will testify that He was never visible, according to the word of Christ: “No man knows the Father, save the Son.”

Ps 8:5; Heb 2:9.

For even in the Old Testament He had declared, “No man shall see me, and live.” He means that

the Father is invisible, in whose authority and in whose name was He God who appeared as the Son of God. But with us God is received in the person of Christ, because even in this manner is He our God."

Tertullian,
Marc II, 27,7.

5.4 God begets his beloved Son

What do we mean when we say that God is the only Father of an only Son?

It is interesting to note that this statement: "Jesus is the Son of God," in the apostolic preaching has more to do with Jesus' death and resurrection than with his birth. The Nativity stories, exclusive to Luke and Matthew, although distinct, serve as a reflection on the post-Paschal faith, rather than as the origin of this faith. It is a projection of the resurrection in the nativity.

Geniuses also wait until the end of their lives to manifest what they are at birth.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, his followers came to understand that he had overcome death with a superior form of life and that he was in God and with God; consequently the community of believers began to assign Jesus titles such as the Son, the Son of God, and later, God himself.

When we say that God gives life to the Son and thus begets him from all eternity, it is simply a way of speaking, because begetting and giving life are inherent and exclusive to the Father: they are what constitute him as such, but they are what he does for all time. It is not a biological occurrence, but a spiritual, eternal occurrence that does not fit into our category of begetting life.

Jesus had called God *his Father*, most likely without referring to a “metaphysical, divine generation,” as expressed later in the Church’s reflection on its faith. Jesus’ expression must be understood in the context of the faith of the people of Israel and of the sense of sonship that Jesus felt when he addressed God as “*Abba*,” with a child’s affection.

Jesus’ condition as Son of God implies a reference to a historical situation in which Jesus experienced and lived in time his eternal condition of Son of God. Jesus’ sonship was something that he not only had from his beginning, but that he also lived and brought to fruition during his thirty-three years of earthly life.

Generation by the Spirit is not the same as the human generation that corresponds to the male of the species. It has to do with the miracle of conception, and with Jesus’ dignity as Messiah, not with Jesus as the eternal Son of the Father. The filiation of the expected Messiah in all of the texts of the Old Testament is an adoptive filiation, never genetic, in the style of the pagan gods.

Jesus is the Son of God, i.e., of the eternal father, not of the Holy Spirit. And even though he was born through the working of the Holy Spirit, and God’s Power—or force—covered Mary with its shadow, this does not make Mary “the wife of the Holy Spirit.” This is without a doubt a metaphorical abuse, which may be pious, but it distorts Christian faith. The Spirit expresses the power and life of God the Father, which is capable of

Lk 1:31.

making Mary the mother of the Son of God. The Holy Spirit is not Jesus' father, or ours either.

It is true that Jesus' eternal sonship is known to us only and exclusively through his presenting himself during his life on earth as the Son of God, in the acceptance of Father's will and in his mission.

The words beget and generation in their ordinary meaning are linked to sexual life, but when they refer to God, they have nothing to do with sexuality: they mean origin, relationship, dependence, similarity, manifestation and revelation. Thus Irenaeus said: *"All saw the Father in the Son: for the Father is the invisible of the Son, but the Son is the visible of the Father."*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 6,6.

"Philip said. 'Lord, let us see the Father and then we will be satisfied.' 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip,' said Jesus to him, 'and you still do not know me? How can you say, 'Let us see the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?'"

Jn 14:8f.

St. Augustine said that just as the mind begets thought, in that same way the Father begets the Son, and the Son cannot exist without the Father, just as the thought cannot exist without the mind. Because the father in himself relates to the Son, and the Son to the Father, as St. Irenaeus said: *"the name of the Son belongs to the Father."*

Augustine
De Trin IX, 1, 1f.
Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 17,6.

Only Jesus, God's only Son, is begotten.

When we refer to Jesus as the Son of God, we are not saying that God is Jesus' Father in the

sense that men are fathers, i.e., through physical generation. God does not have a physical being to commit in his relationship as Father. Our physical being as human persons comes directly from our parents; and at a higher level, all of our being depends on God in terms of his existence. We would do well to avoid thinking that Jesus, as Son of God, was not Joseph's son. God does not take the place of human activity. This has nothing to do with what we call Jesus' divine filiation, even when the condition of Son of God, of Jesus and in Jesus, is expressed uniquely and miraculously in his virginal conception. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus the Son of the Father as Messiah, but not as Son begotten by the Father from all eternity.

Lk 1:26f.

Jesus is not the Son of the Father in the same way and sense in which he is the son of Mary. His condition of son of Mary relates directly, wholly and absolutely to his physical —human— condition. And his condition of Son of the Father relates wholly, absolutely and uniquely to his overall reality. We would do well also to avoid the matter-spirit duality, as if Jesus were the material son of Mary and the spiritual son of the Father.

Human generation is time-bound and momentary; divine generation is ongoing and eternal: the Father is forever begetting his Son, and the Son is forever being begotten by the Father. Thus this relationship of the Son with respect to the Father, and of the Father with respect to the Son, which links them and distinguishes them, is always present. St. Augustine liked to compare the

mind and the heart: for a thought to come into existence, there has to be a mind thinking it; and for love to come into existence, there has to be a subject who loves. The Father can be seen as the mind and Jesus, his thought; the Father, the lover and Jesus, the object of his love. In the mutual relationships between the lover (the Father), the beloved (the Son) and love (the Holy Spirit), Augustine sees an image of the Trinity.

De Trin IX 2, 2; 3, 3f.

Generation is linked to the idea not only of similarity, in the sense that the son is similar to the father, but also of likeness in difference.

Gn 5:1-3.
Jn 8:35-36.

The generation of the Son refers to everything that exists; for this reason St. Paul called him "*First-born of all creation*," "*Eldest of many brothers*." "*First*—of those who will rise— *from the dead*." The First-born is the one who is sent. In the cultural context of the Israelites, the first-born had the same rights as the father. Jesus is given the title of first-born to distinguish him from all the others—and we are also his brothers—because the first-born belongs to God in a special way.

Col 1:15.
Rm 8:29.
Col 1:18; 1 Co 15:25;
Rv 1:5; Heb 1:6.

Lk 2:7, 23.
Ex 13:2, 11.

St. John calls him "*Only Son*" to underscore the special relationship, which cannot be reduced to the relationship with any other human being. "*The only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart*," is another way to refer to "*the Word, who was with God in the beginning*," i.e., from all eternity and before cosmic time. Jesus is "*the begotten one*" without equal.

Jn 1:18; 3:17.
1 Jn 4:9.

Jn 1:18.
1 Jn 5:1.18.

When we say, “God begets his only Son,” what we want to emphasize is a vital, eternal relationship that is decisive for one and the other. This relationship is unique with respect to Jesus and essentially different from that of any other human being, whose relationship with God is characterized as adoptive filiation. On the one hand, Jesus’ filiation is distinguished from our own, but on the other, we understand our filiation as derived from Jesus’, as expressed in the doctrine of participation: “*from his fullness we have, all of us, received...*” and given our vital connection with him: He is the head and we are the body, he is the vine and we are the branches; we are God’s children in the Son. This is where our characterization comes from: we are children of God because he is “The Son.”

Jn 1:16.

Ga 4:4; Rm 8:29.
Ga 2:6.

The word “*beget*” does not mean:

- efficient causality: the Son is not the work of the Father;
- or priority in being: the Father does not exist so that the Son may exist;
- or priority in time: the Father is not before the Son, in Trinitarian life.

It does mean:

Augustine
De Trin IV, 20, 29.

Heb 1:1f; Ep 4:6.

Jn 3:16.

- logical priority;
- priority in revelation;
- and primarily salvific priority;
- fullness and completeness in the giving —of nature, dignity, authority, powers, attributes—;
- exclusivity in fatherhood, in the mission of the incarnation and redemption.

The words “*begotten*” and “*only Son*” are reserved, in Christian faith, only and exclusively for Jesus. And with this we want to affirm

- that Jesus is the Son of God from all eternity, which refers to a full and exclusive communication of God. Son in an essential sense, although divine and transcendent, not like king, prophet or priest;
- that the Father is in no way modified, diminished or impoverished, like the flame from a candle that is not modified or diminished by being communicated;
- that he communicates everything the Father is, his divinity, like the sun that communicates itself in its rays, light and heat;
- that he is the perfect and full image or visualization of God;
- that it would be impossible to conceive of a better or greater or comparable manifestation or revelation of God than that which was given, and continues to be given, in Jesus;
- that Jesus, as God’s eternal Son, is different from all other human beings, that we are not begotten by God, but created. In our analogical language we can say that our relationship with God is not by generation, but by grace, by an undeserved favor;
- that we participate in Jesus’ sonship but not as begotten children; we participate as favored, adopted children;
- he predestined us to be adoptive children. Ep 1:5.

The title of Son, in its essential sense, corresponds only to Jesus, not to the Spirit, although the Spirit also proceeds from the Father. Jesus

is the only, first-born Son, in whom God is well pleased. But other human beings are also God's true children through participation and our communion with Christ; to indicate the distinction, the terms "natural filiation" and "adoptive filiation" were used.

Rm 8:32; 5:10. Paul calls Jesus God's "*own*" Son, as opposed to those for whom he was given.

1 Jn 5:18. The term "*begotten by God*" is used exclusively for Jesus in our Trinitarian terminology; in Biblical language we find the word "*beget*" used metaphorically and applied to all people as well. "*No one who has been begotten by God sins.*"

1 Jn 3:9; 3:6.
1 Co 5:8.

Jesus is begotten by the Father from all eternity, and only by the Father, because the act of begetting, which is proper and characteristic of the Father, does not presuppose complementariness: it is exclusive. The Church fathers used an image that was later taken for our Creed due to its clarity: as the candle's flame proceeds from another's without diminishing it and fully equal, so Jesus is "*God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made.*" The preposition "from" is not about belonging, but about origin. And the word "true" equates them, in the most realistic sense of the word, as if saying as much one as the other. True is opposed to the figurative, the apparent, that which is not authentic. The bottom line: Jesus is as much God as the father is, in the same way, in terms of origin, as a child is as human as her father.

It is interesting to note the relationship that many of the Church fathers drew between Jesus' ongoing generation by the Father and the origin of the Virgin Mary, in time, by the working of God's power and life, personified in the Holy Spirit. *"The only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart"* from all eternity, is the same one who *"when the appointed time came"* would be in Mary's womb, made man. And that he who *"from the beginning,"* i.e., from all eternity, was the Son with no need of a mother, in time would be truly a Son with no need of a father.

Jn 1:18.

Ga 4:4; Jn 1:14.

N.B.

The Holy Spirit has never been invoked by Church teaching as Mary's husband. Only in Mexico, or perhaps in Latin America, is Mary invoked as the wife of the Holy Spirit. The fact that the Father effected Jesus' conception through the Holy Spirit, in time, does not make Mary the wife of the Holy Spirit, neither in time nor from all eternity. Mary's husband is Joseph, and Mary is the temple and the most precious receptacle of the Holy Spirit, where the Father made, through the Spirit, his greatest gift of love. Jesus is the Son of the Father, not of the Holy Spirit, which in the Biblical mindset is God's power and life. Ruah, in Hebrew, is feminine and was never understood or identified as the husband of any human person.

Paul VI,
Marialis cultu 25-27.

Cf Dz-H 4172f.

Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:9.

Lk 1:26f.
Mt 1:18.16.

For Mary to be called the wife of the Holy Spirit, "one third of the comparison" is missing, i.e., a point of comparison with the husband, as in human relations, which is not there between the

Holy Spirit and Mary, something like physical coexistence, and the relationships that spouses and parents have.

The title “Wife of the Holy Spirit” also does not figure in the litanies, which are anthologies of many Marian titles.

In the practices of Christian piety, there is a risk that if we call Mary the wife of the Holy Spirit, it would be easy to call the Holy Spirit the husband of Mary, which does not conform to Trinitarian faith or to Mariology. It is important to recover the image of Mary as Joseph’s wife and Jesus’ mother, which are the most solid foundation for an authentic Christian family life.

Activities

- In your own words, explain what it means that God is the only Father of an only Son.

Before the dogmatic definitions were determined, Tertullian (160-220) explained it as follows:

Cf Ps 2:7; Ac 13:33;
Pr 8:24f.
Tertullian, Prax, 7,
1. In the Vulgata: ex
utero ante luciferum
genui te. Ps 109:4

“The Father became Father when from him proceeded his first-begotten Son, because begotten before all things; and his only-begotten also, because alone begotten of God, in a way peculiar to himself, from the womb of his own heart, even as the Father himself testifies: ‘My heart,’ says he, ‘has emitted my most excellent Word.’ The father took pleasure evermore in him, who equally rejoiced with a reciprocal gladness in the Father’s presence: ‘You are my Son, today have I begotten you; even before the morning star did I beget you.’”

- From Tertullian's text, take the expressions that are most meaningful to you.

Which of these statements do not coincide with the faith of the Church?

- Read Dz-H 1330, 1331, 1333.

- St. Justin (+ 164). *"And his Son, who alone is properly called Son, the Word, who also was with him and was begotten before the works, when at first he created and arranged all things by him, is called Christ, in reference to his being anointed and God's ordering all things through him."* Apol 6,3.

- From Athenagoras of Athens we conserve *A Plea for the Christians*, written around 177 and addressed to Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus; it is written with elegance and moderation, with liberal pagan quotations, and in it he refutes the typical accusations: Christians are not atheists, but monotheists. It contains some important concepts about the Trinity.

"Nor let any one think it ridiculous that God should have a Son. For though the poets, in their fictions, represent the gods as no better than men, our mode of thinking is not the same as theirs, concerning either God the Father or the Son. But the Son of God is the Logos of the Father, in idea and in operation; for after the pattern of Him and by Him were all things made, the Father and the Son being one. And, the Son being in the Father and the Father in the Son, in oneness and power of spirit, the understanding and reason (νοῦς καὶ λόγος) of the Father is the Son of God. But if, in your surpassing intelligence, it occurs to you to inquire what is meant by the Son, I will state briefly that He is the first product of the Father, not as having

been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal mind [νοῦς], had the Logos in Himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos [λογικός]); but inasmuch as He came forth to be the idea and energizing power of all material things, which lay like a nature without attributes, and an inactive earth, the grosser particles being mixed up with the lighter. ... Who, then, would not be astonished to hear men who speak of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and who declare both their power in union and their distinction in order, called atheists?"

Athenagoras,
De Deo 1,1.

Filium non aliunde
deduco, sed de sub-
stantia Patris.
Tertullian,
Prax 4: PL 2,159.

Tertullian wrote: *"But as for me, who derive the Son from no other source but from the substance of the Father."* And to leave no room for doubt, he later states that the word "Son" is not just a term; it expresses the reality: *"This is the perfect nativity of the Word, when he proceeds forth from God."* He then wonders whether it proceeds only from the Father's wisdom as an uttered word, or whether it has real substance: *"Do you then, you ask, grant that the Word is a certain substance, constructed by the Spirit and the communication of Wisdom? And he answers: "Nor could that possibly be devoid of substance which has proceeded from so great a substance —the Father—, and has produced such mighty substances."* The word substance means reality.

Tertullian,
Prax 7: PL 2, 161f.

5.5 What do we mean by divine adoption?

Adoption consists of establishing, desiring or considering as a child someone who biologically is not one's child. It was a technical term used in

the legal language of Greece, Rome and Israel, Gn 16:2; 48:5f. where adoptions actually took place.

The word *adoption* is not a perfect fit for the reality when it comes to our relationship with God the Father; it hides more than it reveals. Our relationship with God is not a legal relationship; adoptees know that while they may well have the rights and even the surname of the parents, nevertheless, they are not actually the children of the adoptive parents. Adopted children have to overcome this trauma and realize that what counts in the relationship between parents and children is not so much the genetic dimension, as the love, care, responsibility, and all the values, principles and attitudes that the adoptive parents want to share with them. The relationship with God the Father goes far beyond all of these concepts and human experiences.

The term adoption is not used to downgrade our relationship with God, but only to distinguish our relationship from the full and ineffable relationship of Jesus, whose condition as "*Son of God*" is something that we all participate in. Only of Christians is it stated that they are children of God *by the Spirit of adoption*; of Jesus it is said that he is the Only Son.

Christians are children with full rights. They are children in Jesus, by faith in Jesus Christ; they participate in his sonship through the Spirit. *We are children by the Spirit of adoption...* "The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts." "You are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." "God is treating you

Rm 8:15-16.

1 Jn 4:9.

Rm 8:15; Ep 1:5.
Rv 21:7; Ga 3:36.

Ga 4:5-7

Rm 8:15-16;

Ga 4:19.

Ga 3:36;

Heb 12:5-8. *as his sons,” “because we too are his offspring”;*
 Ac 17:28; even though total adoption and its consequences
 belong to the future. *“We shall be like him because*
 1 Jn 3:2. *we shall see him as he really is”...*

We should not draw conclusions beyond those suggested by the parables themselves, but it would not be too much to think that the prodigal son was a true son, not a servant or a slave, or an adopted son, and his condition of son with respect to the father is what highlights the eternal Father’s mercy.

Lk 15:13f. *Father’s mercy.*
 Ac 17:28-29; We are *“his offspring.”* We are *“part of God’s*
 Ep 2:19. *household.”* Our filiation is a dynamic thing, not something granted through flesh and blood; it is a process and a goal: *“then you will be... perfect children of God among a deceitful and underhand brood.”* *“Through him —Christ- we have in the*
 Ph 2:15; Cf Dt 32:5f. *one Spirit our way to come to the Father.”*
 Ep 2:18.

One thing about this peculiar relationship of ours, different from Jesus’ but of ineffable value for us, is pointed out by St. John when he insists that not only *“are we called God’s children; that is what we are.”* Adoption is not legal, or collective, as in the Old Testament. Adoption by God through the Spirit makes us participants in divine nature. In our way of thinking, divine nature cannot be divided or shared; but this full giving of God comes to us through the Spirit of intra-Trinitarian life, and in this way we will participate in what God is: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is how we will participate in divine life.

Jesus' communion with the Father meant communion of time-bound and eternal life; ours must also mean communion of life. We participate in the Father's life through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, and in this way we will participate in divine nature, now in a preliminary way, but in eternal life the participation will be full and complete.

In conclusion, our filiation goes far beyond both the old and the modern conceptions of adoption; in fact, we lack a concept and the experiences to express exactly what our relationship with God is and will be. *"We shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is"*: we will be immortal, participating in divine life; we will be like gods; and *"God will be everything in us,"* are expressions that continue to perplex us because our imagination cannot fathom how this could happen and the joy that it could bring us.

"Whoever sees me sees the one who sent me." Jn 12:45.

"We are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed." 1 Jn 3:2.

"The whole creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal his sons... to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God." Rm 8:19-21.

St. Irenaeus wrote in a kind of confession of faith:

*The Father is indeed above all,
and He is the Head of Christ;* 1 Co 11:3.

*but the Word is through all things,
and is Himself the Head of the Church;
while the Spirit is in us all,* Ep 5:23; Col 1:18.

Jn 7:39. *and He is the living water, which the Lord grants to those who rightly believe in Him, and love Him,*
and who know that there is one Father,
who is above all,
Irenaeus, *and through all,*
Adv Haer V, 18,2. *and in us all.*

Because of our relationship with God as Father, he is for us, on our side; he is with us, in our company, and he is in us as in his sanctuary. This relationship, in terms of adoption, is an eloquent concept to underscore the love, the grace, the freedom, the relational dependency with respect to Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father.

Tertullian, *“baptized in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit,”* and only when he cites St. Matthew does he use the expression *“in the name of the Father, etc.”* We know that in Biblical language, a name is a way to refer to a person, but in the case of the baptismal formula we often understand it in the sense of authority, of belonging, of bonds, and almost never in the sense of inclusion suggested by baptism: I submerge you *“in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit.”* The Three-Person God is in us, and we are in God. *“The life you have is hidden with Christ in God,” “since it is in him that we live, move and exist.”*

Apol 20,1: tingueretur in Patrem...

Cf Jn 10:38; 14:11; 17:21.

Col 3:3; Ep 2:4f.
Rm 6:11.
Ac 17:27-28.

Activities

- Explain in your own words the difference between legal filiation —adoption— and the reality of adoptive filiation by God.

5.6 Principle of incorporation

In the Hebrew mentality, especially as expressed in St. Paul's writings, there was a kind of biological assumption that children were stored, whole but in a virtual state, inside the father. The mother played no decisive role at all; she was simply the earth where the seed germinated. It was up to the man to plow the furrow and plant the seed. A barren woman was unable to take the seed into her womb and make it grow. The mother's function was to carry the child in her womb and later to nurse it. Lk 11:27; 23:29.

St. Irenaeus, Tertullian and other Church fathers thought that just as God had made Adam "*out of virgin soil*," i.e., soil that had not been worked by man, in the same way "*the second Adam*" was to be born "*of a virgin woman*," unworked by man. Irenaeus, Adv Haer III, 21, 10. Tertullian, Carn 17, 3; 16, 5.

In our time we obviously do not think that a child is produced only by the father, which may explain why we do not understand some conclusions that seemed self-evident to St. Paul. Today we have different information and this kind of thinking is foreign to us. We do not think that a man carries inside of himself all of the millions of children he could theoretically engender. It is clear that a child, before birth, is physically and biologically inside the mother; in the Hebrew mentality, however, descendents were physically and biologically inside the father, specifically, in Adam.

The pre-scientific way of thinking is the mold in which a theological truth is conveyed to us.

By way of this assumption, a highly important theological message comes to us, a truly salvific message. Let us call this assumption the principle of incorporation, and we could articulate it as follows: We are all included in Christ as if we were talking about our vital medium, and therefore we undergo his same fate and we enjoy his same rights. This principle demands from us unity, communion and conscious communication.

St. Paul's expressions: "*we went into the tomb with Christ Jesus and joined him in death; we shall return to life with him,*" and "*we have been raised with Christ and with him we are seated at the right hand,*" must be understood with the help of this principle of incorporation. What happened with Christ is the same thing that will happen to us, with the requisite changes in time, place, culture and people. There is nothing that we can affirm about Jesus Christ that does not have an implication for us, because of our insertion in him. And everything that happened in him already happened in a "virtual" way for us, to use language that is familiar to us today.

What St. Paul is trying to say is not a fantasy, or a flight of mysticism; it is a reality of faith for everyday life, as we can see in his letter to the Colossians: "*It makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that still has to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church.*" "We carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body."

This conception is not foreign to the rest of the New Testament: we are inserted in Christ like the branches in the vine, in a real, life-giving way. Jn 15:1f. We form with him a whole, like the members of one body; being his disciples implies being with Christ and living his fate. And if we belong to Christ, we are already *"the posterity of Abraham, the heirs he was promised"*; *"you cannot belong to Christ Jesus unless you crucify all self-indulgent passions and desires."* Ga 3:29. Thus St. Paul says: *"I have been crucified with Christ"* Ga 5:24. and at all times Ga 2:20. we live in communion with the Son Jesus Christ: *"God by calling you has joined you to his Son, Jesus Christ, and God is faithful."* 1 Co 1:9.

We might ask: what kind of relationship is this that joins us in a person?

It is not nirvana, or a mental or spiritual state, because the more aware we are of it, the more it personalizes us. When Paul says, *"I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me,"* he says it as a man with one of the strongest, most clearly defined personalities in history. For Paul, one of the most basic and concrete truths of his preaching can be expressed in the formula: *"You are in Christ"* and *"Christ is in you."* ἐν ἐμοὶ. Ga 2:20. Cf Ga 4:19; 2 Co 13:5; Rm 8:19; Ph 1:20; 2 Co 13:3.

This same Paul, in an attempt to explain his thinking, resorted to what for him was self-evident: When Adam we formed out of clay, in Paradise, we were all formed in him, because he was the father of the human race and we are all his descendents... it was only a question of the passing of generations and centuries, and we would

all appear, as wheat sprouts when the seeds are sown in fertile ground. The seed contains the tree that in due time will grow. In Adam we are all included, as in a matryoshka doll there are many little dolls similar to the one that contains them all. “*In Adam*” is an image that is physical, vital, biological and, for Paul, unquestionably real. Through Adam we are subject to death, “*just as*
 1 Co 15:22. *all men die in Adam,*” and form with him a natural body, in a similar but much more exalted way we form with Christ a single vital reality.

Death, in this Adam that Paul assumed, is a reality for us: we must die because we are human beings of the same condition as Adam. This is the first term of the comparison, and death and sin are explained by our relationship of humanity with Adam. “*As this earthly man was—from*
 1 Co 15:48. *the earth—, so are we on earth*”; our death is explained by our inclusion in Adam. In Adam the whole human race forms a single entity. God, by making Adam, made all people in Adam, and thus what is said about Adam applies to every person in particular. We could say that our life was hidden in Adam the way the life of a fetus is hidden inside the mother, and that the fetus’ life is the mother’s life, and the mother’s life is the fetus’ life.

If from a scientific and historical viewpoint Adam never lived as a single, concrete person, that takes nothing away from the theological thinking. The truth being conveyed is no less certain and important.

In the parallelism that St. Paul draws between Adam and Christ, Adam is the first term of the comparison; “*the second Adam is Christ*” is the second term, and the one with the more compelling message. This is what St. Paul is trying to convey:

- The first Adam was from the earth, and the carrier of death; Rm 5:12.
- + The second Adam is a *spiritual body; life-giving spirit*. 1 Co 15:44, 45.
- The first Adam is from the earth, and earthly;
- + The second Adam comes from heaven. 1 Co 15:47.
- As we are modeled on Adam,
- + we will be modeled on Christ. 1 Co 15:49.
- We are in Adam, and thus in death and sin, 1 Co 15:22; Rm 5:12.
- + but we are more in Christ, in life and grace. Rm 5:15.
- In Adam we are materially, bodily joined, contained in him.
- + In Christ we are spiritually joined, contained in him and he in us.
- In Adam we inherit sin and misfortune;
- + in Christ, grace and glory. Rm 5:21.
- In Adam we were thrown out of Paradise; Gn 3:23.
- + in Christ we live already in Paradise. Col 3:1; Ep 2:6.
- Adam is the prototype of humans today: we are like him.
- + Christ is the prototype of humans today and tomorrow: we are like him; where he is, we will be. Ep 2:6.
- Adam, starting point, first, shadow;
- + Christ, end point, Second Adam, prefigured reality. Rm 5:14.
- Adam is the sum of all human beings, because we are included in him. In one... all. Rm 5:12; 16:17.

- Ga 3:28; Rm 5:15-17. + In Christ all of us are included and he is our head.
- Rm 5:12. • With Adam we are joined ever since creation;
+ with Christ, since before the creation of the
Ep 1:3. world.
• Adam is God's son, and God created him in
Lk 3:38. time;
+ Christ is God's Son, because God constituted
Rm 1:3-4. him through his resurrection, for all eternity.
• As we are modeled on the earthly man —
Adam—,
+ so will we be modeled on the heavenly man
1 Co 15:49. —Christ—.

And just as we are human beings in Adam, who is the prototype of the human being, so are we children in the Son, who is the prototype of our vital relationship with God the Father. On many occasions the expressions "in Christ and through Christ" could be interchangeable without affecting the meaning, but it is much more expressive and meaningful to use the preposition *in*, when it is understood correctly, and it translates St. Paul's usage more faithfully.

Paul thinks less about the past —Adam— than the present —Christ—, less about the model than what is modeled; less about time-bound life and more about eternal life. Paul is assuming a doctrine about Adam, a result of Jewish reflection, and he makes use of it to speak about our much more compelling relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is interesting to note the Apostle's insistence that "*in one*," in Adam, disobedience occurred, Rm 5:12-19; *and in one*, in Jesus, justification came about.

"All of you are one in Christ Jesus," only in him Ga 3:28.
 can they be found just, in him is forgiveness, and Col 1:13-14, 20.
"Christ is all things in everyone." *"You together are* Ga 3:28.
Christ's body; but each of you is a different part of 1 Co 12:27.
it."

Oneness with Christ is also oneness among all people; therefore St. Paul says, *"if you sin against your brother, it is Christ you are sinning against."* 1 Co 8:12.

God, by modeling Adam, modeled all people in Adam, and Irenaeus said that he continues to model all of us in our mother's womb, which is why everything said about Adam applies to each person in particular: *"Your hands have made me and formed me"* in my mother's womb. In the Ps 119:73.
 same way, by glorifying Christ and seating him at his right hand, he has seated us there with him; Ep 1:20; 2:6.
 in him we will be glorified and he in us. Jn 17:1f.

St. John tells us: *"You will understand that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you."*; *"May they be one in us"*; *"I in them and you in me."* In Jn 14:20.
 this way we can understand that Christ consecrates himself to the Father in his disciples, who Jn 17:21, 23.
 are like an extension of him. *"For their sake I consecrate myself to you."* The highest expression of our relationship with Jesus is to be found in St. John in terms of the spiritual union with God's eternal Son: *"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him."* Jn 6:56.

St. Irenaeus was moved by the beauty of the image, taken surely from St. Paul or from the Gospel of St. John, that we have been grafted onto Rm 11:17.
 Christ and are one with him, that without him Jn 15:1f.

we can do nothing, give no fruit, like the sprout of a wild olive that is grafted onto good stock and then gives magnificent fruit.

This oneness that all human people form in Christ is not a physical or moral oneness; it transcends that, is more than that. It is a spiritual oneness, as real and effective as physical oneness, but it goes beyond by not being subject to time and space. It is vital, real communion, such as the communion between the body and its members, an invisible oneness that can be seen in its effects. It is not the relationship between the part and the whole, but rather the relationship between what is alive and what gives life. This appears in the Gospel in the allegory of the vine and the branches, and when Jesus says of his disciples that they are his mother and brothers.

1 Co 12:31. Jn 15:1f. Mk 3:14.

The Father's communication to Jesus is projected and prolonged in Jesus' communication to each human being and each one of his disciples, through his Spirit. *"I in them and you in me,"* as St. John puts it, and Paul sums up Christian life as *"living in Christ and Christ in us."* *"Sin will no longer dominate our life, since we are living by grace and not by law."*

Cf Jn 20:22; Jn 17:20. Cf Ga 3:28; 4:19; 2 Co 13:5; Rm 8:19; Ph 1:20; 2 Co 13:3. Rm 6:14.

Activities

- Make a comparative table between Adam and Christ, taking into account the points examined in this chapter.
- Make a list of contrasting positions between Adam and Christ taken from Rm 5:12f.

- Look up the word “recapitulation” on the Internet—in Irenaeus, recapitulation—and find out how it relates to this chapter.
- Look up the term “inhabitation” in a Biblical dictionary.
- Consult the exegesis on Jn 14:20.
- Make a list of ten sentences with the preposition “in”, such as the following:

In Christ God comes to us and we come to God.

In Christ we become pleasing to the Father.

In Christ we are all joined, etc.

5.7 For us, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven

There is no salvation without the Three-Person God, Father of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father; without Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary and of God the Father and therefore God and man like us; and without the Holy Spirit who breathes into us earthly and eternal life, and puts us in communion with God. In order to affirm our salvation, what it consists of and how we are saved, it is necessary to affirm the Trinitarian mystery, because the Trinitarian mystery is essentially a salvific mystery.

We need to keep in mind that our theological understanding and our spiritual life depend on language, concepts, images and experiences, and almost all the concepts and words from the Holy Scriptures are not taken from today's language. For this reason, the Biblical message about our

salvation and about many other things requires historical understanding, reinterpretation, integration, clarification and explanation to be understood and lived in today's world. If we apply this principle to the message of our salvation, we turn up great Biblical and theological wealth. All the images, concepts and words say something to us, but none of them say everything. They can be thought of as the bricks of a huge vault that together hold up the magnificence of our salvation.

The sacred authors used a wide variety of mental frameworks and images to convey what the Father has done for us through Jesus Christ. Some images or frameworks have been taken from the Old Testament and others, from early Christian practices. Of course, for our mentality and our times, some will strike us as more understandable and inspiring than others, and when it comes to theological reflection, there are some theological considerations that need to be updated.

5.8 He came down from heaven

Thomas Aquinas,
S Th q 33 a2;
Senten, III, 6-12.

Lk 15:11; Mk 10:7;
Mt 19:29; Ga 4:7.

Salvation was not always understood as salvation from sin and death. The Church fathers understood it primarily as communion with God. For this reason, nothing could be saved if the Word did not make it his own. And Christ saves us by taking as his own everything that is ours, and by giving as ours everything that is his own. For Jesus, the Kingdom of Heaven is not just the forgiveness of sins; it is more about returning to the father's house, *"being a son and not a slave,"*

and being an heir; "having life and having it to the full": nor did Jesus understand salvation as a return to the imaginary state of original justice. Jn 10:10.

Centering salvation on sin leads to hamartio-centrism —sin as the center of Christian life, and the keystone for understanding redemption—in which sin becomes necessary for God to be a savior. St. Augustine appropriated this conception, seeing sin as necessary for God to be our savior, and even rejoicing in sin because it gained for us so great a redeemer, original sin being necessary so that Jesus does not save us in vain. ἁμαρτία
Sermon 174, Purpose of the incarnation.

St. Thomas believed that the Virgin necessarily had to have sinned in order to be saved, and that if she were spared original sin, she was also spared salvation. The Virgin's most important title is Mother of God, and therefore, Immaculate. S Th III, q27, a2.
Pius IX, 1854.

It is well known that the primary meaning of our salvation is liberation from sin. This is widely expressed in Scripture, and is truly an important issue, although not necessarily the only or even the main one. Salvation is mostly about communion with God, as St. John makes clear in his Gospel: *"I have come so that you may have life, and have it to the full."* The term "life," understood as communion with God, is extraordinarily broad in St. John, and can be seen as the objective of his Gospel. Heb 9:28; Is 53:12; 1 Tm 6:14; Ph 3:20-21; Ac 3:20-21.
Jn 10:10.
Jn 20:31.

The incarnation is not just a transcendent action; it is communion in our life, our pain or anguish; it is a message about God, the kingdom and humanity; it is inclusion in the suffering,

- Ph 1:21. death and resurrection. St. Paul saw his own suffering as so joined to Christ's that he considered it the continuation of Christ's passion. Death for him was a benefit that allowed him to be with Christ. And eternal life was none other than to be co-glorified with Christ and thus grafted forever onto God. The incarnation encompasses everything that Jesus is, what he said, did and suffered; we could say that it encompasses and joins God's life to human beings', in the person of Jesus.
- Rm 6:8; Col 2:20.
2 Co 4:10.
- Jn 14:3.

Through Jesus primarily, and through every human being, God has incorporated himself into the universe. The line of energy is human life, with all its joys and tribulations; in life, freedom, and in freedom, giving, which reached its greatest expression in Jesus Christ, "*Obedient even to*

Ph 2:8. *accepting death, death on a cross.*"

- 2 Co 8:9. *"He was rich, but he became poor for our sake, to make us rich out of his poverty."* **Poverty** and **wealth** mean simply what we are and what he is.
- πτωχεία-πλοῦτος.

Knowing this we can suffer and die with a great hope founded in his person.

To the question "How does the Son of God come?" the answer is: small and naked, like any human being. Many Christians still have more trouble believing in Jesus' humanity, "in his impoverishment" than in his divinity. This leads to a preference for a distant Christ rather than an intimate Christ.

Only because people have sinned, and sin, do Christ and Christianity have the dimension of liberation from sin in order to lead us to the ulti-

mate goal; the ultimate goal of Christ and Christianity is to lead us to communion with God. As a salvific action, the incarnation encompasses the redeeming death and the glorifying resurrection, Vat II GS 22,1-5. i.e., it leads us to communion with God.

CHAPTER VI

JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

Objective: To understand the eternal and universal meaning of Jesus' human condition.

6.1 Meaning of the expression

This topic is obviously related to the previous chapter about the Father, but now we will look at it from the perspective of the Son to the Father.

The expression "*Son of God*" is a title that we give to Jesus. With it we say that Jesus is profoundly linked to God as Father. It is a message about God as Father and about Jesus, the Son without equal. This expression, however, has multiple limitations. It is simply a way of speaking by which we refer to a reality that transcends our language because all language, particularly theological language, is metaphorical, imperfect, peripheral and analogical.

Jn 20:31.
υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Referring to Jesus we also affirm other attributes that complement that of Son of God. We say, for example that Jesus is God's total and definitive expression, his "Word"; we say that he is "Lord," "Messiah," "God's Wisdom," and "Power," "Savior," "Liberator," "Redeemer," etc.

If we ask ourselves what is the content of the expression Son of God, we are forced to resort to human experiences. By referring to Jesus with the title of Son, we are touching on something very personal; son brings to mind a person, speaks to us of a personal being, and links him to the historical Jesus and to our own particular life. From Jesus' sonship we move to his divinity, and not the other way around.

With the expression Son we are trying to say that Jesus' relationship with God is the highest possible and that this relationship presupposes a way of being on the part of God and of Jesus—a relational way of being. God's being as Father consists of giving himself fully to the Son and through him, by way of him, to all people. Jesus' being consists of being relationship, of proceeding from the Father, and also of returning and giving himself to the Father. Jesus has received everything from the Father and will return it all to the Father: he receives time-bound life and he returns it by surrendering his spirit. He receives the disciples: *"They were yours, and you gave them to me,"* and he returns for them: *"I will come back to you and take you with me."* He receives the kingdom and all power and he will return it at

Lk 1:35.
Jn 19:30; Lk 23:46.
Jn 17:6.
Jn 14:18,28; 17:24.
Cf Mt 28:18; 1 Co
15:24-28; Jn 13:3.

the final moment. In short, he has come from the Father and returns to the Father.

The fact that Jesus is the eternal Son of God expresses otherness— Jesus is not the Father— and also Jesus' dependence on the Father and his relationship to him. The starting point for knowing that in God there are three persons is that Jesus called God his Father in a particular and ordinary, but not exclusive, way, and has given us his Spirit of filiation. It is noteworthy that of all the titles that Jesus could have chosen to refer to God, inspired by the Psalms or by the kingdom, he chose "*Abba*."

We say not exclusively because of what we already saw in looking at God as Father. Jeremiah, acting as God's mouthpiece, addresses the sinful people: "*Even then did you not cry to me, 'My father! You, the friend of my youth!'*" Jr 3:4.

As we pointed out earlier, we know something about God in himself from the way he has revealed, communicated and given himself in Jesus and in his Spirit.

Jesus is not simply God in general; he is the Son. God's Word is a particular man, more than a lexical item, and it is precisely God's expression that is humanized. It takes on a mission, a presence in this world, a reality that follows the Salvific Plan that is not simply attributed to a divine person, as it might be attributed to any other person; rather it is particularly theirs, exclusively and decisively of the First and Second Persons. The Father sends and the Son is sent. It is something Jn 1:1f.

that happens, that occurs outside of the intradi-
vine life, in our history. It is not simply an oc-
currence of God; it belongs exclusively to the Lo-
gos —Word—, which, through the incarnation, is
different from the other persons and in this way
shows himself to us. Saying that the incarnation
is the work of the Trinity takes nothing away
from the affirmation that we are making: that
God’s visualization occurs only and exclusively
as the essence of the Son. A revelation of the Fa-
ther without the Word, without the incarnation
of the Son, would be the same as speaking with-
out expressing. The Church Fathers understood
the revelation of the Old Testament as made by
the Son and the Holy Spirit, likewise God’s full
communication as made in his Son and through
his Son Jesus Christ. *“For, whatever was the form
and expression which was then given to the clay
(by the Creator) Christ was in His thoughts as one
day to become man, because the Word, too, was to
be both clay and flesh, even as the earth was then.”*

Tertullian,
Res 6,3.

The fact that Jesus is the Son of God means that
he is in all things equal to the Father, *“consub-
stantial and one in being,”* as the Council of Ni-
caea put it. All the images, metaphors and com-
parisons come back to this point.

Dz-H 125.
ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ
Πατρὸς.

But what does it mean to be *“one in being with
the Father”*? *“True God and true man,”* as God,
in all things like the Father except in being *“The
Son”*; and as man, in all things like us, except in
the fact of being in himself and existentially God
like the Father. We will always be dealing with
one and the same Jesus of Nazareth, one single

being, one single entity and one single person. But what does it mean that Jesus of Nazareth, even during his life on earth, is God like the Father and has the same divine nature, and not a diminished, participated, conceded, derived nature, not a mere similarity?

It is important to make a few clarifications: we refer to divine nature and human nature using the same word, but they are not the same, even when both are true: Jesus is true God and true man. But what is the function of Jesus' divine condition? Certainly it was not to reveal him openly as God. That was the Devil's temptation: "*If —You— are the Son of God,*" show yourself. Mt 4:1f; Lk 4:1-13. And also, in a certain sense, John the Baptist's question: "*Are you the one who is to come or must we wait for someone else?*" Lk 7:20.

The function, so to speak, of the divine condition, just like the Father's, is to originate, found, determine, compel, unify, fulfill; at the same time it is invisible and unfathomable in its fullness. And one more point, which I mention separately to highlight it, is that it is conveyable. From the Father to the Son, in the first place and fully, and by the Son to all people and, in a certain sense, to all of creation. Divine nature includes all the revealed attributes —plus the unrevealed ones— of the divine condition, of God. All of this is what we mean when we affirm our belief in Jesus Christ as "*true*" God. Θεόν αληθινόν.

But incarnate God, which means emptied, adapted, conditioned, in a state of "*kenosis*," as ἐ-κένωσεν.

Ph 2:6f. St. Paul would put it. Made man, servant and obedient even until the cross.

And therefore human nature is a reality, not physical of course, that represents or refers to that which all human beings have in common and makes them typically and personally human.

Human beings, or human nature in its concrete form, are created realities that demand a basis or reason for being, driven by an inner principle — that makes them and invites them to freedom—, not left simply to the indeterminate or to-be-determined law of gravity, i.e., free, self-molded in terms of their being and their way of being for the future, called to a non-existent fullness if we limit ourselves to the spatial-temporal dimension, invited to unity in themselves, with others and with God. Visible, because of their spatial-temporal and conditioned nature. Human nature is not just a concept; it is the conceptual form by which we refer to all human beings, from all times and places, conditions and cultures. Human nature necessarily demands concrete manifestation, because it is the particular that gives rise to the abstraction, but also because it cannot exist outside of the concrete.

It is worth noting that Jesus' divine and human natures are not contradictory—they are not meant to be contrasted— or mutually exclusive—they do not exclude each other— or separate—they are not meant to be separated. They are perfectly united—they unite perfectly without limitation—, in fact, each one is the condition of possibility for the other. And as we have already

seen, they are not to be equated either. God as God and man as man. Dz-H 301, year 451.

Among the Romans, the emperors believed they were gods. But what made them think they were gods? An emperor as cruel and debased as Caligula being worshipped as a god strikes us as absurd today. What was their notion of God? Why did they believe themselves to be gods?

For the emperors and their subjects, life depended on the gods—well-being, peace and prosperity. The gods also had the right to give life and take it away; they also judged men, women and children, and they had the last word. They could destroy and annihilate, and make themselves feared and hated. The gods had nothing to do with what today we call the good, truth or virtue. For them cruelty was virtue; the lack of compassion was heroism; and mercy was weakness of heart and energy. The emperor-gods did as they wished, and in the moral sphere there was no law to stop them.

Jesus was not just different from all of that; he was diametrically opposed. He had come to announce the God's kingdom, not his own; he had come to serve, not to be served; to obey and not to give orders; to collect the fruit of the beloved vineyard; and finally to give it all up with his life.

Mt 6:10; 20:28;
26:39.

Mt 21:33f; Is 5:1-7;
Jn 20:30; Ga 2:20;
Ph 2:8.

He always felt that he was God's Son, and his heavenly Father served as his reference point, for his sense of obedience; for his sense of his own origin; for his sense of being a creature before God, his Creator and Father; for his sense of

Lk 2:49.
Jn 4:34.

Mk 1 22:27; Mt 5:22f. mission and being sent by God; for his sense of Messiahship, which gave him power and authority; and above all, in eschatological terms, for his sense of being the last prophet who will have the final word. Jesus' sonship never took on a genital sense, however, which would have been aberrant for Jesus and any Israelite.

Ap 21:6.

Being the Son from all eternity, during his earthly, time-bound life he lived and experienced his sonship every day and was constituted as Lord and Messiah by his resurrection.

Rm 1:4; Ph 2:11; Ac 2:36.

The faith in one single Jesus with two natures does not imply that there were somehow in him two subjects of action and attribution; there was only one, because he was "one and the same," but "*emptied*," expressed, grounding and sustaining his human person in a process of growth and development.

Cf Dz-H 301: Chalcedon.

Lk 2:40.52; Cf Ph 2:6; Ep 4:15.

Jesus' human and divine condition in no way diminishes his authentic transcendental being as the eternal Son of God, but made man, in our time, space, culture and conditions. "*One who has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin.*" "*Christ Jesus, —who is— himself a man.*" "*As men are, and being made in the likeness of men.*" During his earthly life Jesus' divine person was in a situation of "*kenosis*," which means an emptying or lowering of himself. Jesus' human condition is the perfect, complete and full expression of his divine condition. Nothing of the divine condition is left outside of the incarnation.

Heb 4:15.

1 Tm 2:5.

Ph 2:7.

Ep 2:6f.

Mary's virginity does not make Jesus the Son of God in a sexual sense. —Many Church fathers saw Mary's virginity and the conception by the Holy Spirit as a sign, and even a proof, of Jesus' special and unique sonship. In Luke's Gospel it would seem to have more of a Messianic meaning and not to refer to Jesus' eternal generation—.

Jesus' personality is better understood on the basis of his identity, of his mission to proclaim the Kingdom; he understood himself as the Son of God who was sent, Messiah-Son. It is better to approach Jesus' person not only on the basis of his origin, but also of his mission and his specific history: this is what actually reveals to us who Jesus is from the beginning. Lk 4:21.

His human and divine sonship was something that came from God's fatherhood and from his goodness and love.

Jesus made no distinction between Son of God by nature and son of God by adoption. This latter distinction was made in the context of faith, which distinguishes Jesus as the bearer of the Kingdom and, after the Resurrection, as the head, the first fruit and the first-born with respect to all human beings. Rm 1:4.

Shortly after his resurrection it would become clear, and St. John would express it, that Jesus did not receive his mission at a precise moment, as the prophets had. In John, the mission is not reduced to a specific task. His mission implies his whole life, an ascent and a descent. *"No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down* Jn 6:53.

Jn 3:13; 6:53; 3:17; 4:34; 6:29,38,44,57; 7:28-29; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 9:4; 11:42; 12:44-45,49; 13:20. *from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven.*" The idea of mission in John's Gospel is particularly important: Jesus is the Father's emissary.

Faith in Jesus as the Son of God, God with us, God and Lord, Great God and Savior: these are expressions and titles that clearly belong to the Apostles' preaching. John's Gospel, which is especially rich in the Trinitarian message, aside from the many historical contributions that it makes, is the most theological gospel and the one that had the biggest impact on Trinitarian definitions.

Jn 20:30. John wrote his Gospel *"so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."* It might seem logical to think that here "Son of God" is a messianic title, a synonym for *"the Christ,"* but the fact that this is a concluding verse suggests that we should consider the scope and meaning that the Evangelist has given to the term *"Son of God"* throughout his Gospel.

In the Synoptics, Christ announces and brings about the Kingdom, preaches and realizes the Good News; in John, he gives witness to what he sees in the Father. Only he knows the Father, as the father knows him. His person is the light and the truth. Also, *"Resurrection and life."* Thus his mission consists of giving witness. For John, the object of Jesus' witness is his own mystery and the mystery of the Father.

Jn 20:30.

Jn 3:11; 8:26; 3:32.

The Father who sends him, gives witness to Christ.

Jn 5:37. *"The Father who sent me bears witness to me himself."*
 Jn 8:18. *"The Father who sent me is my witness too."*

The witness is borne by the truth of his message,
 By the effectiveness of his word,
 By his giving of himself, which is the visualization of the Father,
 By his compassion and love, in the miracles,
 By his mercy in his words and acts.

Jesus as the incarnate Son of God, sent to the world, "*emptied of himself*," humiliated, during his entire earthly life,
 Is obedient to the Father, and in that sense "*servant*,"

Jn 1:14; 3:16; 8:42;
 Ph 2:7.

Jn 8:29; 14:31.

Bears the Father's message,
 Receives his power and authority from him,
 He does not know what the Father knows,
 He is inferior to the Father, who is his God,
 The Father is greater than he is,
 Jesus lives for the Father,
 He feels abandoned by the Father.

Jn 8:38; 16:25.

Jn 10:29.

Mt 24:36.

Jn 14:28; 17:34.

Jn 14:28.

Jn 6:57.

Mk 15:34; Lk 22:41.

All of this led heretics as well as some Church fathers, such as Theophilus of Antioch, Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Tertullian, to the conclusion that Jesus, not only during his earthly life—as taught by the Church—but also in his eternal life, was subordinate to the father—which is not the faith of the Church—.

Jesus, "*being of divine state*,
did not cling to his equality with God,
*but **emptied** himself*
to assume the condition of a slave,
and became as men are;
*and appearing in the **likeness** of men*,
*he was **humbler** yet*,
even to accepting death,

ἐκένωσεν.

σχήματι.

εταπεινώσεν.

Ph 2:6-8. *death on a cross...*"

The History of Salvation, which is the starting point for knowing God in himself and knowing what he has done for humanity, did not end with the death of Jesus; his resurrection and exaltation, as well as the preaching of the early Church, are integral and essential parts of this History.

ὑπερύψωσεν. *But God **raised** him **high**
and gave him the name, which is above all other
names
so that all beings
in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld,
should bend the knee at the name of Jesus,
and that every tongue should acclaim*

κύριος. *Jesus Christ as **Lord**,
Ph 2:9-11. to the glory of God the Father.*

Jesus' sonship, in his earthly life, implies a lowering of himself, but not in his eternal life, because he is of the same essence, substance and nature as the Father. His divine filiation is not the same as human filiation, where subordination does occur: the father is an adult while the child is a minor, and the father has superior knowledge and authority.

Jesus, as incarnate God, as "Son of Man," as son
Lk 3:23. "as it was thought" of Joseph and Mary, is at the same time the eternal Son of God. His human sonship and his having lived the experience of God as "Abba," and of himself as beloved Son, linked to the fact of the resurrection, reveals his divine condition of eternal Son of God. His condition of Son reveals the condition of the Father.

Jesus' gift reveals the Father's gift. Jesus' love reveals the Father's love. "*Everyone saw the Father in the Son,*" said Irenaeus; and "*whoever sees me sees the Father,*" wrote St. John. Jn 14:9; 12:45.

The Evangelist sees in Jesus a kind of spokesman of the Father's words: "*What the Father has told me is what I speak.*" The Father gives us life through his Son and in his Son Jesus. Jn 12:50.
Jn 17:1-2; 3:16.

Christian faith is based on a core, essential and specific point: faith in Jesus as the eternal Son of God made man. Thus John writes, "*No one who has the Father can deny the Son, and to acknowledge the Son is to have the Father as well.*" 1 Jn 2:23.

What is given in Jesus is all of the Father's divine being, except that as incarnate God he comes into history and proceeds from the Father, and because in his being he proceeds from the Father, we call him the Son. And with our language and our human figures, we touch something essential and intimate about divine being: its Trinitarian being. God's possibility of expressing himself lies in his Three-Person being, in expressing himself through his Word and life, in expressing himself as a matter of fact in Jesus. The Son occurs outside... and reveals what happens inside, i.e., in God himself. This enables us to say something with certainty about God's life and way of being, because he has revealed his way of being, what he is, with actions and words, and thus we can say that God is one and only, and at the same time Three Persons.

Activities

- Read Dz-H 681.
- By way of prayer

Lord, your Apostle said of you that in eternity “*you were in the likeness of God,*” Son of the Father, exact image of his holiness and companion of his glory. But you didn’t consider “*being like God*” as some kind of usurpation; rather you generously “*empty yourself.*” “*You have assumed the condition of a slave and become as men are,*” for whom you were a model, “*and in all your acts you were considered truly man. You humbled yourself even to accepting death, and death on a cross.*” You have come for people who have turned away from God. You have gone down to the depths of loss and you have brought us home with you. This is why “*God has raised you so high, and given you the name which is above all other names, so that all beings should bend the knee at your name, and every tongue should acclaim that you, Jesus Christ, are the Lord.*” This is why I also bend my knee before your name, and acknowledge that you are my Lord, Redeemer, Savior and Glorifier.

Ph 2:9-11.
R Guard ini:
Prayers from Theology.

6.2 What it means for us that Jesus is the Son of God

By affirming Jesus’ divine sonship, we first want to emphasize Jesus’ total and intimate belonging to God, the profound meaning of Jesus for people as an element of communion with the Father, God’s total and unique self-giving to Jesus, and

in Jesus, and finally, we want to speak of God as he who gives us everything and himself in Jesus.

Jesus belongs to God in such a way that it is impossible to talk about God without referring to Jesus, and God could not give himself in a more immediate or complete way than he did in Jesus, and at the same time there is no communication with God that can surpass the communication he has already had with his Son.

Being a human being is not so much an essential thing—inherent, part of one's nature—as a dynamic thing, something to be realized; in the same way that God slowly manifested himself little by little, progressively and dynamically throughout history, so did Jesus gradually show himself and “grow” little by little and become “a man.” It is important to avoid any kind of “adoptionism”: that Jesus comes to be what he was not at first; as if his merits allowed him to become the Son of God. Jesus' attribute of “*Son of God*” should be understood not just in an atemporal and static way, but also in a historical and dynamic sense, like any human being, in the same sense as when we say that a child is a human person and at the same time becomes a human person.

From the beginning men and women have been created in the image and likeness of the Son of God, even in their embodied condition, even in the flesh that was shaped like clay. The topic of flesh configured by Christ, from the beginning of the world, is a point that St. Irenaeus develops carefully.

Lk 2:40 y 52.
Jn 3:30.

υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ad Haer IV, 33:4.

Jesus' great gift with his incarnation, as St. John presents it in the Prologue to his Gospel, is the ἐξουσίαν. *"power"* he has given us *"to become children of God."* *Power* here does not mean a legal title; it is a dignity that is established and acquired by believing in his name. The filiation of all those who accept Jesus can be seen as a true sanctification or divinization, consisting of participating with Christ in divine life.

Adoptive filiation is a form of participation in the Trinitarian mystery. Through our filiation and our acceptance of Christ we can count on the Father's love, and on a love that is participation in the same love of Christ. Our filiation and the divine life lived in God, which follows from our human life, is none other than God's life lived alongside Christ and the Father. Expressed with St. Paul's words and metaphors, we, too, will be with Christ and in Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father. *"He brought us to life with Christ, and raised us up with him and gave us a place with him in heaven."* This life of the Father and the Son is found in us: it is the Holy Spirit. Thus eternal life is participation in Trinitarian life.

"The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts."

But how can we be children of God? In what sense? It is not by birth: we are not born of *"flesh or blood,"* terms used to designate human weakness, *"or will of man,"* by human initiative. Those who accept or receive Jesus *"are born of God."* The Jerusalem Bible sees these verses as an allusion to Jesus' virgin birth, but many exegetes

believe that they refer to *“those who received him and believed in his name.”*

They are born by God’s eternal plan to incorporate human beings by joining them, in Jesus, to eternal, intra-Trinitarian life. St Paul says, *“They are the ones he chose specially long ago and intended to become true images of the Son, so that his Son might be the eldest of many brothers.”* Rm 8:29.

And Irenaeus comments, *“For, in what way could we be partaken of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself?”* That is the only way we can be where he is and be objects of the Father’s love, and subjects included in God’s Trinitarian life. Irenaeus, Adv Haer III, 18,7.

Eternal life does not take place in a wonderful city, or at an eternal feast; it is life in God the Trinity that is practically unimaginable.

Christians are born again through their faith in Christ: *“Begotten by God”* does not mean returning to the mother’s womb, as Nicodemus thought, but participating in the Spirit of Jesus. *“What is born of the flesh is flesh; what is born of the Spirit is spirit.”* Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:4.18.

“You are, all of you, sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” Ga 3:26.

To those who do not accept Jesus, he answers in John’s Gospel: *“If God were your Father, you would love me, since I have come here from God.”* Jn 8:42.

“When the appointed time came, God sent his son... to enable us to be adopted as sons.”

“The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries ‘Abba, Father,’ and it is this that makes you a son; you are not a slave anymore. And if God has made you son, then he has made you heir.”

κληρονόμοι. *“And if we are children, we are **heirs** as well: heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, sharing his sufferings so as to share his glory.”*

Mt 5:5.9; 13:47;
Jn 3:5; Mt 20:1

The condition of son of God is participation in Jesus’ sonship; it is a gift of the kingdom and belongs to the disciples; it is being God’s child in the eyes of Jesus, and comes mainly from accepting the kingdom, and not just as a consequence of creation. *“Love your enemies... in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes the sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and the rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike.”*

Jn 1:14; 2:11; 12:41;
Lk 2:9; 9:32.

The disciples are those who *“have seen his glory.”* Jesus’ glory, like God’s glory, means power, authority, presence; it is the object of admiration and veneration. The disciples have seen Jesus’ glory, but also the Father’s glory in the person of Jesus.

Mt 6:8,32; Lk 12:30.

Cf J Jeremias, NT Theol., p. 215.

Filiation provides security in this life because the Father knows what his children need. It is like a mother who worries the most about the child who most needs her. It is the least among us that God protects the most.

We can state that filiation is the greatest gift of the kingdom, the gift that encompasses all the other gifts. Jesus' sonship was seen by the Church Fathers as the recapitulation of his message, and our filiation, which is a consequence of Jesus', can be seen as the recapitulation of Jesus' message for us.

Mt 7:11; Lk 11:13;
Rm 8:15.

*The Word of God was made man,
assimilating Himself to man,
and man to Himself,
so that by means of his resemblance to the Son,
man might become precious to the Father.*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V,16,2.

By saying that we "*share the divine nature*," we mean that we share in what God is, i.e., Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is important to note that this sharing occurs in the Son, and through Jesus Christ, through whom the Father communicates. As St. Augustine said, we are children in the Son. Our relationship with God is that of a child because Jesus Christ is the Son from whom we receive life in our natural condition of living beings. With Jesus, the Father communicates in his fullness; with us, through his communion with Christ. Thus all of our relationship with God is implicitly Trinitarian and Christ-centered, although it is not conscious on our part.

2 P 1:4.

When we say that Jesus is the Son of God, we are not talking just about him; we are also saying something about ourselves. Jesus' reference to the Father is the source of our own reference. Jesus is the Son of God in a relationship not only with the Father, but also with all people. By calling Jesus the Son of God, we are referring to all

people who have ties to him. The title of First-Born, which St. Luke and St. Paul give to Jesus, is related to the priority of his communion with God, but also with all people, alive and dead, and with the whole of creation.

Lk 2:7; Rm 8:9; Ap 1:5; Col 1:18; 1:15.

Jesus contrasts the condition of servant to that of child:

Jn 8:27f.

The servant

- goes in and out of the house, but does not belong to the house;
- is there as long as he is paid;
- has obligations governing his relationship and work with the masters;
- must be diligent;
- must be good;
- if he is not happy, he may go, it being his right;
- may be dismissed;
- receives wages in payment for his work;
- has no rights as part of the family, no bonds of love, only the rights and obligations of a worker;
- is not free while working;
- lives in fear of dismissal,
- and unaware of the master's will.

Lk 10:7.

Lk 17:7.

Lk 16:2; Jn 8:35.

Mt 25:24.

Cf Rm 8:14.

The child

- o remains in the home because it belongs to her, she *"is there always"*;
- o has the rights of a family member;
- o has dignity and honor—the sandals and the ring were signs of dignity and honor—;
- o everything belongs to her;

Lk 15:22.

Lk 15:31.

- o and she is an heir; Lk 20:14; Ga 4:7;
- o may not be thrown out; Rm 8:17.
- o does not fear; Jn 8:35.
- o does not get paid immediately; Rm 8:15.
- o does not have to be good, diligent or perfect; Lk 15:31.
- o the house belongs to her and she must be responsible; Mt 21:29.
- o has control over her activities; Mt 21:28.
- o thinks for herself, even when she is wrong; Lk 15:11f.
- o decides for herself, even though she makes bad decisions;
- o is free, with the parents' freedom; Ga 4:6.
- o everything belongs to everyone;
- o the father lives with the children in living communion: they sleep, work, eat, pray, celebrate and rest together; Lk 11:7.
- o or they undergo the same fate. 1 Jn 2:25f.

The first-born

- o belongs to God in a special way; Ex 13:11-15; 22:28; 34:30.
- o receives a characteristic blessing; Gn 27:33-36.
- o has the same authority as the Father; Jn 8:36.
- o represents, defends and protects all the siblings;
- o can free a slave or dismiss a servant, but the eldest has possession of everything to administer it and act as the "Titleholder"; Jn 8:36.
- o has the power of ownership and decision; Lk 15:31; Rm 8:29; Ps 89:27; Jn 3:35; 1 Co 15:24.
- o knows that the Father wants; Jn 4:53; Ac 10:2; 11:14; 18:8;
- o acts like the Father; 1 Co 1:16.
- o because he has learned everything from the Father. Jn 8:36; 5:19-20.

Given the authority and importance of the eldest Son, *"if the Son makes you free, you will be*

Jn 8:36. *free indeed.*” We partake of Jesus’ sonship, and
 Jn 8:36. therefore, of his freedom as well. The freedom
 that Jesus gives is with respect to sin and the law,
 and it frees us from ourselves, from our condi-
 tion of weakness, pain, suffering and death; from
 the Devil, i.e., from all evil. His salvation and his
 main gift are to have us partake of his sonship,
 which is why salvation has a dimension of “in-
 heritance” and we are the “heirs.”

Among “brothers and sisters” there should not
 be disunity, because the father unites them, the
 eldest son unites them, the home unites them, the
 “inheritance” unites them, i.e., they are united by
 the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the world
 and eternal life.

Jn 8:35f; Rm 8:29. This image of the family and of the eldest son
 gives John and Paul material to talk about Jesus’
 privileged and unique relationship with the Fa-
 ther; Jesus is the First-born, the Only Son, the
 most beloved Son, in whom the Father is well
 pleased. The Church fathers, Tertullian in par-
 ticular, make use of the image of the family to
 talk about the Son, as different and similar to the
 Father in dignity and authority.

Lk 10:7; 16:10. When Jesus compares the disciples to workers,
 servants or slaves, it is not to speak of their na-
 ture or condition in the Kingdom, but rather to
 speak of their rights, obligations and responsi-
 bilities.

From the father-son relationship other analogies
 are also drawn. There are children of the light, of

darkness, of this world, of the devil because he is a liar and the father of lies. Lk 16:8; Jn 8:44.
1 Jn 2:21.

Men and women are more than just God's adoptive sons and daughters because they partake of divine nature by being incorporated into Jesus Christ and called to participate in his resurrection. Our participation in divine life is absolute grace that is given to us when we partake of Jesus' sonship. 2 P 1:4.
Rm 8:29.

N.B.

The Israelites maintain a strong sense of family, so much so that if the father or eldest son converts to another faith, the rest of the family is automatically included. Jn 4:53; Ac 10:2;
11:14; 18:8;
1 Co 1:16.

Activities

- In the servant parables, Mt 22:26f, look for their characteristics.
- In the same way, look for the differences with the sons.
- Read the text from Rm 13:8-14, and explain what it means to be children of God.
- Make a list of sentences that sum up this section, for example:

We are children and not slaves, employees, or servants.

God is Father, not master, overseer, or king.

God is the Father of adult children... who place in him the trust and confidence of children.

Spiritual childishness is no virtue.

Look up all the times the word “*first-born*” appears in the Gospel, and find out what it means.

6.3 Jesus is God along with the Father and the Holy Spirit

The disciples’ post-Paschal experience became a conviction, a creed. Jesus is not the Father, but he is equal to the Father in power, authority, pre-eminence and lordship. He is for them the visualization of the Father. As Jesus was, so is the Father, i.e., God.

For Christians, Jesus is God himself who speaks through him, and in him he shows himself to people; furthermore, it is not just the invisible God who is made visible in Jesus; through Jesus God makes all things visible and invisible. Jesus is God’s strength and power that creates, saves and does everything that is up to God to do. In Jesus God has been given to us in all his strength. Without underestimating the value of the concrete and particular, but rather confirming it, belief in Jesus Christ means believing that

Lk 3:23. his meaning goes beyond that of a specific 33-year life, and that the most absolute of human values are given to us in their fullest form in the concrete life of Jesus.

Jesus’ divinity is not an immediately experienced fact; it does not belong to the realm of the phenomenological. It is an affirmation of faith regarding Jesus’ person, revealed directly by God. “*It was not flesh and blood that revealed this*

Mt 16:17. *to you, but my Father in heaven.*” With this expression, St. Matthew declares the origin of faith

in Jesus, although the concrete occurrence and Peter's confession can admit different interpretations.

Faith in Jesus does not consist of something that is perceived, but rather something that is accepted. Faith in Jesus was an interpretation of something that was perceived through the senses. And this perceived reality—the person of Jesus—can be interpreted in many ways. In fact, most of Jesus' contemporaries saw what Jesus did and heard what he said, and yet not only did they not interpret his person along the lines of faith, they considered him mad and possessed by a demon. Mk 3:21; Mt 9:34. In John's Gospel he appears as a blasphemer worthy of execution, *"you are only a man and you claim to be God."* Jn 10:33 y 39; 5:18.

Christian faith is a way of interpreting the life, person and mysteries of Jesus. That is why we can say that believing that Jesus Christ is God is an act of absolute freedom. Nothing forces us to believe in him. In fact, no argument is utterly compelling. Jesus' divinity is not something that is evident. On the other hand, the Biblical texts express the faith of the early apostolic Church, and not necessarily Jesus' own words.

The reasons adduced to support faith in Jesus' divinity are the following:

- + Jesus had greater authority than Moses or the prophets, an authority that corresponded only to God; for this reason he made absolute demands.
- + He had power to work miracles. Through Jesus and in Jesus, God's eschatological kingdom

came. The salvific events of the end times occurred in Jesus, events that showed who Jesus was. Lk 11:20. *"If it is through the finger of God that I cast out devils, then know that the Kingdom of God has overtaken you."*

+ Jesus made clear that in his love and mercy, in his forgiveness of sinners and love for the outcast, the Kingdom of God was already present, as was God himself.

+ He forgave sins. In Jewish belief, only God could forgive sins.

+ Jesus is God for having been conceived miraculously, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, in a virginal woman.

+ Because he attributed to himself, or was attributed with, that which belongs to the Father, such as giving life. Jn 1:4; 5:21; 14:1.

His honor and glory give witness of his identity. Jesus, passing through his life, passion and death, Mk 16:19. *"is seated at the right hand of the Father,"* which means equality with God.

There is no passage in the New Testament that tries to affirm Jesus' divinity in an essential sense, nor is there an equivalence drawn in the Gospel between Jesus and God. St. John's expression: Jn 10:30. *"The Father and I are one,"* does not have an essentialist but a referential sense, and it was part of the early Church's faith that Jesus was included in God from the beginning; it was a case of unity of thought and action. The word *"thing or reality"* Jn 1:1. does not have the same meaning; Jesus does not say 'my Father and I are the same thing,' but 'we are one,' as if he were saying: 'what the Father

concedes, I concede; what the Father does, I do as well; whoever sees me sees the Father; where I am, the Father is.’ Jn 14:10 y 18; 16:23; 5:17.

When Jesus is called “*My Lord and my God*,” Jn 20:28. as a conclusion to St. John’s Gospel, he is being linked to God and to the believer, but it is not being stated that God and Jesus are the same. It does not say that God is Jesus, but it does say that Jesus is God. In other words, Jesus is God’s expression, his gift, his communication. The Father-Son scheme speaks of otherness, relationship, and dependence, which is why preference is given to the more Biblical and existential formula of calling Jesus the “*Son of God*,” over the more metaphysical— and less historical and Biblical— formula that simply states that Jesus is God.

The New Testament texts that speak of Jesus as God are not trying to set forth a definition; they are mainly expressing the function that Christ has for us. In order to describe the reality of Christ, both the early Church and today’s Church created names and titles for Christ; all of them are necessary, and all of them come up short. The title of “God,” which must be considered in connection with all the other titles that express the historical reality of Jesus, is the basis for assuming the paradox of a particular man being God and, above all, of God being that man and not another, which is revealed and communicated to us in Jesus. Jesus’ premier title could be that of “Jesus is God,” but that does not mean that it is his only title, or the supreme title, or that it

is enough to express and encompass, religiously and theologically, the mystery of Jesus. Jesus is God and Man, which cannot be said of either the Father or the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is not God in the abstract; the God who gives and reveals himself to us in Jesus is the incarnate God, bound to the singularity of human beings, with their circumstances and their history: the God of the Covenant linked to the world. God bound to human suffering.

What should be avoided is a representative interpretation: Jesus as God's proxy. This interpretation would imply that Jesus has taken God's place or substituted for God among human beings. Jesus does not take God's place among people, nor does he take people's place before God. Jesus, with his life, his message, his death and resurrection, is the perfect expression of God for people, and of God in himself, which is why we can call him, as Paul does, "*image of the unseen God*," "*the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*," from which it follows that a person is also "*image and glory of God*."

What should also be avoided is making Jesus out to be a mere participant in what God is, because God cannot be divided; or a functional identification, based on the role that Jesus plays among people, as a kind of attorney who represents us when we get into trouble.

The formula "*Jesus is God*" places each one of us before Jesus and points out the root of the mystery and the singularity of Jesus: his oneness

with the Father makes it possible for him to be for us what God is. The living and true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is unthinkable without Jesus, and Jesus in turn is unthinkable without God.

There is a danger in assuming that we know who Jesus is by stating that he is God and man at the same time: a person in two natures; akin to knowing that water is a compound made up of two molecules of hydrogen and one of oxygen, when water is known to us on a vital level through thirst. It would be a mistake to situate the force of the statement that Jesus is God on the level of divine metaphysics; it is much more about God's communication, manifestation and salvation.

Paul tells us that *"in Jesus' body lives the fullness of divinity."* Col 2:9; 1:19.

The Spirit that is communicated to us sheds light on his condition as Son of God; and just as no one can forgive sins except God alone, in the same way no one can give us God's Spirit without being God. Mk 2:7; Lk 5:21.
Cf Tertullian, Bapt 10,3.

Jesus is God because he is the complete, absolute and only expression of God.

The fact that God through Jesus gives himself totally to people, and gives himself to Jesus through human nature, is what makes Jesus God.

God's giving himself to Jesus eternally, totally, definitively, absolutely and finally is what consti-

tutes, in the final analysis, God's divine fatherhood with respect to Jesus.

And the fact that Jesus is the Son of God by nature means that it is proper to God's being, from the beginning, to express himself and give himself to Jesus through human nature. And it is proper to Jesus to be the perfect, complete and natural expression of God.

In Catholic faith we call Jesus "*Consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit*," by which we highlight his divine nature, his essence. We do not say that he participates in the divine essence, because this essence cannot be divided. The concept of *consubstantial* indicate his divine being together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, from whom he cannot be separated with respect to his divine being. The distinction and separation occurs only in his personal being, on account of being begotten of the Father from the beginning and historically sent to the world. But the fact of being God occurs in his personal being. Jesus is God by being —by the fact of being—the Second Person of the Holy Trinity; he was to be incarnated, he was incarnated and he will remain incarnated, i.e., in his eternal relationship with human beings, with creation, with what is not God.

Col 2:10; Ep 1:21.

The word "*consubstantial*," according to the understanding of the Church Fathers who took part in the Council of Nicaea, is the translation of the Father-Son analogy, which is not mere resemblance, but rather reality in the sense Jesus referred to. "*It is not a philosophy that takes its*

place next to the Bible; it is the Bible's protection against the attack of philosophy," which wanted to make Jesus a transitory being, like any other creature.

Walter Kasper
El Dios de Jesucristo,
Ed. Sígueme, 2001.

The statement "Jesus is God" is a true statement, but it is incomplete because "Jesus is God with the Father and the Holy Spirit," just as each divine person is together with the other two. This is the theological meaning of the word "*consubstantial*." We can now translate these terms to understand their theological meaning as "co-existent, co-real, co-transcendent, co-loving and co-operating." We want to say that what and how the Father is, he is together with the Son and with the Holy Spirit, except for that which makes the Father Father and not Son, all of this in the eternal relationship of proceeding.

N.B.

The texts supporting faith in Jesus' divinity are: Mt 12:41-42; Lk 11:31-32; Mk 12:35-37; Lk 20:41-44; Mt 12:28-36; Mt 17:1-9; Mk 1:7; Lk 7:26-28; Mt 13:41; 16:27; 24:31. Most exegetes think that these texts refer to Jesus' Messiahship, not to his divinity, as consubstantiality with God.

Activities

- After reading the text, explain in your own words what we are to understand by the expression 'Son of God,' and by the expression 'Jesus is God.'
- Point out the parts of the creed that correspond to this section.

- Read Dz-H 533-536, and formulate questions if anything is not sufficiently clear.
- Read the exegesis for Col 1:15-20; Christ, Creator and savior, in *Comentario al Nuevo Testamento*, Sígueme, Verbo Divino, Salamanca, 1998.
- St. Irenaeus writes against the Ebionites and Judaizers who do not accept the incarnation of the Son of God:

But again, those who assert that he was simply a mere man, begotten by Joseph, remaining in the bondage of the old disobedience, are in a state of death having been not as yet joined to the Word of God the Father, nor receiving liberty through the Son, as He does Himself declare: "If the Son shall

Jn 8:36. *make you free, you shall be free indeed."* But, being ignorant of Him who from the Virgin is Emmanuel, they are deprived of His gift, which is eternal

Is 7:14. *life; and not receiving the incorruptible Word, they*

Jn 4:10.14. *remain in mortal flesh, and are debtors to death, not obtaining the antidote of life. To whom the Word says, mentioning his own gift of grace: "I said, You are all the sons of the Highest, and gods;*

Ps 82:6-7. *but you shall die like men."* He speaks undoubtedly these words to those who have not received the gift of adoption, but who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of the Word of God, **defraud human nature of promotion into God**, and prove themselves ungrateful to the Word of God, who became flesh for them. For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and he who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to

incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons?

1 Co 15:53-54;
Ga 4:5; 2 Co 5:4.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer III, 19,1.

6.4 What does Jesus' divinity mean for us?

Jesus is “*God like the Father, consubstantial with the Father, one in being with the father*”; “*God from God*.” All of these are ways of understanding and expressing the eternal meaning of Jesus' relationship with God and with humankind.

Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ.

For many people nowadays, believing in Jesus means accepting a statement that makes no sense to them and makes no difference to the way they act. If we want to ask today about the meaning of our confession of Jesus' divinity, we would do well to focus on its impact on our day-to-day life.

Jesus' divinity is a confession that refers to the transcendence of Jesus' life—ongoing and universal validity and value—in our relationship with him. It is equivalent to saying that Jesus' life is worth as much as God's life, and is valuable for each person and for everyone to the extent that we are bound to Jesus.

Believing in Jesus' divinity means accepting Jesus absolutely in a way that determines our own life. The Church's proclamation of Jesus' divinity is, first of all, an invitation to people to make a

decision in their own life—to give it the meaning that the Church gives it based on the Church's faith. It is not a call to accept a statement, but a call to accept a meaning, that Jesus is God who gives our own life the absolute, decisive, fundamental and prospective place of his personal life.

It is useless to state that Jesus is God and then to continue living with an attitude that shuts out the Gospel and the apostolic message.

Believing that Jesus is God means:

- Making Jesus the decisive and ultimate core of our own life.
- Focusing on Jesus as the center and ultimate goal of our religious practice.
- Making Jesus the center of our love, and letting him determine, condition and evaluate all of our other loves.
- Giving Jesus the last word when it comes to taking the measure of our life, as Redeemer and Judge. It is up to Jesus to assess each person's life at the personal, social and cosmic level. This assessment does not happen only as we live our life, but also as an overall judgment of history.
- Knowing that what we believe, acknowledge, love and adore about God is to be found in Jesus, and in parallel, what God has accepted, loved, chosen and forgiven about us, is likewise to be found in Jesus.

It makes little difference to say that Jesus is one in being with the Father, and to profess the Church's Creed, if faith, trust and love for Jesus

do not determine and guide our life. On the other hand, if Jesus really does guide our life, he must also guide our way of thinking and judging, the interpretation of our experiences and feelings, which are what actually set the direction of our life.

What is distinctive about being a Christian is acknowledging in our way of living that Jesus is God, and not just as a verbal confession of faith. It must be more than a theoretical statement; it must be reflected in our practice, which means that the confession of faith must be tied to love for others. Jm 2:14f.

Believing in Jesus' divinity is an act of genuine faith. It is not something that springs from the experience of verifiable reality, nor is it a conclusion inexorably drawn from certain postulates. Faith in Jesus' divinity is an act that transcends a human being's perceptive capacity.

Calling Jesus "*God and consubstantial with the Father*" means acknowledging just how far Jesus is linked to God and God to Jesus. In the context of faith, the only context in which the expression "*Jesus is God*" makes any sense, the expression is more historical than metaphysical and essentialist. God has revealed himself to us, given himself to us, and joined us to himself in Jesus of Nazareth, and that is why Jesus is God.

The acclamation of Jesus as God is a response of adoration and worship to the God who has revealed himself to humankind in Jesus. The confession of Jesus' divinity is an acknowledgment

Jn 20:28; Rm 9:15; Heb 1:8. of God's sovereignty and lordship in Jesus and through Jesus. It is also an acknowledgment of the fact that in Jesus we touch, so to speak, the living God. This one and living God has communicated himself to us in the particular life of Jesus.

Jn 1:17-18.

All of Jesus' titles serve to affirm the same message in different ways: that God has fully revealed himself to us in Christ, and that Christ is not just a sign alluding to God, but the one who makes God present in the way that God himself wishes to be and can be for humankind: its salvation, its God.

Theological reflections and definitions are not so much about "understanding" Jesus as about genuinely following him, making him the core of our Christian option, being moved by his Spirit.

Believers may find reasons or motivations in which to ground their faith, but not to demonstrate it. Proofs of Jesus' divinity are really reasons that support faith once it exists; they are not postulates from which faith can necessarily be derived.

If people accept Jesus, and accept him as he is and as he was, they are implicitly accepting what we call Jesus' divinity, because what determines truth is reality, not the image we make of it. When it comes to Jesus, and to God, reflection does not come before faith. The precedents that lead up to faith are admiration, a call, and a response that consists of following, together with praise and adoration. When Jesus calls, first we must

respond, and only then can we formulate our questions, although sometimes questions about Jesus can lead us to an authentic faith.

The confession of Jesus' divinity should be an affirmation that gives explicit expression to what in life gives witness to him. Whoever affirms that Jesus is God is affirming that the supreme value in her life is Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus' cause, which was humankind, and human beings who are at a disadvantage; that her love for God above all things is projected and materialized in her love for Jesus, and her love for Jesus in her love for her sisters and brothers.

Mt 25:34f;
Lk 10:33.

Lk 10:25f;
Jn 8:42; 14:23.

Believing in Jesus' divinity means believing in human dignity, that of each one of us, and knowing that what we are, human beings and persons, is elevated in Jesus to God's right hand, because the Word at God's side is the Word among us. Believing in Jesus' divinity means believing in the value of human beings, because for Jesus there is nothing more sacred in the world than human beings, not the Sabbath, not the Temple, not sacrifices, and while it may seem contradictory, not even doctrine or faith; the good man in the parable was a Samaritan, and the main thing in Christian life is love, even for one's enemies.

Jn 1:14; Mt 1:23.

Mk 2:27; Mt 12:1f.
Mt 5:23f.

1 Co 13:13.

Mt 5:43f; Lk 6:27f;
Rm 12:20.

From a historical perspective, the fundamental and ultimate reason we believe in Jesus' divinity is the interpretation that the Apostles and New Testament authors made of him, and on this basis, the Church, over the centuries and in different cultures. It was clearly not an arbitrary interpretation, but rather one grounded in the facts

about Jesus' life, death and resurrection, that gave rise to Christian faith. Faith in Jesus' divine condition leads us to faith in the Trinity of the one true God.

Cf Jn 8:39f. The option taken with respect to Jesus visualizes and materializes our option before God. Accepting God means, for Christians, accepting Jesus, and accepting Jesus means accepting God and being his true children. God wants people to climb up to him by the same ladder he used to enter into communion with people, namely, Jesus of Nazareth.

Tertullian, Apol II, 2.
"Carmen Chisti quasi
deo dicere". A pagan author of the first century was scandalized to see Christians worshipping Jesus as God. Pliny the Younger, whose full name was Cecilius Secundus Plinius, was born in 61 AD, was governor of the Roman province of Pontus, in Bithynia, starting in the year 110. In 112 he wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan and mentioned that the Christians "sang hymns to Christ as if he were God."

Tertullian, Apol L, 4; XXI, 10. The early Christians felt proud to give their lives in witness to their faith in Jesus' divinity. Tertullian wrote: "The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed... We say, and before all men we say, and torn and bleeding under your tortures, we cry out, 'We worship God through Christ! By him and in him God would be known and be adore'... 'We are neither ashamed of Christ-for we rejoice to be counted his disciples, and in his name to suffer, and it speaks well of our faith that we die gladly'""

Writing against Marcion, he says in the second book:

“With regard, however, to the Father, the very gospel which is common to us will testify that he was never visible, according to the word of Christ: ‘No man knows the Father, save the Son.’ For even in the Old Testament he had declared, ‘No man shall see me, and live.’ He means that the Father is invisible, in whose authority and in whose name was he God who appeared as the Son of God. But with us, God is received in the person of Christ, because even in this manner is he our God.”

Tertullian,
Marc II 27:7.

It should be noted that the adjective “our” is applied to God, *“He is our God,”* not as one among several, not as something that belongs to us or that we can own, but rather to indicate our belonging to him. But we also apply it to the Father: he is *“our Father”*; and to the Son: he is *“our God and Lord.”* This possessive adjective is the one that St. Paul uses the most to refer to Jesus: he is our Lord. The Holy Spirit is also *“our Spirit”* because it belongs to us as a gift. And God gave it to us as that which belongs most intimately to him and to us, ever since creation.

Mt 6:7; Rm 15:6;
1 Co 1:2.

Gn 2:7; Cf Jn 20:22.

The Covenant essentially states that *“Yahweh is our God, and we are his people.”* And the decisive element of the New Covenant is that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and above all the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, in union with the Holy Spirit, is our God, and we are his Church.

Is 26:12.

N.B.

Ac 10:38. The Greek took certain great men for gods, such as the divine Plato, Empedocles, Pythagoras. They were divine men —Θεός ἄνδρες— on account of having been poets, visionaries, magicians, heroes, saviors, and athletes. The Gospel eventually told them that Jesus was not just a great man on account of his undeniable human qualities, but also that he was still alive; that he not only “*went about doing good*,” but he continues to live and go about —act— among us. Jesus’ divinization, i.e., his deepest divine and human condition, has nothing to do with the divinization of emperors, wise men or heroes; it is not trying to put Jesus at their level, or at the level of mythical beings; the Trinitarian and Christological councils attempt to express the faith in a way that challenges these conceptions of hybrid gods.

Activities

- Share an experience in which you put Jesus in God’s place.
- What would it mean for you if Jesus were simply an ordinary human being like you?
- What would it mean for you if Jesus were only God and not a human being?
- Research the exegesis of the following texts: Jn 20:28: “*my Lord and my God*,” and Rm 15:6.

6.5 Pre-existence

From the earliest days of the apostolic preaching, pre-existence became the point of departure

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 Jesus' death. John's Gospel was written around the year 100 and presents a more elaborated Christology that takes Jesus' pre-existence as the starting point.

For St. John and St. Paul, Jesus of Nazareth is present to the eyes of God from all eternity. They affirm the pre-existence of Jesus of Nazareth as a personal, concrete reality, just as he presented himself in history, but in a dimension that transcends space and time, in God's dimension.

Rm 8:3; Ga 4:4;
Jn 1:1; 1 Jn 4:9.

For them, Jesus existed, pre-existed, prior to his presence in the world.

John identifies the Word with Jesus: Jesus is the Word of God from the beginning of time, "*at the Father's side*," in the Father's heart. Between the Word of God and Jesus there is true identification. The Word is not something different from the historical Jesus; it is the Son of God himself, pre-existent, that is made flesh. The historical Jesus pre-exists and therefore precedes Abraham and David.

Jn 1:14; 10:30;
1 Jn 1:2.

Jn 1:14; 10:30;
1 Jn 1:2.

Jesus came from God in order to lead us to God. He himself is God, and his divine power is expressed and given to us in his "becoming man."

What is said about the Word is known in reference to Jesus of Nazareth. The "Logos" is oriented from the beginning of time to the historical Jesus and to the world. The Good News is given about the historical Jesus, concrete and within

the world, and not about the Logos. The Logos, as a Christological notion, serves to affirm the eternal meaning of the person of the historical Jesus and the value of his salvific action. The historical dimension represented something that was so valuable for God and its meaning was so great that he had it from the beginning of time. The Jesus who existed as the Son of God was the same one who would come to exist in history.

Affirming the pre-existence of Jesus as Son of God underscores Jesus' full divinity, and God's relationship with the world, and the world's with God, through Jesus Christ. Any talk of pre-existence, or of God *before* the creation, is simply a way of speaking, because before the creation there was no time at all to serve as a reference point. Pre-existence thus means God's transcendence and immanence, by which we refer to Jesus' eternal meaning.

Meaning of pre-existence:

- Jesus' pre-existence serves to affirm his absolute origin in God.
- It affirms Jesus' transcendence.
- Jesus is the Son, seated at God's right hand, even before appearing historically as such.
- He appeared as the Son because he already was the Son.

Pre-existence indicates that Jesus enjoys reality in God even before becoming a man; with this the incarnation is seen as the act by which Jesus assumes human life.

Jesus' pre-existence is not a function 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 put history aside; on the contrary, it affirms the transcendence of the historical dimension, projecting it to the very origin and for all eternity.

For St. John and St. Paul, Jesus was the Son of God and the only Son, even before his historical condition. For them, Jesus did not become the Son of God by becoming a man; Jesus is "*the Son*" from and for all eternity, and his Sonship is manifested and realized historically in his human life. It is not saying that "a Son" pre-existed and then became Jesus, but rather that Jesus is the Son that already pre-existed in God.

Ph 2:6; Jn 1:1f; 17:5.

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 having been previously in God anyone who was later to become Jesus. —In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is the Son of God on account of being the Messiah and having been conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit; as of that moment he began to exist—. From a Biblical perspective it is not certain that the texts that might appear to insinuate the pre-existence of Jesus actually refer to this; being the Messiah does not presuppose existing prior to David. The interpretation of these texts could lead to the conclusion that the synoptics also speak of Jesus' pre-existence.

Lk 7:34-35; 11:49;
Mt 23:34; 11:25-30;
Mt 22:42-45;
Mk 12:35.

Jn 6:29. The idea of pre-existence is directly linked to the concept of “Son of God,” and particularly to the idea of mission. *“This is working for God: you must believe in the one he has sent.” “The Father sends, and the Son is sent, and comes.”*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 6,3.

If God has manifested himself as such in Jesus, it is because Jesus’ communion with God forms part of God’s being. Jesus is inseparable from God, meaning that his communion with God, which is eternal, is not distinct from his human, time-bound and conditioned state. Jesus’ existential realization gives currency in time to his eternal relationship with God.

The fundamental message of pre-existence is to affirm that Jesus’ temporal life had eternal meaning, and that what was once manifested in the world as full of meaning made visible the meaning that it had in the Father’s heart. Jesus would come to be, in history, was he already was in the Father from the beginning of time. The Son of God, in eternity, will show himself to be “the Son” in his temporal life, and will come as the emissary to be the savior of all humankind. The Son in the Father’s innermost being is he who would become the Son in Mary’s womb.

Jn 1:1; Lk 1:35.

Jesus’ pre-existence refers directly to God’s eternity where there is no before and after; where there does not have to be time, space or process of becoming; where being is independent of time-space coordinates. It is therefore an ineffable category in terms of time and space, which is not to eviscerate history of its novelty and risk, nor is it to determine what Jesus was to become

in his life on earth. From all eternity Jesus is for the Father what he in time was to become for humankind. His eternal being does not contradict his development.

Historically one must “come to be” what one is through the process of development; one comes to be what one already was. In this sense, what occurs simply gives currency to possibilities. But in Jesus’ case, pre-existence is a true existence in God, not a temporal pre-existence, which it is only with respect to us and with respect to time.

Cf Dz-H 422, 125,
150, 554.

The risen Jesus, who lived a human life, now lives a divine life that is essentially tied to his temporal life, just as before his history he lived a divine life that referred to his temporal life.

Ep 1:1f; Ph 2:6f;
Jn 4:9; 13:13; 16:18.

From the biblical perspective there is a risk of identifying Jesus with his divine nature and thinking that Jesus pre-exists inasmuch as he is the Second Person of the Trinity. We know that the New Testament make no reference to any divine and eternal Son separate from Jesus who was incarnated at a certain point in history. When the New Testament alludes to pre-existence, it always assumes that Jesus had a kind of human reality from the very beginning of time. It is not the abstract eternal Son that pre-exists; it is the human Jesus of the Gospel. Jesus exists actively in the beginning of the world and presents himself as a human being at a specific moment.

In John’s Gospel the idea of pre-existence appears clearly in the following words: *“I came from the Father and have come into the world and*

- Jn 16:25-28. *now I leave the world to go to the Father.* "It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father." And in another text it is written: "God's love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son so that we could have life through him."
- Jn 13:1.
- 1 Jn 4:9.

The Second Person of the Trinity is perfectly identified with Jesus, i.e., all of the Second Person of the Trinity is Jesus forever and only Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity. Jesus in the innermost being of the Father, before living temporally, is perfectly identified with the person "he would come to be in history."

If pre-existence is interpreted in a physical sense, Jesus lacks physical existence before coming to be a human being, but if it is interpreted in a meta-physical sense, Jesus comes from God and belongs to his communication; God does not exist without Jesus, and this is why by coming from God, Jesus transcends the field of the cosmos and history. In God we cannot speak of a physical pre-existence, because God is not a physical being; we can only speak of a spiritual pre-existence.

We know furthermore that in Jesus' case we can speak of an authentic pre-existence, although not in the sense of a physical reality in God before being a physical reality in history. But we can speak of an authentic existence of Jesus in a spiritual—divine—sense. His divine personal being in time would come to be historical. He was "*one and the same*," from all eternity, in God.

Chalcedon,
Dz-H 301.

Jesus does not create the world as one more cause in the physical realm— as if he were acting in his temporal life— but rather in communion with the Father and the Spirit, as a founding, transcendent, enabling, compelling and fulfilling cause: he gives the physical and human world unity and meaning, and establishes, with himself as the foundation, the possibility and the reality of communion with God.

Jesus' pre-existence was not a secondary and accidental notion; it was absolutely necessary for Jesus' relationship with God expressed in terms of filiation. Only the doctrine of eternal sonship and pre-existence guaranteed that God was involved in Jesus' earthly life, in his death and resurrection. God presented himself in Jesus in an eschatological and definitive way, and this way of accepting and understanding Jesus' message necessarily called for accepting that Jesus belonged to the very essence of God, his eternal essence. Otherwise Jesus would not have been able to talk about God in an eschatological and definitive way. Pre-existence also sets the stage for his universal significance and the universality of his salvation, because Jesus is the Only Son of God, by which we are also made children of God.

Rm 8:14-17; Ga 3:26;
4:5; Rm 8:29.

The fact that God's eternal Son, the Word or his Discourse is from the beginning he who was to be incarnated, or he who was to take on our flesh, means that his eternity is tied to his human condition, and his human condition is tied to his eternity. In Tertullian's words, the Father is the one who clothed the Word in human flesh, with

the consent of the Virgin, and by the presence and action of the Spirit.

Tertullian, Res 34,10:
Quid a patre Christus
acceperat nisi quod et
induerat? Hominem,
sine dubio, carnis ani-
maeque texturam.

“What had Christ received of the Father, if not that with which he had clothed himself, manhood undoubtedly, warp and woof of flesh and soul?”

Mt 21:23-27;
Lk 20:9-19.

The mission or the sending, without the notion of pre-existence, could be taken as a metaphor, the way God sent the prophets, but in the case of the Son, it was always interpreted in a literal sense, although not in a physical sense: it was the same Jesus of history who by existing —being— in God and with God, pre-existed in reference to history. The sending of the Son consisted fundamentally of the incarnation.

1 Jn 1:1f.

It is said about all people that they are present in God’s eyes, that God has known them, loved them, chosen them and predestined them for eternal life, not only before they accumulated any merits, but before they even existed. Humans do not pre-exist; they are simply present in God’s mind and in his heart, like a future project, the way a goal is present in the person pursuing it. God’s love is the deepest root in people’s lives. *“Had you hated anything, you would not have formed it,”* says the author of the Book of Wisdom. In Jesus’ case, however, a true pre-existence is affirmed. Jesus, in the innermost being of God, is an authentic reality that at the divine level provides the foundation for another entire reality, which is why we call him creator and life-giver of everything that exists.

Rm 8:29.

Wi 11:24.

Jn 1:3.

What pre-existence does not mean:

It does not mean that the real, historical Jesus, situated in space and time, was present and acting in eternity in exactly the same way as he appeared and acted in the world. It is the same Jesus that is present and that acts, but not in the same way, and this way refers both to his presence and his actions. In the world he is a personal physical presence who acts as one cause among other physical-personal causes. In eternity it is the same personal subject, Jesus of Nazareth—divine human—who without being a glorified man and an incarnate divine person, acts with the Father and the Holy Spirit in an eternal and divine way, that is to say, founding, being a source of possibilities and dynamism, compelling and fulfilling, as the ultimate end of created being. In this way, his relationship with physical, spatio-temporal being is not physical; it is more than that. It is transcendent, spiritual, meta-physical or meta-empirical. The pre-existent body of Christ would be for St. Paul the same body but spiritualized, i.e., in its eternal and transcendent form. Glorious body. God's form —*morphé* *Zeu*— the form that the pre-existent Jesus takes, is not mere form, but rather his divine way of being, existing and acting.

σώματι τῆς δόξης
αὐτοῦ. Ph 3:21;
πνευματικόν
1 Co 15:44f.

μορφῇ Θεοῦ.
Ph 2:6.

Pre-existence is an uncommon topic, perhaps even strange, in the Church's catechesis and preaching, maybe because it is poorly understood, or maybe because of the difficulties embodied in the relationship between eternity and time. How could Jesus be the one "*without whom*

Jn 1:3. *not one thing that had its being came to be,*” before he was even born?

Activities

- Look up a text from the Holy Fathers that talks about Jesus’ pre-existence.
- Study the exegesis of Col 1:17: “*all things were created through him and for him.*”
- Select the expressions from this section that seem the clearest and most meaningful to you. Try to express them in your own words.

6.6 The incarnation

Incarnation refers to the process by which the Second Person of the Holy Trinity takes on human nature, i.e., he becomes a unique, unrepeatable man, time-bound and conditioned. By assuming the human condition and making it his own, he is not only assuming the material dimension of his body, but also a life that begins and ends, located in a particular space in the world:

Lk 2:1f. Nazareth, Galilee, Jerusalem. He also makes a certain culture his own, the culture that prevailed among the people of Israel at that time; a mindset, that of his surroundings; a way of thinking, that of the established paradigms, ideas, traditions, customs and rites. Divine nature—Jesus’ being God—does not act detached from, or at the margin of, or independently of, his humanity. On the contrary, it reveals itself, manifests itself, and expresses itself in his being a real, genuine man.

Salvation, if it is really to save the whole person and all people, must be authentic communion with God. We can think of salvation in limited terms, as salvation from harm, from danger, from an epidemic or some disaster; we could even speak of salvation from death and sin. But it would be a meager salvation, even if it meant returning to a paradise on earth, or to a life of the “just.” Some might even find that a misfortune. Who wants to live forever in this life that is more death than life?

Salvation can only be communion with God. Proximity to God, in the case of all people, and union with God, in the case of Jesus, does not diminish the human person; on the contrary, it makes her more free and more autonomous, and more herself. Being human—human nature—implies perfect harmony and communion with God. The only thing that can be perfectly united to God is a human being, and the only thing that God can make perfectly his own forever is likewise a human being. This communion achieves the highest degree of perfection in Christ Jesus, our head, but also in all of his members. Salvation is available only to that which God makes his own.

1 Co 6:15; 12:27.

Through the incarnation, the Son of God has united himself to every concrete human being; we express this reality by saying that he assumed human nature. The Fathers of the Church said: “*We are the flesh taken from the Virgin Mary.*” And thus he has in fact saved us already, because the

*Caro de Virgine
sumpta, nos sumus.*
Leo the Great, Ser-
mon 10 on the Incar-
nation.

Father, by the strength and power of the Holy Spirit, joined us to himself in Jesus.

The incarnation is not only a supernatural event that makes it possible for Jesus to assume the individual existence as God-man. It is God's relationship with all people, and with what makes people human, a relationship that reaches its apex in Jesus and opens door to the salvation of all those whom St. Paul calls members of Christ.

*Homo sum: et nihil
humanum a me alie-
num puto.*
Terence.

On account of the incarnation, and with the incarnation as the starting point, humanity—the human being—is something that belongs to God and something in which God makes himself known. For that point onward, nothing that is truly human is alien to God any longer. And nothing that is truly divine is alien to human beings any longer. And everything that makes a person human, by that very virtue, is a link to God. And whatever dehumanizes people leads them away from God. The incarnation is a mystery that touches all human beings, precisely in that which makes them human.

Cf Jn 3:17. The expression “*God has sent his Son to save the world*” constitutes one of the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. The fundamental mission consists of becoming a man: being conceived, carried in the womb for nine months, and born; and living, announcing the kingdom, dying and rising. For this reason the Fathers insisted that “*nothing that is not assumed can be saved.*”

The process is not about the Word coming and becoming a man. It is not about becoming; it is about union, which begins with the conception and culminates in the moment of the death-resurrection. Therefore we do not say *God made his Son a man*, but *God has sent his Son*: “*God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son.*” God did not become a child; without ceasing to be God he begins to be a child. There is no contradiction: he can continue being fully God and fully a child. Jn 3:16.17.

Paul presents the incarnation as a mystery introducing the passion and death. John focuses on the coming of the Son of God. The Passion is the end and the culmination of the coming: he comes in order to return. Incarnation and Death-Resurrection constitute the mystery of Jesus. Believers are those who profess that Jesus comes from the Father and who affirm that it is God himself who sends him, and that he comes “*in the flesh.*” 2 Jn 1:7.

Jesus comes from the Father, which is why he can present himself to people as the bread of life, light of the world, gate, way, truth and life, resurrection and the true vine.

John does not set out to shed light on the figure of Jesus by taking his biological origin as the point of departure. The essence of Jesus’ work as the revealer of God can be condensed in these features:

- As the emissary from heaven he does God’s work on earth. Jn 3:16.17.
- His main mission or task is not simply occasional or functional; it is incarnation itself. Jn 1:14; 3:14.16.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Jn 10:15; Mt 11:27. | • He knows the Father. |
| Jn 8:28; 12:50. | • He teaches what the Father orders. |
| Jn 14:31; 6:38. | • He fulfills what the Father wants. |
| Jn 17:21. | • His Father is in him, and he in the Father. |
| Lk 3:22; Mk 1:11. | • The Father loves him with special favor. |
| Jn 13:1; 14:12. | • He goes where the Father is. |
| Jn 18:11. | • He gives his life up to the Father. |
| Jn 17:1,5. | • The Father glorifies him. |

For John, the incarnation consists of the Father's sending his own Son. The incarnation is more about revelation than metaphysics. The profession "*Jesus is the Son of God*" cannot be interpreted biblically as a metaphysical fact. Metaphysics is not an issue or topic of biblical reflection, which is not to say that there is no foundation for a Christian metaphysics.

Jesus comes from God in such a way that he can be seen as his lieutenant or proxy, his instrument and action on earth. And yet Jesus' function is not impersonal or transitory. He is not a means to achieve an end; he is not simply God's transmitter through which he communicates his demands and promises. He is not a road to walk down and leave behind. There is a risk of leaving Jesus obstructed behind his function. John considers it very important to take one more step. Jesus and God are permanently joined: Jesus' relationship with God pre-exists and subsists.

However, our main interest is not focused on any kind of essentialist speculation about Jesus or divine being; the important thing is to discover that God comes out to meet us, to find him in the person of Jesus, and to ground our existence

in him. Jesus is not just “*Emmanuel, God with us,*” but also “us with God” in a definitive and ultimate sense. Mt 1:23.

Believing in the incarnation means that everything that we can say about God and hope from him 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. His divinity must appear in his being a man. Scripture presents Jesus as saying: “*To have seen me is to have seen the Father.*” Jesus the man is God’s presence, his creative, redemptive, salvific, sanctifying and glorifying presence. Jn 14:8.
Jn 1:1f; 17:1f.

Saying that in Jesus there is one single person—the divine person—affirms that there is one single subject, one self; not two subjects, a divine one and another human one. The expression that in Jesus the divine Person is incarnated and becomes a historical man means, in contemporary terms, that he becomes a human person, which is at odds with the affirmation—and the fact—of one single subject in Jesus. Dz-H 150, 300.

Traditional Christology does not often speak of the human person of Jesus; in fact, it is explicitly stated that such a thing does not exist as a metaphysical entity. Only the divine Person exists. Dz-H 681.

We speak of the human person of Jesus not in a dogmatic and metaphysical sense, but rather in a historical, existential, psychological sense. The human person of Jesus was that Jesus whom the disciples followed, whom they called by his name, and who answered them, although of course, un-

- Dz-H 302. derlying and sustaining that perceptible reality was, ultimately, the divine Person of Jesus.

Activities

- In this text by Tertullian, underline the parts that speak to you most compellingly about the Incarnation.

“Recollect that God was wholly concerned with it and intent upon it, with hand, mind, work, counsel, wisdom, providence, and especially with that affection which prescribed its features —this is about the creation of Adam—. For whatever expression the clay took upon it, the thought was of Christ who was to become man (which the clay was) and of the Word who was to become flesh (which at that time the earth was). For the Father had already spoken to the Son in these words, ‘Let us make man unto our own image and likeness.’ And God made man (the same thing of course as ‘formed’): unto the image of God (‘of Christ’, it means) he made him. For the Word also is God, who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God. Thus that clay, already putting on the image of Christ who was to be in the flesh, was not only a work of God but also a token of him” —for the resurrection.

Ph 2:6.
Tertullian,
Res 6,1.

- There are texts that have one sense in their origin and another one in their application, such as “*Emmanuel, God with us,*” but the application is also an object of revelation. Look for another text that is similar in its origin and application, like the prophecy in Is 7:14.
- Mt 1:23.

- Read St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*, IV, 29 and point out the relationship between Christ, the Father's emissary and the Holy Spirit.
- What do you think was the purpose of the incarnation?
- What could we say about St. Augustine's opinion: "*If man had not sinned, the Son of God would not have come*"?

Si homo non perisset, Filius hominis non venisset. Sermon 174, Purpose of the Incarnation.

6.7 Jesus the Creator

In Christian faith we call Jesus Christ the Creator. Why?

What can it mean that Jesus Christ is the Creator? The statement is hard to understand in the modern mindset.

This is a theological statement, not a cosmological one. It is not claiming to know the historical origin of the world, or the physical order of created beings and all that falls within the nature of time and space. The statement refers to that which calls forth time and space without being encompassed by them.

By saying that Jesus Christ is the Creator and Savior, we are affirming that the world and humanity are grounded, in terms of their origin, in Jesus, as the end and the savior of all of created reality. We are stating the world's total relationship with Jesus.

If Jesus is really God-Savior, he is that not only for each person in the "here and now"; he is the Savior, from start to finish, of all reality.

The experience of God the Creator is an experience of the relationship of everything that one is with God, the source and origin of being and life. In order 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 final stage, and to discover the unity that holds together the world, life, history and God's action.

Jesus with his creative input gets physical reality underway, but his presence and his action do not belong to the physical world; they are of a spiritual, meta-historical and meta-physical nature. His presence and action cannot be measured or proven in the physical realm; they are a reality that can only be experienced in the spiritual realm of faith. His creative action does not belong to the physical realm; it is not contained in a specific moment or space. It is God's input that on a meta-physical level gives rise to and sustains all things. At this same level, Jesus Christ is present as he who brings the world of physical reality from its origins to its fulfillment.

The question of how Jesus can be the creator of the universe before historically becoming Jesus is a chronological problem that we could state as follows: Jesus cannot be the cause of existent being before existing himself. Underlying this formulation are the following assumptions:

- That Jesus is the same kind of cause as other causes that are fully contained in the world.
- That creative action is detectable and subject to proof in the experimental physical realm.

- That the historical —temporal—realm and the metaphysical realm are mutually exclusive.
- That Christ's causal input in the world is of a physical nature.

These points call for careful examination. When we refer to Christ's creative action, we mean the causal impulse that sets physical reality itself in motion with its causalities included. He is the cause of the causes, not just one cause among others. This causal impulse could be called, in order to distinguish it from the others, "transcendent causality." For this reason, Jesus' causality is not subject to proof in the physical-temporal realm, because it is the founding principle, not a founded principle. Jesus' transcendent causality sets the historical and physical dimension in motion and sustains it. Therefore, it does not exclude this dimension; it serves as its foundation.

We know of the transcendental causal impulse by analogy with the historical-physical realm. This does not mean, however, that Jesus' causal impulse of history and the world is physical in nature. Jesus as the transcendental cause sustains the action of physical causes.

Jesus takes communion with God to its fulfillment because it is the goal of the divine design; he is effectively present from the beginning because between the beginning and the end there is true unity. There is also unity in the world, which is the medium in which life occurs. There is unity in the plan and design of God, who accomplished everything through his only Son.

Jesus' creative action is, furthermore, an action that is distinct from his historical action, and yet his historical action is not an isolated period of the history of salvation. His link with physical reality does not touch upon only the mystery of the incarnation, but also on the mystery of physical reality from its origin to its end, which is why Jesus is professed as Creator in the origin and Judge at the end.

In the mindset of the Greek Fathers, Jesus has a real link with creation even before his birth. Between Jesus and the world there is not only a salvific relation; Jesus is also the active, operating expression of God the Creator. And he comes to be the Savior of the world because in its origin he was its Creator. The line of knowledge and revelation does not go from creation to salvation; it goes the other way around, from salvation to creation. In other words, for Jesus to truly save the world and all people, his salvific impulse was necessary from the first moment the world and humanity existed. This is not only about referring the world to Christ; it is also about interpreting the world with Christ as the starting point.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 41, 4; V,
12, 6.

God creates to save, and the one who saves is the same as the one who creates. "*There is one salvation just as there is one God.*" Jesus is God's possibility to emerge from himself, and he appears in Jesus' human dimension, in his concrete life. But this possibility of God's to emerge from himself and to save humanity is also the possibility that God has to create it and regenerate it. For the Latin and Greek Fathers, if Jesus with his

cures made the sick whole, it was because he had made all people; if he regenerated them, it was because he had generated them; if he made them whole, it was because he had made them.

Irenaeus, *Adv Haer*
V, 12, 6;
Augustine, *On the*
Gospel of John,
Homily 32.

Between the physical and historical world and Jesus there is a reciprocal relationship that does not exist with any of the other divine persons. Only the Word, from the beginning, has historical and physical character, and matter and life, Christic character, because Jesus was to become a physical, living, historical reality. God's Word has always been "*he who was to become flesh*" —"Incarnandus"—, and the world was his home in which he was to live. He has been the source and the author of life because in him was life. God's creative Word is revealed as a redeeming and salvific Word. The link that creation, and particularly humanity, has with Jesus, when we refer to the beginning, is expressed with the Christological title "*Jesus the Creator*."

Jn 1:11.

In the Hebrew mindset there is no concept of essence or nature that determines being from its origin, as there is in Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. For the Greek philosophers, being is determined from the beginning by its essence; for example: human beings, from the first moment of their existence, are rational animals and nothing in their historical process makes them more or less human; they simply have the possibility of realizing their potential. The essence is something like the greatest perfection of a being, and this being, by existing in a concrete form, is degraded. The essence of human beings, or the

idea of human beings, is more perfect than any concrete instance and thus, the historical process diminishes things.

For the Hebrews, on the other hand, creation is not finished. God expects people to cooperate and work. Creation comprises not only the first man and woman, but also all of humanity descended from the original pair. The origin is simply a birth, and what determines a person is his history. This means that the biblical mindset is historical, not essentialist; it also means that time is seen as an ascendant process, oriented toward a goal and a end, not as an eternal recurrence.

In the Greek mentality, time is more of a downward spiral that inevitably repeats itself; in the biblical mentality, it is an unrepeatable upward line.

What had a beginning can have multiple ends, but only its actual end reveals its identity, its being. The end determines and constitutes the being, and the end implies the historical process as well. The Hebrew mindset includes an eschatological vision in its conception of reality, and of the human person. This implies that the human person is an unfinished being, and only becomes fully human at the end. St. Ignatius of Antioch said that if people are made to see God, they will only become fully human when they finally see God. And St. Irenaeus said that God had made people so that they would grow and develop, and eventually come to be the perfect image and likeness of God; in fact, God's greatest and most god-

like act of creation is to make human beings in history. Having everything from the beginning and being perfect is proper to God; being made and developing is proper to the human person.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 15,2.

This vision of being and of the world is related to creation and Jesus Christ's ongoing activity, and to the action of people. If Jesus saves humanity, and leads the world to fulfillment, then Jesus was involved in creation, which will reach its end and fulfillment in salvation. Humans will only become fully human with the salvation that Jesus affords. And the world is ever in the midst of a creative and salvific process through the action of people and of Jesus, which will not stop transforming it until the end of time.

Activities

- Explain in your own words what the creative work of Jesus consists of.
- Express the part of the Creed that corresponds to the points covered in this section.
- Research the exegesis of the expression "through Christ." As final cause: on account of, in order to... As efficient cause... As the means or the way by which we obtain the Father's love and everything else.

Jn 1:2.

6.8 Difference between Jesus in time and Jesus in eternity

In our Trinitarian language we can state that between the Second Person of the Trinity and Jesus there is perfect identification: Jesus is the

Thomas Aquinas,
S Th III, 14,1,1.

1 Jn 4:12; Jn 1:18;
6:46; Col 1:15.

Second Person of the Holy Trinity and the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is Jesus. The fact that Jesus is born and appears in history does not negate, but rather manifests Jesus' transcendent, eternal and divine condition. *"The way to Jesus' divinity is his humanity."* He is the visible image of the invisible God.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus is *"the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of his nature"*; he is also the *"Seal,"* i.e. a sculpted or engraved image that serves as a token of authenticity, like the seal that the emperor made with his ring to guarantee a document; an image of his being and his authority, and therefore, *"he has inherited a title that is higher than the angels'."* Jesus, on account of being the Son of God made man, is the Father's servant, obedient to the Father, not because he is inferior, but because he is the Son: *"And that the Son of the Father calls himself servant, (this is) on account of his subjection to the Father: for among men also every son is the servant of his father,"* wrote St. Irenaeus.

Certainly for us, Jesus' conception, birth, life, death and resurrection constitute an occurrence outside of the Trinitarian life that we could call temporal and spatial, but not for God *"in whom we live, and move, and exist,"* in whom there is no before and after, because *"you were God from all eternity and forever,"* and we are bound, by our union with Christ, to participate in the intra-Trinitarian and atemporal life, i.e., outside of time and imperishable.

By incarnating, Jesus does not put distance between himself and God the Father, *“the eternal becomes temporal; the impassible, passible; he who was invisible becomes visible; he who is the Son of God by the Spirit becomes the Son of God in the flesh—and the Son of David, and the Son of Mary, and the Son of Man—, equal to the Father as Son, and less than the Father as incarnated; all-powerful as Son and weak as made man.”* In time he has not moved away from God or the Father, although in time he does feel abandoned or forsaken by the Father. —See the diagram at the end of the chapter—.

Dz-H 611.

Mk 15:34; Lk 22:41.

Jesus is inferior to God the Father, not because he is the eternal Son, but because he is a man. God continues to be one and transcendent. Jesus is the “Son of God” without equal, who by his death and resurrection will come to be eternally glorified at the Father’s right hand.

Jesus is one and the same, in time and in eternity. Paul does not accept a faith in Jesus that turns its back on the earthly Jesus. *“Begotten of the Father before the beginning of time, and the very same, begotten of the Virgin Mary in the end times.”*

1 Co 12:4.

Dz-H 301.

- Jesus, in eternity, is the creator together with the Father and the Spirit,
In time, he is a creature.
- As a divine person, in eternity, in God he is not autonomous; in all things he proceeds from the Father—he desires, loves, decides and acts together with the Father and the Spirit—.

In time, as a human being, he is autonomous — that is why he obeys and does the Father's will—.

- In eternity he is not born, nor does he grow or die—he is simply present in his process and he is the eternal object of the satisfaction of the Father and the Spirit—,

In time, he is born, grows, is ignorant and learns, suffers and dies —and is the incarnated object of the Father's eternal satisfaction—.

- In eternity he has the same invariable and eternal will as the Father and the Holy Spirit;

In time he has a human will in which he anticipates the torments of the passion.

Jn 8:22. • In eternity he will judge the living and the dead, and the entire world.

Jn 8:25. In time he does not judge anyone.

It is “the same” Jesus, whether considered in the Father's innermost heart or in Mary's womb, but it is not the same to consider him immersed in the eternal God as immersed in Mary, in time and history.

Dz-H 569. The Second Person upon incarnating does not acquire anything that he was lacking before. Like God, he has from the beginning everything that he will have in time—he pre-exists and subsists, or super-exists—.

We might wonder: How can the Son of God's temporal death be reconciled with his eternal life? It is worth pointing out first that birth and death are the limits of a temporal life, which implies that dying means taking life to fulfillment. And when we were given life, we were also given

death because they are complementary terms, not contrary. We could reformulate the question as follows: How to reconcile temporal life with eternal life? The incarnation is precisely the Son of God's expression of eternal life in within the temporal, concrete life of Jesus of Nazareth.

God has the possibility of expressing what is proper to him in what is human, and to make what is human into something absolutely his and personal, in the Second Person of the Trinity. In this way he made his own, once and for all, suffering, anxiety, pain and everything else that makes a person human.

This human life has the possibility of being grafted onto eternal life without diminishing it; human life simply gives human expression to eternal, divine life. And divine life —God— has the possibility of expressing and assuming human life as its own in Jesus of Nazareth and, in him, in all human beings. We call them both life, but they are not of the same nature: God's life is the source, term, origin and end, decisive and fulfilling; in itself invisible and incomprehensible in fullness, but also capable of expressing itself humanly, and thus of making itself visible and supportive.

In God's life, everything is present. History stops being a succession of events and becomes ever-present occurrence. Everything that happens and is told, or not told, in the Gospel is present for the Father in Jesus, his Son. What happened once, happened forever; as the Church Fathers put it: *"he never put down what he once took up."*

"Quod semel assumpsit nunquam dimisit;"

This was set forth clearly in the Council of Chalcedon, held in November of the year 451: the compatibility of divine life and human life, united in a single person, in Jesus.

Council of Chalcedon

We then, following the Holy Fathers, all with **one consent, teach people to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,**
the same

perfect in divinity—

and the same

— perfect in humanity,

truly God—

consubstantial with the Father according to divinity —

and the same

—truly man

begotten of the Father before all ages according to divinity, —

and the same

— consubstantial with us according to humanity,

and the same

— begotten of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in these latter days, with respect to humanity, for us and for our salvation

who is to be acknowledged as
one and the same Christ, the Lord,
 only-begotten Son,
 in two natures,

inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably;
the distinction of natures being by no means
taken away by the union,
but rather the property of each nature being
preserved.

Dz-H 301.

Activities

- Separate into two columns what belongs to time and what belongs to eternity in this text:

The Alexandrine Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom, used by the Ethiopic Church, says: *"We once again proclaim the essence of the Only Begotten, how he is, how he came down and how he was born. He came without leaving the Father; he came down without being separated from his essence; he left without departing from the Trinity; he bowed down without detaching himself from his union; he lived in a daughter of flesh without leaving his throne; he was conceived in her womb without having to be formed in parts, given his fullness; he was enclosed in her bosom without surrendering any of his superior properties; and he was born without adding anything to his inferior being; he became a perfect man without sin and he appeared as a servant, while acting as Lord."*

6.9 The Jesus of faith and of historical reality

Exegetical and theological reflection about Jesus of Nazareth has found it necessary to distinguish among different concepts regarding the real Jesus, the earthly Jesus, the historical Jesus, the Jesus of faith and the theological Jesus. They

are worth mentioning in order to understand the characteristics of these distinctions, their relationship and their importance.

We are not interested so much in contrasting them as in summarizing them. A well-founded faith calls for distinctions in order to integrate times, events, interpretations, spiritualities, mindsets and objectives of all people who are between Jesus and us and who have served as his interpreters. We all make up the Church and in a certain sense, its magisterium.

Each person is important for God, more that she herself can imagine.

The *real Jesus* is the one who existed and the way he existed. He is not limited to historical facts, or to subjective interpretations; rather, he transcends them somehow, like any person, who is greater than her biography or the interpretation that others make of her, or even that she makes of herself. This Jesus includes everything that a “reasonably complete” reflection could say about him. About the real Jesus we can say with certainty what we know about a real human being, that he was born, grew up, developed, made decisions, suffered and died.

The *earthly Jesus* is, more specifically, Jesus’ life on earth. It is about the mark he left, irrespective of his meaning before the Incarnation and after the resurrection. —If Jesus’ whole life had been filmed, his earthly life would be what was caught on camera—.

We should not limit ourselves to the interpretation that Jesus himself gave to his person and his actions, because even for the real and earthly

Jesus, the moment of his resurrection had not yet come, and that moment is not only an integral element of his being and his meaning, but also the key to his conception, birth, life, passion and death. Otherwise it would seem like the resurrection added nothing to Jesus' temporal condition.

The *historical Jesus* is the one who can be reconstructed using the scientific methods of historical research. 1 Co 15:14.

It is important to avoid historicism because it is not Jesus' history, or even the reality of the earthly Jesus, that saves us, but Jesus in his Trinitarian dimension. In the history of the faith, the Jesus of history was contrasted with the Jesus of faith, and overestimated, as if only the historical were decisive and significant. It is evident that the Jesus of faith is grounded in the real Jesus of history, which is its indispensable source, but the message about Jesus surpasses the historical facts. St. Paul conveys and develops this message without having known Jesus personally. Faith in Jesus is much more than his biography. We know more about the real Bach by listening to his music than by researching where he was born and who taught him. Historical truth, in terms of the details, is not the crux of salvation or of faith; these depend on the transcendent acceptance of his person, i.e., the acceptance of Jesus who surpasses time and space. 1 Co 2:2; 2 Co 5:16.

From the historical perspective, the only importance that Jesus gave to himself was as the bearer of the Kingdom. The core of Jesus' preaching and behavior was not his person but the coming

Mk 1:14. of the Kingdom of God. Of course, this kingdom involved a doctrine; a message; a new way of seeing, thinking and acting; an opening to God and others; and therefore a conversion.

The plurality and conditioned nature of the New Testament statements about Jesus of Nazareth clearly demonstrate that his person and his work must be understood from a point of view that goes beyond the categories that historians use to understand history. When speaking of Jesus, we must transcend history.

The fact that Jesus was a historical person, subject to all manner of specific conditions, whose work and destiny unfolded in a certain historical period and can be understood as an element of the course of history, does not offer sufficient compelling reasons to recognize what God has done in Jesus Christ. People who look only at verifiable facts cannot experience the true God in Jesus. The Jesus of history, also as historical, is transcendent, unfathomable and incomprehensible. His love, mercy and self-giving surpass all limits.

The framework in which Jesus presents himself and the context in which belief in him is rooted are a set of titles and biblical attributes that translate faith into the transcendent, eternal and universal meaning of Jesus of Nazareth. This is what is truly important in the Gospel: the meaning, action and presence of Jesus himself, who is more than the particularities or the concrete facts, which in different times and circumstances could have been different.

According to the New Testament, Jesus' decisive meaning in history derives from the fact that he is the eschatological event. "*Jesus is the one who is to come and we do not have to wait for someone else,*" and that in him the promises were fulfilled, "*The Yes to all of God's promises is in him.*" Jesus is accessible when a transcendent meaning is given to his life, death and resurrection.

Mt 11:3; Ga 4:4;
Jn 3:19; 5:25.

2 Co 1:20.

God's word, before it is a verbal message, is the earthly Jesus himself in flesh and blood together with his actions. The New Testament is the written expression of the faith of the early Christian communities. God does not reveal himself in some kind of written dictation; he did it through the biography of Jesus and the historical events that it touched off.

Christians believe that the real Christ is more than what critical history can establish. We cannot act as if Christianity were founded on testimonies and texts, on literary relics, because there can be another history made of living relics, without which Christianity would be no more than a parchment religion, i.e., not a living Christianity.

The *Jesus of faith* is the early Christians' response to the experience of the living faith, an acceptance of the real and historical Jesus. This experience is gathered in the four Gospels, integrated with the real Jesus and the Jesus of history, distinguishable with the methods of historical-critical exegesis.

It is certain that the disciples recapture, reinterpret and relive the historical experience of Jesus'

Mk 9:32; Lk 9:45;
Jn 8:27; 12:16; 13:7;
14:20.

companionship in the light of their faith in the resurrection. The evangelists draw attention to the fact that disciples did not understand the real meaning of Jesus until after the resurrection. They see everything in the light of the Easter experience, and everything takes on a new meaning: what happened ceases to be only history and becomes ever-present reality.

For Paul, true knowledge of Jesus is faith in "*his mystery*," not direct knowledge of the historical Jesus, such as Annas and Pilate had. Paul values direct knowledge of Jesus only inasmuch as it supports knowledge by faith. "*Even if we did once know Christ in the flesh, that is not how we know him now.*"

2 Co 5:16.

The faithful exegete's task is to keep the Jesus of history from being only history, and to avoid undoing the essential unity between the Christ of faith and the Christ of history.

The faith of the Apostles and the early Christians is expressed in images, similes, metaphors and comparisons, not in concepts. It was deep reflection on faith that led to concepts.

Years 325, 381,
431 and 451,
respectively.

The ***Jesus of dogmas*** is the one who was gradually defined at the Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon, in response to the heresies that threatened essential elements of Jesus' identity and the Church's unity.

Jesus, for the disciples, became "meta-historical" and transcendent after the resurrection, which was a real occurrence, but not for that reason historical in the sense of modern science,

i.e., leaving as proof a verifiable and physically perceptible trace in the coordinates of time and space.

Spurred on by philosophy, faith draws on concepts much more than images to express itself. The question becomes *What were they trying to say or reveal? What exactly was said or revealed to us there?* The real objective being sought is a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the faith, not a cloaking of the faith that will only obscure it more.

The ***theological Jesus*** is the one that is considered in meditation and reflection on all the others mentioned above, and presented to contemporary Christians to enrich their faith and their life in dialogue with their culture and the thinking of the Church throughout its history. In the theological Jesus the aim is to reconcile and synthesize the different visions of the sacred writers as well as the different stages and contexts of Christian reflection.

The attempt is made to respond, from faith and in the context of today's culture, to the questions: *Who is, was, and will Jesus of Nazareth be? What meaning did he, does he, and will he have for us in this life and in eternal life?*

The ***Jesus of Christian piety*** is the same Jesus as an object of devotion— almost always popular— which highlights certain aspects and relegates others; while fundamentally grounded in the Gospels, it sometimes separates Jesus and conceives of him in a different way and with dif-

ferent characteristics, for example, the devotion to the Sacred Heart, to the nine First Fridays, to the Most Precious Blood, to the Five Wounds, etc. All of this belongs to the spiritual sensitivity of times, places and persons. Christian faith — and theology— should enrich and orient any type of religiosity.

The Trinity is not a hypothesis, a theory, or a theological system; it is the interpretative key that the Church has had from its beginnings to understand Jesus' person and message, as well as our own destiny and God's way of being with us. The Creed is the compendium of the breadth and depth of the whole New Testament.

Activities

Answer or comment on these questions:

- Can Trinitarian faith exist without cultural mediations?
- Does a religiosity that is purely of the heart or feelings make sense?
- Can faith be limited to a private and asocial creed?
- Is it correct to practice Christian virtues such as charity without referring to Him for whom they are practiced?
- Could there be such a thing as an anonymous Christian life?
- Can the faith be transmitted without a transmitter? Can testimony be given without a witness?
- By way of prayer

I give you thanks, Lord, for the time and the opportunity you give me to reflect in depth on the mystery of your love; may they help me to grow in prayer and study so that I can serve you in my brothers and sisters. Enlighten my understanding so that I can better understand. Strengthen my memory so that I retain what is important. Impel my will so that I decide what is best for me. Keep me from deceiving myself with false desires, and from giving up more for less. And deliver me from all evil.

6.10 Representation of time and eternity

The following outline can help to visualize the difference and the relation between eternity and time, what we might call God's realm and the human realm, the incarnation and our participation in Trinitarian life.

- 1.- The top circle represents the eternity of the one God, with no beginning and no end. Dz-H 150, 800, 3001.
- 2.- In God are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, from all eternity and for all eternity, and they are inseparable. Dz-H 1331.
- 3.- The Son proceeds from the Father, by generation. Dz-H 284, 490, 1330.
- 4.- The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, by donation—in order to be given—. Dz-H 1451, 527.
- 5.- In God's eternity there is no elapsing time, and in time there is no permanent eternity.

- Dz-H 145, 4892. 6.- The Father sends the Son, which means mission and abasement (Kenosis).
- Ga 4:4. 7.- The Son of God is born in time, Son of Mary.
Dz-H 1337.
Lk 3:23. 8.- He lives 33 years; his public life lasts roughly three years.
- Jn 19:30; Mt 27:50. 9.- He truly dies, and stops living for a time.
- Rm 1:4; Ac 2:29. 10.- He rises and returns to the Father (Anastasis).
- Rm 8:11. 11.- The Son's temporal life, linked to the lives of all people. Like his, but not in exactly the same way, the life of human beings and of all creation is inserted in God.
- Rm 8:22; Dz-H 3002. 12.- Creation includes everything that is spatial and temporal, the whole universe, over 5 billion years up to Christ and everything that is not God.
- Ap 1:8f. 13.- The beginning is symbolized with the letter Alpha, A.
- 14.- Omega represents the end of the world, Ω.
- Ep 1:10. 15.- The brace means that everything is recapitulated in Christ (anakafaláiosis).
- 16.- The parallel line, corresponding to the bottom of the triangle, but inside the circle, represents the insertion of Jesus' temporal life within God's eternity, within God himself.
- Col 3:3; 2:12f. 17.- And as Christ's life is inserted in God, so is ours.

CHAPTER VII

JESUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Objective: To understand the function, nature and action of the Holy Spirit.
Mk 1:1.

7.1 The Holy Spirit in the Synoptics

St. Mark starts off his Gospel by saying, “*The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*” Then, after telling us about John the Baptist as the forerunner, he has John speaking these words: “*I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*” And when telling us about the baptism of Jesus, he says, “*Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John. No sooner had he –Jesus—come up out of the water than he saw the heavens torn apart and the Holy Spirit, like a dove, descending on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, my Beloved; my favor rests on you.’*”

Mk 1:1.

Mk 1:9-11.

According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus had very little to say about the Holy Spirit and almost nothing to say about his personal character. From the historical perspective, the most solid text is to be found in Mark: *“Let anyone blaspheme against the Holy Spirit and he will never have forgiveness; he is guilty of an eternal sin.”*

Mk 3:28-30.

Jesus was convinced that he drove out “impure spirits” through the Spirit of God. For Jesus, the Holy Spirit was God’s force and life joined to his love and mercy, and therefore was a gift of the kingdom and accompanied Jesus. *“On him the Spirit of Yahweh rests... for the country is filled with the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters swell the seas.”*

Mt 12:28;
Mk 3:28-30.
Is 11:2-9; Jl 3:1f;
Ac 2:17.

St. Matthew maintains that Jesus acted with full awareness of possessing the Spirit, God’s strength. *“If it is through the Spirit of God that I cast devils out, then know that the kingdom of God has overtaken you.”* Luke speaks of “the finger of God,” meaning divine initiative.

Mt 12:28.
Lk 11:20
Ps 8:4; Ex 8:19;
31:18; Dt 9:10.

God’s strength is also glory and power; even though historically Jesus said little about the Holy Spirit, the Gospels present him as filled with the Spirit, because he is the Messiah and the Servant of God.

Mk 1:22; 27:2; 2:10;
5:30; 9:39; 12:24;
Lk 5:17.
Mk 1:11.

“On him the Spirit of Yahweh rests, a Spirit of wisdom and insight, a Spirit of counsel and power, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh.”

Is 11:2; 59:21.

The Spirit of God is never equated with the Messiah. In Hebrew theology, *Shekhinah* is the active presence of God interacting with people.

Ruach is the presence of God infusing life into the world and the people of Israel and governing them through his chosen ones: priests, prophets, kings, and the Messiah.

Ne 9:30; Zc 7:12;
Is 42:1; 2 Co 15:1.
Ezr 1:5.

Matthew tells us, applying to Jesus the text of the prophet: *"Here is my servant whom I have chosen, my Beloved, the favorite of my soul. I will endow him with my Spirit, and he will proclaim the true faith to the nations."*

Mt 12:17-18.
Is 42:1-4.

Luke sees Jesus not only as inspired by the Spirit when he speaks and acts; Luke presents Jesus as the master and lord of the Spirit. Jesus acts and performs miracles through the Spirit. The spirits, both good and evil, are servants of Jesus and obey him.

Lk 4:14; Is 61:1.
Mk 1:23f; 5:8; 9:25.

Revelation overall does not assign the Holy Spirit his own voice, as it does to the Father and the Son.

Jn 16:13; 14:16;
15:26.

The first recipient of the divine Spirit is Christ: in him the Spirit dwells in fullness, to such an extent that the Gospel writer visualizes him as monopolizing the strength, life, knowledge and fear of God that is the Spirit. *"For there was no Spirit as yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified."* The context is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. *"He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive."*

Ac 2:33; CEC 1831.
Jn 7:38-39.

The Holy Spirit, which is God's strength and life, is the greatest thing the Father could give to his Son. We should not think of it so much as a gift that can be given or not given; it is above all the gift of himself, the gift of life. It is what makes the

Father, Father; and the Son, Son. In his earthly life it is the greatest thing that the Son can receive, the sum of all gifts. It is what makes Jesus the Christ – the anointed one, the Messiah—, and Son of God in the messianic sense.

This is why we say that in the intra-Trinitarian dimension, the Holy Spirit depends on Christ, and not the other way around. If Jesus were Son by the Spirit, as all of us human beings are, that would suppose sonship by adoption, which is proper to the Spirit, and not by generation.

The Christian community saw Jesus as the prime depositary, the model and the source of all outpouring of the Spirit.

Lk 1:35. Receiving the Holy Spirit in fullness would make him first of all “*the Holy One of God*” from his conception. And yet even bearing in mind his conception by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit did not fecundate Mary in the normal way, which is why the Spirit is not, and cannot be called, the father of Jesus.
Dz-H 282.

He received the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, fully and at every moment.

- That is why his word was full of God’s strength, life, knowledge and wisdom.
- That is why he was powerful in his works.
- The Spirit enabled him to suffer his passion and death.

Mt 26:41. “*The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.*”

Even though the text does not refer directly to the Holy Spirit, it refers to the state of mind, and this is a fruit of the Spirit's action.

The Father communicated himself to Jesus through the Spirit, because it was Jesus, before anyone else, who called God "*Abba*," moved to do so by the Spirit. The Spirit is the communion of love, life, mission and action between the Father and the Son.

7.2 The Holy Spirit in Paul and John

St. Paul repeatedly calls the Holy Spirit "*Spirit of Christ*." Being pulled or pushed by the Spirit is a characteristic of Christian life, but that does not rule out a discernment of spirits; in fact, it demands it. On this point St. Paul says, "*I want you to understand that on the one hand no one can be speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit and say, 'Curse Jesus,' and on the other hand, no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.*" The decisive point in favor of the divinity of the Spirit is proper doctrine, the profession that Jesus is Lord. God's Spirit can only be given in harmony and in connection with the revelation of Christ. We can state biblically and theologically that Jesus does not depend on the Spirit and the Spirit does depend on Jesus. The criterion could be as follows: if the Spirit leads you to deepen and proclaim your Christian faith, then you have the Holy Spirit, but if the spirit leads you away from Christian faith, you do not have the Holy Spirit; you have the spirit of evil.

Rm 8:9; Ph 1:19.
2 Co 3:17; Ga 4:6.

1 Co 12:3.

Cf 1 Jn 4:1.

The Spirit that penetrates the depths of the divinity is none other than the “*mind*” of Christ that the believers have received, and thus, “*unless you possessed the Spirit of Christ, you would not belong to him*”; “*possessing the Spirit of Christ*” and “*living in the Lord*” are complementary and progressive expressions, because the Spirit leads us to live in the Lord, which means living the values of the Gospel, making Christ the decisive measure in life, establishing a new and unique relationship with him and others, having the same sentiments of faith, service and self-giving. For Paul, “*living in the Lord*” is the distinctive way of being Christian. The Spirit does not offer a new revelation; his function is to lead us to a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ.

What is the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit? Paul uses the expressions “*Spirit of God*,” “*Spirit of Christ*” and “*Christ in us*” interchangeably. The Spirit of Christ is identified with the risen, spiritual and historical Christ, who dwells in us. The idea that the Holy Spirit should be equated somehow with the risen Christ is clear when he states, “*Now this Lord is the Spirit*.” In other passages he makes a clear distinction between Christ and the Holy Spirit. Paul defines Christian existence and the benefits it offers in terms of salvation on the basis of both Christ and the Spirit.

- 1 Co 1:30;
- 2 Co 5:17; Rm 8:9. • The baptized are both in Jesus Christ and in the Spirit.
- Rm 8:10;
- 2 Co 13:5; 2:20. • Christ dwells in them, and the Spirit does too.
- Rm 8:9; 1 Co 3:16.

- Joy comes from the Holy Spirit, and at the same time from the Lord. Rm 5:5.
- God's love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And this love is the "*love of Christ.*" Rm 5:8; 8:35-39.
- The same goes for peace. "*The kingdom of God means righteousness and peace and joy brought by the Holy Spirit,*" and "*peace of God... will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus.*" Rm 14:17.
Ph 4:7.
- Freedom, "*Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom,*" "*the false brothers spy on the freedom we enjoy in Christ Jesus.*" 2 Co 3:17; 2:4.
2 Co 3:8; Ph 4:19.
- Glory. 2 Co 3:6; Rm 8:2;
- And life. 6:23; 5:25; 6:8; Ph 4:19.
- Christ is Truth, Jn 14:6.
- and the Spirit is the Spirit of truth; in John the Spirit is also the truth. Jn 16:13.
1 Jn 1:7; Jn 11:25.

Paul thinks of Christ "*as the powerful force that is activated and present only through the Spirit and as Spirit,*" in this way "*he was made Spirit that gives life.*" The strength and the life of the risen and glorified Christ are manifested in the Christian community through the Spirit. And yet St. Paul and St. John do not equate Christ and the Spirit in every aspect. There are relationships that are not reversible:

- Christ acts through the Spirit, Rm 15:18f.
- But the Spirit does not act through Christ. Ph 1:21; 2:20;
- Paul says of Christ that he is "his" life, Cf 3:4.
- But he does not say the same of the Spirit.
- Christians should become like Christ, Ph 3:10.
συμμορφιζόμενος.

- o which they cannot do with respect to the Spirit, because he is not a model, example or prototype of the Christian.
- Jn 14:6. • Christ is the Way, but the Spirit is not,
- Cf Rm 8:3f. o the Spirit makes us walk.
- The spiritual Christ is the same as the incarnate, crucified Christ, and the one who will come again.
- o The Spirit is not incarnated and will not come again at the end of time, because he has already come and continues to come.
- o The Spirit does not act on his own; he depends on the Father and the Son.
- Jn 14:26; 16:14. o The Spirit does not speak in his own name.
- Jn 16:13; 14:16; 15:26; Mt 10:20. When we profess that “*he has spoken through the prophets,*” it is not on his own initiative or with a distinct message of his own; he is foretelling Christ, according to the testimony of the Holy Fathers.
- o The Spirit is contrasted with the flesh, weakness and sin.
- Mt 26:41; 5:16. • Christ is contrasted only with sin, because he was flesh, and weak, tempted but not vanquished.
- Jn 1:14.
- Lk 4:1f.
- The Spirit performs functions that are not carried out by the Father or by the Son; for that reason we can speak of the Spirit as a distinct Person.
- o Christ’s death and resurrection are renewed by the Spirit in each Christian.
- 1 Co 6:11. o The Spirit links Christ to the baptized, and the baptized to each other.
- 1 Co 12:13. o Together with the Father and the Son he has his own personal functions and actions: he
- Jn 6:59.
- Jn 16:8-11.

- bears witness, passes on the message, gives glory. The Spirit of the Father will speak in you. Jn 14:26; Jn 16:14.
Mt 10:20.
- o The Spirit does not express himself as a person outside of us, but rather inside of us. Ep 4:40.
The Holy Spirit has some functions that are entirely Christ-centered.
 - o Jesus Christ promised him. Jn 14:15f; 16:7.
 - o To continue his work on earth. Jn 16:7.
 - o The Holy Spirit will ensure that Jesus' word and his salvation have their full effect. Jn 16:13.
 - o And they endure. Cf Jn 20:22.
 - o He will not teach anything new. Jn 16:13; 14:25f; 15:18f.
 - o Or on his own. *"He will not be speaking as from himself."* Jn 14:26; 16:13.
 - o He will teach and remind people of what Jesus has already said. Jn 14:26.
 - o He proceeds from Jesus Christ and will give him to whomever he wishes. *"The Spirit will receive what is mine and give it to you."* He is not an alternative, or a rival; he continues what Jesus started. Jn 14:16.
 - o He will bear witness to Christ. Jn 15:26; 1 Jn 5:6-7.
 - o He will inspire and strengthen the disciples. *"The Spirit of your Father will speak in you."* Mt 10:20.
 - o Through the Spirit, Jesus will make himself present in all times, Jn 14:16; Rm 8:9; Ph 1:19; Ga 4:6; Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:7.
 - o The Spirit is the one who makes us belong to Christ: *"Unless you possessed the Spirit of Christ, you would not belong to him."* Rm 8:9.
 - o Through the Spirit, Jesus Christ becomes Christ in the present for those who believe in him. Ep 3:16; Ga 4:6; 2 Co 3:17.

- Jn 14:16. o He performs the same functions as Christ did
1 Jn 2:1. on earth. He will be “*another*” advocate, intercessor, paraclete.
- Jn 16:13; 2 Co o He has the job of teaching, proclaiming and
2:10-14; 12:3; 2 Co developing the message of Jesus Christ in all
4:13f; Ep 3:5-16f. its depth and fullness.
- Mk 13:11. o When the time comes to bear witness to Jesus Christ, to suffer hardships, it will not be the disciples who speak, but the Holy Spirit.
- Cf Jn 14:23; 20:22f. o Jesus remains close to his own, in profound intimacy, through the Spirit.
- Jn 16:7. o The Paraclete takes Jesus’ place and carries on his work, acts in close union with him, and it is even Jesus himself who comes in the Spirit with a new kind of presence.
- Jn 16:7. o The Paraclete is sent by Jesus and proceeds from the Father.
- Jn 15:26; 14:26. o The Father gives and sends the Paraclete in the Son’s name.
- Jn 14:16; 14:26. o The Spirit is the principle of resurrection.
- Rm 8:11f. o His ultimate objective is to lead believers to the glory that the Father has given the Son before laying the foundations of the world.

What John says about the Paraclete, he says about Jesus in other parts of his Gospel.

- + The Paraclete will come as Jesus has come to
Jn 5:43. this world.
- + He proceeds from the Father, just as Jesus
Jn 16:27-28. came from the Father.
- + The Father will give the Paraclete at Jesus’ request, just as the Father gave his Son.
Jn 3:16.
- + The Paraclete will be sent in Jesus’ name, just
Jn 5:43. as Jesus came in the Father’s name.

- + Jesus consoles and intercedes, and the Holy Spirit is “another Paraclete.” Jn 20:15 y 20.
Jn 14:16.
- + The first Paraclete is Jesus. 1 Jn 2:1.
- + If the Paraclete is the Spirit of Truth, Jesus is the Truth. Jn 14:6.
- + If the Paraclete is the Holy Spirit, Jesus is the Holy One of God. Jn 6:69.

Jesus performs, with respect to the Father, the same functions that the Spirit performs with respect to Jesus.

- + We know the Father through the Son, and we know the Son through the Holy Spirit.
- + The privilege of knowing and recognizing the Paraclete corresponds to knowing Jesus. Jn 14:7.
- + The Paraclete will be in the disciples, just as Jesus remains in them. Jn 14:20.
- + He will teach the way Jesus taught. Jn 6:59.
- + The Paraclete announces or reveals the things that are to come. Jesus presented himself as the one who was to come, who tells us everything. Jn 4:25-26.
- + The world cannot accept the Paraclete, just as people do not accept Jesus. Jn 14:17.
- + The Paraclete will bear witness in the face of the world’s hate, just as Jesus bore witness against the world. Jn 7:7.

The Holy Spirit is God’s strength for people; he relates to people, and through people, to the world. St. Irenaeus said that God was the Father, the Son and the human person given life in communion with God through the Spirit, i.e., the Holy Spirit inasmuch as he gives life to humanity and divinizes it. This way of talking about the Trinity emphasizes the fact that God’s creative and sanc-

Irenaeus, Adv Haer IV, 1.1: *manifestavimus neminem alium Deum appellari a Scripturis, nisi Patrem omnium et Filium et eos qui adoptionem habent.*
Adv Haer IV, Prologue, 4: *qui adoptionis Spiritum accipiunt.*

tifying action is intended, through the Spirit, for humankind, for adoption, for God's vision, for communion with God, and for immortality; that humankind is included in the Trinitarian mystery because it possesses the Spirit of God; that God's action outward culminates in the inclusion of humanity in God's mystery.

The Holy Spirit is God's life given in all its fullness to Christ, and through him, to humankind. The Holy Spirit is Christ's life in us, and through him we come to partake in divine filiation. The Holy Spirit is a process of interpersonal relationship with Christ, like a process of friendship. He is what enables us to have a relationship of communication, of communion and dialogue with God.

The Holy Spirit is the divine dimension that exists in people, and he is intimately related to the life we lead, and not only to this life in the sense of grace. The Holy Spirit has everything to do with the mission that Jesus entrusts to his disciples. He has been given to them so that their words have strength and touch the heart of people. Jesus does not establish a community of idle mystics; he founded a community of apostles. The mission takes on special importance due to the Easter experience: those who have had an existential experience, who have seen and heard him, and who above all have received his Spirit, are sent to the whole world to preach the Gospel to all of creation.

Cf Mk 16:15; Mt 28:18-20; Lk 24:46; Jn 20:21f; Ac 1:8.

The Spirit is the element of continuity and fullness

- between the pre-Paschal Jesus and the glorified Christ; 1 Jn 4:2.
- between the glorified Christ and the community of believers.

His Spirit is God's very life as initially expressed in the historical expression of Christ, who has reached his fullness in glorification, and who has made people participants in this glorification; suffused in them and throughout the world, the Spirit is the fruit of resurrection as the life-giving principle of the future Kingdom in the present moment. The Holy Spirit is God himself, who together with the Father and the Son is communicated to us through the Spirit. Jn 7:37-39; Rm 8:23; 2 Co 1:22.

St. Basil writes: *"He who receives the Son does not divide Him from the Spirit, but, in consecution so far as order is concerned, in conjunction so far as nature is concerned, expresses the faith commingled in himself in the three together.... nor can He (the Son) who works all things by the Spirit ever be disjoined from His own Spirit.... But the communion and the distinction apprehended in Them are, in a certain sense, ineffable and inconceivable, the continuity of nature being never rent asunder by the distinction of the hypostases, nor the notes of proper distinction confounded in the community of essence."* Basil, Letters 38,4.

In Hebrew, Spirit is feminine, "Ruach"; it is God's force or life. In Greek and in Latin it is masculine, "pneuma," "spiritus," and means breath or exhalation. The translation in the masculine favors personification and distinction from the other divine persons. It is clear that language has

a great deal to do with the way things are understood and explained, and even with the way our faith is shaped, since faith comes to us, or we come to faith, through our hearing. Accounting for our faith calls for expressing ourselves in a way that can be understood, at least in part.

How does St. Paul see the relationship between the Father, Christ, and the Spirit?

He often calls him “The Spirit of God.” As the spirit of humanity is in human beings, the Spirit of God is in God. The Spirit is related to God “The Spirit of God”; the Spirit is God’s holiness; it is what belongs to God, which he gives to Christ in his fullness, and through Christ and with Christ, to humanity. The Holy Spirit is the gift of God and Christ for humanity.

N.B.

What St. Paul says about the Holy Spirit for all people can be applied truthfully and pre-eminently to Jesus, since the Spirit and his functions are the same, safeguarding that which refers to the order and the relationship of the divine persons, for example, we are God’s children by the Spirit of adoption, but Jesus is the Son of God by nature, begotten, because the Father is the Father of Jesus in the first place —the First Born—, and in him, of all people. Through the Holy Spirit the Father makes Jesus appear in Mary as a human being, but the Spirit does not make Jesus the eternal Son of the Father that corresponds uniquely and exclusively to the Father. In Jesus the eternal Son of God and “the Messiah” are equated in his

person. But in the Hebrew mindset the Messiah did not presuppose natural and eternal divinely begotten sonship, only sonship by adoption.

Cf Ps 2:7; 13:33; Ac 1:5f.

Paraclete is not an adjective; it is a noun. It comes from “para” and “kaleo,” which can be translated as “he who speaks in favor of, he who is there to defend.” Thus Jesus is the first Paraclete, and the Holy Spirit is the second: “Another Advocate,” but he is also the one who is there to lift up, console, encourage, like a father or a mother. The Paraclete is not just the one who speaks for me, like an advocate, —in the legal sense—, but also he who is with me for whatever is needed —in the family sense—like a mother with her young child.

παρα-καλέω.

1 Jn 2:1.

Jn 14:16.

When Paul says “*The Lord is the Spirit*,” he is not speaking in our Trinitarian language; he is not talking about Christ and the Spirit as persons or hypostases, which would represent an answer to a question that had not even been asked. What he is doing is admitting a certain dynamic equivalence between the Risen Christ and the Spirit that is superior to any kind of functional unity. The Risen Jesus concentrates the highest degree of the Spirit’s action and presence, just as he does the Kingdom of God. The Spirit is the gift of the kingdom, but the kingdom is not a gift of the Spirit. “*The Spirit of God descended upon Jesus, so that we, receiving from the abundance of His unction, might be saved.*” “*And it is the Father who anoints, but the Son who is anointed by the Spirit, who is the unction.*”

2 Co 3:17

Ezk 36:26; Jr 24:7.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer III, 9,3.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer III, 18,3.

Activities

- Make a comparative table explaining the characteristics that are proper to the Spirit and those that are proper to Jesus.
- Make a list of the titles that you could give the Holy Spirit according to his functions.

—Example: You are a teacher because you teach us, Guide because you lead us, Paraclete because you defend us, favor us, encourage us... etc. You

- Ep 1:13. You are a seal because you mark us and certify us. You are the pledge of our inheritance because without you we cannot enter into communion
- Ep 1:14. with God. You are a friend because you inspire us to good works and you are saddened by our
- Ep 4:30. bad actions. You are from the Father because you proceed from him; you are also from Christ because he sends you to our hearts and you are ours because you have been given to us and you belong to us; with you we can renew the face of the earth.

7.3 The Spirit and the Early Church

Christianity was born of three elements that are at the same time the pillars that hold it up:

1. the words and actions of Jesus of Nazareth joined to his passion and death,
2. the appearances of this same risen Jesus, and
3. the experiences of the Spirit in the post-paschal Church.

The Christian community saw in Jesus the source of all outpouring of the Spirit, because

“God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” Ga 4:6.
and he was also the model whose image we were Rm 8:17:29.
to reproduce by the action of the Spirit.

If we take the water from the source, we see that in Scripture, Spirit means strength and life, Gn 1:2.
which means he is present in creation. He is the one who speaks through the prophets, the one Is 11:2; Jn 2:28;
who prepares humanity to receive the Son, the Ezk 36:26.
one who comes over Mary to make her receptive and fruitful so that the fruit of her womb will be Lk 1:35; Mt 1:18-20.
the Son of God in History, and the Messiah,

the one who moves Jesus to preach the Kingdom, Mk 1:10; 1:12.
the one who leads him out into the desert, Lk 4:1.
the one who enlightens and strengthens him so that he can defeat the demonic forces, Mt 12:28.
the one who comes over humanity to make it receptive to the new, personal presence of Christ Ac 2:1f.
and to give rise to the Church,
the one who prepares listeners for the apostolic proclamation of the Gospel,
the one who steers them toward missionary activity. Rm 1:4; 8:11;
1 Co 15:45.

The Spirit appears as the main character in Christ’s work at key moments such as his conception and baptism. Paul mentions Jesus’ human origin and does not attribute it to the Holy Spirit: Lk 4:14-18;
Mk 12:36;
Lk 1:15-17;
Lk 2:25-27; Ac 1:2.
“according to the human nature he took, he was a descendent of David.” Ga 4:4.
He sees the sending of the Son and the sending of the Spirit as two separate things. St. Paul does not mention the Spirit as an agent of the resurrection of Christ, but he does Rm 1:3.
attribute our own resurrection to the Spirit. Ga 4:6; Rm 8:3f.
Rm 8:11.

The New Testament texts that follow the resurrection conceive of the Spirit in relation to Christ and dependent on him, as we have seen.

The Spirit is “the promise” that Jesus makes to the apostles, that he will send so that they will be clothed with the Power from on high.

The faith in God that saves us through his Son and that continues to act in his followers through his Spirit led the early Church to many different Trinitarian formulas. *“God’s love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son... to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away... because he lets us share his Spirit.”*

The baptismal formulas take on special importance: *“Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

“Baptize” suggests purification, forgiveness, justification and sanctification. In, “εἰς,” in Greek, suggests inclusion, immersion, location. John baptized in the Jordan. When the preposition takes a name as its object, it means direction, belonging. The “name” is the Hebrew way of underscoring the personal sense of the action; name equals person... The fact that the names are given in the singular and not in the plural has been seen to indicate the divine unity of the trinity of persons. The listing of the persons reveals a salvific and Trinitarian principle, order, sequence. The triple listing expresses the trinity of persons of equal condition, which will later be interpreted as equal nature.

“You have been washed clean, and sanctified, and justified through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Spirit of our God.”

1 Co 6:11;
2 Co 1:21-22;
1 P 1:2.

The Trinitarian greeting of the Eucharist recalls the core mystery of our faith: *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”*

1 Co 13:13.

St. Irenaeus writes:

*By causing the Spirit to dwell in man,
He is Himself made the head of the Spirit,
and gives the Spirit to be the head of man:
for through Him (the Spirit) we see, and hear,
and speak.*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 20,2.

Just as the Word from all eternity was the one who would be incarnated, in the same way the Spirit was the one who would be poured out. The Holy Spirit is seen as the “gift” for people; it is what we receive and what qualifies us, independently of the intra-Trinitarian life, such as the love between the Father and the Son, or such as that which makes the Son be “The Son.”

Verbum incarnandum.

Spiritus effundendus.

Tertullian argued on the basis of the text from Genesis: *“God spoke in the plural: Let us make, and Our, and Of us. For in whose company was he making man, and like whom was he making him? He was speaking with the Son who was to assume manhood —induturus— and the Spirit who was to sanctify man —sanctificaturus— as with ministers and mediators in consequence of the unity of the Trinity.”*

Tertullian,
Prax XII, 3.

Within the Trinitarian mystery we can speak of priorities as long as we do not take them to mean

priorities in time, or substantial difference; we can, however, speak of priorities in our logical order, and in the order of revelation and salvation. This order is indicated by naming the Father first, and then the Son and finally the Holy Spirit, by recognizing the Father as the unbegotten, the Son as the begotten and sent, and the Spirit as the gift poured out on human beings. It is thus not stated that Jesus is God or the Son of God by the Spirit that is given to him, even though the Spirit is given to him in fullness. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father, but also of the Son, and he is a Paschal gift that we would not have received if Christ had not risen. We could say, to use St. Paul's words, that if Christ was not raised, there is no Spirit of eternal life for people.

Cf 1 Co 15:13f.
Jn 7:32.

The Father can be located, so to speak, in heaven; the Son, on earth and in all places and at all times; and the Holy Spirit, in the heart of humanity.

Mt 6:9.
Jn 1:11; Mt 28:20.
1 Co 3:16-17.

For Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is not a gift in a strict sense, but rather something that belongs to him on account of his condition as only begotten Son of God, which did not keep Jesus in his earthly life from showing himself full of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. St. Augustine tells us: *"The Father is the beginning (principium) of the whole divinity, or if it is better so expressed, deity,"* not the Spirit, or the Son. And the Spirit and the Son always relate to the Father. But the Father, beginning (principle) of divinity and of everything, is only so in relation to the Son and

Cf 2 Co 3:17.
De Trin IV, 20,29.

the Spirit, just as only in relation to them can he make himself accessible to our understanding and “*God with us.*”

The Gospel is the good news about Jesus, not about the Holy Spirit. It must be noted that even though the Gospel was written in the early Church, and even after some of Paul’s letters, and under a strong influence and multiple experiences of the Spirit, the Gospel writers do not project back onto Jesus the functions and gifts of the Holy Spirit, as if to safeguard Christ’s difference and salvific priority over the Spirit. And yet they do not overlook the force of the Spirit over Jesus; thus Peter says: “*You must have heard about the recent happenings in Judaea; about Jesus of Nazareth and how he began in Galilee, after John had been preaching baptism. God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, Jesus went around doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil.*” Ac 10:37-38.

The Holy Spirit is not the visualization of God; God does not reveal himself to us in the Holy Spirit, but rather through the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit presents himself in the form of wind, or a dove, or flame, it is to make us understand that he is not any of these three things, that he has the force of the wind, the freedom of a dove, and the light and heat of a flame, but he did not incarnate in the dove, or in the flame, or in the wind. Nor did he reveal himself to us in order to be worshipped separately from Jesus, or to be recognized in our sisters and brothers, who are

images of Christ and not of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit moves us to give our lives for Christ, as the early Christians did, but Christ does not move us to give our lives for the Spirit.

Ep 1:13-14 By the seal of the Spirit we belong to Christ and
1 Co 1:22. not to the Spirit; the Spirit is a gift that belongs to us, but we do not actually belong to the Spirit, except in the sense that he fills our hearts and we act in response to his moving force, and that he is the Third Person of the Trinity. The Spirit is a gift for us, but we are not a gift for the Spirit. When it comes to the concept of gift, grace and favor, the important thing is not so much the gift as the person giving. We do not abide in the Spirit;
Cf CEC 687. it; the Spirit abides in us. We are the recipients of the Spirit. We do not follow or go to the Spirit; the Spirit comes to us.

The Holy Spirit is not the prototype of the human person, nor is he imitable. He is God's creative force that moves us to follow and imitate Christ creatively.

In the early Church, the Holy Spirit was the communication of Christ's Spirit. And it is Christ who, by communicating his Spirit to us, makes us sons and daughters as he is. *"The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cried, 'Abba, Father!'"*
Ga 4:6. Thus, the Holy Spirit is never to be separated from the immediate following of Jesus, from the faith, love and trust placed in him, which is the first fruit of the Spirit in us.

Origen wrote: *"There have been wise men who, having God, passed his words on to us; however, they only possessed the Spirit of God partially... but the Savior, sent to convey God's word, does not give the Spirit partially, because he does not communicate it to others on account of having received it himself, but rather because he, who has been sent from on high and is superior to all others, he himself gives the Spirit because he is its source."*

Origen, Commentary on the Gospel of John 48.

In the early Church, the Holy Spirit is seen as linked to the person of Jesus, his words and deeds. After the resurrection, the characteristic feature of the Spirit is that he makes Jesus present permanently; through him we are linked to Jesus' humanity, to the Gospel, to his presence and action, and we form a community that we call "the Church," of which Jesus is the head, and the Holy Spirit, the soul.

Dz-H 3328; Augustine, Sermon 395,4; Ac 4:32: *"The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul."*

Activities

- Look up a text from the early centuries that discusses the action of the Holy Spirit. For example, Dz-H 542.
- With respect to the prayer of Paul and the Christians, see Ep 3:14-17.
- Make a commentary on the following texts: *"Since the Lord thus has redeemed us through His own blood, giving His soul for our souls, and His flesh for our flesh, and has also poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and, on the other hand, at-*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 1,1.

taching man to God by His own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at His coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God—all the doctrines of the heretics fall to ruin.”

- Comment on the following text:

St. Cyprian, 258;
Vat II, Lg 4.

The Church is a people gathered “*by virtue of the unity of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*”

“*Quoniam ubi Tres, id est Pater et Filius et Sapiritus Sanctus, ibi Ecclesiam, quae Trium corpus est.*”
Bapt VI, 2.

In reference to baptism, Tertullian says: “*Where there are three, that is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there is the Church, which is a body of three.*” In Tertullian, the word body means expression, reality, that which is visible. And the Church is body because through baptism, faith in the Trinity is expressed in the Church, and through the Church it is conveyed and professed.

7.4 The Holy Spirit as a personal gift

Not only the Christian community but also each one of those who form it can call God “my Father,” through the Spirit that has been given to each person in baptism.

The Holy Spirit is directly and primarily related to human beings, to Jesus as the “*First-born*” of all human beings and of all creation, and through people to institutions like the Church and the hierarchy. Even though Bernini represented the Holy Spirit above the Chair of St. Peter, the Holy Spirit is not poured out onto the chair, but into the heart of the person occupying it.

It is characteristic of the Spirit to encourage, strengthen, enliven, and thus its “chair” is the hu-

man heart, not things or buildings. The apostolic Church conceives of the Spirit as a force, a drive, an engine, an agent, a guide, not as a goal or an end, or as an object of worship separate from the other divine persons. If it were represented as an object of worship, then it would become necessary to ask for “another” spirit to lead us to the Spirit. The Spirit’s job is to lead us to Christ and through Christ to the Father. But there is nothing wrong with turning to the Spirit for help with other matters— inspiration to pray sincerely and courage to bear witness without fear, guidance toward communion with Christ. And there is no reason to exclude him when we glorify the Father and the Son, since he is the Son’s Spirit and comes together with him.

Dz-H 3325.
Rm 8:15f.

The Spirit proceeds totally and absolutely from the Father for the Son, by the Son and together with the Son for humankind. For the sake of humankind he was sent to the world.

The Spirit is life and truth. He is the communion of all of God to humanity, and the one who enables humanity to open itself to God. He is the life of human beings, the divine dimension that they have inside. He is what God has given and can give of himself to them, without being something different from what God is, or of what is given to us by Jesus Christ. In short, he is what people have that is God, that is Trinitarian, that is Christ-centered, and it is through the Spirit that people participate in the shared life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is Trinitarian life, divine life.

He will be a true teacher because he will teach us everything about God and remind us about everything that Jesus has told us.

Jn 14:26.

Jesus will send him to us, such that if he is not glorified, the Spirit will not come to us, he being the paschal gift.

Jn 16:7.

His Spirit will be a true guide who will lead us to the full truth about Jesus.

Jn 16:13.

The Spirit will receive from the Father what belongs to Jesus, in order to give it in turn to us.

Jn 16:14.

The Holy Spirit is a gift that Jesus gives us, a gift that becomes a wellspring of living water, of good actions.

Jn 7:38-39.

The Holy Spirit makes us children of God and moves us to live accordingly. *“Having the Spirit of Christ”* means the same as *“living in Christ,”* i.e., living in love for him and for others, which implies a new life, a new society, a new world. And the job of the apostles is to preach the Good News and thereby steadily transform the world into a better way to be and to live. In this sense, the Holy Spirit is the one who compels us and inspires us to transform our structures and our society. It is characteristic of the Spirit to give us life, but that should not be understood in an exclusively individual and intimate sense.

Rm 1:3-4.

The Holy Spirit little by little makes us resemble Jesus Christ. He has been sent to our hearts to shape us like Christ. The Holy Spirit is the principle of life and communion with Christ. St. Paul wrote: *“Anyone who is joined to the Lord is one*

1 Co 6:17.

spirit with him." For St. Irenaeus, the Spirit was the one who joined us to Christ in a personal way. "The image" is the relationship of all people to Jesus Christ, while "likeness" is the vocation that all people have to reproduce Jesus' attitudes in our lives through faith, the sacraments, the action of the Church, and primarily our personal work, moved by the Spirit.

"Communicatio Christi Spiritus Sanctus."
Adv Haer III, 4,1.

Cf Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 6,1; 9,3.

*"The Spirit will render us like him,
and accomplish the will of the Father;
for it shall make man after the image and likeness of God."*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 8,1.

"The Holy Spirit," Jesus says, *"will be my witness,"* because he is with me, *"and you too will be witnesses because you have been with me from the outset."* The Holy Spirit is linked to missionary and apostolic work.

Jn 15:26.

Jn 20:21-22.

*As many as fear God
and trust in His Son's advent,
and who through faith do establish the Spirit of
God in their hearts,
such men as these shall be properly called both
pure,
and spiritual, and those living to God,
because they possess the Spirit of the Father,
who purifies man,
and raises him up to the life of God.*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 9,2.

Through the Holy Spirit we have communion with God, which necessarily produces salvation and immortality. This is why the Holy Spirit, whom we have already received, is the pledge of our inheritance.

*But where the Spirit of the Father is,
there is a living man,
...the flesh possessed by the Spirit,
forgetful indeed of what belongs to it,
and adopting the quality of the Spirit,
being made conformable to the Word of God —
incarnate—.*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 9,3.

St. Paul sees the great freedom that should suffuse the life of Christians as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” The Lord makes us free through his Spirit, and eventually leads us to the complete freedom of God’s children.

2 Co 3:17.
Rm 8:21.

Tertullian said:

*“The reason why the Lord sent the Paraclete was, that, since human mediocrity was unable to take in all things at once, discipline should, little by little, be directed, and ordained, and carried to perfection, by that Vicar of the Lord, the Holy Spirit. ‘Still,’ he said, ‘I have many things to say to you, but you are not yet able to bear them: when that Spirit of truth shall have come, he will conduct you into all truth, and will report to you the supervening (things).’ But above, withal, he made a declaration concerning this His work. What, then, is the Paraclete’s administrative office but this: **the direction of discipline, the revelation of the Scriptures, the reformation of the intellect, the advancement toward the “better things”?***

Tertullian,
Virg 1,4.

The Spirit, not as the Third Person but as God’s force, life and way of being, is common to the three persons. The Father is Spirit, but he is not the Holy Spirit, and the same can be said about

the Son. For the Church fathers, in the same way Jesus is “*God of God*,” the Holy Spirit is Spirit of Spirit, but the relationship with the Father is not one of sonship but of proceeding, because the Spirit is not revelation or visualization, or expression separate from that of Jesus. He is rather the one who makes it possible. The adjectives that best suit the Holy Spirit are closely related to us because he sanctifies us, because he is a gift, because he is communion, because he gives us strength and life, because he is another intercessor —Paraclete—.

For Jesus, “*finding life*” means living with God, and this life surpasses the psycho-biological concept —*ψυχή*— and refers to God’s own specific life —*ζωή*— which in other places is expressed as Spirit. God’s life is what saves humanity’s life; it is its fullness, what it longs for, what it needs and the only thing that can satisfy it: “*Because they possess the Spirit of the Father, who purifies man, and raises him up to the life of God.*” Eternal life, or participation in the intra-Trinitarian life, is usually expressed by Irenaeus in terms of vision, of communication.

Mt 10:39; Lk 16:22;
Mk 12:26; Jn 12:25.

Jn 4:24.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 9:2.

*The Spirit will truly prepare man in the Son of God,
and the Son will lead us to the Father,
while the Father, too, confers upon us incorruption for eternal life,
which comes to every one from the fact of his seeing God.*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 20,5.

The aspect of communion with God through the Holy Spirit was regarded as extremely important

in the early Church, even as a basis for faith in the divinity of the Holy Spirit. They said, for example, *"How could he not be God if he divinizes us?"* Divinization through the Spirit means the greatest communion possible for a human being with the divine being, with the Father, with the Son and with the Holy Spirit, i.e., the participation of humanity in intra-Trinitarian life, which is afforded to us on account of our adoption, i.e., by grace, without any kind of proportional grace on our part.

The Spirit's proper task for people was not just sanctification, but divinization, a way of saying immortality, the divine vision: *"We shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is."* All of this was none other than the fullness of salvation. How could we ever free ourselves from death and sin except in the greatest communion with God? We will have to partake of what God is in order to be able to live with God. Only *"by your light do we see the light."* In John's language, and in general in the Bible, seeing and knowing means the greatest possible communication with God.

If the Spirit were not God, but a creature, *"how can he make me God, or join me with the God-head?"* Gregory applies to the Holy Spirit the same argument that Athanasius makes about the Son: *"If he is not God, how can we be divinized by him?"* We can say that the Holy Spirit is the outpouring of the Father, by way of Christ, on humanity, in this life and in eternal life. The Holy

Gregory of Nazian-
zus, Oration 31,4.

Cf Arians 39, PG
26,93 A.

Spirit dwells in us on account of being sent, and as soon as he is sent, by the Father and the Son.

All of the Holy Spirit's activity, which ceaselessly moves people in their Christian life, propels the Church forward and inspires the whole world, culminates in communion with God. And the ultimate goal of the human person is participation in Trinitarian divine life: with the Father, with the Son, with the Holy Spirit, that life which proceeds from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. And each one of the divine persons is communicated to us in his peculiarity. As Irenaeus said: "*All saw the Father in the Son*"... And God's glory was manifested to us in the face of Jesus... Although life in the Spirit must have characteristics that go beyond our way of thinking, of speaking, and of being subject to space-time experiences.

When speaking about the Holy Spirit, people often list the gifts that he bestows on us, traditionally seven:

Dz-H 178.

+ The gift of understanding enables us to know the mysteries of faith that are necessary for Christian life.

+ The gift of wisdom links us to God and to others, and to all things in reference to eternal life.

+ The gift of piety joins us to God in a familiar and reverent way.

+ The gift of knowledge helps to sanctify us in the world and to sanctify temporal realities.

+ The gift of counsel offers us a conscience that is righteous and sensitive to God's motions in ourselves and in those around us.

+ The gift of fortitude helps us overcome difficulties.

+ And finally, the gift of the fear of God joins us to him in the acknowledgment of his sovereignty, in an attitude of respect and love.

Ga 5:22. St. Paul lists more than seven, which can be considered the fruits or consequences of the gifts. We can actually say that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are numerous and depend on the idiosyncrasies of the person receiving them. The greatest gift of the Holy Spirit is not a thing at all: he gives himself to us as personal grace to fill our hearts. He is the sum of all his gifts and he surpasses them

Cf Lk 11:13. infinitely. *“Don’t you realize that you are God’s
1 Co 3:17. temple and that the Holy Spirit dwells in you?”*

Just as Jesus is forever the incarnate God, and from all time he who was to incarnate —incarnandus, induturus—, in the same way the Holy Spirit is the God who communicates, who was to be poured out —effundendus—; he is God’s “possibility,” so to speak, of engaging in continuous and personal—three-person— communication, in terms of love, with the Father and the Son, and with humanity.

Among the many images that the Bible uses to describe the actions and effects of the Holy Spirit—breath, air, wind, living water, fire, anointing, seal, peace—, those of gift and love have been the most frequent in the history of theology. The Spirit is, according to the Bible, God’s eschatological gift, and as such, the fullness of God’s works. The Spirit is considered pure gift. New Testament statements about the Spirit often use

Ac 2:38; 8:20;
10:45; 11:17;
Heb 6:4; Cf Jn 4:10.

the verbs “give” and “receive.” The Holy Spirit is the one who “spoke through the prophets” prefiguring Christ. And in this way, he is not just “Creative Spirit,” but also historic presence and action.

In order to highlight the relative nature of the Spirit, Church teaching says that instead of the name “Holy Spirit,” which does not express the relationship clearly enough, the term “*Gift*” can be applied, since the Holy Spirit exists as a “*Gift*” and the word expresses better the idea of grace, gift, communication. “*Because he is bestowed upon the faithful by the Father and by the Son, with whom he shares the same essence in everything.*” And even though the Holy Spirit is “*Gift*,” he exists as such even before being given to creatures.

John Paul II and the
16th Synod of Toledo.

Dz-H 570, 4780.

Dz-H 570.

Augustine,
De Trin V, 15,16.

We live in communion with the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit and in the Holy Spirit, but we do not live joined and in communion with the Spirit through the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is not manifested in himself, nor is he the primary object of revelation, but he is the one who makes it possible, and he is manifested through Christ, the prophets and us.

N.B.

It is important to distinguish between the Spirit and the Holy Spirit because as Trinitarian notions they are not equivalent. God is Spirit—the Father is, as well as the Son and the Holy Spirit. The word Spirit, without qualification, refers to God’s oneness, because God is Spirit, in the

Jn 4:24.

same way he is love, life, light and Lord. With the words Holy Spirit we refer only and exclusively to the third person of the Trinity directly communicated to give life, holiness and glory to humanity.

Activities

- In an attitude of meditation, try to make a prayer based on Irenaeus' text.
- The objective of creation is attained gradually and progressively; point out these characteristics in this text by Irenaeus:

*the Father planning everything well and giving His commands,
the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating,
and the Spirit nourishing and increasing [what is made],
but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect,
that is, approximating to the uncreated One.
For the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God.
Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created;
and having been created, should receive growth;
and having received growth, should be strengthened;
and having been strengthened, should abound;
and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin];
and having recovered, should be glorified;
and being glorified, should see his Lord.
For God is He who is yet to be seen,*

*and the beholding of God is productive of immortality,
but immortality renders one near unto God.*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 38,3.

7.5 The Holy Spirit and today's Church

The Holy Spirit that we receive as a personal gift is received in the Church and for the Church, and in a certain sense also by the Church. **In** the Church because it is through the Spirit, received in the sacrament of baptism, that we are incorporated into the Church; we are joined more deeply and vitally to Christ; we are consecrated and sanctified by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; we enter into a dynamic of communion with God through the Spirit, which we receive in the sacrament of initiation. And we receive all of the Spirit's gifts in communion with the Church.

St. Irenaeus writes:

But the path of those belonging to the Church circumscribes the whole world, as possessing the sure tradition from the apostles, and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same, since all receive one and the same God the Father, and believe in the same dispensation regarding the incarnation of the Son of God, and are cognizant of the same gift of the Spirit, and are conversant with the same commandments, and preserve the same form of ecclesiastical constitution, and expect the same advent of the Lord, and await the same salvation of the complete man, that is, of the soul and body.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 20.1.

*"Nam et ipsa ecclesia
proprie et principaliter
ipse est spiritus, in
quo est trinitas unius
diuinitatis, Pater et
Filius et Spiritus
sanctus.*

*Illam ecclesiam con-
gregat quam Domi-
nus in tribus posuit".*
Tertullian,
Pud XXI, 1.

And Tertullian said that the Holy Spirit is given to us in the form of Trinitarian faith. *"For the very Church itself is, properly and principally, the Spirit Himself, in whom is the Trinity of the One Divinity Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (The Spirit) combines that Church which the Lord has made to consist in 'three.'"* Tertullian believed that wherever people are baptized, there is the Church, and that people are baptized in the immersion in the three divine persons.

In the Church, the Spirit joins us, and any kind of division goes against the Spirit. Through Christ, Ep 2:18. *"through him, both of us have in the one Spirit our way to come to the Father."*

The Spirit is the vital medium, and in this sense he could be identified with the Church, in which Christians are born, grow and develop.

*"We do preserve this faith, which always, by the Spirit of God, renewing its youth, as if it were some precious deposit in an excellent vessel, causes the vessel itself containing it to renew its youth also. For this gift of God has been entrusted to the Church, as breath was to the first created man, for this purpose, that all the members receiving it may be vivified; and the communion with Christ has been distributed throughout it, that is, the Holy Spirit, the earnest of incorruption, the means of confirming our faith, and the ladder of ascent to God. 'For in the Church,' it is said, 'God has set apostles, prophets, teachers,' and all the other means through which the Spirit works; of which all those are not partakers who do not join themselves to the Church... **For where the Church is,***

1 Co 12:28.

there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace, for the Spirit is truth”.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer III, 24,1.

All gifts, however personal they may be, always serve a social function: they serve the Church: they are received **for** the good of the entire Church body. When the Father and the Son communicate their Spirit to us, they are looking out for our wellbeing and that of the Church. The personal gift of the Spirit always offers some kind of service for the Church, which means that if a gift of the Spirit were to divide the Church, that would be a sign of its inauthenticity. Personal gifts are always intended to lend service to the Church. The Holy Spirit is always a spirit of love that unites the Church.

1 Co 12:7; 14:4.

Cf Ep 4:7:12;
Rm 12:3-8;
2 Tm 1:6:7.

1 Co 13:14f; 12:28.

Jesus, who descended and ascended, was the one who called on some to be apostles, others prophets, etc.

Ep 4:9-13.

For Paul, the temple of the Holy Spirit consists of the faithful who make up the Church, like a well constructed temple set of firm foundations.

Cf 1 Co 3:16.

“So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors: you are citizens like all the saints, and part of God’s household. You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself as its main cornerstone. As every structure is aligned on him, all grow into one holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built into a house where God lives, in the Spirit.”

Ep 2:19-22.

Ep 4:30. Evil in the Church “*grieves the Holy Spirit of God.*” The Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, is an ongoing invitation to steer clear of evil and to look for good. In Jewish theology, the *Shekhinah*, God’s spirit active in humankind, is the principle of moral life; he is what motivates us to fulfill his will. For the Jews, God’s spirit can be personalized, but not personified.

When we act the wrong way, the Holy Spirit invites us and moves us to convert, but the Holy Spirit is not the one who directly forgives our sins; the Lord does, made present in the apostles and in priests. The priest says, “*I forgive you,*” because he acts in Christ’s stead, —in persona Christi. He does not pray: may the Holy Spirit forgive you. Thus Jesus says:

“*Receive the Holy Spirit.
For those whose sins you forgive,
they are forgiven;
for those whose sins you retain,
they are retained.*”

Jn 20:22-23.

It should be noted that the Spirit does not come to the Church as “community”; the Spirit’s dwelling-place is not the community, but rather the faithful **in** community and **for** the community. The Holy Spirit is a “Gift” for people, sent upon both leaders and the led, those who make up the community, that is, the Church. Therefore the led are obliged to listen to their leaders, and the leaders are obliged to listen to the led, because the Spirit is not exclusive to either one.

The Holy Spirit is received from the Father and the Son **through** the Church; in this case, the

word “through” means ministry, action, way, authority and authorization. The Holy Spirit is the soul or the life of the Church. Dz-H 3328.

We have insisted that the direct object of the Holy Spirit’s presence and action is the human person, but the human person lives as a member of the Church and the Holy Spirit is received **for** the good of the Church. For this reason, the first fruit of the Holy Spirit’s action is the love that gives meaning to sacrifice and service in the cause of building a community of brothers and sisters. Rm 12:12f.
1 Co 13:13.

The Holy Spirit makes the Church advance by dealing with the crises that befall it. And just as the Spirit is present, acts and intercedes for each one of the Church’s members, he also acts and intercedes for the Church as a whole.

The Holy Spirit will make the Church and Jesus’ word in it endure as a living thing until the end of time. But believers also need to take up this responsibility: the Spirit acts in them to renew the Church, because the Spirit does not act on his own, or speak on his own. This renewal of the Church should take place in the whole Christian people, i.e., in each particular church, and in the form of an inner renewal. We could say that the Holy Spirit belongs to the Church, but also that the Church belongs to the Spirit. He always keeps the Church young, as St. Irenaeus said on p. 249. The Holy Spirit is also its principle of unity and diversity in communion. Cf Jn 16:13; 14:16:17.
Cf Vat II LG 34,1-2; AA 3,1; 29,3.
Vat II UR 2,2.

“It is a mystery that finds its highest exemplar and source in the unity of the Persons of the Trinity: the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, one God.”

Vat II UR 2,6.

Res 40,1.
1 Co 11:18-19.

Tertullian stated, recalling St. Paul, that it was good for the Church to have heretics because they pushed the Church to express its faith more deeply. In this same sense we can also say that it is good for the Church to deal with many problems because they become the fertilizer that allows it to give better fruit and to live better in the present without forgetting the past, but rather learning from it.

Activities

- Read Dz-H 850.
- Make a presentation of the ideas expressed in CEC 867f.
- Analyze the texts from the Church Fathers and point out the passages that enlighten or obscure the meaning of Trinitarian faith. Keep in mind that the Magisterium did not exist yet, and that these were the first Christian thinkers to struggle with the defense and expression of their faith. *“For by whom has truth ever been discovered without God? By whom has God ever been found without Christ? By whom has Christ ever been explored without the Holy Spirit? By whom has the Holy Spirit ever been attained without the mysterious gift of faith— baptism?”*
- Write ten statements, each with its corresponding adversative, like these: The Holy Spirit shapes us like Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ does not shape us like the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit

Tertullian,
An 1,1.

moves us to follow Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ does not move us to follow the Spirit. The Spirit is a gift for us, but we are not a gift for the Spirit. The Spirit is not a prototype of the human person, and is not imitable, but he is God's creative force that moves us to follow and imitate Christ creatively.

7.6 Jesus "has come to judge the living and the dead"

In Greek *parousia* —παρουσία— means "presence." The *parousia* or second coming of Christ Jesus has an Old Testament basis: a manifestation of God who comes to judge his people and the whole world. *"See, the days are coming—it is Yahweh who speaks—when I will raise a virtuous branch for David, who will reign as true king and be wise, practicing honesty and integrity in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell in confidence. And this is the name he will be called —Yahweh-our-integrity."* *"For, see, Yahweh will soon come out of his dwelling, to punish all the inhabitants of the earth for their crimes. The earth will reveal its blood and no longer hide its slain."* The Messiah *"does not judge by appearances, he gives no verdict on hearsay, but judges the wretched with integrity, and with justice gives a verdict for the poor of the land. His word is a rod that strikes the ruthless, his sentences bring death to the wicked. Integrity is the loincloth around his waist, faithfulness the belt about his hips."*

Jr 23:6.

Is 11:3-5.

The second coming also has an eschatological meaning: it will be the *"Day of Yahweh"* that can bring condemnation or salvation, as the case

Am 5:18.

may be. There is talk of “*new heavens and a new earth*.” And this applies especially to the Messiah, according to Zechariah, who describes him with peaceful images; the Psalmist, however, depicts him as a warrior.

Is 65:17.
Zc 9:9; 10:6.
Ps 17:21f.

In the faith of the early Church, Jesus, who is the Messiah, the Son of Man and the Son of God, will bring everything to its fulfillment. The one who first came in humble guise, in mercy, will come back, and he will not be someone else, nor will he be newly incarnated, but he will come in glory, power and majesty to gather the fruits of his love and mercy in order to offer them to the Father. “*And when everything has been subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subject in his turn to the One who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all.*”

Mk 14:61f.
1 Co 15:28.

It is evident that we are presented here with images, comparison and allegories that convey to us a theological truth revealed by God. But like all revealed truths, it is expressed through cosmovisions, images, symbols and mental constructions involving space-time experiences along with traditions. Just as the emperor returned to Rome after conquering another land, in the same way Christ will return to earth to offer it to the Father. The word *parousia* was primarily used to refer to the presence of the governor on an official mission, or else to royalty.

The Gospels contain a number of predictions about this presence of Jesus upon his return to earth.

Mt 16:27; 24:26-28;
24:37-41; Lk 17:22-37; Jn 14:3; 2 Tm 2:26; 4:1; 1 P 4:5.

We might express the theological truth as follows: Jesus will come to bring unity and fulfillment to his work of creation, redemption and glorification, to his saving mission, in order to offer it all to the Father and to integrate everything into the Triune God. The end of the world is seen as integration, fulfillment and the goal of the work of salvation.

“He is coming” to take his place before all nations —peoples and individuals— to weigh the value of their works, and it will be like a new appearance. It will be universal and salvific.

Mt 24:27; Heb 9:28.
Mk 13:35; Mt 24:43;
Lk 17 30f; 1 Th 5:4 y
9, 2 Th 2:8;
I Tm 6:12; Tt 2:13.

It is Jesus himself who “is coming,” the Jesus who rose from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come back just as they saw him ascend into the heavens.

Ac 1:11; 3:20-21.

The parousia conforms to apocalyptic formulas, as part of the old cosmovision. Just as the creation story was taken from a certain cultural setting, the end of the world was as well. The images and comparisons join the present to the future, what will happen or happened in the short term with what will happen at the end of time. The end is something they understand and expect as an imminent occurrence, laden with apocalyptic images.

Mk 13:24f.

Mt 24:34.

Ac 2:17; Mk 13:14f.

We might wonder whether the last judgment is a Christological, anthropological, cosmological or ethical message. And the answer could be, without separating the elements too much, that the message is primordially Christological, as it ap-

pears in the Creed, as a complement to the presence of Jesus resurrected and glorified.

Christological message

- It is the same Jesus who is coming, the Jesus who was born of the Most Holy Virgin Mary and died under the rule of Pontius Pilate, who rose from the dead and will return some day.
Ac 1:11; Rv 1:4f.
- The time is not known but it is expected soon.
Mt 24:34; Rv 1:3.
- For this reason we are to wait for him always celebrating the Eucharist *"until he comes again."*
1 Co 11:26.
- It will be first of all a time of grace and universal salvation.
Ac 2:17.
- This explains why the early Church looked forward to it with such yearning and hopefulness.
Rv 22:20; Ph 4:5.
St 5:8.
- *"It will be the time of comfort."*
Ac 3:20.
- *"He will appear a second time to reward with salvation those who are waiting for him."*
Heb 9:28.
- *"Happy those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. I tell you solemnly, he will put on an apron, sit them down at table and wait on them."*
Lk 12:37-38.
- *"Now you are waiting for Jesus, his Son, whom he raised from the dead, to come from heaven to save us from the retribution which is coming."*
1 Th 1:10.
- Jesus accompanies us always, until he returns.
- Everything will have its unity in Christ, encompassing the plurality of people and cultures, to be handed over to the Father.
1 Co 15:24.
- Christ glorious will be revealed and made known to all nations.
Mt 25:14; Rv 1:4f.

- It will be a time of evaluation and judgment in the midst of joyful hope. 2 Th 2:4; 4:17;
1 Jn 2:28.

But also of condemnation

- of those who have resisted God's grace and refused to bear fruit, as a result of personal and social responsibility. Mt 24:3f.
- Just as the good is weighed, evil is also weighed in personal, social, historical and circumstantial terms. Evil is seen in relation to good, the future in relation to the present, in the sense of weighing actions taken now, considering faith professed now. Mt 10:32;
1 Jn 2:28.

It is also an anthropological message

- The life of each human being is related to the whole, to what is beyond, to the end, which gives it eschatological and transcendent meaning. The life we live is not just a life in the world, based on human values only: we live for the Lord. Rm 14:8.
- This life is meant to lead to a personal and salvific encounter with Christ. Mt 25:14.
- *"God never meant us to experience the Retribution, but to win salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who dies for us so that, alive or dead, we should still live united to him."* 1 Th 5:9-10.
2 Co 6:2.
- *"I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone: the Lord is very near."* Ph 4:4-5.
- *"Now be patient, brothers, until the Lord's coming. Think of a farmer: how patiently he waits for the precious fruit of the ground until it has*

- had the autumn rains and the spring rains!
You too have to be patient; do not lose heart,
because the Lord's coming will be soon."*
- Jm 5:7-8.
- An encounter of fulfillment and glorification for the Head and its members, present at different levels: Christ and the Church – community of believers—, Christ and all human persons –human brotherhood—, Christ and the universe –solidarity of all that exists—.
- 1 Co 15:23.
- It links each individual person to Christ not just on account of her personal dignity but also of her works.
- Rv 1:7.
- Human actions transcend their historical moment.

As a cosmological message it tells us

- That the world is not a mere setting; it is the vital medium of communion with God.
- Jn 1:3; Mt 24:3; Rv 1:8.
- That it is linked to Christ in his origin and in his end.
 - That physical reality is not exclusively physical in the scientific sense; it is also a reality that is inserted in God due to the incarnation, because God made himself a physical, human and historical reality.
 - However, it tells us nothing in a scientific, historical or phenomenological sense about the cosmological end. "The end of the world," like the origin of the world, is a theological story. Its purpose is to affirm the value of our life and our actions, not to identify precise events in the field of science. Cosmological language does not deal in historical predictions.

As an ethical message

- What people make of themselves and do with themselves, with the world and for the world, especially with their neighbors and for their neighbors, has transcendent meaning and is integrated into the whole.
- Our actions either bring us together or isolate us, join us personally to Christ or separate us from him. Mt 24:27f.
- In the end, Christ is able to remake what is already made, or what is flawed –the healing miracles—.
- Christ will not change; he will be the same in his love and mercy.
- But it will not be possible to equate right with wrong.
- The end does not do away with responsibilities; it sheds light on them.
- One must always be ready. Mk 13:33; Mt 24:42; 25:13-15; Lk 19:12.

There are so many apocalyptic images, comparisons and metaphors, and their theological meaning is so slight that it hardly seems necessary to make a list of them. It should suffice to point out a few:

- 1) initial tribulations, Mt 24:1f; Mk 24:24; 2 Th 2:2; 1 Th 5:3.
- 2) Antichrists and deceptions, Mt 24:4 y 24; 1 Jn 2:18f; 2 Th 2:4.
- 3) cosmic catastrophes. Mk 13:24f; Rv 8:7f. 9:1f; 2 P 3:6.

The Antichrists that appear on different occasions are Christological heresies, or persecutors—emperors—in the guise of beasts preying on Christians. 1 Jn 2:18-22; 2 Jn 7.
Rv 13:1:18.

Ac 1:11; 3:20-21. Even though the early Church understood the second coming in a very literal and descriptive sense, which was to be expected, this does not mean that it should always be understood that way. The focus should not be on the message's descriptive details but on its theological truth, even if that means understanding it differently today. It is not the faith that changes, but our understanding of the faith.

Ac 2:20. The parousia also includes aspects that evoke a devoted awaiting. As J. Ratzinger points out, it is important to purify our thinking about cosmological imagery, both ancient and modern. The word "world," as in "end of the world," is not primarily the physical world but the human world, i.e., the history of humankind. Furthermore, the world and humankind are not realities that can be easily separated: humans are of the earth and made of earth, and the world belongs to humankind. The message is about the union and salvation of everything in Christ, and that will be the "*the great Day of the Lord*," the final goal. Thus the Lord's resurrection, and ours with him, have an eschatological meaning and are the anticipation of what we are awaiting "*at the end of time*." Jesus, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Origin and the Consummation, will be present and will evaluate all of creation inasmuch as he was present at the beginning, at the creation of the world, with a divine, spiritual presence and in an essential, "unipersonal" relationship with his physical and historical presence, just as the Easter appearances were the same Jesus, directly related to his

Mt 27:52-53.

real, historical presence, and yet not subject to space and time.

Not being physical and historical is not the same as not being real; it does not imply mere supposition or imagination. God is neither a physical nor a historical being, and yet he is the most real of all real beings, the foundation and goal of all real beings and of time and history. The handing over of everything to the Father carried out by Christ and completed by the action of the Holy Spirit is *“so that God may be all in all.”* 1 Co 15:27-28.

The evaluation, or final judgment, of the world, portrayed in St. Matthew’s parable: *“Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world,”* is extraordinarily positive, and the negative is there only to highlight the positive, which is why St. Matthew uses exactly the same expressions, and the reward is the reverse of the punishment. The Evangelist highlights the positive by saying that when he comes again, *“The Master himself will wait on them.”* Mt 24:31f. Mt 25:31f; 1 Th 5:9. Lk 12:37.

For the believer there are two realities that are not contradictory, but rather contrasting and somehow complementary. On the one hand, God’s grace and salvation as the fruits of faith, and on the other, the need for good works, also as the fruits of faith. Consequently, believers should rest easy knowing that they can count on God’s love and grace in abundance, but they should also assume responsibility for their acts because that is what will be judged. Men and women are like the steward who is called to render accounts

Lk 16:1f. on the property that the master entrusted to him. Responsibility exists when there is someone who evaluates or judges. The Gospel is understood only when there is someone who responds or fails to respond. Otherwise it is a voice crying in the wilderness.

Ac 7:1-53;
13 15-25; Lk 16:16.
Am 5:18. The delay in the Lord's coming is not fraudulence on God's part; it is grace. It is the time needed to spread the faith in the Lord's person. This event belongs to God's great deeds. "*The Day of the Lord*" is also "*the Day of Christ*." This delay was interpreted as one more grace, as a time of conversion for Jews and Gentiles.

1 Th 5:2; Ph 2:16.
Rm 11:5f; Mt 24:22.

Will this moment be the time when the world ends for me and I for the world, or when the world ceases to exist? The statement in the Creed clearly refers to an eschatological moment, i.e., to "a theological moment," not a historical moment. The expression "*the living and the dead*" refers to the assumption that at the end some will be alive and others will not, as St. Paul supposed. This would also agree with the immanence of the end.

1 Co 15:52.
2 Co 5:1f; 1 Th 5:1f.

This article of the Creed can help us realize the transcendent and eschatological character of the entire Gospel, and that the justice of God, who is a good Father, quick to forgive and slow to punish, as carried out by Jesus Christ, his merciful Son, necessarily demands the distinction of times, cultures, places and persons. It would not be just, as it were, for God to measure everyone with the same yardstick. With the parable of the

talents and vineyard workers, Jesus taught that God is generously and mercifully just. Mt 25:14-30;
20:1-16.

The dynamic vision of being and its historical process that characterized the people of Israel captures the progressive evolution of being in history much better than the Aristotelian and Platonic conception does, as it considers being is a static way, leaving no room for the possibility of moving toward perfection.

The Gospel writers do not attribute to Jesus during his earthly life the mission of judging the world. John has Jesus making these statements: *"God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that through him the world might be saved," "The Father judges no one," "I judge no one."* Luke presents him as an intercessor before the Father. Jn 3:37.
Jn 8:25; Jn 8:15.
Lk 13:8.

The Gospel shows clearly that Jesus' decision in the Last Judgment will depend on the attitude that the person in question takes toward him. And thus, the relationship established between the Son of man and Jesus reveals Jesus as the Eschatological Judge. Jesus is not just *"he who was to come"* as the promised Messiah, but also *"he who comes"* to judge the world. Lk 12:8f; 17:24f;
13:35.

Jesus of Nazareth will appear one day as the Son of man and Judge, and this Jesus who will come in the future will still be the Jesus who walked on earth, not a mythical figure from the realms of fantasy.

The one who weighs and declares the definitive worth of our life is Jesus Christ. Jesus of Naz-

areth, who died and was raised from the dead, has been entrusted with the judgment, because he is the Creator and Savior of humankind, and because the world will be judged and assessed on the basis of what has been revealed in Jesus Christ.

Cf Mk 10:37;
Mt 20:21. Since Jesus is the revealer of God, the Redeemer and Salvation, it is up to him to judge humankind. And we understand that the judgment is not so much a dramatic, suspenseful event, but rather a weighing of the value of a person's life. The parables that speak of reaping, of the wheat and the weeds, of the wedding banquet, of the net, of the murderous vineyard workers —they all make it clear that they are images of the same fundamental truth: the assessment of a person's life according to the norms of the Gospel. The one who will have the last word about our life is the same one who during his life had words of love and forgiveness, and who has forgiven us throughout our life. What sense would his words of forgiveness have had if in the end his last word were not of mercy? St. Irenaeus connects the Incarnation of God's Word with the final judgment and says that *"it was fitting that those who were to be judged should see the Judge, and know him who would judge them and would give them the gift of glory."*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 12,6.

This should instill in us an attitude of trust, and not fear. *"God's love will come to its perfection in us when we can face the day of Judgment without fear."*

1 Jn 4:17.

The faith in the final coming of the Lord, as the Judge of the living and the dead, was one of the main points of the apostolic preaching, and the fervor with which the early Church awaited it went hand in hand with the intensity of the early Church's eschatological awareness. This is why the Book of Revelation ends with the nostalgia-filled exclamation "*Come, Lord Jesus,*" in order to finish the work that you started with the creation of the world, that you re-established with your death and resurrection, that you maintained with your presence and activity, and that you will bring to fulfillment with your final word by having us partake of divine life.

Ac 10:39-43; 2:36;
17:31; 1 Th 4:13;
5:10; 2 Tm 4:1.

Rv 22:20.

Activities

- For you, what would be the strongest reason for understanding that Jesus will be the one to weight the value of your life in the end?
- By way of prayer

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who sent your disciples the way your father sent you, send us your Spirit so that we can know you better, follow you more closely, and courageously proclaim your message.

Give us

Capacity to understand it,

Concentration to meditate on it,

Wisdom and prudence to communicate it,

Grace and joy to live it,

We ask this of you who together with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever.

CHAPTER VIII

TRINITARIAN FAITH

Objective: To understand that the Trinitarian confession, life of the Church, emerges from our faith in Jesus.

8.1 Origin of Trinitarian faith

We know that Jesus did not speak of the Trinitarian mystery, and yet it is the heart of Christian faith. The Trinitarian experience, not yet defined or interpreted as we know it today, grew like a ripe fruit from the encounter with Jesus of Nazareth, from following him, from his message, and mainly from his resurrection and glorification. Faith in Jesus led us to believe in God in a new way. Our idea of God emerges from the History of our Salvation. We know exactly what God is like because he has been revealed to us and his face and his glory have been shown to us in Jesus of Nazareth.

Col 1:15.

Jn 1:14.

It was impossible for Jesus to teach the Trinitarian doctrine as such because a constituent and essential part of it is the divine condition of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, not yet revealed in the preaching of the historical Jesus,

- because it included the salvific meaning of Jesus himself as death, self-offering, resurrection and return to the Father,
 - because it included his resurrection and exaltation, “*seated at the right hand of the Father,*”
 - because Jesus did not center his message on announcing himself,
 - because the Spirit was a Paschal gift.
- 1 Tm 2:6; Mk 10:46;
1 Co 15:4.
- Mk 16:19; 1 Tm 3:16;
1 P 3:22.
- Mt 19:17; Mk 10:18.
Jn 20:22.

We could say that it was impossible for Jesus to reveal the solution to us before the problem had been clearly laid out.

The first disciples spent time with Jesus, saw how he prayed, experienced what he felt and thought through his teaching and his way of being, how he treated the sick, the poor, those marginalized for their sins; they thought that God made himself present in his words, in his deeds and in him. His death destroyed everything, but the resurrection not only remade him, but also gave him a new meaning, and new meaning to actions and words that had first seemed insignificant and circumstantial.

They began to live the faith that they “experienced” together, expressing it with songs, prayers, rituals and praise. Little by little, but quite soon, they began to profess this faith when celebrating baptism and the Eucharist. Preaching and cat-

echesis led them to speak coherently about God as Father, Jesus as his only beloved Son, and the Holy Spirit as a force of inner life by which difficulties and death were overcome, leading the faithful to believe in Christ and love him above all other things.

Jesus' message and the message about Jesus led them inexorably to the Trinitarian mystery, because Jesus, like them and all the patriarchs and prophets, had believed in the one God. Jesus never had the idea of separating from Judaism, and in the transfiguration Jesus appears amidst Moses, Elijah, the law and the prophets.

Mk 9:2; Mt 17:2.
Lk 9:30.

We might ask whether Trinitarian faith adds anything to the New Testament, or why it is necessary to express our faith in this way.

The first question we can answer by saying that Trinitarian faith adds nothing foreign to the New Testament; it simply offers concepts and analogies to give explicit expression to what Jesus already said and lived in the message about the Kingdom, and to what the Apostles proclaimed.

To the second question about why it is necessary to speak about a unity of nature and a trinity of persons, we can respond: because revelation and faith have a historical character. We are not the first people to believe in Jesus or to follow him, and the way God has revealed himself and communicated in the past is the pattern by which he will continue to communicate in the future. When it comes to faith, we cannot abandon our origins, even though we recognize in them certain limita-

tions of understanding or of information, such as God the Creator as presented in Genesis. The job of the Church's *magisterium* and of theology is to give revelation and faith —*depositum fidei*— a contemporary expression that makes sense to the faithful today.

In the final analysis, Trinitarian faith expresses about Jesus everything that we can and must say about him: that Jesus is God in every sense of the word, and we use concepts and words to express what God has said with signs, images, metaphors and deeds.

We must point out the important role that the Church Fathers played in expressing and clarifying the faith in the Church's first centuries. With thousands of hours of prayer, reflection and discussion, they prepared what came to be defined as the faith of the Church in the ecumenical councils. They managed to integrate their faith with their culture and their life, and to give this faith a living expression with the blood of martyrdom, and no less so with their culture, concepts and words. Like love, faith needs and demands verbal expression. People truly believe when they know what it is they believe and why they believe it.

It is true that renewed efforts can be made to express Trinitarian faith with new concepts, but these efforts, because they refer to the one transcendent God, would have to be explained; we believe that a better strategy is to explain the old concepts. That way we can come into living contact with the original faith of the Trinitarian mystery, which is not only a "rule of faith," but also

a source and universal expression of that same faith.

The early Christians firmly believed in one God, creator of all that exists, Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and above all, and in a special way, of Jesus. They believed that by his death and resurrection he had been constituted as Lord and Messiah, Son of God, and that he was at his side, seated at the Father's right hand; that the Spirit, whom Jesus had possessed in fullness, by his death and resurrection and after them had been poured out in a special way on all who believed in him. In its origin, the apostolic teaching centered on the person of Jesus, dead and resurrected, and on his transcendence. Paul wrote: *"This is the faith we proclaim: If your lips confess that Jesus is Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved."* And St. John: *"Anyone who has the Son has life, anyone who does not have the Son does not have life."* *"True faith is faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who has come in the flesh."* Trinitarian faith is a deepening of the Apostolic teaching.

Jn 20:22; 1:33.
Ac 1:8f.

Rm 10:9; Ac 2:36.

1 Jn 5:12.

1 Jn 4:2.

The Trinitarian mystery is the culmination of faith in the transcendence of Jesus, the most sublime expression of faith in Jesus. By saying that Jesus is God we are making his message and his personal significance endure. And conversely, whoever does not accept Jesus' divine condition has no need to believe in the Trinity and therefore, relativizes both Jesus' message and his person. The characteristic trait of Christian faith is faith in the full transcendence of the person of Je-

- Jn 1:1. sus: believing that Jesus is the *Logos* at God's side and that he is rigorously the same as the *Logos* at our side. But this understanding of Jesus should not lead to a fundamentalist view of the Gospel or of Jesus' words taken literally, or of isolated facts, without taking into account the whole of the Gospel in its cultural context. Catholic doctrine is characterized not only by being universal but also by taking into account the whole Biblical message.
- Jn 1:11-14.
- Cf Vat II
DV III, 11,12.

In the early Church a “*rule of faith*” began to circulate, consisting of the fundamental and characteristic truths that make a believer Christian. These rules of faith were the outline of what we now know as the Creed. We find them in sacramental prayers and rituals, mainly baptism, and in a good number of texts by the Church Fathers prior to the Council of Nicaea such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Tertullian.

Irenaeus wrote: “*The Church, though dispersed through out the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father “to*

gather all things in one,” and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer I, 10,1.

“The rule of truth which we hold, is, that there is one God Almighty, who made all things by His Word, and fashioned and formed, out of that which had no existence, all things which exist. Thus says the Scripture, to that effect ‘By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established, and all the might of them, by the spirit of His mouth.’ And again, ‘All things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made.’ There is no exception or deduction stated; but the Father made all things by Him, whether visible or invisible, objects of sense or of intelligence, temporal, on account of a certain economy given them, or eternal; and these eternal things He did not make by angels, or by any powers separated from His will. For God needs none of all these things, but is He who, by His Word and Spirit, makes, and disposes, and governs all things, and commands all things into existence—He who formed the world (for the world is of all)—He who fashioned man—He [who] is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, above whom there is no other God, nor initial principle, nor power, nor pleroma,—He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we shall prove.”

2 M 7:28.
Ws 1:14.

Ps 33:6.
Jn 1:3.

Col 1:16.
2 Co 4:18.

Gn 2:7.
Mt 22:29; Ex 3:6.
Irenaeus,
Adv Haer I, 22,1.
Ep 1:3.

“This then is the order of the rule of our faith, and the foundation of the building, and the stability of our conversation: God, the Father, not made, not material, invisible; one God, the creator of all things: this is the first point of our faith. The second point is: The Word of God, Son of God, Christ

οἰκονομία. *Jesus our Lord, who was manifested to the prophets according to the form of their prophesying and according to the method of the dispensation of the Father: through whom all things were made; who also at the end of the times, to complete and gather up all things, was made man among men, visible and tangible, in order to abolish death and show forth life and produce a community of union between God and man. And the third point is: The Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied, and the fathers learned the things of God, and the righteous were led forth into the way of righteousness; and who in the end of the times was poured out in a new way upon mankind in all the earth, renewing man unto God.*

Irenaeus,
Demos 6.

Tertullian wrote: “Now we have a Rule of Faith, which teaches us what we are to defend and maintain, and by that very Rule we believe that there is one God, and no other than the creator of the world; who created all things out of nothing by his Word, whom before all things he sent out from him; that this Word was called the Son; and at sundry times and after different manners appeared to the Patriarchs in the Person of God; that he spoke by the Prophets; and was afterward carried by the Spirit and Power of God the Father into the Virgin Mary; was in her womb made flesh, and was born of her in the person of Jesus Christ; that he taught a new law, and a new promise of the Kingdom of Heaven; that he wrought miracles, was nailed to the Cross, rose again the third day, and being taken up into Heaven sat down at the right hand of the Father; that he conferred upon the believers the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, which was the represen-

tative of himself; that he will come again with glory to receive his saints into the rewards of eternal life, and the promises of Heaven; and to condemn and adjudge the wicked to eternal flames, the just and the unjust being first raised again, and their flesh fully restored."

Tertullian,
Praes XIII, 1.

And on another occasion he wrote:

"The rule of faith, indeed, is altogether one, alone immoveable and irreformable; the rule, to wit, of believing in one only God omnipotent, the Creator of the universe, and His Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised again the third day from the dead, received in the heavens, sitting now at the right hand of the Father, destined to come to judge living and dead through the resurrection of the flesh.

The reason why the Lord sent the Paraclete was, that, since human mediocrity was unable to take in all things at once, discipline should, little by little, be directed, and ordained, and carried on to perfection, by that Vicar of the Lord, the Holy Spirit. 'Still,' He said, 'I have many things to say to you, but you are not yet able to bear them: when that Spirit of truth shall have come, He will conduct you into all truth, and will report to you the supervening (things).' But above, withal, He made a declaration concerning this His work. What, then, is the Paraclete's administrative office but this: the direction of discipline, the revelation of the Scriptures, the reformation of the intellect, the advancement toward the better things?

Jn 14:25.

Tertullian,
Virg I,1. *He will be, after Christ, the only one to be called and revered as Master; for He speaks not from Himself, but what is commanded by Christ. He is the only prelate, because He alone succeeds Christ.*

Activities

- Underline with one color the similarities of these rules of faith with the Creed that you know.
- Underline with another color the parts that increase your knowledge of the divine persons.
- Read Dz-H 75, 328; 421.

8.2 The Trinitarian question

The mystery that the Trinitarian faith is interested in is not an accounting problem, or a question of divine essences; it is not even about God in himself. The focus of interest is the God who reveals himself in saving action toward humanity. What we know about God is what we can see through the window that he has opened. It is not a mystery of irreconcilable ideas. It is a mystery of happenings and relationships. God's revelation would make no sense to us if it were not at the same time a revelation of the meaning of our existence and of our relationship with him. Trinitarian faith is the definitive interpretation of God's word, i.e., of the Bible in the Church.

The question emerges from the moment Jesus is recognized as having not only a special relationship with God of a historical nature, but also a link with God that transcends the human dimension and reaches God's very being. The distinc-

tive feature of faith in the incarnation consists of believing that Jesus is pre-existing God before his earthly life.

Key question

The ultimate root of the Trinitarian revelation is Jesus' divine condition, his reference to the Father. All of God is revealed, manifested, and is or is found in Jesus, and yet the Father who is revealed in the Son continues to be the Father, making Jesus his Son.

While the distinction is made in history, it would be a mistake to situate it only in the temporal realm. The Father is not the Father only because he is not incarnated in the world, and the Son is not the Son on account of having lived in the world. The saving event is the consequence of Jesus being the visualization, the expression of God absolute, original and eternal expression.

- In the temporal realm —history— the eternal is revealed, reflected, but that is not the cause of the eternal. The Son in history is the consequence, not the cause, of God's being the Father.
- God is Father with regard to the Son. This occurs even before the incarnation. The Son, who is Jesus, was linked from the beginning to his appearance in history. God is revealed as Father in the Son.

As a confession of faith, the Trinity emerges from the confession of Jesus' meaning in his relationship with God. The foundation of the Trinitarian confession is Jesus' unique and personal link to

God, and in our expressing this link in the terms that Jesus uses when he refers to God as Father.

Jesus is God, but not another God, nor is he the same as the Father.

Summary of the Trinitarian content

The content and proclamation of the message consists of:

+ Affirming, experiencing, living and believing that God is Father of all people and especially of Jesus, and that he is the origin of everything that exists.

+ That Jesus is God —Lord and Messiah— for all people and for —*at the side of*— the Father. In terms of personal relationship, he is “*the only Son*,” the “*Son in whom the Father is well pleased*.” The qualifier *only* highlights his original relationship with the Father. In salvation terms, he is “*the one who is sent*.”

+ That the Holy Spirit is God’s strength and life, who gave himself in fullness to Christ, and through him, to all people. The seat of the Holy Spirit is humanity.

Framing the Trinitarian question

A. The faith of Israel and of Jesus in the one and only God is firmly maintained. This is a fact, first, of revelation, and then of reason.

“One” refers to integrity, with no real or possible division. What is essentially one, if it is divided, is destroyed; it is a oneness without constituent or component parts. Oneness in God cannot be

moral unity, like that of a team, because that would call for many gods, but rather oneness of life, action, power, glory, worship and adoration, which will be expressed as oneness of nature, essence and substance.

“Only” tells us that there is no other God of any kind—not different, not the same, not similar.

B. Faith in Jesus as true man, but who surpasses the human dimension

- who lives God’s life, —and not only in communion with God—,
- who is next to God or at his side, —equal in dignity, glory and power—,
- who is God’s Son, —in the literal, not adoptive sense—,
- who is seated at his right hand, —in the sense of authority and glory—,
- whose way of being reveals God’s way of being,
- invisible God —is made visible in him—,
- who came on God’s behalf, —his word is the same as God’s word—,
- who pre-exists with God, —his life is projected onto all of creation and history—,
- whose presence was the way God visited his people,
- in him, God became “*God with us*,” and we with God, in a real sense,
- whose message was the word of God, —the kingdom was the maximum revelation of God and his will,
- whose merciful way of acting revealed God’s way of being,

Jesus could not be better than God.

- who in dying gave his life for us, —for our salvation and not for our condemnation—,
- who upon rising from the dead was made by God master and Lord of the universe and in particular, of the human species,
- who was full of God's Holy Spirit and who with his death and resurrection communicated this same Spirit to all who believed in him.

All of this puts Jesus not only at the level of any king, prophet, priest or holy Messiah, but at the level of God, in a certain degree of equality.

The problem is scandalous, which is how it is presented in St. John's Gospel: "*You are only a man and you claim to be God,*" and "*He spoke of God as his own Father, and so made himself God's equal.*" Calling God "*his own Father,*" in the mentality of the evangelist and of the Jews, is "*making himself God's equal,*" which led them on several occasions to try to put him to death.

C. How to understand this without undermining the precept of the one and only God? In the New Testament, faith in God and in Jesus is clear, i.e., the question is perfectly formulated, but not the answer.

D. The Fathers of the early Church undertook this huge task in an environment of controversy, but also of tremendous fervor. Christianity was setting down deep and firm foundations on which to build the faith of all believers.

E. With the help of Greek thought —Platonic, Aristotelian and Gnostic— the problem was

framed in metaphysical terms more than in Biblical or salvific terms.

The solutions could not be adoptionist

- because they diminished the transcendence and meaning of Jesus: if Jesus was adopted, as king, priest, prophet or Messiah, with no relation to God's being, any other human being could be adopted, and Jesus would be one among many, unable to put us in direct communication with God.

- If Jesus were a kind of intermediary or incarnated angel, he would not be able to give life on his own account, nor would he have his own power or authority; he would be, so to speak, waiting for God's authorization to speak and act. His function would not be stable. And faith would be deposited not in God, but in his intermediary.

- Jesus could not be an emanation, derivation or part of God, because God's oneness and simplicity means that he cannot be divided, or derived, or emanated.

- The solution was not docetism—from δοκεω: seem—: that Jesus only seemed to be a man without being one really; this would make the whole Gospel a lie.

- The solution could not be subordinationist either, even though some texts and facts would seem to suggest it. *"The Father is greater than I,"* but many others would be left hanging: *"As you are in me and I am in you," "The Father and I are one," "My Father goes on working and so do I," "The Word was God," "My Lord and my God," "For the Father, who is the source of life, has made the*

Jn 14:28; Mt 24:36.
Mk 13:32.

Jn 17:21.

Jn 10:30.

Jn 20:28.

Jn 5:26.

Jn 5:21. *Son the source of life,* “*Like the Father, so the Son gives life to anyone he chooses,*” “*It is in my power to lay down my life, so it is in my power to take it up again,*” etc. Jesus is the Son, but that does not make him less than the Father, or subordinate to the Father, like an angel or a creature.

- Neither could it be understood as the eternal God’s presence in time, because then the Father would be the same as the Son, and it could be supposed that God the Father was born and died, and there would be no place for Jesus’ relationship with the Father.

- There can be no lieutenant for God, i.e., someone who without being God speaks and acts like God, who could represent him without being him. And if salvation is communion with God, no one who is outside of God can give us salvation.

F. The path suggested by Jesus himself when he called God his Father was:

- Believing in the one and only, living, personal, good, universal creator God, with all the attributes of divine being.

- After that, God was thought of as an essence: what things are in themselves, what makes things be what they are. God’s essence is to exist in and of himself. “*I am who I am,*” who I will be and will reveal... More than telling us who God is, in the metaphysical sense, —he who exists in and of himself—, the text tells us that he will gradually reveal himself, in the salvific sense.

Jn 10:17.

Ipsa esse
subsistens.

- God was thought of as a nature, which relates to taking action. Nature is what things can be and do, what makes them be and act in their own determined way. What beings do is a func-

tion of their nature. It is usually by the effects that one comes to know the nature of the being that acts. Nature cannot be apprehended directly.

- God was also thought of as a substance, which is what identifies a being and accounts for its permanence. Substance is independent, free of change and becoming, as opposed to the accidental, but it consists of the substantive, that which makes the being be what it is.

When these three words —essence, nature and substance— are applied to God, they refer to the same, unique divine reality, and allude to some aspect of this reality. God, who creates, saves and glorifies; who begets his only Son, and adopts us in him; who gives us his Spirit— all of this refers to God's own way of acting, to his nature. God, who exists in and of himself and forever, eternally, who is one and only —this refers to his essence. God, who is love, faithfulness, communicability and redeeming and glorifying gift— this is his permanent and invariable substance. But the three factors are simply our ways of speaking: they all refer to one and the same reality, which we call God.

When we speak of physical beings, essence, nature and substance are not beings that exist in and of themselves; they are abstractions, concepts, or entities of reason. They exist only in thought, and inasmuch as they are thought.

When we refer to God, we refer to God's spiritual and intangible reality, and therefore, God's substance, essence and nature are not attributes, or abstractions about God; they are our way of

referring to God's reality. Thus all of the divine attributes belong to any one of these three synonyms. In God, being and existing are the same, just as past, present and future are, and so when we refer to the divine essence, substance or nature, we are referring to his existence, to the reality we recognize as God.

The divine Persons

Given that God is all indivisible nature, essence and substance, and at the same time is

+ The Father as subsisting reality in God; as Father he begets as Son from all eternity,
he is the almighty creator of everything that exists,

he is also Father of all people.

+ The Son, in God and of God, is also a subsisting reality;

while not like the Father, who is not begotten, the begotten Son, inasmuch as he proceeds from the Father,

and was sent to the world to reveal the Father by making himself human, and like humanity,

and thus saves us with his life, death and resurrection, joining himself to us and us to him.

+ The Holy Spirit is also a subsisting reality in God.

But he is not the Son; he is not begotten, nor is he created;

He is the Father and the Son's gift for humanity and for the Church,

He is also the strength, the life and the love of the personified God,

Because where God's love is, there is God.

These three realities in God were first called "prosopon," which in Greek meant representation, mask, or theatrical role. Later it was translated as "person" in the metaphysical sense, not the psychological sense, because human beings were not yet designated as persons. The subsistence is there in the three subsisting realities, or persons. The subsisting reality is not an independent subject that can be isolated, conscious and free of the other two subsisting realities; in that case, there would be three gods.

πρόσωπον.

ὑπόστασις.

The persons subsisting in God were seen as constituted by the relationships among them and with human beings.

- The Father is such because he begets and is the origin of everything, and he himself has no origin nor is he begotten; he is the Father of Jesus and our Father.

- The Son, on account of being begotten by the Father, is his visualization and his image; by having been sent to the world and by being the salvation of humanity, he was called Jesus.

- The Holy Spirit is the strength of the life and love between the Father and the Son, and thus he is also God's strength, life and love that are communicated by the Father and the Son to human beings, freely, as an undeserved gift. What is given—the Spirit—has a relationship with both the giver—the Father and the Son—and the beneficiary—the human being—and thus we call him

Cf Augustine, *De Trin* V, 14. “*our Spirit*” because we receive him and because he was given to us and belongs to us.

The fact that they are three persons does not contradict the reality of the one and only God because numbers indicate the quantities of things, not their natures: if I say one plus one plus one is three, I can be referring to persons or things, animals, plants or stones. Because number refers to quantity, not to the nature of the numbered things, I can say that in God there are three persons but only one nature, substance or essence. As Gregory Nazianzen said, “*Every number expresses the quantity of what is included under it, and not the nature of the things.*”

Discourse 31,18.

Thanks to the abstract concepts and the Greek terminology, the content of the Biblical message began to be translated into more precise concepts and terms that got to the bottom of the questions under discussion. The sign was left behind in order to speak of the signified; the replica was left behind in order to speak of the original; the figure in order to speak of the referent, the construction in order to speak of its foundation.

On the other hand, the conceptual enrichment brought with it an existential impoverishment of meaning. Practical discourse for the purpose of worship gave way to theoretical and abstract statements. And theological thinking and activity was caught up in theorizing, to the detriment of dialogue with the people, with everyday life and culture; to the detriment of meaningfulness, and in the final analysis, of dialogue with God and spirituality.

Trinitarian dogma should not be considered as merely a catechetical tangle. It led to a genuine deepening of the faith and of the understanding of the salvific mystery, to a highly meaningful discernment of words and contents. It took its place in the Christian community in keeping with Christian life and the Biblical message, and became a distilled or concentrated version of the Apostolic message.

Without forgetting that analogy is still the key to knowledge, we can know in truth not only what God is like, but also who God and Jesus are, along with myself and others, although it is also true that I will never finish knowing: my knowledge of them and of myself does not exhaust the reality. The higher one climbs a mountain, the wider the horizon grows.

Why is it that only in the Christian faith do we believe in one Three-person God?

There are authors who have tried to discern a Three-person God in other religions, and in the Babylonian and Egyptian divinities they find families of gods: father, mother and child; in others they find deities that share power, war, fertility. In the Roman Empire itself strength, power and the whole territory were shared in three parts, the Triumvirate. The political alliance of Caesar, Pompey and Crassus to take power in the year 60 B.C. But all of these cases involve gods in the polytheistic sense. None of them imply the fundamental sense of Trinitarian faith, which refers to one God.

Only Christian faith sees in Jesus the perfect image of the one true God, the unrepeatable visualization, the absolute revelation of the divine in the human. This is the original and ultimate reason of the Trinitarian mystery. Faith in the Holy Spirit is a consequence and fruit of faith in Jesus' message and his resurrection. The History of Salvation and of revelation falls to Jesus and not to the Holy Spirit; he makes it possible in both the Old and the New Testament. Possible in the active sense of the word, making people understand what is said by both the people of Israel and the Christian people, accepting and professing faith, *"thus no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit."*

1 Co 12:3.

Activities

- Read the 1st Council of Nicaea (Aug 25, 325) Dz-H 125.
- In the following text, underline what seems to agree with the Church's faith, and with another color what seems inexact.
- Tertullian, in his Apology against the Gentiles, writes: *"Also, when a ray is projected from the sun, it is a part of the whole; but the sun will be in the ray, because the ray belongs to the sun and is not separated from it by nature but stretches out from it. Spirit comes from Spirit and God from God as light is kindled from light. The parent-stem remains whole and unlesened in substance, even if you borrow a number of offshoots of its character from it: so also that which has come forth from God, is God and the Son of God, and both are*

one. So the Spirit that comes from Spirit and the God that comes from God brought about the number two, as regards the measure (of the possession of being), in grade not in unchangeable condition, and it did not separate from the source, but came out from it.

This ray, therefore, of God, as was always foretold in the past, coming down into a certain virgin and being formed into flesh in her womb, is born man mixed with God. The flesh having been informed with breath is nourished, grows up, speaks, teaches, works, and is Christ."

Tertullian,
Apol XXI, 12,14.

8.3 Person and hypostasis

The word "hypostasis" can be translated as substrate, subsistence, or person. And thus we can say that in God there are three subsisting realities: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We will call the hypostases "persons" because they were revealed to us and we understand them as distinct, although not independent. The divine persons are not something abstract; it is the most concrete dimension of God, the only way to be God. The concepts of divine or human persons are not Biblical concepts; in the New Testament we find that God is spoken of as Father, Jesus Christ as Son, and the Holy Spirit as gift proceeding from the other two.

ὑπόστασις.
Dz-H 421.

In the first century, the Trinitarian Mystery had not yet been formulated, nor had the concept of person within the Trinity. When people spoke of the divine persons, there was no corresponding reference to human beings as psychological per-

sons, thus there was no confusion between divine and human persons.

In the divine persons, subject does not come first and then relationship, as in human persons; what constitutes the persons as such is the relationship itself. Relationship in God means only and exclusively **relationship of provenance**, of expressive self-communication, because the Father gives himself to the Son, and one and the other, together constituting the only source, give themselves to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, upon being sent and giving of himself to us, is something that we possess, and together with him, the Father and the Son, because they are inseparable. Relationship is proper to the three divine persons among themselves; and it is also a relationship of God with respect to us which links us to him, as Father, as daughters and sons in the Son, and with the Holy Spirit as source of communion with God and of immortality. The relationships among the divine persons are **not** psychological relationships, or sociological relationships, or of a human character at all. The word relationship, like the word person, is ambiguous —analogous—; both can lend themselves to confusion and misinterpretation. This does not mean that the divine persons are not **by, with and for** each other, because that is what unity in trinity expresses.

Dz-H 162. The relationships in God are eternal. There was no time in which the Father was not the Father, or in which there was no Spirit or Son in God. Nor was there a time when God did not intend or want to communicate to us as he did.

Historically first came the Trinitarian concept of person and then the philosophical concept. In the 6th century Boethius (+524) defined the human person as “*individual substance of a rational nature.*” But this definition of person is not applicable to the divine persons because they are not individual substances in the sense of independent, and because they do not form a single genus, and they are not multipliable. In order to refer to the divine persons, Richard of Saint Victor (+1173) modified the definition in the 12th century: “*the person in God is the incommunicable existence of the divine —rational— nature.*”

Naturae rationalis
divinae incommuni-
cabilis existentia.
PL 196, 964.

Each one of us is by nature a person in process, which we become on the basis of what we are born as, i.e., of what we are virtually. The person over time does not merely persist, but more importantly grows, matures, makes real a great number of possibilities that before were not realities, only possibilities, without reality.

The concept of person is applied to God as an analogy, and sometimes mistakenly when people think that God is a person the way we are, analogously, because a divine person is not the other, aside from the fact that each divine person has personal characteristics —begotten, not begotten, poured out—. Because Jesus, who is God for all time, has been divine like the Father and human like us. Even when speaking of the three divine persons, we also apply the concept as an analogy because each one of the three persons is a person in a peculiar way. The Son is a person from the Father, for all eternity. Even as God, Je-

sus, from all eternity, is “God from God,” which the Father is not. If the three divine persons are compared to three human persons, there are more differences than similarities. Precisely because they are three persons in an analogous sense, the three divine persons, while distinct, are not three gods. The relationship of the Father with no origin, and the originated Son, and the Holy Spirit that is poured out, sent, is also a demonstration of the divine unity. The ways of being divine persons, of the Father with no origin, of the begotten Son and of the Spirit who is sent, are the eternal and continuous relationships that constitute them as persons and at the same time involve them—they are expression of divine oneness and singularity.

Unlike human persons, divine persons are inseparable in their being and in their acting, which is why they mutually involve one another. And accordingly, when we address the Father, or the Son, we are implicitly linking ourselves to the three persons; when it comes to God, they are three dependent and linked, but distinct, subsisting realities.

ἀνα-κεφαλαιώση. The love between the Father and the Son, on account of their oneness, is love directed first of all to the three persons themselves: it is reciprocal intra-Trinitarian love. Then this love spills over, so to speak, but it continues to be Christ-centric love because Christ “**recapitulates**” or encompasses all of creation and each and every human being. In human beings the Father sees the image

of his own and only Son, and he loves them with the same love. Jn 17:23.

The divine persons exist in one another, each with and for the others. There is a genuine communion or inhabitation in them, but not community, family or group, because they are not persons in the psychological sense, i.e., centers of consciousness, freedom, feelings or action; they do not need to reach agreement, or dialogue or negotiate; they do not coexist in juxtaposition, but rather in mutual involvement and relationship. Among the three divine persons there is no family or community life; the analogy does not fit at all as there is absolutely no point of similarity. Family and community occur among psychological persons, and in God the personal being of the three persons is not of a psychological or numerable nature; it is metaphysical and metanumerical. Three human persons are three people, but three divine persons are not three gods. The relationship of the Father and the Son is not about coexistence or dialogue, which would imply divergent consciousness, freedom, action and responsibility. In the divine persons there is only one consciousness, freedom, action and responsibility, and exclusively continuous relationships of origin, provenance, mission and lordship.

If one thinks of God as a person in the human way, i.e., as a center of consciousness, freedom, responsibility and self-giving in love, then one is thinking of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in their oneness of intra-Trinitarian persons, because consciousness, freedom, responsi-

bility and love are attributes of the one God, not of the divine persons. In God there are not three subjects of attribution such as I, you and he—distinct, independent, conscious, responsible, free, independent agents. The human person is neither model nor criterion of the divine persons.

Between the three persons and God there is perfect identification: God is the three persons and the three persons are God. The existence of the one God is not first or prior to the existence of the three persons. We can say that God does not exist without Jesus, without the Holy Spirit and without the Father, but that does not mean that God's existence is somehow a consequence: God is not the sum of the three. The divine oneness is not the result of the Trinitarian relationships; these relationships are the foundation or root of the distinctions of the divine persons.

The persons in God are diverse among themselves; actually and conceptually separable, but not independent. The term does not apply in the same way to each one of them. The persons are not only distinct, but also different: even as persons they are not the same, as we human beings are. Jesus, for example, is the Second Divine Person who assumed human nature by becoming a man, i.e., a human person, without ceasing to be the Second Divine Person, and yet there are not two persons in him, just the Second Divine Person who manifests, expresses and communicates himself in the human person, beginning once, *"when the appointed time came,"* and forever.

Ga 2:4.

C. Chalcedon 451,
Dz-H 301.

Jesus Christ's condition of incarnated —human— person remains forever: it is the same Jesus, —incarnated but spiritualized, as St. Paul would say. He does not need space, nor does time transpire for him; risen from the dead, he transcends time and space.

σῶμα πνευματικόν.
1 Co 15:44.

The concept of “human being” suits only Christ, the Second Divine Person. Only the Second Divine Person has come to be a human person, i.e., a man.

From the dogmatic viewpoint, there is only one person in Christ: the divine person, who becomes flesh, and expresses, reveals and gives himself in Jesus, who became man, and therefore a person, this time in the psychological sense, because the only way to be truly human is by being a person. “*Jesus is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be forever.*” What he once made his own, he assumed forever. The Incarnation is the exclusive, eternal and unique mission of the Second Divine Person.

Dz-H 308.

Heb 13:8; Rv 1:4.

Quod semel assumit
numquam dimisit.

Dz-H 325.

Only the Second Person has a relationship of dependency—the Son of the Father—that we call filiation. This is what can make history, visualize—become flesh, because it is God's opening to the creature, God's visualization. By calling Jesus “*God from God, light from light, true God from true God*” in the Creed, we profess his eternal provenance from, and relationship with, the Father.

Col 1:15.
Θεὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ,
φῶς ἐκ φωτός.

Dz-H 150.

The divine persons surpass our complete understanding and imagination. Only the Son, by

having become a man, and as a man, a human person as the expression of the personal divine being, is the incarnated person, the only who can be incarnated. The Father and the Holy Spirit do not become flesh; they communicate with people through the Son.

When we refer to the divine persons, we are referring to what is proper and exclusive to them, not to what is common. Thus the properties are not interchangeable, and one cannot take the place of the other—the Father cannot take the place of the Son and vice versa.

Dz-H 302.
 ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν.

Human persons find their foundation in God and more specifically, in Christ, who of the three “divine persons” is the only one who has been humanized, who has come to be a human and historical person. But that does not mean that there are two persons in Jesus, one divine and one human. There is only one, because he is only one, *“One and the same”* and he is not a human person in the same sense and rank as he is a divine person. The divine person proceeds from the Father only, and this person becomes flesh, manifests himself, communicates, gives himself through his human being.

Dz-H 432.

Only the Second Person becomes a man, with a physical presence in the world, time-bound, 33 years old, and historical. His presence is transcendent: by becoming a man, he became a man forever. And in the order of faith, Jesus-made-man continues to be present in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist we receive Jesus, and in Jesus, the other two divine persons.

The Holy Spirit is a person in the most dissimilar way to us and the other divine persons. The three persons, even as persons, are not alike, nor are their missions interchangeable. The Holy Spirit, for example, could not become flesh, because he was not the Son, or God's visualization or image. Col 1:15.

The Holy Spirit is the form and means by which God makes himself present in humanity, in the Church and in the world. The Holy Spirit is the Father and the Son's strength, life, wisdom and power in humanity. He is the sum of all gifts. When God gives himself personally, he has nothing more to give; the Father gives himself through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus proceeds from the Father only, and not from the Holy Spirit, because all the Father—the originating God— gives and manifests himself with no diminishment whatsoever in all of Jesus Christ. The diversity of one and the other is not in life, but in relationship and origin. The diversity is not in being as separate entities and they are not therefore three numerable units. The numerical dimension, when applied to God, leads to error. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are differing, but not separate or independent relationships, which means that only in an analogous sense can they be numbered and called three persons.

The divine being is in all and fully, and impregnates everything not as a numerable reality distinct from the being that is numbered, but as origin and sustainer of the plurality of all beings. Things, unity and plurality are not a unity, plus

God, but a unity and nothing more, and God is the origin and foundation and he who enables the unity and plurality of the countable being. God is not one as opposed to another, because God is not the other who is other than and foreign to this one. God is in everything. The concept that applies to God is “the only one,” which speaks more of relationship to the absolute, to the universal, than to the numerical.

The divine persons are determined only by their mutual reference, not by their individuality or independence. **Because in God everything is, in rigorous identity, one, as long as it is not in opposition to relationships of origin.** Relationship constitutes the divine persons as subjects of reference, because as subsisting realities they are related, for example, the Father with the Son, but the subsisting subject does not come first and then the relationship, or the other way around, because in God there is no first and next. In God these three personal subsisting realities are joined in a single substance, essence or relationship. In his treatise on the Trinity, St. Augustine wrote: *“The Trinity consists of a mutual relationship that is personal and in the oneness of essence.”* The relationship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which is fundamentally a relationship of origin, also implies the communion and dependence of the Holy Spirit with respect to the Father and the Son, and of the Son with respect to the Father.

Cf Dz-H 1330.

Augustine,
De Trin IX, 1,1.

When we state that God is one in three persons, we mean three things: first that the divine per-

sons differ among themselves, second that each one of them is indivisible, third that the divine personal Trinity does not contradict oneness and singularity.

Thomas Aquinas,
S Th q 30 a 9; q 9
a 3.

Interpersonality exists in the divine essence, and we know it in the transcendent historical-salvific event that we call Jesus Christ. Neither starting from nor based on Jesus Christ considered in time. The fact that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit is something that we know and that was revealed to us in Jesus of Nazareth, dead and raised.

Each one of the divine persons communicates as he is in himself, in his peculiarity and in his diversity. The Father in his divine fundamentality, in his love, in his providence and in his predilection. The Son, in his being that reveals the Father, and in his identification with us, in his participation in life, death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit, as strength and divine life, as sanctifier and pledge of intra-Trinitarian life. But at the same time each one of the persons, when communicating, communicates in his relationship with the others, and by communicating with us as Persons, in the Trinity, they communicate to us the one living God.

What we have pointed out as individual or characteristic is designated with the word “hypostasis” or person. What is common to the three persons, such as being love, truth, life, holy, Spirit, etc., is what constitutes the oneness. The attributes that are common to the three divine per-

ὑπόστασις.

sons coincide with the terms of substance, nature and essence.

Why are the three persons a one and only God? On the basis of what we have seen, we can answer this question as follows: because the three persons have the divine attributes such as love, holiness, truth, lordship in their fullness; they have the same divine, eternal, imperishable life, the origin of all life. Because the three persons do not share but rather possess essence, substance and nature in their fullness. Because the three persons are one reality in their being and their acting.

Why aren't the three persons three subjects? Because they are not three different and independent centers of operation, of consciousness, freedom and responsibility, as we human beings are. The only one who during his earthly life was a human subject or human person, in which his divine person was revealed to us, was Jesus of Nazareth: *"The way of coming to the Godhead of Jesus is through his Manhood."*

Thomas Aquinas,
S Th III, 14, 1,1.

Activities

- Explain in your own words what *person* means and how this concept is applied to the divine persons.
- Read Dz-H 530: there is only number in relation to the Persons.
- According to what has been discussed here, comment on what Benedict XVI wrote about the

Trinity in the following paragraph of the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* 5,54.

Unity, justice, peace, development... *“This perspective is illuminated in a striking way by the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity within the one divine Substance. The Trinity is absolute unity insofar as the three divine Persons are pure relationality. The reciprocal transparency among the divine Persons is total and the bond between each of them complete, since they constitute a unique and absolute unity. God desires to incorporate us into this reality of communion as well: ‘that they may be one even as we are one.’* Jn 17:22. *The Church is a sign and instrument of this unity. Relationships between human beings throughout history cannot but be enriched by reference to this divine model. In particular, in the light of the revealed mystery of the Trinity, we understand that true openness does not mean loss of individual identity but profound interpenetration. This also emerges from the common human experiences of love and truth.”*

- Make a list of important summary sentences of each section.
- Make an extract of the topics covered in each section.

8.4 Digression on the human person

Among human beings, all people are equal from a legal standpoint, but from a psychological and existential standpoint we are all different. A woman is a person in a different way from a man, a child or a baby. In these cases, people

Objective: To point out the differences between human person and divine person.

are persons analogously, i.e., in a way that is the same and different, and both aspects are inseparable.

Human persons are original and unique from the time they are born; they are naturally similar to and different from their forebears. Originally they are a vocation, a hope, a possibility oriented toward their own development, which occurs relationally, in dialogue, and hand in hand with others. They need others. People are persons on the basis of others, together with others and for others.

Human persons are by nature beings in progress. In men and women, being a person is inseparable from becoming a person: we could go so far as to say that persons are made, not born, but they are made from what is born. Being a human person means becoming a human person. We become persons in the presence of others, but also helped by others, in continuous relationship with them. Other people can help to build us as persons, but unfortunately they also destroy us, or they can destroy us.

The evolution of our personality is linked to our biological growth, and to the development of our understanding, feelings, conscience, freedom and responsibility, as well as to our consciousness and sense of others and of everything, to our capacity to love and to give of ourselves for the sake of love. It is linked to everything that humanizes people. People are not only about self-possession or self-fulfillment; they are mainly

about self-giving. They are also linked to respect for others, whoever they might be.

But persons are essentially beings who are responsible for themselves, at least in part. They are capable of building themselves up or of destroying themselves in spite of those who try to help them. Given their responsibility for themselves and their original nature, they are unforeseen and unforeseeable beings, uncontrolled and uncontrollable, and for these and other aspects, they are an ineffable mystery, greater than my concepts, images and dreams.

The innumerable multiplicity of unique persons speaks to us of the transcendence of each one of them. Each one is more than she believes to be and is worth more than she believes she is worth. —For whom, and with respect to what?— Persons are original, unique, and hence do original things. They are not closed in their self-possession, in their consciousness, but rather open to giving of themselves freely, in love.

Human persons are necessarily limited beings, not just in themselves but also by others, by their surroundings, by their circumstances, by time and space. Being a person implies accepting ourselves as persons and being “tolerant” of others and in a certain sense, of ourselves.

The human personality includes individuation, and individuation includes limitation, because I am not like the other person or what that person is. A man lacks full femininity, and a child lacks maturity. As individuals, persons live in a world

The person is the most wonderful way of existing.

of individual realities. I would not exist without my parents, my food, my home, my instruments, my customs.

Human persons are determined —defined— by a “particular way of being,” the place where they find themselves, their culture, a specific time that belongs to them alone. People are persons inwardly and outwardly, voluntarily and involuntarily, in an improvised or a projected way. Human persons become persons through their relationships: it is almost certain that their consciousness and their way of being and acting emerge from their relationships. The divine persons “are not made” by psychological or sociological processes, or by interacting with others.

The concept of person describes the real human person. We find it in a seminal or virtual form in other cultures, particularly in the culture of the people of Israel. In the mindset of the people of Israel, human beings always felt treated and respected as persons, primarily by God; and sin was considered an offense that violated what today we would call a person’s rights.

Gn 1:1f; 3:1f.
Ex 20:12f.

Religious values, such as faith, hope, love and freedom, have a tremendous personalizing power. God, in the history of our salvation, personalizes us. All human values personalize us, just as inhuman acts depersonalize us. In this way, persons are oriented toward good and this makes them more themselves. The moral order is a constituent element of the personal order.

Personalism as a philosophy, anthropology and sociopolitical system —human rights— is actually a fairly recent development.

Human persons, no matter how united they are, will always form a moral unit, never an entitative or essential unit, because they are independent, free and essentially autonomous —separate— creatures.

By stating that God is a person, we are stating that God has all the perfection that a human personality includes, and we exclude the imperfections that are inherent to the human condition. No category of created being can do the job of referring to God unambiguously. However, the word person attempts to reflect what characterizes God himself, his loving relationship with humanity.

Dz-H 804, 3283,
3546, 3887.

1 Jn 4:16.

The human person can be considered as equivalent to the soul, or as its substrate or ultimate result; but the concept of person adds different aspects to that of the soul: it is not a static concept; it is something that evolves, grows and develops on the basis of an original subject, where the person himself is involved in his fulfillment. It does not displace God from the creation of the person, but rather makes him a participant in the growth and fulfillment as a human person in time. This participation is much more important than participation in all of creation because its object is the development of the person himself and his final —eschatological— objective. It integrates the elements of time, space, culture, circumstances, coexistence, love, and all human

values. It highlights individual differences, with God's own intervention in human history. It sees the human person as a whole, with a body and soul, space and time, culture and circumstances, coexistence and love, personal and social responsibility, and it encompasses all of this as a personal and merciful term of God's love.

Human persons are also mysterious beings, incomprehensible and ineffable, limited, but always greater than they thought, unpredictable, fleeting and ephemeral; like a god, but tremendously limited and contingent.

Ps 8,5-6; 82:6.

Activities

- Write ten contrasts between the human person and the divine person, for example: Human persons are born and die; divine persons do not. Human persons grow and develop; divine persons do not. Human persons are independent; divine persons are not.

8.5 Trinitarian faith and the fullness of Christian life

The Trinitarian mystery has a salvific character, but not so much because it is knowledge about God as because it is the origin, means and end of our own salvation; because it tells us how God is with us; because it expresses Jesus' place and importance in our salvation; and above all, because it includes us in God's mystery by means of his Spirit. What is proper and characteristic of God is not just creating us, but also saving us, "*since*

nothing is so worthy of God as the salvation of man.” If creation is an undeserved grace, salvation is much more so, as it is not just salvation from sin, from death and from all other evils; it is primarily the lifting up of human beings to Trinitarian life. Salvation will never be full if it is not communion with God.

Tertullian, “*quia nihil tam dignum Deo quam salus hominis*”
Marc II, 27,1.

The question of divinization, perhaps because it is so hard to understand, rarely appears in preaching today, and texts such as this one from the Epistle of Peter tend to be neglected: “*Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy has given us a new birth as his sons, by raising Jesus Christ from the dead, so that we have a sure hope and the promise of an inheritance that can never be spoiled or soiled and never fade away, because it is being kept for you in the heavens... By his divine power he has given us all the things we need for life and for true devotion, bringing us to know God himself, who has called us by his own glory and goodness... so that you will be able to share the divine nature.*” 2 P 1,3-4.

Share the divine nature is a philosophical expression, somewhat opaque for our mindset because divine nature is unique and indivisible. But the expression contains the Christian sense of our destiny: sharing the life and love of God, in whom we will see ourselves immersed due to our faith in Jesus. “*With him is the fountain of life, by his light we see the light.*” The light is that which shines from God’s face. “*Happy the people who... live in the light of your favor, Yahweh!*” Ps 36:10.
Ps 89:16; 27:1.

Θείας κοινωνοὶ
φύσεως. The phrase *sharing divine nature* clearly shows its Greek influence, but the author finds it useful to speak of ineffable communion with God. Although the expression is unique in the New Testament, —ἅπαξ-λεγόμενον: one-time expressions— the idea is repeated many times in other words.

1 Jn 1:3; 3,2,9;
Jn 15:4; 17,22-23;
Rm 8,14-17.

Jesus became what we are, so that we can become what he is... He took on our human condition in order to join us to his divine condition.

The Jews said to Jesus, “*We are not stoning you for doing a good work, but for blasphemy: you are only a man and you claim to be God.*” Jesus answered: “*Is it not written in you Law: ‘I said, you are gods?’*” Jesus quotes the psalm: “*You too are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.*” The Psalmist reproaches the judges who do not act fairly and who were God’s representatives here on earth. For the Evangelist, the gods are the sons and daughters “*to whom the word of God was addressed.*” The argument could be constructed as follows: If you, who are unfair judges to whom God addressed his word, are gods, “*And Scripture cannot be rejected,*” it stands to reason that “*someone the Father has consecrated and sent into the world*” has an even greater claim to the title, so why do you say “*he is blaspheming because he says, ‘I am the Son of God?’*”

Jn 10:33.
Ps 82:6.
Jn 10:35.
Jn 10:36.

For Jesus a human being “*to whom God addresses his word*” is as linked to God as a god in miniature. This serves to underscore the responsibility and dignity of the person who from the beginning “*is the image and likeness of God.*”

Thus the Psalmist says, *"You have made him little less than a god, you have crowned him with glory and splendor."* Ps 8:6.

Jesus sees *"finding life"* as equivalent to living with God, which explains why losing this life is of lesser importance. *"Life"* in its highest form is the life that Jesus has at God's side, that he receives from the Father and that Jesus pours out on those who believe in him. Jn 1:4; 5:26; 6:57.
Jn 3,16.36; 5:24; 6, 40-47.

The message of sharing in the divine Trinitarian life might seem unconvincing and unbelievable for our scientific mindset. From the phenomenological point of view, humans live the same as all other living creatures. Why give them a projection beyond death? But the gift of faith consists of transcending the phenomenological.

Believing means giving human beings a privileged place, the one they have from Genesis: *"made in God's image and likeness."* Thus it is proper to Christian faith not only to believe in the Trinity, but at the same time to believe in the resurrection of the dead for communion with God. Gn 1:26.

For John, Jesus was the source of people's life and light. God's life is what saves human life; it is humans' fullness, what they long for, what they need and the only thing that can fulfill that need. Jn 1:4.

"Because they possess the Spirit of the Father, who purifies man, and raises him up to the life of God." St. Irenaeus tends to express eternal life or sharing the Trinitarian life in terms of vision, communion, love, knowledge and glory. Thus he says, *"The glory of God is a living man; and the life of* Irenaeus, Adv Haer V, 9,2.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 20,7.
Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 20,4.

man consists in beholding God.” “In order that man, having embraced the Spirit of God, might pass into the glory of the Father.” We, without being gods in the strict sense of the word, will be like God, because we will be under his influence, which is the only way we will be able to know him, see him and love him, and share in his glory.

St. John tells us, *“Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”* According to this expression, formulated as a confession of faith, eternal life is something that a person possesses in potential from the moment she believes in God as one and true, and in Jesus Christ as the one sent by God. God cannot be recognized as one and true except through Jesus Christ, by acknowledging in Jesus the presence of the one true God.

To speak of communion with God the Eastern Church used a term that might sound strange to us: divinization. We can understand it as inhabitation: God is in us, —all of him!— and we in him. *“As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they be one in us.” “So that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them.” “One God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all.”*

Θεοποίησις.

Deification could be reinterpreted today as fullness of communication with God for the created being, vision of God, immortality, immersion in God, interpersonal relation with God, sharing divine love and being.

Deification can be defined as God lifting up the creature in order to insert it into his Trinitarian life. While people are not divine by nature, they are called to share in what is proper to God and in God himself, without forsaking their condition of creature and always by way of grace.

In today's world, amidst wars, sin and all manner of problems, it seems almost flippant to speak of deification, but we forget that deification does not refer to the success of human life in a world that is contaminated in so many ways, but to our destiny, to something that we already have latent inside of us, like a title and guarantee that have not yet been fulfilled. *"We are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed. All we know is that when it is revealed, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is."* *"The whole creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal his sons."* Divinization tells us more about our destiny than about the present moment in which we are under the sign of darkness.

1 Jn 3:2.

Rm 8:19.

Cf 1 Jn 1:5f.

Divinization consists of sharing fully in the glory of the incarnate and risen Christ, and this is not to be understood in metaphysical terms, nor should we ask how this can be, since it goes beyond our capacity of understanding. It makes more sense to frame it in terms of love. St. Irenaeus said to his readers: *"Following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."*

Ep 3:19.

Lk 6:40;
Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 1.

This should not be understood as a kind of incarnation, because God does not join himself to us to make each human being a unique reality, as in Jesus' case, but through him all the rest of us human beings can obtain the acceptance of our persons in order to enter into communion with him. This is what we now call sanctification, and it is, of course, a prolongation or projection of Jesus' mystery in us: it is filiation, sharing in the Son's condition.

In Christ not only are all human beings to be found; all things are synthesized, virtually contained, or in the language of Paul and Irenaeus, "recapitulated" —ἀνα-κεφαλαιώσασθαι— "*everything in the heavens and everything on earth*," "*He holds all things in unity. Now the Church is his body, he is its head. And he is the Beginning, he was the first to be born from the dead, so that he should be first in every way.*" "*The incarnation is the elevation of the whole universe in Christ our Lord.*"

Ep 1:9-10.
Col 1,12:20.
Cayetano in III, q.
1, a. 1: Incarnatio
est elevatio totius
universi in divinam
personam.

Christ occupies the first place in the mystery of communion with God; in theological language this has been called "hypostatic union" and it corresponds to Jesus for being the only Son of God, the image of the invisible God, the one who was sent and who will come. But just as Jesus is linked to God on account of his divine nature, he is linked to people on account of his human nature. And just as he is God with God, he is a human person with people. Thus in Jesus we have been accepted for communion with God and thus we can share in his glory. The incarnation was not a favor done to Jesus; it was a favor done

Jn 1:1.
Jn 1:14.

to humanity, i.e., to all people. And in Jesus we have been accepted and favored with communion with God.

1 Jn 1:6f.

In Irenaeus the idea of divinization appears often: *The Word of God was made man, so that man might become the son of God. "Or how shall man pass into God, unless God has [first] passed into man?"* And Tertullian, with his characteristic eloquence: *"God entered into converse with man, so that man might be taught how to act like God. God treated on equal terms with man, so that man might be able to treat on equal terms with God. God was found to be small, so that man might become very great."* And St. Cyprian: *"What man is, that is what Christ wished to be, so that man could be what Christ is."* And St. Gregory Nazianzen (330-390) said: *"You have been made children of God, co-heirs of Christ, and to put it boldly, you have become gods."*

Adv Haer IV, 16,3, 95f; III, 18, 7, 163f; III, 19,1, 18f.

Et quae admodum homo transiet in Deum, si non Deus in hominem? IV,33,4; 20,4,77f.

Tertullian, Marc II, 27,7.

Quod idola, 11 fin.

Oration 14:23. PG 35,888.

Divinization, as sharing in the Trinitarian life, is Christ-centric in character: we share in God's life through Christ. *"May they all be one, as you are in me and I am in you."* Divine participation is a prolongation of Christ's incarnation and glorification in each one of the disciples, of those who believe in him. It is theirs to contemplate God's glory in Christ's face and actions. *"We saw his glory."* God's glory is manifested in Christ and results from his being *"the only Son"*; *"his face shone like the sun."* And *"we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord."* We know God's invisible glory becomes visible in Christ and that we do and will con-

Jn 17:21.

Jn 1:11.

1 Jn 1:14; Mt 3:17; 17:5; Mt 12:18.

Mt 17:2.

2 Co 3:18.

Col 1:15.

- Jn 17:24. template this glory in the face of Jesus, because
 1 Co 13:12. *"then we shall be seeing face to face."* God's face is visible in Jesus' face. *"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am so that they may always see the glory you have given me."*
 Rv 22:4. *"They will see him face to face and his name will be written on their foreheads."* God's face is only visible in Jesus' because he is the first and ultimate expression of God. For all human beings, including non-Christians, God's glory is Christ, because faith is not what constitutes reality; reality is what we know through faith, even if this faith is rudimentary.

The text of the Psalm, so often cited in this context by the Church Fathers, *"By your light we see the light,"* would thus mean: by your light, which is Jesus, we will see the light, which is God.

- In the Hebrew mindset, human life is understood as coming from God, and death as the return to God of the spirit, which he had given to us in the beginning with his breath. This gift of perishable life is also, in the New Testament, the seed of eternal life, and participation in the life and glory of Christ, our Lord. The Spirit plays a very important role in the realm of time-bound life, and this role will be proportionally greater in the realm of eternal life, because through him we will be enabled to share in the life, immortality and love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which have already been given to us as a pledge of eternal life.
- Jb 34:14; Qo 12:8.
 Lk 23:46.
 Gn 2:7; 6:17; 3:19.
 1 Co 15:42-43.
 Jn 17:24f.
 2 Co 1:22; 5:5.
 Ep 1:14.

The lifting up of human beings to share in Trinitarian life is by God's grace as he embraces us

in communion and unity with what is most his: his Son. It is God's eternal projection into our time-bound being, which makes it immortality for us. It is sharing in his holiness, which makes it sanctification for us. It is inclusion in his Son, 2 Co 5:4. which makes it filiation for us. And if we are children, then we are also heirs. All of this is the fruit of the Spirit's action in us, who does not finish his work until he enables us to share in Trinitarian life. Eternal life for human beings is not just immortality; it is also communion, participation in Trinitarian life. From creation to revelation, the History of Salvation and Christian life, everything tends toward sharing in Trinitarian life.

Divinization is the fruit and the end of the incarnation, of Jesus' presence and action in history, and although it requires the right kind of living in love, justice, freedom, it comes about through no merit of ours. It is the fruit of the Father's generosity and communicability, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. It is not just forgiveness, restitution, justification; it is much more than that: it is sharing in God's life, which is given to us only after justification. And John puts in Jesus' words the greatest message for humanity: *"I have given them the glory that you gave to me..., so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them."* Rm 8:29-30. Jn 17:24.

St. Gregory Nazianzen states that the Word became flesh *"in order that I too might be made God so far as He is made Man."* The communion of life with God, in Christ, by means of the Holy Spirit, is more a desire of God's than a desire of ours. Oration 29:19.

To this end the Son of God became man, and the freeing from sin was a necessary condition, not the ultimate purpose, which would be communion with the Trinitarian God. For salvation to take on its truest sense, and not simply to refer to someone or something that threatens us, it must be communion with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Salvation can only be God himself.

Just as we cannot separate Jesus' divinity from his condition of Son of God, neither can we separate our condition of "*adoptive children*" from our vocation or "*inheritance*" to come to share in God's life. In this we have the justification, the holiness, the immortality, the communion with the whole body of the Church and the whole universe.

N.B.

Divinization is a somewhat neglected topic in Western theology. The word "divinization" does not even appear in the book *Fundamental Theology*, or in Denzinger, or in practically any of the theological dictionaries.

Heinrich Fries,
Θεοποίησις.

From the pastoral perspective and in keeping with the custom of the Western Church, it might be better to steer clear of the term "divinization," which requires explanation and could easily confuse many believers, and to prefer and explain the concepts of filiation, inhabitation of the three persons, communion of temporal and eternal life with God. We can say that in Christian life we live in Christ and Christ in us, that we form a

vital unity with Christ, and through Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Eternal life is not the result of a championship with elimination stages, even though St. Paul uses this simile. It is the fruit of the ongoing invitation that the Spirit makes to us to strive to be better and help others, regardless of the goal that is actually reached, to trust in the Father's love and mercy as manifested and offered in Jesus Christ to come to share in the glory of the Triune God.

Ph 3:14.1 Co 9:24-26. Ph 3:16.

Activities

- Look up the words "*heir*" or "*inheritance*" in a Bible concordance and see how many times it refers to eternal life.

- By way of prayer:

My God, how could I ever know you if you do not come to me?

How could I ever save myself if you do not save me?

How could I ever be your child if you do not adopt me?

Cf Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 33,4.

How could I ever be happy and immortal without seeing you?

How could I see you if not in the face of Jesus?

How could I ever be like God, without God?

Cf Irenaeus,
Adv Haer III, 19,1.

How could I ever be merciful if I am not first the object of your mercy?

I cannot set out to be like God without being fully human first... Help me to grow until I reach you.

Cf Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 39,2-3.

"How, then, shall he be a God, who has not as yet been made a man? Or how can he be perfect who

was but lately created? How, again, can he be immortal, who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker?

For it must be that you, at the outset, should hold the rank of a man, and then afterwards partake of the glory of God. For you did not make God, but God you. If, then, you are God's workmanship, await the hand of your Maker which creates everything in due time; in due time as far as you are concerned, whose creation is being carried out. Offer to Him your heart in a soft and tractable state, and preserve the form in which the Creator has fashioned you, having moisture in yourself, lest, by becoming hardened, you lose the impressions of His fingers.

But by preserving the framework you shall ascend to that which is perfect, for the moist clay which is in you is hidden by the workmanship of God. His hand fashioned your substance; He will cover you over within and without with pure gold and silver, and He will adorn you to such a degree, that even 'the King Himself shall have pleasure in your beauty.'

Ps 44:2.

But if you, being obstinately hardened, reject the operation of His skill, and show yourself ungrateful towards Him, because you were created a [mere] man, by becoming thus ungrateful to God, you have at once lost both His workmanship and life. For creation is an attribute of the goodness of God but to be created is that of human nature.

If then, you shall deliver up to Him what is yours, that is, faith towards Him and subjection, you shall receive His handiwork, and shall be a perfect work of God."

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 39, 2-3.

- Underline what you find most important in this text by Cyril of Alexandria:

“The Word then dwelt in all through one body so that, the One being declared the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, dignity might come unto all human nature and thus because of One of us, it might also be said of us: ‘You are gods and all of you are children of the Most High’... Is it not clear to all that he descended unto the condition of bondage, not himself giving thereby anything to himself, but bestowing himself on us, that we through his poverty might be rich, and, soaring up through likeness to him unto his own special good, might be made gods and children of God through faith? For he who is by Nature Son and God dwelt in us, wherefore in his Spirit do we cry ‘Abba Father.’ And the Word dwells in one temple taken for our sakes and of us, as in all, in order that having all in himself, he might reconcile all in one body unto the Father, as Paul says.”

Rm 1:4.
Ps 82:6; Jn 10:34.
2 Co 8:9.
Rm 8:15; Ga 4:6.
Ep 2:16; Cyril of Alexandria, *In Johannis Evangelium* 1,9; PG 73, 161-164.

8.6 Divine unity and Christian life

Talk of the Trinity should by no means diminish the importance of the oneness and singularity of God in which the people of Israel fervently believed, which Jesus affirmed decisively and in which the early Church firmly believed. And the God of Israel was revealed as the one God, creator of absolutely everything. Trinitarian monotheism is not soft monotheism; it is strict monotheism, like Jesus’, that bears in mind God’s communicability. The Father communicates fully to Jesus, his Son, and through him and in him, to human beings by means of his Spirit.

Dt 6:4-5; Mk 7:37.

Dt 6:14f; 7:4f. The fact that all of Israel's neighbors were polytheists most surely represented a temptation, but the prophets always insisted on God's oneness and on the worship of the one true God.

God's oneness was understood and the unity of his being, existence and life, as well as unity of action, presence, love, goodness, faithfulness and lordship. His oneness is not numerical, because what is one and only is not countable or numera-ble, nor is it physical oneness because God is not a physical being. It is spiritual oneness, which in his reality surpasses physical reality. It is oneness of life, of being, of intention, inspiration and ac-tion, oneness of love, acceptance and giving. The Father who is the origin of the Trinity, without being the origin of himself, is also the origin, be-ginning and source of the oneness and singular-ity.

Cf Ep 3:14-15.

Divine singularity does not depend on our con-cepts of substance, essence or nature, although divine oneness has almost always been under-stood in reference to these concepts. In the Creed we affirm the oneness of essence, that God is one, not just the equality of the divine persons. But before being a dogmatic issue, divine singularity is a practical issue of worship. The one and only God unifies our being and keeps us from worship-ping other gods, be they idols, money, pleasure, selfishness, magic, superstition, even temporal

Jn 17:3f. life itself, because we cannot serve two masters.

Mt 6:24. The one and only God must give direction to our entire being. God's oneness occurs amidst the diversity of the persons. And everything that we

know about God becomes a message about ourselves: the fact that the Father communicates fully to the Son, and both to the Holy Spirit, and all three to human beings, is a salvific message of divine intra-Trinitarian communion and also of salvific communion for human beings.

The communication and union of the divine persons in their being and acting is so great that this union is the source of their singularity. God is the only God —there is no other— because there is no place for otherness in God. The words origin, source and beginning should not be understood in their temporal or causal sense. Cf Jn 10:30.

When it comes to God we cannot say that divine oneness takes precedence over trinity, or that the former gives rise to the latter, or that trinity is the origin of oneness, because between trinity and oneness there is perfect identification: the one God is the Trinity and the Trinity is the one God. In God, nothing is first and nothing is next. In God everything is eternal simultaneity.

We can express the divine oneness by means of the attributes that are common to the three persons:

Such as goodness, love, mercy,
Spirit, strength, power, lordship,
Truth, wisdom, reason, light,
Life, personality, openness, communication.

Practically all of these are Biblical attributes, some particularly pointed out in the New Testament, such as God is love, mercy, truth, life, spirit, light, holy, Lord, etc. We can apply the three

persons' common attributes to God in the same way we confess that God is one and the same essence, one and the same nature and one and the same substance, as well as one and the same love, one and the same truth, and one and the same life. We can say that Jesus loves us with the same love as the Father, or that the Father's love makes itself known to us in Jesus' love; that the Holy Spirit is light just as Jesus is, that the Father is merciful just as Jesus was, that the Holy Spirit is truth just as Jesus is.

Jn 8:12.

Jn 14:6.

ομοούσιος.
Cf CEC, 253.
Dz-H 421, 530.

Because they are one and the same substance, we say that the three divine persons are "*consubstantial*," and because they are one and the same nature, we confess that the Son is "*one in being with the Father*."

The human nature in us is not the same as the divine nature in God because when we speak of our nature we are referring to a concept, the fruit of an abstraction made by our mind after experiencing the diversity of human beings; divine nature is not the fruit of our abstraction because we do not know many gods from whom we deduce the nature that they share. We speak of divine nature by way of comparison with human nature.

Ipsium esse
subsistens.

When we speak of divine nature, we are referring to God's reality. God does not have a nature; he is divine nature, essence and substance. With these abstract names we refer to the God who exists. God is he who exists in and of himself.

Nature is not related to number. Each one of us is all of human nature, the same as the other six

billion human inhabitants of this planet. And human nature was complete when there were only a handful of human beings. Likewise in God, his nature is all of God and all of it is present in each of the divine persons.

All of God's attributes and everything we can say about him are not things that are added to him, but rather expressions of his one being. God is the same as that which is said about him: God is truth, life, spirit, love, person. God is what he is and we understand him in the terms that our mentality affords us and as he makes us understand and feel. Revelation is obviously the most important thing for our knowing and feeling about God.

God communicated with us in his three-person oneness; it is not that the one God communicates to us in a different way in each of the divine persons, which are not different ways to get to the same result or different paths to reach the same destination. The Father is not one path, the Son another, and the Holy Spirit another. For us, God our Father is the goal, the Son is the path, and the Holy Spirit is the strength to walk down it.

St. Paul said to the Corinthians: *"For us there is one God, the Father from whom all things come and for whom we exist; and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things come and through whom we exist."* The singularity of God is attributed to the Father as origin and end of absolutely everything, but together with the Father is the Son, to whom all lordship has been given without compromising God's oneness in

1 Co 8:6; Ep 4:5-6.

the least. Because “*God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself.*” God’s oneness is also oneness among the divine persons, the same as his singularity, because God’s oneness does not exclude, but rather comprehends the diversity of the three persons.

- Dz-H 421. Our relationship with each of the divine persons does not imply three separate relationships, but the relationship with the one true God, and by relating to each of the three persons we necessarily relate to all three.

But due to the divine oneness, all of these more or less precise ways of speaking are necessarily metaphorical. God communicates everything in each one of the divine persons, and each one implies the others. They do not exclude one another; they imply one another. Even though each one is himself and one is not the other, they are nevertheless in a close relationship of presence and action. And all of this is without division or separation; God has revealed, communicated and given of himself to us in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, and all of this with the characteristics that correspond to their being as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit. The Father has given us of himself as Father, the Son as Son, and the Holy Spirit as Spirit.

- Jn 10:38. εἰς ἓνα Θεόν. The attribute “*only*” is common to the three persons. The three persons are the only God. We can say that the Father is the only God together with the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the same goes for each of the divine persons. Only refers to God as God, and also as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In this last case, the attribute only is due to the personal condition, because there is no other like the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And the God of our origins asks us to tend toward oneness. If the author of Genesis had projected life toward the past only, he would have imagined a God who made clay figurines, not one, many, and not all the same: some painted white and others black; that would have better described his experience of life. But for him, who saw God as one and only, and the only creator, the oneness of the human species is a theological fact: just as there is only one God, he created only one human being; human beings form a unit, a family; we are all their descendents. The theory of scientific polygenism does not alter the theological message of the unity of the human species, nor does the possibility of living beings on other planets. 1 Co 15:22f.

Because God is the only God, he is the Lord of all, even those who do not know him, and he is also Lord of the whole universe, even though it goes beyond the coordinates of time and space, it being bigger, more dynamic and older than anything we had ever imagined. Science and imagination do not go against God, but they are not God's measure.

We might ask: Why are the three divine persons not three gods? There are a number of reasons: because they are not independent realities, and they include one another in their being and in their acting, since being a divine person characterizes them but does not exclude them. Because

they proceed from one and the same beginning or origin, which is the Father, without moving away from him. Because three gods cannot exist in the proper sense of the word.

- Dz-H 421. God's oneness implies the oneness of creation, of reality, and of truth. Because God is one, there is only one reality and truth is one, which does not mean that there are not almost infinite ways and degrees of knowing it, because truth is also related to the mind that apprehends it.

The fact that God is one and only is manifested in the oneness of his action: thus creation, revelation, salvation and glorification form a unit. God's action is one and integrated: all his acts are like integrated and dynamic episodes of a single work.

St. Irenaeus wrote:

*Wherefore, then, in all things,
and through all things,
there is one God, the Father,
and one Word, and one Son,
and one Spirit,
and one salvation
to all who believe in Him.*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 6,7.

- Ep 1:4f. God's singularity speaks to us of the singularity of his salvation. We have all been foreseen, fore-
Col 3:11. loved, fore-chosen and predestined in Christ. All
Mt 18:14; Rm 11:32. in Christ, "*because he is everything and he is in everything,*" everything created, "*in order to show mercy to all, so that they may be saved by him.*"
Col 3:11;
1 Tm 1:15; 2:6.

Because God is one and only we are to love him with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind. The one and only God calls for a wholeness of heart, of faith, giving and service. People believe in many gods when they worship many things. Those who worship other gods do not love God with all their heart. In the Bible monotheism is not an ideological or theological issue; it is above all a practical issue. At its deepest level it is a personal response: Who deserves all my trust and love? What or who is the ultimate love that gives meaning to my life? A false god or idol could be the absolutization of a relative value, such as money, pleasure, honor, power.

Dt 6:5; Lk 10:27.

Mt 6:24; Ph 3:19.
Jn 5:44.

The confession of one God determines the path of a person's life. One cannot worship two gods, or serve two masters. One believes in one God when God is the ultimate meaning of one's own life.

Mk 10:21; Lk 10:42.
Mt 6:24.

God's oneness is the origin of the oneness of humanity and demands unity. *"May they all be one, Father, as you are in me and I am in you; may they be one in us."* If everyone believed in one and the same God, we would be less divided and there would be fewer wars. Christ's divine unity with the Father and with the Holy Spirit is a condition for the possibility and the goal of the unity of the human species. All wars are absurd and inhuman, religious wars especially so.

Jn 17:21; 10:30.

The more we consider God our one Lord, the less enslaved we are to others, to things, to luck, and the more human we feel in the house of the one God. The one God is necessarily God for ev-

Rv 15:3; 18:6.

Is 41:4; 43:10f; 44:6; 48:12;
Rv 1:4; 8:17.
1 Co 15:28;
Col 3:11. everyone and in favor of everyone. He is the God of all peoples and of all history. The First and the last. God's oneness implies his universality and his omnipresence. He is "*everything in everyone.*"

The inhabitation, or active presence, of the Father in the Son and of the Son in the Father is the model of unity between Jesus Christ and all human beings, and also among people, mutually, and everything tends toward the unity between God and humanity through Jesus Christ.

Just as people cannot have more than one father here on earth, they can also have only one Father in heaven, and he is above all fatherhood: "*You have only one Father, and he is in heaven.*"

Mt 23:9; 6:9.

Many people would like there to be many gods, in order to choose one among many, or to make arrangements with one and another, or to play them off each other and justify differences and wars. Polytheism would lend itself more to the imagination, fantasy, selfishness and exploitation.

God's oneness tells us that everything we believe about him—that he loves us, that he is good, that he is holy—and all his attributes are simply diverse aspects of his one being. Thus God is "One and All" at the same time. The one God also has only one way of being.

God's singularity speaks to us of the oneness of revelation. God is one and the same, and people come to know him little by little, over the centuries and throughout our lifetime. The process

of knowing God is as long and wonderful as the humanization of the human species.

The exhaustive understanding of God goes against Christian faith, as much as absolute lack of understanding does. People need to know God, as much as God wants to be known by people. Jn 17:3f; 10:4f.

From God's transcendence and singularity it follows that no comparison regarding the Trinity will be a perfect fit. All such comparisons will fall short on one or more points, but that does not mean they are not useful for illustrating some aspect of the Trinity.

All the mysteries of Revelation could be reduced to one: divine transcendence. God is more than we can ever think, say and experience. In salvific terms it would be that the Triune God saves us by means of Jesus Christ, joining us to himself, through the Spirit.

What is it that we can understand and that should be clear to us about the Trinitarian mystery, and what is it that we cannot understand and thus not explain?

It should be clear to us that God, "*who is, in respect of His love, the Father,*" wishes to save us by communicating with us through his Son, and that in him he has opened the gates for us to imperishable communication, in his glory. Also the eternal meaning of Jesus' human condition, that the Holy Spirit is God in us as he was in Jesus, and that we are always under his influence and we are never something foreign to God. Adv Haer V, 17,1;
1 Jn 4:8-9.

The Trinitarian mystery is not primarily a metaphysical mystery, or a numerical or mathematical mystery; it is fundamentally a salvific mystery: How can God love us so much, overlooking our human limitation, that he himself, in his Son, becomes what we are in order to give us what he is, —his life—? How can the Creator become a creature, in time, without ceasing to be the Creator? How can he be absolutely one and have an eternal Son, who at the same time is distinct?

We speak of the “**Trinitarian mystery**” for three reasons that surpass our understanding:

- 1) God’s absolute singularity in the real distinction of the three persons.
- 2) The absolute equality of the three persons and the dependence of the Second and Third.
- 3) God’s simplicity in the plurality of attributes and properties can be broken down into:
 - a) God’s Trinitarian essence, and the simplicity in the diversity of his attributes.
 - b) The incarnation, exclusive of the Second Person in Jesus.
 - c) The communion of God and with the three-person God, through the Holy Spirit, of all the redeemed.

Activities

- 1) Read Dz-H 3001; Cc Vat I, 24, Ab 1870.
- 2) *“The Church, though dispersed through our the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this*

faith: in one God, the Father Almighty, ‘Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them’; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father ‘to gather all things in one,’ and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, ‘every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess’ to him, and that he should execute just judgment towards all; that he may send ‘spiritual wickednesses,’ and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may, in the exercise of his grace, confer immortality on the righteous, and holy, and those who have kept his commandments, and have persevered in his love, some from the beginning, and others from the moment of their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory.”

Ex 20:11; Ps 145:6.
Ac 4:24; 14:15.

Jn 1:14.

Lk 9:51; Ep 1:6.

Mt 16:27; Ep 1:10.

Ph 2:10-11.

Rm 2:5; Ep 6:12.

Mt 18:8; 25:41.

Tt 1:8; Jn 14:15.

Jn 15:10; Jn 15:27.

2 Tm 2:10;

1 P 5:10. Irenaeus,
Adv Haer I, 10,1.

3) In the following text from Athenagoras (171 AD) underline that parts that refer directly to our topic.

“We reckon the present life of very small worth indeed, and are conducted to the future life by this

Athenagoras,
Apology, 12.
1 Jn 4:8.

one thing alone, that we know God and His Logos, what is the oneness of the Son with the Father, what the communion of the Father with the Son, what is the Spirit, what is the unity of these three, the Spirit, the Son, the Father, and their distinction in unity; and we know that the life for which we look is far better than can be described in words."

4) Do an exegetical study of the phrase "God is love": Do they constitute a perfect identity? Is knowing God the same as recognizing his love? Is the expression descriptive and historical-salvific?

5) Analyze some of the typical comparisons of the Trinitarian mystery, that God is like the sun, the source, a tree —Tertullian—, or like water that can exist in a solid, liquid or gaseous state, or like light that can be broken down into colors, or like a triangle or a triangular pyramid. Discuss how they can be useful and how they might lend themselves to misunderstanding.

For example: The triangle and the pyramid: it can be clearly seen that we are talking about a single reality —substance, essence, nature— made up of three realities; however, the side is not the triangle, nor are the triangles the pyramid. Besides, God is not made up of three persons the way the triangle is. The three persons do not join to form a pyramid.

Water in three states: it is clear that a single nature is possessed equally by the three modes of presentation; however, this comparison lends itself to modalism: a God who presents himself as Father or as Son or as Spirit.

The sun is a good comparison: it represents the Father as the origin of everything; the rays that stream out from him while remaining joined to him —the Son—, strike objects and confer heat, life, proportion, joy —the Holy Spirit—. However, the comparison does not highlight what is common to the three persons.

The source would be the Father who is the beginning of all things; the Son is the river, from whom everything is given to us and comes to us; the Holy Spirit makes the earth —us— bloom. However, this lends itself to thinking in terms of emanation or derivation; the Father does not become the Son or the Holy Spirit.

A tree can represent the Trinity: the root —foundation and source of nourishment, is the Father; the visible trunk that holds everything up is the Son; the flowers and fruit are the Holy Spirit in us.

Tertullian's three comparisons incorporate human beings into God, but they do not show that everything is common to the three persons except the relationship of provenance. No comparison is a perfect fit.

CHAPTER IX

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE FINAL ARTICLES OF THE CREED

Objective: To understand that Christ makes himself present and leads the Church through the Holy Spirit.

9.1 The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church

The Apostles' Creed—in its brief version—contains twelve articles. Actually, however, there are not twelve articles, or three. There is only one: faith in God, in other words, the way God has given himself to people and people's openness to God, in other words, the way Christians believe in God.

The Creed arose as an expression of faith and as a requirement for receiving baptism; its most concise version can be found in Matthew's Gospel. The creed was the history of Jesus and therefore acquired, with regard to the other divine

Mt 28:19.

persons, a historical character. It referred to the creation as the initial event, to the presence of Jesus Christ, to the pouring out of the Spirit until the Second Coming of Christ, and to the last judgment. The last part should be understood as the continuation of the history of Christ. The Spirit was situated between the presence of Christ and his return. He was the way Christ made himself

2 Co 3:17. present in the church community.

At first, the Holy Spirit was not understood as the Third Person, but rather as the vital medium by which Jesus' message was accepted, along with Jesus himself as the Son of God. The Spirit was like the bond of communion among believers, not so much an object of faith as the enabler. It could be compared to our saying today, "I don't believe in the Church; I believe in Church, that is, in communion with all." At the Council of Nicaea, 325 AD. Dz-H 125. *"A third of the Creed did not allude directly to the Third Person of the Trinity as a distinct object of worship, but to the Holy Spirit as God's gift in the history of those who believe in Christ."* The statements that come after the confession of the Holy Spirit specify his presence and action. However, they should actually be seen as an integral part of the Spirit.

Cf J. Ratzinger,
Introduction to
Christianity.

In the beginning, the Creed said nothing about God's intimate life as an analysis or a kind of divine metaphysics; it spoke of the God who communicated, of Jesus as "*God with us*," of the Holy Spirit as the power by which the glorified Lord continued to be present in the world's history. In

fact, the mission of the Spirit and of the Church coincided.

Activities

- What was new for you in this section?

9.2 I believe in one Church

Belief occurs in communion with all those who make up the Church, and the Church is, substantially, a communion of faith and of its expression through love. What makes the Church is faith in Jesus' message and person. Its primary mission is not just to preserve this faith, but also to communicate it and keep it alive and fervent.

Εἰς ἐκκλησίαν μίαν.

This is why Irenaeus wrote: *"Our faith which, having been received from the Church, we do preserve, and which always, by the Spirit of God, renewing its youth, as if it were some precious deposit in an excellent vessel, causes the vessel itself containing it to renew its youth also. For this gift of God has been entrusted to the Church, as breath was to the first created man, for this purpose, that all the members receiving it may be vivified; and the [means of] communion with Christ has been distributed throughout it, that is, the Holy Spirit, the earnest of incorruption, the means of confirming our faith, and the ladder of ascent to God. 'For in the Church,' it is said, 'God has set apostles, prophets, teachers,' and all the other means through which the Spirit works; of which all those are not partakers who do not join themselves to the Church, but defraud themselves of life through*

1 Co 12:28.

their perverse opinions and infamous behavior. For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth."

1 Jn 1:7; Irenaeus, Adv Haer III, 11.

Heb 11:1. Belief is placed in the Church as a community of faith, not as an object of faith, because the Church is a visible reality, and what is visible is not an object of faith. The Church is the vital medium of faith, in which believers live with a particular authority and a particular organization that in absolute terms could be different. The Church should not define itself by its organization, or authority, or location, but by its unity in the faith and by the Holy Spirit. The Church is not the Roman Pontiff, even though he is the supreme authority, Christ's Vicar on earth, and the one most responsible for running the Church. The Church should also not be defined by its location, even though from the beginning, with the exception of a few years (in Avignon, 1309-1377), it has had its headquarters in Rome. Its location is not essential for its mission.

Cf J. Ratzinger, Introduction to Christianity. The Church, as authority and organization, has become the main obstacle to faith in the eyes of many. They believe it possible to have genuine Christian faith without the Church. And those who think that they believe in Christ in spite of the Church forget that the Church is not the authority or the institution as such; it is the community of faith.

For St. Paul the Church, like Christ, is "*a mystery*," i.e., something that has ever been part of

God's plan, hidden at the beginning and revealed in the end times, because the community in faith is "*the body of Christ*," i.e., a single living reality with him. The requisite organization is for "*building up the body of Christ*."

Ep 1: 9-10.
Ep 1: 22-23;
Col 1:18.
Ep 4:11-12.

The Church reflects and manifests in the world God's Trinitarian action, which is primarily salvific action. "*As the Father sent me, so I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit*." The Church's mission is linked to the sending of the Son.

Jn 20:21.

People belong to the Church not so much to be a visible member of a visible body, not so much to be inserted into a society of believers; they belong in response to inner attitudes of faith, love, hope and solidarity. From the first moments of the Church's life it was clear that people also belonged to the Church through the desire to do so, which in certain cases took the place of the sacrament of baptism. Opting for the Church is not opting for a form of government, or even for a way of life; it means opting for God who has opted for human beings, for their salvation, carried out in a concrete, Trinitarian way.

The Church has its beginnings in the Father's love; in Christ's life, message, death and resurrection; and in the sending of the Holy Spirit. In this sense St. Cyprian wrote: "*The Church is a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit*." Christianity lived in the Church is the way Christ gives us his historical reality, i.e., he relives the Gospel in us: his birth, life, message, call, death and resurrection in our own life and historical reality —liturgical life—.

De unitate Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti plebs adunata. De ordine dominica 23, quoted in Vat II, LG 4.

It is the way Christ continues to live in us and we in Christ, through the sacraments and the Christian and human virtues. We thus constitute a unique reality for the Father, in Christ, through the Spirit and in the Church.

Εἰς ἐκκλησίαν μίαν.

What makes for the Church's uniqueness is the oneness of faith, expressed in its essential points in the Creed. All of us who are baptized believe the same thing, although not always in the same way, because faith is a personal act related to a whole constellation of experiences, knowledge and gaps in knowledge, circumstances and conditions. And in this context faith is always a gift from God, an undeserved grace for which we must continually pray.

The oneness of faith calls for accepting the Church's authority as the party in charge of maintaining, adapting and propagating *"The Deposit of Faith"* in a relevant and living way.

Activities

- Underline the most relevant parts of the following texts:

"In the bosom of this Church, the rich variety of liturgical rites and the legitimate diversity of theological and spiritual heritages and special disciplines, far from injuring her unity, make it more manifest."

"Recognizing also the existence, outside the organism of the Church of Christ, of numerous elements of truth and sanctification which belong to her as her own and tend to Catholic unity, and believing

in the action of the Holy Spirit who stirs up in the heart of the disciples of Christ love of this unity, we entertain the hope that the Christians who are not yet in the full communion of the one only Church will one day be reunited in one flock with one only shepherd."

Paul VI,
CPD 21-22.

"We believe that the Church is necessary for salvation, because Christ, who is the sole mediator and way of salvation, renders himself present for us in his body which is the Church. But the divine design of salvation embraces all men."

Paul VI,
CPD 23.

9.3 The holy Church

The Church is the Bride of Christ, although it might seem to us sometimes that it sells itself, *"because it is his body —and we are its living parts,"* of his flesh and of his bones, as Eve was of Adam. *"This mystery has many implications,"* said St. Paul, *"but I am saying it applies to Christ and the Church."* And as the Bride of Christ it must be chaste and pure, and it must belong to Christ only. Its mission, like Paul's, is to suffer the pains of giving birth until it sees Christ formed in Christians.

Ep 6:29-32.

2 Co 11:25f.

Cf Ga 4:19.

About the Church we state something that cannot be seen: that it is holy and not only because of its origin and its destiny, but also because of that which makes it live in our world, because of the Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit unites us in the Holiness that sanctifies us, in God, in baptism, and in the Eucharist. The Church has a God-centered, Trinitarian, Christ-centered and

Εἰς ἐκκλησίαν ἁγίαν.

1 Co 10:17; Ep 2:15. sacramental character. The Mariological aspect is included in the Christ-centeredness.

The key point is not the grouping of the believers as such, but rather the transformation that people undergo in this new community by means of the sacraments. It is about ongoing conversion, purification and communion in the Eucharist, and ultimately, about communion with God.

We believe in the holy Church in spite of its disfigured face. The Church's holiness consists of God stirring up holiness in it, mindful of human sinfulness. Christ continues to take up sinful humanity, transforming it, sanctifying it and loving it to the end. Through the Church, Jesus' sanctifying holiness is continually present among sinful people.

As late as in the 5th century all of those who belonged to the Church were called saints, because it was the "Body of Christ" and Christ was who sanctified it; good behavior was primarily a consequence of faith. For this reason St. Augustine called his followers saints, and St. Paul did the same.

1 Co 1:2; Ep 1:1;
Ph 1:1; Col 1:2.

"Christ's disciples were scandalized that Christ did not have this judicial bent. He neither judged nor condemned: he was not fire that consumed the unjust, or zeal that pulled up the weeds that grew before their eyes. On the contrary, his holiness was displayed in his contact with the sinners who approached him."

Cf 2 Co 5:21;
Ga 3:13; J. Ratzinger, Introduction to Christianity.

The Church, holy in its origin and its end, but sinful because of us, encompasses all believers

from all times and places. It is not just an organization; it is above all sacramental life, and in that sense, an object of our faith.

Although the Church is holy due to God's ongoing action in it, due to the sacraments, and for having been planted like a seed by Jesus in his apostles and disciples, in whom he was "*sketching it out*," it is nonetheless scandalously human, not divine. St. Paul's ideal is to present the Church to Jesus as a pure virgin. We may not find her especially pure, but we should love her like a mother to the point of being burned alive for love, but since she is tremendously human, she is also a prostitute. The prophets have often compared the people of Israel to prostitutes, as opposed to the true wife. "*An adultress welcomes strangers instead of her husband; a prostitute is paid. But you, in your whoring, have given your presents away to all your lovers; you have offered them gifts to attract them from everywhere. In your whoring you have done the exact opposite from other women; no one was running after you, so you went and paid them; they did not pay you since your behavior was so outrageous.*" Infidelities and idolatry were some of the sins that gave rise to this comparison. The Church is the wife of the slaughtered Lamb and can also be led astray by power, idolatry and the world, and in this way, sell herself. For St. Leo the Great, Mary Magdalene represents the Church.

Tertullian,
Carn 7,13.

2 Co 11:2.

Cf 1 Co 12:12s;
13:1f.

Ezk 16:33-34.

Cf H.U. von Balthasar, *Casta meretrix: Sponsa Verbi*, quoted by J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*. Sermon II on the Ascension, 74.

For this reason the Church always needs reforming: "*Semper reformanda.*" It always needs purifying and renovation in the Spirit. We, as the

Rv 2:18f.

Church, are never completely converted, and we never finish converting.

Activities

- Write three reasons why the Church seems holy to you, and three reasons why it seems sinful.
- What is up to you, and what is not up to you, to make the Church holy in our times?
- How could you explain the Church's holiness to simple or young people? Make an outline of a presentation.

9.4 The Church is catholic

Dz-H 2. Catholicity has been professed since the earliest formulations of the Church's beliefs.

Εἰς ἐκκλησίαν
καθολικὴν.

Etymologically “catholic” means universal. It comes from the Greek “κατά” meaning “according to, in compliance with,” and “ὅλος,” meaning “everything, total, complete.” Countless meanings have been assigned to the word “catholic.” In its origin catholicity implied the unity of faith. It referred to those who kept the faith as a whole, or those who believed everything they were supposed to believe, i.e., who accepted and understood the Scripture and salvific action in their entirety, without absolutizing or dismissing any revealed text.

Catholicity also refers to local unity, unity around the bishop, not to the groups who have taken any pretext to separate from the Catholic

Church. Then, to the unity of the local churches. Catholicity expresses the Episcopal structure of the Church and the unity of the bishops among themselves. Then to the spiritual and doctrinal authority of the Bishop of Rome. The Roman pontiff is a sacrament of unity for the Catholic Church.

As an essential characteristic of the Church, catholicity refers to its mission of “being for all,” of being open to and addressing all people of all races and cultures, with no limitation in terms of space or time. This is a consequence of the universal salvific will, of redemption “of all and for all,” and of the universal action of the Holy Spirit.

Tertullian presents the Church as proud of having spread to all of the known world. Apol 1,7.

We, that is, the Church, have a right to rituals, customs, cultural traditions and places of worship, organization and funding, but we should not be constrained by them.

If the Church becomes tied to the conditions of a certain time, it cuts itself off from God, Jesus and the truth. *Jesus said, “I am the truth,” but he never said he was custom.* Catholicity means evangelical concreteness, but also apostolic freedom.

Dominus noster
Chritus veritatem se,
non consuetudinem
nominavit.
Tertullian, Virg I,1.

The fact that the Church is catholic means that the Church is for everyone, not by imposition but by adaptation. It means freedom in the sense of not being limited by time, space or culture, much less by civil or political authority. Adaptation, without forsaking the essential, is a demand of its catholicity.

The Church's catholicity has often been understood as a restriction, as a moral straitjacket, not as a universality that compels it to reach out to all peoples, and to adapt to different cultures.

Activities

- What can we do to be in greater communion and dialogue with our pastors and bishops?
- Explain what makes today's Church catholic for you.
- What do you see as the main demands of the Church's catholicity?

9.5 The Church is apostolic

Εἰς ἐκκλησίαν
ἀποστολικήν.

The Church is apostolic not only because it has the apostles as its foundation, but because it has the same mission that they had: *"As my Father sent me, so I am sending you."* *"Go out to the whole world."* *"They went out and preached everywhere," "to all the nations."*

Jn 20:21.
Mt 28:19.

The Church should be apostolic in each and every one of its members. We have become accustomed to belonging to the church passively, often irresponsibly, and most of the time childishly, without taking charge of our own Christian life. Assuming responsibility for one's personal Christian life does not mean disconnecting from the Church's authority or moral values, doctrine and norms. What it means is the free and responsible appropriation of these values. And since we are social beings and members of a single body, it

also means participation, communion of values, and co-validation.

Goodness and truth cease being what they are when they are made exclusive. We should have an apostolic attitude in our family, at work and in our interpersonal relations. We should not just give indications of our faith; we should also prudently attempt to spread it. Belief in the Church's catholicity is also a missionary commitment, made more explicit in the Church's apostolic character.

The apostolic dimension of the Church is fecundity and the capacity for con-figuring and re-producing Christians, which makes it a commitment for everyone, because we become Christians not only by means of a sacrament, but also and primarily by means of the testimony, life example and organic community —body— of those who have been Christians before us and who are Christians now along with us. We become living Christians little by little and with the life example of those around us. Christians become Christians the same way they become persons: in life. Life, with the grace of God, has the power to con-figure us as persons and as Christians, which means we have the duty not only to allow ourselves to be molded by those who co-shape us in the image of Jesus Christ, but also to be active and contribute to the co-shaping of others. This is how Jesus made his followers into true Christians and apostles. He gradually con-figured them in his own personal way of thinking, feeling, being and

acting. In the hearts of his apostles Jesus founded his Church.

If our Christianity has stopped being meaningful, it is because we have turned it into a kind of life without life. It is up to adult Christians who are mature in their faith to teach and give testimony in the world in which they lead their lives—in their family, at work, and in their human relationships.

Christian life, understood as mission, is central to Christianity, and the clearest example is the one that God himself has given us: the incarnation. When the Church, meaning us, becomes flesh in different cultures, then it will have completed its mission. Inertia is one of the Church's chronic ailments—a Church that is comfortably parked, satisfied with its ninety-nine sheep, which are actually diminishing day by day.

Mt 28:19.
Lk 15:4f.

It is not the Church's mission to uphold ancient forms of culture, such as the Greek culture or the European Middle Ages, or to create new ones either, only to watch them fall out of fashion. Its mission is to spread the God of Jesus to all cultures. The Church, like salt and yeast, must be folded into all cultures, and shine its light on the whole world.

Mt 5:13f.

“The divine design of salvation embraces all men; and those who without fault on their part do not know the Gospel of Christ and his Church, but seek God sincerely, and under the influence of grace endeavor to do his will as recognized through the

promptings of their conscience, they, in a number known only to God, can obtain salvation."

Paul VI,
CPD, 1968.

Activities

- Read the Constitution LG n 6, from Vatican II, and find the images of the Church.
- Read AG n 2, from Vatican II, about the Church's missionary activity.
- The clearest way to imitate God and Jesus consists of showing mercy, healing, and helping to carry burdens. What Gospel texts would serve to prove this statement?

9.6 The communion of saints

The communion of saints is an article of our faith that is often misunderstood. The expression appears in the Apostles' Creed, but not in the Nicene and later creeds. It should not be thought, however, that something has disappeared, or that the Church stopped believing in it.

Credo in... communionem sanctorum.
Dz-H 21, 26, 29.

Human beings exist in an ongoing relationship not only with their neighbors, but also with their history, their past, their present and their future. They can only exist by proceeding from others, and they can only live, at least fully, in communion with others. This might seem to be simply an anthropological fact, but it actually also applies to the mystery of salvation. The new branches produce grapes in clusters, but the cluster belongs more to the vine than to the branch, and although we might be pushing the metaphor too far, it is true that we are saved in clusters. Being

Jn 15:1f.

Christian has a social dimension to it; this is an essential and existential reality.

The communion of saints is a way of speaking to refer to the Church, in both its temporal/militant mode and its imperishable/triumphant mode. It is the Church as a community of faith in union with Christ, the union and solidarity of the vine and the branches, of Christ as the head and us as the parts of his body. *“He —Jesus— is the living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him; set yourselves close to him so that you too, the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God, may be living stones making a spiritual house”; “so you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are citizens like all the saints, and part of God’s household. You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone. As every structure is aligned on him, all grow into one holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built into a house where God lives, in the Spirit.”*

Jn 15:1f.
Col 1:18; 2:19.
1 P 2:4-5.
Ep 2:19-22.

We might ask about the meaning that the communion of saints had back then and that it has now. It refers the common union of believers, reciprocally, and with Christ in the realm of eternal life. It is related to the ongoing action of the Holy Spirit as a source of love and all that is good. It reminds us that the meaning of our faith includes society, Church and salvation. Faith unites us and sanctifies us, and it is the origin or source of our salvation. Thus Tertullian said that *“the oth-*

er name for faith is Salvation.” The community of saints is the faith in our bond to Christ and among ourselves, as members of a single body, whose head is Christ, and this bond makes us participate in the holy things first of all in the Spirit of Christ —life and strength— which lives in our hearts, and then in the Eucharist and all the sacraments and good actions of this body formed by all of us. Cf 1 P 1:8.

It is important to point out that the reference is made to a community of spiritual goods, and not evils, even though from a social standpoint evils also have an effect on the community.

There is only one Saint by nature, but we are saints by the Spirit that has been given to us in love, by adoption. Cyril of Alexandria interpreted salvation by recalling that by the Holy Spirit we are joined to God and in God, but also among ourselves. Vat II, LG 1, 51. SC 48.

The communion of saints is the basis of prayer for others, whether they are living or dead. It is not a doctrinal principle, a part of a system, but rather the expression of an existential situation that expresses a need, similar to what St. Monica experienced when she prayed for St. Augustine, or what a child experiences when he prays for his dead father. We live, we move and we believe in communion; we could say: like in communicating vessels, with the social-Christian responsibility to “pull our weight” because the responsibility is not individual in nature. It is clear that this responsibility is due to countless actions in the sphere of civic life; for now we wish to high-

light how it relates to our growth in Christ: “*May Christ live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and length, the height and depth; until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.*”

Ep 3:17-19.

The sociability we refer to when we speak of the communion of saints is not only about spiritual things, but it does not focus only on economics either, or on people’s everyday problems. Life must be lived in community in all its aspects. The communion of saints, who are also sinners, is not something that only needs to be explained, understood and analyzed; above all it needs to be lived.

The communion of saints expresses our faith in the unity that we form with Christ and with all Christians of all times, but it is not only or even primarily a type of physical community, as expressed in Biblical images. More than that, it is a community of meaning, value, origin and end. Our life and sacrifices, joined with those of Christ, as well as our freedom, acceptance and giving, take part in, or have the same salvific meaning, as Christ our Lord’s acceptance unto death, and death on a cross. Our life and our death also

Ph 2:8. have a salvific, redeeming and sanctifying meaning. Through our union with Christ we also take part in the meaning of his life, passion and death.

The members of the early Church had such a strong sense of solidarity that when the father of a family was baptized, the whole family was bap-

Cf Jn 4:53; Ac 16:31-32; 16:15.

tized along with him, and Pablo mentions a practice, later adopted by the Marcionites, of being baptized for the dead who had not been baptized. *“If this were not true, what do people hope to gain by being baptized for the dead?”* —This was a Marcionite practice with a social meaning: —I want to communicate to my ancestors, or to my parents, the joy that they did not have, and that I now have: the joy of being a Christian.

1 Co 15:29.

The historical process of this article of faith is a long one, but at its deepest level it is the believers’ right to express their faith that they live and die for the good of others, and that they take part themselves in the merits of the saints and martyrs. This article of the creed appeared in the second half of the 4th century. It is not just another way of expressing faith in the unity of the community —Church—, which is holy and also sinful, but whose holiness, which comes from the Father through Jesus Christ in the Spirit, is capable of transforming sinners into saints, thus enabling them to share in divine life. At the root of this common-union is not an individual’s decision, but rather the efficacy of a History of Salvation reaffirmed by baptism. It is a supernatural solidarity that links us to all those who have had faith before, have it now, and will have it after us.

Dz-H 21, 26, 29.

This communion of saints that must be realized here on earth reaches its fullness in eternal life, where the Father will be above all and above everything; Jesus, his Son, will be with God and with us forever, and the Holy Spirit, in all of us.

The goal of Christians is not private beatitude, but the good of all and of everything. Christians believe in Christ, and thus believe in the future of the world, not just in their own future. They know that this future is more than what they can accomplish by themselves. They know that there is an intelligence that they cannot destroy. Believers know that they are journeying forward, not moving in a spiral. They know that history is not something that ends only to start all over again. The fear of futility is a real threat —so much effort for nothing—. We human beings never stop being human in the negative sense. But Jesus tells us: *“Be brave: I have conquered the world.”*

Jn 16:33.

The new world, described at the end of the Bible as a heavenly Jerusalem, is not a utopia; it is the certainty that we encounter in faith. The world has been redeemed: that is the certainty that sustains Christians and encourages them to stay true to the faith in a threatening world.

Rv 21:3f.

Activities

- Read Vatican II, AG n 2 and underline three meaningful phrases.
 - Research the exegesis: *“If this were not true, what do people hope to gain by being baptized for the dead?”*
- 1 Co 15:29.

9.7 The forgiveness of sins

One of the most encouraging truths of Christian life is the faith professed in the Creed about *“the forgiveness of sins.”* It is a way of proclaiming ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

that we live under the sign of love and grace. If St. Paul insists on the universality of sin, which we can apply to original sin, personal sin, social sin, structural sin, political sin, etc., it serves to enhance our faith in the universality of salvation, thanks to God's love and our ties to Christ, because "*however great the number of sins committed, grace was even greater,*" and we are bound more tightly to Christ in grace and in life than to Adam in sin and death, and the first Adam was no more than a "*shadow or figure of the one to come,*" i.e., of Christ.

Rm 6:15.

Rm 5:12:14; 15:17.

For St. Mark faith is the power that heals and saves. "*The opposite of sin and despair is not virtue, but faith.*" The common denominator of all the miracles is the awakening of faith in God who heals and saves, and thus frees us from despair. For John, it is clear that faith in Jesus has salvific power.

Mk 5:24-35; 7:24-30;
10:46-52.

Soren Kierkegaard.

Jn 20:30-31; 12:44.
1 Jn 1:7; 2:2.

Authentic Christians understand how serious sin is, by experiencing all of its effects, but they understand it within the framework of the love, faith and hope that their relationship with Christ gives them. St. Paul's texts say so much more than the statements contained in the Old Testament about sin and being freed from it. Sin, in any of its forms, has a function that we must never forget, which is to tie us to Jesus Christ as our only salvation. We speak about sin not only to affirm its existence—there can be no doubt that the Bible is full of stories about sin—in some cases quite a bit more serious than Adam's, like Cain's, or the story of the men who married the

Gn 4:1f.

Gn 4:23-24; 6:1f. daughters of the gods who gave birth to heroes,
 2 S 11:1s; 12:1f. the detailed account of David's sin. Sin should
 make us aware of the need we have of Jesus as
 redeemer.

Ex 34:6. The God of our faith is a God who is capable
 Ps 103:8; 145:8. of forgiving sin, and in his being of love and for-
 giveness, Jesus Christ is included as our Savior,
 not just because he forgives our sins leaving us as
 we were before committing them, but because he
 ties us perpetually to God, and without him we
 would never have such a tie. Even supposing that
 automatic forgiveness were possible, that way we
 would never have learned what God was like, in-
 cluding his divine and human dimension, in Jesus
 Christ. The forgiveness of sins is tied into the life,
 passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 His very being, expressed in Hebrew style in his
 name, is linked to our salvation. In the Creed we
 express this when we profess that he "*died for our*
 καὶ διὰ τὴν *salvation.*" With his death he gave us his life, un-
 ἡμετέραν σωτείαν. derstanding by death everything that Jesus was
 —incarnation, life, death and resurrection— and
 Mt 1:21. by life everything that Jesus is —eternal Trinitar-
 ian communion between him and us—.

Mt 6:11:13. The forgiveness of sins is also a way to talk about
 the continuity of life, with its continuous need
 for Christ. The forgiveness of sins is necessary to
 live in Christ and he in us, which is the fruit of
 his Spirit's action. This article of faith, applied
 daily, alludes to our weakness and our strength,
 our smallness and our greatness, our solitude
 and our solidarity. "*If we say we have no sin in*
us, we are deceiving ourselves and refusing to ad-

mit the truth.” Jesus no longer performs miracles as he did in his native land, but he forgives sins every day, perhaps even with fewer conditions than those set forth in our treatises on morals. This, however, is not to say that he does not care whether we observe good behavior or not. 1 Jn 1:8.

When God forgives sins, through our Lord Jesus Christ, he does not change his face; he simply shows us his eternal love as manifested, revealed and realized once again in Christ, and includes us in it.

In the Apostles’ Creed, the forgiveness of sins is not presented as linked to baptism, which suggests that it is not only about sins prior to conversion, but also those committed out of human weakness. In the pre-Nicene formulas of faith, and in the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople II, the forgiveness of sins is linked to baptism, but the experience of Christian life soon made it clear that the power given to the apostles and their successors applied to everyday life as well. Dz-H 30.

Jn 20:22-23;
Mt 16:19; 9:6-8;
6:12-13.

In today’s culture there is a tendency to deny, conceal or minimize guilt at the personal level, but when it comes to guilt in other dimensions — social, structural, historical, political or ecological, for example— responsibility becomes diffuse. Each person, whether he cares to acknowledge it or not, is weighed down with guilt from different sources, and even if he tries to ignore it, the time comes when reality and responsibility cannot be denied and a sense of guilt rises in his heart, sometimes a full-blown guilt complex. From a therapeutic perspective it is vital to believe that

God is capable of forgiving our sins, even grievous sins.

Christianity is not primarily and characteristically a religion of salvation from something bad; it is more about a remodeling of the whole human person by God, in his image as manifested in Jesus Christ. Christianity is not a patch to mend the tears in the fabric of life, or salvation that returns us to a mystical paradise. It is a religion that lifts us up so that we can walk hand-in-hand with God.

Activities

- Read n 606 of the CEC, reproduced below:

The Scriptures had foretold this divine plan of salvation through the putting to death of “the righteous one, my Servant” as a mystery of universal redemption, that is, as the ransom that would free men from the slavery of sin. Citing a confession of faith that he himself had “received,” St. Paul professes that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures.” In particular Jesus’ redemptive death fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy of the suffering Servant. Indeed Jesus himself explained the meaning of his life and death in the light of God’s suffering Servant. After his Resurrection he gave this interpretation of the Scriptures to the disciples at Emmaus, and then to the apostles.

Is 53:11;
Cf Ac 3:14.
Cf Is 53:11-12;
Jn 8:34-36.

1 Co 15:3.
Ib Cf Ac 3:18; 7:52;
13:29; 26:22-23.

Cf Mt 20:28.

Cf Lk 24:25-27.

9.8 Personal resurrection

Resurrection and faith

Faith in the resurrection and eternal life is not something added on to faith in God; it is not “something else,” one more truth in the Creed. It is our faith as a whole, taken to its fulfillment, its anthropological endpoint —the “what for” of all of revelation. 1 Co 15:13.

When we profess the resurrection of the flesh in the Creed, we are not assuming a dualist vision of the human person as made up of soul and body, as theological thinking and the Church’s Magisterium did to a certain extent. On the contrary, the Creed is much more a defense against that dualist vision. Some thought that people would rise from the dead because they had a simple and immortal soul, but that they would only rise as spiritual beings, and thus not the entire person of flesh and blood. The faith of the early Church was opposed to this way of understanding the resurrection. It insisted that what would rise was the whole person, however that was to be understood. And it affirmed the resurrection of the flesh against those who contended that only the souls would rise —a Platonic and Aristotelian vision.

The neo-Platonic vision is especially questionable, almost inadmissible, at odds with the Biblical, Jewish vision, and therefore at odds with Jesus’ vision. Jesus spoke of the resurrection of the whole person, in her being and with the whole

package of her life, with whatever she had done with her life, whatever she had made of her life.

Col 1:18; Rm 6:5; 1 P 1:3. The resurrection of the flesh is meant to defend the unity of the person and the value of the bodily condition. The criterion for understanding and believing in our own resurrection is the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is considered the "*first to be born from the dead*," and Christians are "co-risen." Jesus is the cause or starting-point, and the example of our own resurrection.

Jn 14:2. The kingdom of heaven, understood eschatologically, was an essentially and fully integrated part of Jesus' message. Without it, the Gospel cannot be fully understood. Consider, for example, the Beatitudes. Jesus understood the human person as a coherent whole and as such he situated the human person in "*the Father's house*." In today's language, making use of concepts we are familiar with, we could say that Jesus thought of human beings as people loved by God, the fruit of his ongoing creative action, and at the same time, although at a different level, of their own decisions as free and independent people.

Faith in God has to do with what I believe about myself. Theology is not elaborate speculation about God, or revelation about what God is in himself, without me. Discourse about God serves as the light that illuminates anthropology, and the whole world. This is why faith in God gives human life a new dimension and enriches it. The demand of the false gods was the death of human beings; what the true God demands is life.

He who called us out of non-being to being is the one who calls us from death to life. And whoever believes in God and Christ is led to believe necessarily in something that touches her being and her transcendence; she is led to believe that God loves her as a person, in the historical and concrete particulars of her life, together with all other people, in a common destiny of communion with Christ and with God. Faith in the resurrection is a consequence of faith in God the Creator. Resurrection is a new life that assumes a “*new creation*” in communion with God. The resurrection is God’s last word in a person’s life.

Jn 21:15f.
2 M 7:9-29.
Rv 21:1-5.

What St. Peter told the Jews can be applied to all Christians: “*It was for you in the first place that God raised up his servant.*”

Ac 3:26.

For St. Paul “*the last of the enemies to be destroyed is death*” by resurrection, beyond all doubt.

1 Co 15:26.

Faith in resurrection has a history

Our own resurrection is directly linked to Christ’s. What Paul says about Christ can also be applied to faith in the resurrection of the dead. Jesus was resurrected with a different life, “*he was raised in order not to die again,*” in order to show that he was the life principle, the beginning and end of life for all people.

2 Co 5:15.

We know little about eternal life because much of what is said is more a message for the present than a clue about the future. The metaphors that Jesus used to talk about the other life do not try to uncover the secret of the eternal; on the contrary, they try to give temporal life a meaning that tran-

scends the life of this world. His proclamation of eternal life is not meant to reveal what is in the great beyond, but to give the here and now its full importance. The proclamation of eternal life was a necessary and indispensable consequence of the proclamation of the Kingdom.

We have no comparison that explains what it means for people to live in the fullness of God's life. This world simply does not contain the language, concept or image that would do justice to that reality; it surpasses the space and time we live in.

Human persons are raised in their personal reality

For the Greeks, the human person was a composite that did not subsist after death. The soul and the body went their separate ways in accordance with their nature.

The Sadducees refused to accept the doctrine of the resurrection, arguing that it was not included in the original message of the Pentateuch, and that the flesh was to return to the dust from which it came.

2 M 7:9f. Pious Israelites believed that Yahweh had power over the kingdom of the dead, that he could free people from the kingdom of death. Yahweh has the power to give life back to the dead, as he does in response to the prayers of Elijah and Elisha. The Psalmist says, *"in redeeming your life from the Pit, in crowning you with love and tenderness."*

Dt 32:22; Pr 15:11.
Ps 30:4; Si 51:2.
1 K 17:17;
2 K 4:32f.
Ps 103:4.

The Pharisees —1st and 2nd centuries B.C.— accepted the resurrection as the final, eschatological event, the outcome of the judgment. It would be a personal and universal happening.

Cf Jn 11:23f.
Mt 12:50.

For Jesus, eternal life is included in the announcement of the Kingdom, and was in fact the fulfillment of the Kingdom: what gave meaning to suffering, work and death. It is given for free, like the forgiveness of sins and the love of God. On the other hand, it was also a prize or the fruit that came from following Jesus, from keeping his commandments and from faith in him. It assumes freedom and demands the acceptance of the message of the Kingdom.

The resurrection will be a new way of living, with no bodily needs. Whoever dies is actually alive for God, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And not just in memory —in an active way that allows for dialogue. Death opens the doors of God's house where there are many rooms.

Mk 12:18-27;
Lk 20:27-38;
Mt 22:23-32.

Jn 14:2.

Like the Kingdom that is already among us, so is the life that Jesus gives to those who accept and cooperate with him. He does not speak in terms of hope; he speaks about reality, not a question of space and time: *"Look here! Look there!"* It is a relationship and a communion of life. The fourth Gospel is a development and explanation of Jesus' message: *"Whoever keeps my word will never see death."* *"Whoever believes in the one who sent me, has eternal life."* *"So that a man may eat it and not die."* *"He has passed from death to life."* To Martha, who says, *"I know Lazarus will rise again at the resurrection on the last day,"* Jesus

Lk 17:20.

Lk 17:21.

Jn 8:51.

Jn 6:48.

Jn 5:24.

Jn 11:24. says, *"I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies, he will live."* Jesus announces the resurrection and the Kingdom as something that is here and now, and at the same time, close at hand.

Lk 23:42. Jesus says to the good thief: *"Today you will be with me in paradise."* St. Paul does not know what to choose: *"to be gone —die— and be with Christ... or to stay alive."* Ph 1:21. All of this makes us think that for Jesus and the apostles resurrection was something that happened right after death.

Jesus' doctrine could be stated more or less as follows: —the Kingdom, already present among us, implies resurrection— it is a kingdom of the living. Eternal life, which is communion with God, is now like a seed inside of you, the fruit of God's love for you and of your own personal and free acceptance. So do not think that you will be raised, but that you have already been raised, virtually as it were. Cf Col 3:1-3. *"Let your thoughts be on heavenly things... because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God."*

If the criterion for knowing something about our own resurrection is the resurrection of Christ, who is our head, then as promptly as he was raised, we will be also.

It is important to point out that the other life is not to be understood as an extension of this one, in temporal continuity, but as something completely different, but at the same time totally connected to this life. It could be compared to a metamorphosis, like a butterfly's chrysalis, or to

the tree that is the fullness, realization and fulfillment of the seed, and totally connected to it.

*It is the same with the resurrection of the dead:
the thing that is sown is perishable but what is
raised is imperishable;
the thing that is sown is contemptible but what
is raised is glorious;
the thing that is sown is weak but what is raised* 1 Co 15:42-43.
*is powerful;
when it is sown is embodies the soul; when it is
raised it embodies the spirit.
Sown in dishonor, raised in glory!
Sown in weakness, raised in power!
Whatever you sow in the ground has to die be-* 1 Co 15:36.
fore it is given new life.

Professing the resurrection of the flesh refers to the integrity of the person. This means that this very being that I am will be raised with this very body, but in a spiritualized form. The body is the form, not a part of the personal being.

Professing that the soul is immortal, but without an everlasting connection to the concrete and historical dimension of its human condition is not the faith of the Church. We can put it more precisely by saying that subject of the resurrection is the person, not the soul or the body; it is more than the two things together, i.e., the object of God's eternal care and love. And it is the human person as person who enters into communion with the three-person God.

Resurrection involves the person's identity, everything that is implied by being in the world, by

being among others and for others, with all the meaning of the person's life and destiny. We include the person's bodily being even though that body could have other qualifiers: God loves something more than the molecules and the physical, chemical and aesthetic body.

The resurrection is God's encounter with the human individual, with all of his story; we might think that resurrection and judgment can be identified as the assessment of the personal being, in immortality and eternal life. Because the finite person, upon passing to the infinite, shakes off the limits of time-bound life.

The emphasis on the identity of the flesh serves to counteract the affirmation or assumption of a new birth of the soul in a different body—a kind of reincarnation.

A person's identity depends on the unrepeatable and unique nature of bodily existence. We profess the fact of resurrection even though we do not know with absolute certainty when or how. Even in Jesus' message on the subject, he never goes beyond the level of images. The revelation is not about the when and how; it is about the fact of resurrection.

Ep 1:13-14.
ἁρραβὼν. *“Now you too, in him, have heard the message of the truth and the good news of your salvation, and have believed it; and you too have been stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit of the Promise, the **pledge** of our inheritance.”* So this pledge, by dwelling among us, already makes us spiritual—of the Spirit—and mortality is absorbed by im-

mortality, as St. Paul said: *"Your interests, however, are not in the unspiritual, but in the spiritual, since the Spirit of God has made his home in you."*

2 Co 5:4.
Rm 8:9.

Faith in the resurrection of the dead is not a primary and fundamental point of only Paul's preaching, but of the whole New Testament. What is professed is the continuity of the whole human person and a destiny like Jesus'. The fullness of Christian anthropology, i.e., the meaning of the life of all people who participate in Jesus' life, passion, death and resurrection, is attained in Christology.

Ac 17:18-23.
Cf 1 Th 5:23.
Jn 17:24; 14:3.
1 Co 15:12-23.
Mk 12:25-27.

Tertullian understood that the resurrection of the dead encapsulated the whole of Christian faith. *"Christians' faith consists of believing in the resurrection of the dead"*; and he saw our daily sleep as a handy image of death. He associated the maternal womb with the dark sleep of the grave, and birth with resurrection to a new life. And in Peter's first epistle we read: *"You are sure of the end to which your faith looks forward, the salvation of your souls."*

*Fides cristianorum
resurrectio motuo-
rum.* Res 1,1.

Tertullian,
An XLIII, 13.
1 P 1:8.

The message about Jesus' resurrection is quite clear and simple, and could be reduced to the following statement: the Crucified One loves forever at God's side, as a commitment and hope for all of us. This is the foundation of Christianity, but it is also the summary of all of Jesus' message. It makes no sense to believe in God and not in eternal life. This explains why faith and salvation, for the Church Fathers, were synonyms: *"The other name of faith is salvation."* Conversely,

1 P 1:9.
Tertullian,
Res 13,2.

1 Co 15:14. St. Paul tells us: *"If Christ has not been raised, our faith is useless."*

"Christ, as we know, having been raised from the dead, will never die again. Death has no power over him any more. When he died, he died, once and for all, to sin, so his life is now life with God."

Rm 6:9-10. Faith in eternal life after death has fundamental implications for life before death. For this reason, in Christian anthropology eternal life determines the form of earthly life. Otherwise, the proper

1 Co 15:32. conclusion would be: *"Let us eat and drink today; tomorrow we will be dead."*

The resurrection will be the fulfillment of our history of salvation; it will be the work and hour of God in us and, at the same time, of the three divine persons, because it will be shared work, and yet personal at the same time, with each per-

Cf CEC 259. son acting in us according to his personal features or characteristics.

It will be God's own doing, the handiwork of him who raised his Son from the dead, and with him, all people. Christ was raised by the Father as our head, and we will be raised as his body.

Our resurrection will be a co-resurrection with Christ. *"Everyone who believes in the Son has eternal life in him."* Being with Christ is the beginning of life, of resurrection, and of overcoming death.

Jn 3:15s; 3:36; 5:24.
Ph 1:23; 2 Co 5:8.
1 Th 5:10.

The Spirit, principle of life, will be the one to give it to us again, but this time in an imperishable form. *"If the Spirit of him —the Father— who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, then*

he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies.” Paul attributes the resurrection to the Father whose Spirit will give us life. Rm 8:11.

It will be the work of the Spirit, who is God’s strength and life in us, and who with the Father and the Son undertakes everything and is the pledge of the future resurrection, irreplaceable agent of our purification, sanctification and divinization, i.e., of our eschatological communion with the three-person God.

He will raise us at the appointed time, bringing to fulfillment what he already offered us through the Spirit that he gave us as a pledge of eternal life. And seeing that Christ was raised on the third day, after having truly died and descended to the place of the dead, we will surely also be raised on a “*third day*,” that is, after our true death.

The resurrection on the “*last day*,” that is, at the end of the world and for judgment, is another reflection that the Church recommends highly. But it will also be the work of Jesus, who “*the Father has made the source of life*,” and in him we will be dead to sin and alive to God, who with the death and resurrection of Christ gave us the Spirit. Jesus and the early Church expected the “*last day*” as something that was about to happen. Jn 5:26.
Jn 6:40; 1 Jn 2:18;
Ac 1:2; Heb 3:14;
9:26; 1 P 4:7.

Activities

- Can you find any parallelism between the transformation and conservation of energy as a

scientific fact, and the conservation and transformation of life as a fact of faith?

9.9 Life in communion with God –immortality, or eternal life–

Ex 33:20; 1 Tm 6:16. For the Church Fathers, human beings “as such” are mortal. Immortality is a gift from God and a consequence of the divine vision: in this life it is not possible to see God and continue living, and in eternal life it is not possible to continue living without seeing God. The vision of God is an image of communion with God and the source of immortality.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 3. *For how could a man have learned
that he is himself an infirm being, and mortal
by nature,
but that God is immortal and powerful,
unless he had learned by experience what is in
both?*

Rm 8:11; Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 8,1. *“If God made men of clay, how is it that he cannot make him emerge again from the earth and give him a fuller form of life? If you are alive, how can you say that flesh is not capable of living with eternal life? Earthly life is no less a miracle than eternal life. “Learning by experience that we possess eternal duration from the excelling power of this Being, not from our own nature.”*

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 2,3.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 3,2. *“He who in the beginning caused him to have being who as yet was not, just when He pleased, shall much more reinstate again those who had a former existence.”*

Love calls for continuity, and God's love not only calls for it, but provides it. Resurrection as immortality is born of the relationship established with the Creator, and for this reason it is grace.

Jb 19:25; Ps 73:23s;
2 M 7:9f.

St. Irenaeus says that *"In the same manner, therefore, as Christ did rise in the substance of flesh, and pointed out to His disciples the mark of the nails and the opening in His side (now these are the tokens of that flesh which rose from the dead), so shall He also raise us up by His own power."*

Jn 20:20-27.

1 Co 6:13-14.
Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 7,1.

Just as the cutting of the vine is buried and then yields grapes, and the grapes yield wine, which later becomes the blood of the Lord, *"so also our bodies, being nourished by it, and deposited in the earth, and suffering decomposition there, shall rise at their appointed time, the Word of God granting them resurrection to the glory of God, even the Father, who freely gives to this mortal immortality, and to this corruptible incorruption because the strength of God is made perfect in weakness."*

1 Co 15:53.
2 Co 12:3;
Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 2,3.

Speaking of death, we said that when God gives life, he gives death, because the two form a single unit; but now we can say that when God gives life, he gives it truly and forever, and that it will be a different life, but linked to the original, as a tree is to a seed. The most wonderful thing about a seed is what is hidden inside. Human beings—me and everyone else—are a manifestation of the divine being—of God. Human beings are a call to partake of the divine being. Now we can answer the question: What does eternal life consist of? Of participation in the three-person God,

participation in his life and in everything that God is.

Christian anthropology is the project and the fulfillment of the human person open to the divine. In the reflection about human beings in the light of the resurrection of Christ, the human element became eternally valid. Those who believe that Jesus' destiny is significant for the human person, believe in the eternal dimension of their own meaning.

Rm 8:24. The answer to the problem of the totality of life is not to be found on this side of death, but on the other side. Only in the light of the end, which cannot yet be seen or lived, can the life we are living be understood.

Eternal life is not confined by the coordinates of time and space and thus by what we can experience and demonstrate here, not so much because it is life but because it is eternal, i.e., another thing that cannot be demonstrated, and thus an object of faith.

Lk 15:4. Faith in the resurrection and eternal life is nothing more than a radicalization of our faith in the three-person God. It is nothing more than the glorious ending to the search for ourselves, in whom God has placed himself.

Is 40:15; Jr 32:27. In his prophecy, Isaiah refers to living beings in their weakness: *"The glory of Yahweh shall be revealed and all mankind shall see it."*

Activities

- In what ways does eternal life enrich your earthly life?
- How is society favored by human beings having faith?
- By way of prayer

Lord, I know that believing in you and receiving your body and blood are pledges of resurrection, and that resurrection simply means living in communion with you, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, forever.

CHAPTER X

TRINITARIAN AND CHRISTOLOGICAL COUNCILS

Objective: To understand that the councils express the Church's faith and substantially condense the Apostolic message.

10.1 Descriptive Trinitarian images prior to Nicaea

There are descriptive New Testament images of the Trinity that predate the expressions used at Nicaea to express faith in Jesus. These first understandings of Jesus adhere to the terms of Jewish thought. In fact, Jesus has been interpreted, understood and accepted in the light of Scripture.

The Christian community, almost immediately after the Resurrection —the year 35, possibly—, began to give Jesus a wide variety of Biblical titles, most of which he surely never applied to himself, but others specifically express his relationship with God, whom he called Father.

Mk 1:11; 3:11; 5:7;
12:6; 13:3; Jn 3:35.

Mt 3:17; Heb 1:6. This Father-Son relationship was the clear-
 Col 1:15,17. est, and led the early Church to see Jesus as the
 Rm 2:29; Lk 1:32. first-born, beloved, well-loved, chosen Son of the
 Mk 14:6; 1 Jn 4:9. Most High and Blessed; due to this unique rela-
 μονογενής. tionship he is called the only-begotten; he is also
 Mk 1:1; 1:11; 15:39. understood to be the Son who knows, thinks and
 Mt 3:6; 4:3; 11:27; speaks God's word. He himself is the word, wis-
 27:4; 10:20. dom and power of the pre-existing God; from the
 ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν beginning he is with God and at God's side, in
 καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. such a way that "*in the fullness of time*" he was
 sent by the Father to speak to us of the invisible
 God. God has always been with him and in him,
 and through him, with us.

Mt 1:16; Lk 9:20; Thus in Christ all the Scriptures are fulfilled,
 22:67; 24:26. and he is the Messiah. The Father directs and
 Ac 2:36; 3:20. rules the whole world through his Messiah-Son.

After the resurrection he is seated at the right
 hand, and is the heir, master and steward and, in
 the end, will turn everything back to the Father.

Ga 4:4. Like any human being he is "*born of a woman,*"
 but he is the one who is sent to show us God's
 Jn 5:22; Lk 22:30. love and way of being. He will judge the whole
 Ac 17:31. world, especially human beings, because he is
 also a human being. He does what God does,
 such as giving life and raising the dead, and thus
 in practice he is God. And if he is God in practice,
 then he must be so in reality because otherwise it
 would not be a consistent God. His death, like his
 birth in time and space, along with all the condi-
 tioning circumstances of his life, do not prevent
 him from being like the Father, because he is the
 incarnate Son, and different from the Father, to
 whom he always referred as his Father.

For St. John and St. Paul it is evident that Jesus belongs to divine transcendence.

<i>"In his body lives the fullness of divinity."</i>	Col 2:9; 1:19.
<i>"My Lord and my God."</i>	Jn 20:28.
<i>"Christ is the head of every man... and God is the head of Christ."</i>	1 Co 11:3.
<i>"And from their flesh and blood came Christ who is above all, God for ever blessed! Amen."</i>	Rm 9:5.

The fundamental question to answer is: Who is, in reality and in truth, in and of himself, actually, Jesus Christ? Who is he, all images and metaphors aside? This concern, already expressed in the Gospel, and that Matthew puts in Jesus' words: *"Who do you say I am?"* —What do I mean for you in this stage of your life?— is a vitally important issue. Mt 16:13.

According to most contemporary exegetes there is no Bible text that refers to Christ's nature, only to his functions, because it was never the hagiographers' intention or thinking to speak of divine nature or essence. But the texts can be considered the foundation of the explications given by the later councils. See note in Jerusalem Bible:
Jn 10:30.

In the early centuries of the Church many Christians wondered how Jesus could be taken as God without contradicting the divine oneness. This gave rise to the first heresies, i.e., those who denied Jesus' divine condition in order to defend God's oneness.

The first councils and the Church Fathers would make a great effort to extricate their thinking from the Judaic mindset and express the same

content in Greek terms. It is the same faith that the Apostles and the early Church professed, but universalized, and expressed in Greek terms and within the framework of Greco-Roman culture. The Roman element can be seen in, among other things, Emperor Constantine's interest in unifying the empire under one faith.

ὁμοούσιον. The council, and before it the Church Fathers, translate all this into one concept: "*consubstantial*". They are defending and acculturating the faith. Now they need not only to describe Jesus, but also to respond to the question in real, substantial, non-figurative, and, in a certain sense, ultimate terms: Who is Jesus in reality? Who was he, and who does he continue to be? The answer would be formulated more or less as follows: he is one with us and like us, and one with God and like God, true God and true human. God in himself and human in himself. Eternal with the Father—and thus pre-existing—and temporal with us. Creator with the Father and creature with us. And in this same way we could continue listing the divine and human attributes.

Jesus' consubstantiality with the Father does not emerge from any Biblical text using the Jewish mindset without the Greek and Apostolic perspective and mindset. In order to believe fully in Jesus Christ, the early Christians, who were originally Jewish, had to distance themselves from Jewish faith and practices, without giving them up entirely, but rather interpreting them and living them in a new way. The sacrifices were inter-

preted as a prefiguring of Christ's singular sacrifice, reenacted in the Eucharist. Cf Heb 5:1f; 7:1f.

The Holy Scripture continued to have the same value and meaning as it had for the Jews, including Jesus; but after the resurrection other texts were added— letters, gospels and other writings—which the Christian faith saw as fulfilling the faith of the people of Israel.

In this way, Jesus was first interpreted in an exclusively Biblical key; he could not have been interpreted in any other way, as his presence and meaning would have been utterly incomprehensible without it. For the Romans, who had invaded Israel, Jesus was a figure who belonged to the revolutionary movements of the Jewish patriots. His message, for them and for the Greeks, was lacking in interest. Cf Lk 24:27. Ac 17:18 y 22f.

What are we trying to say when we claim that Jesus is God with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, "*consubstantial, one in being*"? ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς.

1. In terms of parity: that Jesus is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. Mt 28:19.

2. In terms of communion: that Jesus is united to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

"I am in the father and the Father is in me." Jn 14:11.

"I am not alone because the Father is with me." Jn 16:32.

3. In terms of presence: that Jesus is present for the Father and for the Holy Spirit, and both for Jesus.

- Jn 14:13. 4. In terms of action: that Jesus acts with the Father and the Holy Spirit, always. *"Whatever you ask the Father for in my name I will do."*
5. In terms of revelation: that in Jesus and through Jesus, God has told us everything he wants to say. That Jesus is God's total revelation.
- Heb 1:1-4.
- Col 1:15; Jn 14:7,9; 12:45; 1:18. 6. In terms of vision: that Jesus is the visualization of the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- Jn 15:23. 7. In terms of discord: *"Anyone who hates me hates my Father."*
8. In terms of union: no one can be more united to God than Jesus, and God cannot be more united to anyone than to Jesus.
- Mk 1:11; Mt 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; Mk 9:7; 12:6; Lk 3:22; 9:35; 20:13. 9. In terms of bestowal: God cannot give of himself to anyone more than to Jesus.
- Jn 10:17. 10. In terms of surrender: no one can surrender herself to God more than Jesus has.
- Jn 8:36. 11. In terms of rights: Jesus has the same rights as the Father and the Holy Spirit.
12. In terms of worship: he deserves the same adoration, veneration and devotion.
13. In terms of eternal glory, the same as the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Activities

- Point out and explain the Trinitarian meaning of three Biblical texts of your choice.

10.2 Council of Nicaea, 325 A.D.

The Council of Nicaea marked a decisive moment in the disputes that arose around the doctrine of those who did not believe that Jesus was true God; they agreed that he resembled God, that he was God's lieutenant, or a kind of intermediary, an angel or an apostle, but not God, because if he were, God would no longer be a single being. Arius (256-336).

The dogmatic formulas were the Church's way of making the faith intelligible in a certain time and mindset. The Council of Nicaea established the unity of the faith of the Church and the Empire. This was the hope, and to a certain extent it was achieved, but not entirely.

It is important to point out that the policy of Constantine and the Church Fathers had a favorable effect on Christian faith. They did not examine the speculative aspects of Arian doctrine. The Fathers merely wanted to safeguard the doctrine of the Bible and tradition. Thus they turned to the baptismal profession—from the Church of Caesarea or Jerusalem—and completed the Biblical forms of this profession with interpretative glosses aimed at heading off the opposing doctrines, personified in the doctrine of Arius.

The decisive statement of the Nicene creed centers on the person of Jesus: *"We believe... in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God; begotten, not made, one in being with the Father, through whom all* ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ Πατρὸς.

καὶ
ἐνανθρωπήσαντα.
Dz-H 125. *things were made in heaven and on earth; who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made man.*"

The Nicene Creed is important for a number of reasons:

1. It can be characterized as a liturgical profession inspired in the Biblical and Church tradition. It strikes a *balance between tradition and interpretation*. It does not delve into abstract speculation. The Church builds its faith on the shared tradition as expressed primarily in worship. However, it does not take tradition literally, but as a living tradition that continues to develop in dialogue with new questions that come up.

2. The use of Greek concepts means strength and life. It was no mean feat to express the Christian message in a language that spoke to the mentality of the time. The profession of faith is a sign of a deepening understanding the faith that keeps it alive and vigorous, with the strength of the incarnation and spiritual presence. Translation into philosophical concepts does not mean a betrayal or distortion of faith; on the contrary, it is a valuable service and a sign of full acceptance.

3. The council, challenged by Arianism, attempts to consolidate and reinforce the claims of the New Testament regarding the Son of God, and to confirm that God himself is revealed in Jesus Christ. It states that Jesus Christ is not a creature, but God; that he was not made, but begotten, and that he is one in being —ὁμοούσιον— with the Father. The statements do not constitute

a hellenization, but rather a de-hellenization of Christianity. The term *homoousios* comes from ὁμοούσιον. the emancipatory doctrine of Valentinian gnosticism, which explains why many of the Nicene Fathers and many post-Nicene bishops and theologians resisted accepting it. The council wanted to state that the Son is divine by nature and belongs to the same entitative rank as the Father, meaning that whoever is with him is with the Father. Jn 14:9f.

4. It did not attempt to explain precisely how this one being of the Father and the Son can be reconciled with the distinction between the two. The Council of Nicaea —like most of the councils— limited itself to finding a solution to the problem that it was called to address. Weighing the implications of its statement is a job for subsequent theological reception and interpretation.

5. The council ended up saying that Jesus is not the same person as the Father, but that he is the same as the Father, that he does not form a moral unity with the Father, but rather an essential unity for both the Son and the Father, and thus a unity in their nature and in their action.

6. *The Nicene definition does not offer any speculative interest; it focuses on salvation.* Athanasius, who headed up the opposition in the controversy with Arius, always insisted that if Jesus is not true God, then we were not redeemed by him, and we are not God's daughters and sons. Athanasius summarized his position in these terms: "Therefore He was not man, and then became God, but He was God, and then became man, and that to deify us." The doctrine of the divinity of Jesus

Athanasius, Adv
Arrianos I, 39 PG 26,
91-94; Ib II, 47; 59;
69f PG 26, 245-248;
271-274; 293-296.

Christ must be understood within the framework in which the early Church set the total salvation of humanity and of its idea of redemption as the divinization of humanity. Salvation means communion with God, sonship, and in the language of the Fathers, divinization. In Athanasius it means that the Son of God by nature makes us children of God by grace and adoption when we receive the Holy Spirit. This is a completely Biblical idea that does not wipe out the distinction between God and humanity, that deals in personal categories, not natural ones: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who comes to sanctify people, thereby marking them for Trinitarian life. This is what the Greek Fathers called divinization.

7. Although Nicaea wanted to safeguard the Biblical idea from philosophical deformation, it was only able to repel the attack by resorting to the same weapons and language as the philosophers, and introducing the term *homousios*.
 ὁμοούσιον. The Nicene dogma represents *the introduction of metaphysical thought into the Church's preaching and theology*.

8. After that the Bible's eschatological and historical thinking was pushed aside, and speculative work predominated, relegating the Biblical aspect.

9. The kenosis of the Son of God, closely related to the Biblical statements about the incarnation, partially lost their meaning. The humanization of God —Athanasius' great topic— and above all, the passion and death of the Son of

God become complicated problems after the Council of Nicaea.

“The Nicene Council, after solving the problem of faithfulness to the Bible and tradition, created other problems that we have to solve today by taking Nicaea as our starting point. Thus the dogma of the first universal council shows that dogmatic formulas never represent the definitive formulation of a debate; on the contrary, they give rise to new questions and problems. Precisely because dogmas are true, they need to be reinterpreted constantly.”

Cf Walter Kasper,
The God of Jesus
Christ,
p. 213.

Reformulation and adaptation of the Nicene faith

The anti-Arian insertions offer the strongest evidence of the doctrinal focus of the Nicene creed: it aimed to rebut specific errors of Arianism, or errors attributed to Arianism by most bishops. Following the order in which they appear in the text, the first of these formulations is based on the essence—or substance—of the Father. The aim here is to respond to the claims that the *logos* was created from nothing and there is no ontological communion between the Son and the Father. The contrary claim is that the Son has the Father’s essence, introducing a concept that is confirmed with the term “one in being” or “substance.”

ουσία.
λόγος.

Activities

- What do you think would have happened to Christian faith if the Council of Nicaea had not been held?
- Which Biblical expression best expresses for you the sense of “consubstantial”?
- Why was it so urgent to give metaphysical answers to the Arian positions?
- Read something about the history of the councils.

10.3 Trinitarian theology in the East and West

Jn 3:31; 10:17; 15:9;
17:23-26; 1 Jn 4:8;
2 Co 13:11; Ep 1:6;
Col 1:13, etc.

For the Greek Fathers, claiming that God is love is not a metaphor or a moral attribute; it is a characterization that touches on God’s very being. Love is activity and life. The New Testament’s insistence that God is being who loves us is revealing. By loving, God comes out of himself, not in search of something, but as a giving of his love, life and activity.

Love lives through its many manifestations, properties and acts. The property of a living being who loves consists of being aware of his love and making it real; his living being is no less than his love toward those for whom he is alive.

People are alive thanks to a series of physical-biological and psychological acts that make them live and without which it would be impossible to stay alive. God is alive due to his love. Irenaeus said that “*God was Father due to his love.*” The fullness of the unity between his life and his be-

ing Father is a function of how alive he is. Life is a radical and originating unity because it is the source of all his **activities** and at the same time the result of them.

People's **activities** are simply an extension of their own life and can be distinguished from those that keep them alive. Being alive is one thing, but not as a mere negation of division, but as a unifying activity, because it unifies people's physical, biological, psychological, conscious and subconscious **activities**.

For the Greeks, being is also source, beginning, *πηγή, αρχή*, so that a living being lives and is a life principle. This is its "ἐνέργεια" its potential and actions. These consist of making it live; it lives because it acts in order to be alive.

We can think of God as the same subsisting dynamism and love, as the same "Pater subsistens" that begets the Son and creates and sustains all being. All-powerful and Eternal God, Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ and Our Father, is Love—the eternal lover and the love that we have inside—that was manifested in the gift of his own Son as the first-born of all creation, who was sent to make us share in his love and in his condition of Son.

The Greek Fathers were more inclined to see the reality of things on the basis of activity, rather than activity on the basis of reality; unity on the basis of activity, rather than activity on the basis of unity. For a living being, action "ad intra" in itself and for itself is not subsequent to its being;

Prius est esse quam
operari.

ὁ Θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν.
1 Jn 4:8.

it *is* its way of being. If this action does not take place, the being does not exist as one and specific, characteristic and singular. It is not true that first comes being and then action; being implies acting in order to be alive and personal. We Westerners say that God is love because he loves us; Easterners would say that God is love in himself, because he cannot exist in any other way.

10.4 First Council of Constantinople, 381 A.D. Dz-H 150

In the year 381, the second ecumenical council was held in Constantinople, chaired by the patriarch of the city, St. Gregory Nazianzen. The Eastern bishops met to define the Church's faith regarding the Holy Spirit against Arius' teaching. Dz-H 150. There they proclaimed the *Dogmatic Creed*. It was approved by Pope St. Damasus in the year 382. Later this creed was recognized as the standard of faith for the universal Church by the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

The Council proclaimed the divinity of the Holy Spirit. But it preferred to avoid non-Biblical terms like "*consubstantial*" because these had given rise to objections in Nicaea. It preferred to express the divinity through reference to the following divine actions:

ἐκ πνεύματος
καὶ Μαρίας
τῆς παρθένου
ἐνανθρωπήσατα.

"—*The Son*— was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, and was made man." This council did not look at Mary's virginity as a virtue of hers, separate from her service to Trinitarian action. Ever since the first Church Fathers who passed on the Apostolic faith—for example,

St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Irenaeus— all had seen Jesus’ virginal birth as the sign that the Father wished to give humanity to show that both the incarnation and salvation are not a result of human effort but of divine action. Virginité should not be taken as *the noun* —that is to say, as the object of faith— but as *the adjective*, that is, that which qualifies Mary’s maternal service to the Father’s action through the Holy Spirit.

“*And I believe in the Holy Spirit.*” The Spirit is, εἰς.
like the Father and the Son, an object and focus of Christian faith. It is worth noting that this council uses the literary genre of the formula of faith to define truth. In this profession, the preposition *in* —“εἰς”— stands out, with its sense of personal orientation, almost as if we were saying “*I believe toward.*” It is not about believing in as *in* a location (inside) —for example: in (inside) the Church—. The Holy Spirit is professed as a “*personal subject*” to whom we submit through faith.

“*Lord.*” The Spirit’s divinity is affirmed. Lord- τό κύριον.
ship corresponds only to God. It is the title given to the risen Jesus, which we profess earlier in the same Creed: “*And in one Lord, Jesus Christ.*” Here the echoes of Scripture can be heard: “This Lord is the Spirit.” This title indicates his divine 2 Co 3:17.
equality with the Father, *Universal Sovereign*, and Παντοκράτορα.
the *Lord* Jesus Christ. It is the title by which the Septuagint Bible translated the names Yahweh, Adonai and Elohim into Greek.

“*Creator of life.*” The most common expression is ζωοποιόν.
“giver of life.” This is also true, but the profession of faith goes further: he is “*the one who makes,*” ποιέω.

or creates life,” and thus can also give it. It is the Spirit who pours out divine life. Therefore he is the source of our sanctification and of our participation in Trinitarian life. He has the function of making things new, which goes all the way back to Genesis. Yahweh God breathed his Breath — Spirit— of life into man, and he became a living being, with God’s life.

Gn 2:7.

The one who raises Jesus is the Father, through the Spirit, and that Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son “*will give life to our own mortal bodies.*” The Spirit originally was not understood in a personal sense, as he was clearly understood and defined in this council.

Rm 8:11.

παρά τοῦ πατρὸς. “*Who proceeds from the Father*” expresses the relationship within the Trinity. It takes its inspiration from Jn 15:26; 14:26. This is the basis for professing the Spirit as God, not creature; but also as consubstantial with the Father and the Son. The Spirit can give life because he “proceeds” from the Father. Here the word does not refer to generation, to distinguish him from the Son. The term “proceed” is Biblical: taken from Jn 15:26. The Council explains that this proceeding consists of an outpouring of the Spirit.

συμπροσκυνούμενον.
συνδοξαζόμενον. “*Who with the Father and the Son is to be worshipped and glorified.*” These words once again express the Spirit’s divinity, using a liturgical formula. Only God may be worshipped. Also the Spirit, worshipped not only together with the Father and the Son, but in the same act of worship with them. His being does not belong to a lower category. He is a personal object of worship, and

thus he is prayed to as well. Christians do not just pray *in the Spirit*, but also *to the Spirit*, as they do to the Father and the Son. The fact that he is glorified together with them with the same glory means that the Spirit shows himself with the same divine dignity as the Father and the Son, inasmuch as we do not see God directly: we see him in the expressions of his greatness, works that are common to the three Persons. CEC 2670-2672.

“Who spoke through the prophets.” This statement was not new at the time: it has Biblical and catechetical echoes. However, the way of understanding “the prophets” by both the Bible and the Church Fathers encompasses all the inspiration of the Scriptures. With this phrase the Creed starts the description of what the Spirit does in the History of Salvation. The Holy Spirit speaks through the hierarchical Church and through the people of God.

Next the Council professes the Spirit’s action in our human existence by including a series of points in the third part of the Creed, which corresponds to the Spirit’s action: the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church; one baptism for the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and eternal life. Dz-H 150.

The Council of Constantinople was a synod of the Eastern Church that took on a universal scope when it was reaffirmed at the Council of Chalcedon in the year 451. It produced a doctrinal text —*Tomus*— that was lost; we know of its contents, however, from the letter that the synod of the year 382 addressed to Pope Damasus,

and from the Western synod of Rome, held in the same year 382 and chaired by the Pope himself. This text speaks of the one divinity, power and essence —“ουσία”— of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are afforded the same honor, dignity and sovereignty and who exist in three persons.

Dz-H 151. Canon 1^o anathematizes Macedonianism, Ari-

Dz-H 290-295.

anism and other heresies. The Western synod of 382, called by Damasus, taught substantially the same thing. Aside from the *Tomus ad Flavianum*, written with theological terminology, the Council of Constantinople took up a formula that Epiphanius had left in his *Ancoratus*. This formula completed the doctrine regarding the Spirit as set down in the Nicene Creed: “We believe... in the

ζωοποιόν.

*Holy Spirit, Lord and **giver of life**, who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son is **worshipped** and **glorified**, and who spoke through the prophets.*” This doctrine of the

συμπροσκυνούμενον.
συνδοξαζόμενον.

Dz-H 150; NR 250.

Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which is the Church’s primary profession of faith, unites the Churches of the East and West.

It is surprising that the article of faith about the Holy Spirit, unlike the one about Jesus Christ, does not use the term ὁμοούσιον. However, the confusion caused by the Nicene formula discouraged its use. But in terms of content, the doctrine about the *divinity of the Holy Spirit* was perfectly clear.

ο κυρίον.
τό κυρίον

It was doubtlessly known that “**the Lord**” was reserved for the Son and thus the Spirit was named

with the neuter article. The Holy Spirit is he who belongs to the category of Lord, which is God.

The term “*giver of life*” expressed the same idea ζωοποιόν. from the perspective of action and function. This concept had to mean that the Spirit is not only the gift of life, but also the giver of this gift—giver and gift who gives himself, author of spiritual life, which is proper to God. This formula underscores the salvific and existential character of the profession of the Holy Spirit.

The Fathers always argued as follows: if the Holy Spirit is not true God, we have not been divinized by him. The formula “*who proceeds from the Father*” was meant to express the *intra-Trinitarian relations of the Father and the Spirit*. It was important to keep the Holy Spirit from being considered a creature of the Father, but it was also important to state that the Spirit is not begotten as the Son is, and yet he maintains a relationship of origin with the Father. Jn 15:26.

The relationship with the Son was not specified until later, with the added “*filioque*,” a formula that gave rise to a conflict with the Eastern Church that has yet to be sorted out. See CEC 248f.

The phrase “*who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified*” reintroduces the *doxological topic* that had already played a key role in Basil at the beginning of the controversy. The formula is trying to say that the Holy Spirit is owed the same worship and glorification as the Father and the Son and that he should be worshipped and glorified along with them. This means that

the Spirit is afforded the same dignity as the Father and the Son. Finally, “*who spoke through the prophets*” highlights once again the Holy Spirit’s role in the history of salvation. The Old and New Testaments are united by the same Spirit; one is the promise and the other its fulfillment.

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, after its reception by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, became the common legacy of all the Christian Churches of the East and West. It came to be one of the most robust ecumenical formulations and can be considered the fundamental summary of Christian faith.

All other statements about the Spirit are ultimately glosses on this profession of faith, including the famous addition of the Western creed that states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son —*filioque*— which is not found in the Eastern creed. The formula explained the divinity of the Holy Spirit as a premise of his salvific function; it also shed light on the Spirit’s relationship with the Father, but it left open the question of his relationship with the Son.

Activities

- Read Chapter 1 of the book *Gospel and Tradition* by Bernard Sesboüé, S.J., Convivium Press, 2011.

10.5 Constantinople II, 553 A.D., the 5th Ecumenical Council Dz-H 421-438.

More than a new definition, what this Council approved in canon 1 is the vocabulary that had been used since the Cappadocians to express the Trinitarian mystery in a conceptual form, with reference to the Economy revealed in Scripture, which serves as the basis for the doctrine:

St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Basil the Great, brother of Gregory of Nyssa, 4th century.

“If someone does not profess a single nature or substance of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and a single virtue and power, consubstantial Trinity, a single divinity worshipped in three hypostases or persons, he is anathema. Because one and only is God the Father, from whom all; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all; and one Spirit, in whom all.” Dz-H 421.

The Council teaches the unity of God, which consists of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit sharing one and the same nature and substance, and being distinguishable only by being different persons. Therefore, each and every one of the divine attributes is affirmed equally in all three. This means that when it comes to the Holy Spirit, everything proclaimed about divinity should be professed, as it is with respect to the Father and the Son. For example, if God is eternal, the Father and the Son are eternal, and by this same account eternity must be attributed to the Holy Spirit. And yet each one is a person inasmuch as he exists in himself, impossible to confuse as such, whereby they are not merely different names given to the one God, or different ways that he manifests himself.

Here is how the process of salvific revelation is presented: the Father is the origin of all things; he has made all things by means of his Son, and all things have their perfection and consistency in the Spirit. The Council does not separate the order of divine being from the process God followed when he put into motion the saving plan that he has revealed to us. On the contrary, he shows how both orders coincide, i.e., God's way of being and the order of his manifestation.

The separation between God's way of being and the salvific process came later, and the treatise on the Trinity lost its transcendence and became meaningless for Christian life. In presenting the mystery of our faith here, we have tried to avoid this separation throughout our reflections, in an attempt to recognize the value of the Trinitarian mystery for Christian life and its salvific force.

It was a very unfortunate limitation of later Latin theology that it focused theological reflection on the aspect of God's being—in other words, on ontological expressions—to such an extent that the economic order, that of his salvific work, was neglected. The clarity with which the Holy Spirit's action should have been highlighted, became dull and cloudy. Attention was not paid to the Holy Spirit's ongoing, common action. The Trinitarian mystery was turned into a metaphysical mystery, and its importance as a salvific mystery was relegated. Something that was living and highly inspirational became murky, abstract and overly intellectualized.

Activities

- Read the *Tomus ad Flavianum*. Dz-H 290-295.
- By way of prayer:

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, Cf Ep 3:14f.
from you all human and spiritual families take
their name. By the abundance of your love give
us the strength of your Spirit, and make Christ
live through faith in our hearts, so that we can be
rooted in love for him and set firmly in his love,
and we can comprehend Christ's love in all its
breadth, length, depth and height, and know him,
even as we know that he is beyond all knowledge.
In this way, knowing him in our life experience,
we will be filled with the fullness of the three-
person God.

CHAPTER XI

DOCTRINE ABOUT THE TRINITY

Objective: To understand the text of the Trinitarian dogmatic expressions.

11.1 The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Scripture needs a dogmatic criterion to be interpreted, because it contains many different authors saying many things, and when it comes to Jesus, the titles, images and metaphors are too numerous to count. But it would be wrong to say that anything goes in interpreting Scripture, although just about every heresy has found some verse to back up its arguments. And conversely, dogma only makes sense if it is read on the basis of what Scripture says. This demands that we bear in mind the revealed message in its entirety, without focusing exclusively on one part or author and overlooking the rest.

Trinitarian faith is not religious metaphysics, although in the early centuries of the Church it was expressed in those terms and came to the defense of multiple philosophies. Trinitarian dogma is a faith-informed reflection on the mystery of Christ, of God and of humanity. It can only be understood from the standpoint of faith in the mystery of our salvation. We understand the word “mystery” in the Biblical sense, i.e., that which was hidden to us and has been lately revealed.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church —CEC— starts out by talking to us about God, who is understood to be God the Father, he who revealed
 CEC 198. himself to Israel as the one and only God, known
 CEC 200. by the name Yahweh. This same God is the one
 CEC 203-204. whom Jesus reveals as his Father, and he is his
 CEC 238-242. only Son. Christ speaks to us and sends the Holy Spirit, who is sent to the Apostles and the community of believers by both the Father in the name of the Son, and by the Son in person, once
 Jn 14:26; CEC 244. he returns to the Father’s side.

The doctrine of the First Council of Constantinople of the year 381 A.D. sets forth and teaches that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son.

It affirms that the Latin and Greek doctrines are complementary. The former teaches that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son; the later that he proceeds from the Father by way of the Son. *“At the outset the Eastern tradition expresses the Father’s character as first origin of the Spirit. By confessing the Spirit as he ‘who proceeds from the Father,’ it affirms that he comes*
 Jn 15:26.

from the Father through the Son. The Western tradition expresses first the consubstantial communion between Father and Son, by saying that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (filioque). It says this, 'legitimately and with good reason,' for the eternal order of the divine persons in their consubstantial communion implies that the Father, as 'the principle without principle,' is the first origin of the Spirit, but also that as Father of the only Son, he is, with the Son, the single principle from which the Holy Spirit proceeds. This legitimate complementarity, provided it does not become rigid, does not affect the identity of faith in the reality of the same mystery confessed."

Cf AG 2.
Cc Florence, 1439:
Dz-H 1302.
Dz-H 1331.
Cc Lyon II, 1274:
Dz-H 850.
CEC 248.

How the CEC summarizes the doctrine

"The Trinity is One. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the consubstantial Trinity. The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire: The Father is that which the Son is; the Son that which the Father is; the Father and the Son, that which the Holy Spirit is, i.e. by nature one God... Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature."

Cc Constantinople, II, 553 A.D.
Dz-H 421.
Cc Toledo XI, 675: Dz-H 530.
Cc Lateran IV, 1215; Dz-H 804; CEC 253.

"The divine persons are really distinct from one another. God is one but not solitary. Father, Son, Holy Spirit are not simply names designating modalities of the divine being, for they are really distinct from one another: He is not the Father who is the Son, nor is the Son he who is the Father, nor is the Holy Spirit he who is the Father or the Son... The divine Unity is Triune."

Fides Damasi:
Dz-H 150-177.
Cc Lateran IV, 1215: Dz-H 804.
CEC 254.

CEC 255;
Cc Toledo XI,
675 A.D.: Dz-H 528. *“The divine persons are relative to one another. Because it does not divide the divine unity, the real distinction of the persons from one another resides solely in the relationships which relate them to one another: In the relational names of the persons the Father is related to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to both. While they are called three persons in view of their relations, we believe in one nature or substance.”*

Cc Florence, 1442:
Dz-H 1330. *Indeed everything—in the divine persons—is one where there is no opposition of relationship. Because of that unity the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son.*

Cc Florence:
Dz-H 331.
CEC 255.

Regarding divine action the Catechism says:
Cc Constantinople,
553 A.D.: *“The whole divine economy is the common work of the three divine persons. For as the Trinity has only one and the same nature, so too does it have only one and the same operation... However, each divine person performs the common work according to his unique personal property. Thus the Church*
Dz-H 421;
Florence, 1442;
Dz-H 1331. *confesses, following the New Testament, one God and Father from whom all things are, and one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things are, and one Holy Spirit in whom all things are. It is above all the divine missions of the Son’s Incarnation and the gift of the Holy Spirit that show forth the properties of the divine persons.”*

Cf 1 Co 8:6.

Cc Constantinople
II: Dz-H 421.

οἰκονομία. *“Being a work at once common and personal, the whole divine economy makes known both what is proper to the divine persons, and their one divine*

nature. Hence the whole Christian life is a communion with each of the divine persons, without in any way separating them. Everyone who glorifies the Father does so through the Son in the Holy Spirit; everyone who follows Christ does so because the Father draws him and the Spirit moves him."

Jn 6:44; Cf Rm 8:14;
CEC 259.

"The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity. But even now we are called to be a dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity: 'If a man loves me,' says the Lord, 'he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him.'"

Cf Jn 17:21-23.

Jn 14:23; CEC 260.

The CEC gives us a synthesis of Catholic doctrine about the Trinity. All of God's actions, in the economy of salvation, are common to the three divine persons, who have one and the same nature and therefore one and the same operation. And then it says that each divine person performs the common work according to his personal property; in creation, for example, the divine persons work in common, but with different characteristics proper to their personal being—appropriations. The Father, as he from whom all things proceed; the Son, through whom all things were made; and the Holy Spirit, who acts in the hearts of human beings.

St. Irenaeus expressed it with rare beauty in the second century:

"But the path of those belonging to the Church circumscribes the whole world,

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer V, 20,1.

*as possessing the sure tradition from the apostles,
and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same,
since all receive one and the same God the Father,
and believe in the same dispensation regarding the incarnation of the Son of God, and are cognizant of the same gift of the Spirit,
and are conversant with the same commandments, and preserve the same form of ecclesiastical constitution,
and expect the same advent of the Lord,
and await the same salvation of the complete man, that is, of the soul and body.*

It is important to point out that in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the treatise on the Trinity is the whole catechism, without which we could never understand or completely appreciate the mystery of Christ and our salvation, the Sacraments, the Church, or all the rest. Thus we can affirm that there is no true evangelization without catechesis, because the Holy Scripture and the Gospel can be interpreted in myriad ways if we stray from the history of the faith, i.e., from the apostolic faith and the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church over the centuries.

All of this should dispel any suspicion that Trinitarian doctrine is some kind of obstacle or distraction for understanding the Gospel and Christian life; on the contrary, it is the master key that opens up and makes sense of the whole Christian message.

“It should be added that the veneration accorded to the saints and angels, to the Virgin Mother of God and to Christ, leads to and culminates in the Trinity.” Dz-H 3325.

Activities

- Look up one of the councils that the CEC quotes and find out about the context in which it was held, what heresy it fought against and what the heresy consisted of, who was Pope at the time and what was said about the Trinity.
- Make a table of revealed and defined Trinitarian truths. Cf Arias Reyero, p 277; Index of Dz-H.

11.2 Ancient and modern Trinitarian errors

In the early centuries of the Church, its faith had not yet been set down, and naturally there was a strong desire and even a need to express it in Church life and liturgy, as well as in more or less understandable formulations that would codify the faith in a creed, and define it and defend it against currents of thought that ran counter to the Church’s common sense and belief. Dogma did not arise to impose truths; it served to defend the faith from contrary thinking. This is why the Church saw the need to defend its faith.

Heresy does not always come from a desire to do harm; it often starts with a mistake in thinking by someone who is striving to understand and explain the faith. In many cases, heretics were fervent, apostolic believers, eager to serve God and their fellow believers. If not for their errors

of faith, they might have been canonized. They tried to account for their faith, but for different reasons they lost sight of the whole of revelation, or they got sidetracked by their own very personal way of thinking, disregarding the Church's judgment as expressed by its pastors.

Among the Church Fathers, even among the great theologians, it is hard to find one who does stray from the faith as defined by the Church on at least one point; this includes St. Augustine and St. Thomas. All of them are also "*ministers of the* Word," no less than of the Church's thought and intellection.

Lk 1:2.

Around the year 190, a Christological and Trinitarian heresy called adoptionism appeared. Theodotus the Tanner contended that Jesus, the Son of Mary, was no more than a man upon whom the Holy Spirit had come down at the moment of his baptism. This was condemned by Pope Victor, who defended the Church's faith. But what was the Church's faith? It was becoming more and more necessary to define authorized dogma. At that time many popular conjectures were circulating, encouraged by Gnosticism. Christian life seemed to be a "tempest of ideas." There were brilliant lights, but also tremendous confusion.

In the 3rd century, adoptionism reared its head again. Paul of Samosata professed that there is no more than one person in the divinity: the Logos of God is merely one of the divine attributes. Christ saved us by dint of his virtue and holiness, and God exalted him for that, to such an extent that we can call him God.

Paul of Samosata was condemned and deposed because his teaching was not the Church's faith either. From the beginning of the apostolic preaching, the faithful were convinced that Jesus was much more than what the adoptionists professed and that his life and work had eternal meaning.

St. John tells us that the Jews accused Jesus of "*making himself God's equal*," which was cause for great scandal: "*But that only made the Jews even more intent on killing him, because, not content with breaking the Sabbath, he spoke of God as his own Father.*" Jn 5:18.

It is true that the speculations of the erudite can sometimes be a danger for the Church, but popular faith is no guarantee either. The Church, which embraces both the erudite and the simple, finally spoke, but not right away, and it was only after long labor pains that it finally saw its faith expressed in words. This happened during the first centuries of the Church; it could be argued that it was only a question of decades because it was actually just a handful of years in which the Trinitarian mystery was set forth and put into words. Later the formulas were revised to become more precise and profound, without modifying the fundamental doctrine. Cf CEC 7,1.

Adoptionism

This teaching contends that: Jesus Christ is only a man who possesses the Spirit of God, and who, for his holiness and merits, is adopted by God as his Son. Jesus is seen as a prophet, a Messiah or

a king, but not the Son of God in the strict sense, in the Trinitarian context.

This position was championed by Paul of Samosata in the 3rd century, and by Elipandus of Toledo and Felix of Urgel in the 8th century.

Agnosticism

A-γνῶσις. Agnostics contend that we cannot know anything about God, nor should we know anything about him. Whether or not he exists, what he is or is not like, goes beyond our capacity to know through certain, scientific means. God is a religious postulate that sparks little interest today.

Agnosticism insists on the fundamental incapacity to know that which goes beyond the perception of the senses; it reduces knowledge to the worldly, to that which is knowable with proper, unambiguous concepts.

Modern agnosticism includes people who think:

- That when it comes to God it is better not to know or inquire, because he is infinite and goes far beyond our knowledge.
- That God is an impersonal, lethargic being; uninterested in human beings and the world. He is like a physical force that goes beyond the physical, like a “black hole.”
- That God is the way you think and desire, if you need him. God is a mental and sentimental structure; he is not an objective reality; he is a mental and subjective reality —subjective, psychological agnosticism.

The problems of the cognoscibility of God gives rise to four more or less distinct issues: **a)** existence, **b)** nature, **c)** possibility of knowledge, **d)** possibility of defining.

Agnosticism separates the first two, which should be joined, and joins the last two, which should be separated. The first two questions, although distinguishable, are inseparable, because we have no direct intuition about the nature of anything. We must settle for studying God's nature by way of the indirect manifestations that he makes of himself in his creatures. We know God indirectly and therefore we speak about him in analogies. Spencer, by looking at the question of "God's nature" separately from "God's existence," deprives himself of the only natural means of knowing him, which is through his works.

Only by studying the Absolute and his manifestations together can we complete and fill in the concept of God by way of his creatures, which are not like God. The idea of God cannot be fully analyzed separately from the manifestations.

Arianism

This heresy took its name from Arius (256-336), a priest from Alexandria and later a Libyan bishop, who in 318 started propagating the idea that there are not three persons in God; there is only one, the Father. Jesus Christ was not God; rather he had been created by God from nothing as a kind of fulcrum for God's plan. The Son is therefore a creature, and the Son's being has a beginning. This means there was a time when he did

not exist. By sustaining this theory, Arius denied the eternity of the Word, which implies denying its divinity. Jesus can be called God, but only as way of speaking, on the basis of his intimate relationship with God.

Arius professed the existence of one eternal, incommunicable God; the Word, Christ, not divine, a creature, although exalted above all other creatures and chosen as the intermediary in the creation and redemption of the world. Arius concerned himself primarily with divesting Jesus Christ of his divinity, and he did the same with the Holy Spirit, whom he likewise saw as a creature, in fact inferior to the Word. His guiding principle was to defend God's oneness.

Ebionism

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer I, XXVI, 2;
XXX.

Against Celso, II, I;
De Princ IV, I, 22.
Hist Eccl, III, 27.

Tertullian,
Praes XXXIII, 5, 11;
Carn XIV, 18.

The term *Ebionites* is a translation of an Aramean word meaning "*poor people*." St. Irenaeus was the first to mention the word, but without explaining what it meant. Origen and Eusebius associate the name of these sects with the concept of "*poverty*" that they attributed to Christ. Other writers such as Tertullian, St. Hyppolitus, and Epiphanius assumed that the sect's name came from a man called Ebion.

The Ebionites were a group of 1st-century heretics influenced by Jewish faith, who found it very difficult to accept Christian faith entirely due to references to Jesus' divinity.

St. Justin's "*Dialogue with Trypho*," written around the year 140 A.D., mentions two Jewish

Christian sects that took their distance from the Church.

Some Ebionites denied Christ's divinity and virginal birth, clung to the observance of Jewish law, considered St. Paul an apostate, and recognized only St. Matthew's Gospel. They rejected the pre-existence and divinity of Christ. Moderate Ebionites were probably fewer in number. St. Epiphanius called the most heretical band Ebionites, and the Catholic-leaning group, Nazarenes.

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer I, XXVI,
2; III, XXI, 2; IV,
XXXIII, 4; V, I, 3.

Their teachings tend generally toward Gnosticism.

a. Matter is eternal. Creation is the transformation of pre-existing matter.

b. The logos —or Sophia— does not constitute a distinct person, as it does in Christian theology. Sophia produces the world through successive evolution.

Σοφία.

c. This universe is divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of good and the kingdom of evil. The Son of God reigns over the kingdom of good, and the world to come belongs to him. The Prince of Evil is the prince of this world. The Son of God is Christ, an intermediate being between God and creation. He is not a creature, but he is not equal to God either.

Cf Jn 14:30;
Ep 1:21; 6:12.

d. Adam was the bearer of the first revelation; Moses, of the second; and Christ, of the third, which is perfect.

e. Human beings are saved through knowledge —γνῶσις— by believing in God and by baptism.

Eusebius, *Hist Eccl*
IV 22,8; Jerome,
De Vir III, 2.

Clement of A.
Stromata, II 9,45.

Among their writings the Ebionites gave importance to a gospel according to St. Matthew and another one according to the Hebrews, which was known to Hegesippus, Origen and St. Clement of Alexandria.

Some scholars believe that they can be linked to the origin of Islam.

Modalism

This sect maintained that God is triune only in his way of operating: creation, incarnation, sanctification, which is what we know as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It ultimately denies the relationship between God's being and his manifestation in action: God is one way and proceeds another. They said: God is triune as far as we are concerned, but he is one in himself.

Anyone who thinks that there was one time when the Father acted, another when the Son acted, and another when the Holy Spirit acted, or who divides the History of Salvation into three chapters, or who thinks that one part is the Father's job, another the Son's job and another the Holy Spirit's, to the exclusion of the other persons, has fallen into a modern modalism.

The Church's faith against these Trinitarian errors —Sabellianism and Modalism— maintains that the Trinity is not constituted by God's relationship with the world and humankind; it ex-

presses the being of God himself and expresses his way of acting in the History of Salvation.

Macedonius

Archbishop of Constantinople, and Eunomius (+395), denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit. They considered him a created being.

PG 39, 631-651.
Dz-H 1332.

Monarchianism

This heresy denies the Trinity in God. It states that the only true God is the Father; the Son is subordinate to him and is not a Son in the full sense of the word. He is an adopted son, as an angel or a man could be. According to Cerinthus and the 1st-century Ebionites, Jesus could not be anything more than a prophet adopted by God.

The divine monarchy, understood in the way of the Greek Fathers, did not imply superiority or inferiority in the divine persons, or royal subordination. It referred to divine oneness as the sole principle of all order and reality, including intra-Trinitarian reality —**mono**: one, only, and **arche**: principle, origin, chief—, meaning that the Father, without forsaking his equality with the other persons, is the Principle of Trinitarian oneness and action. In God there is no anarchy, synarchy, or oligarchy; there is only monarchy understood as one God as the Origin of everything and as Father.

μονο.
ἀρχή.

Monarchianism as a heresy saw the Father as superior to the Son and the Holy Spirit, not as equals: there was subordination among the di-

vine persons. This contradicts divine unity and the equality of the persons.

Nowadays a kind of Monarchianism exists in practice when Jesus Christ is not recognized as true God and equal to the Father. At the heart of this position is a kind of scandal at the incarnation, the idea that Jesus is like God, but diminished; the distinction is not made between Jesus in time and history, and Jesus in eternity, glorified.

Sabellianism

In Rome Sabellius of Libya came up with another system —Sabellianism: the Word and the Spirit are abstractions; Jesus is God and is not distinguished from the Father: in him, in time, the Father was born, died and rose from the dead. In other words, the Father suffered and died— patripassianism. Depending on whether one considers him in time or in eternity, he will be knowable or unknowable, visible or invisible, created or uncreated, mortal or immortal. The doctrine would seem to rescue divine oneness, but it betrayed the Father and the Son because it affirmed that one and the other were the same.

Dz-H 1332. This was a heresy of the 3rd and 4th centuries. It was condemned by Pope Callixtus I as alien to the faith of the Church, and then moved the Egypt around the year 275 A.D. In the 2nd century Praxeas proposed a similar stance, and Tertulian wrote one of the most profound and insightful polemics about the Trinity, which inspired many later authors.

This conception, which came to be known as Sabellianism, Modalism or Monarchianism, re-emerged as a tendency in different movements, especially in liberal 19th-century Protestantism.

One modern form of Sabellianism can be found in those who identify the persons of the Holy Trinity as the “Creator,” the “Redeemer” and the “Sanctifier,” referring to their actions as exclusive of each one of the persons, when they are really common, and only by appropriation do we attribute them to the divine persons.

Subordinationism

This heresy maintains that Jesus is not equal to the Father, but inferior, created since the beginning of time but subordinate to the Father. Thus it attempts to resolve the scandal of the passion and death. It argues that the Logos and the Holy Spirit do not proceed or receive their essence from the Father; they are divine forces with which God configures the world and the History of Salvation. In this way, Subordinationists believe they remain faithful to monotheism and divine transcendence. Heresy of the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

Joachim of Fiore (1130-1202)

In the 12th century, the abbot of a monastery in southern Italy proposed a new version of history: the kingdom of the Father occurred in the Old Testament; the kingdom of the Son in the hierarchical Church, which at that time had many shortcomings, stains and sins; and a third kingdom would come, that of the Holy Spirit, a

Dz-H 803, 807.

Church in accord with the spirit of the Gospel, the promises of the prophets and the most authentic aspirations of humanity.

We must accept not only the holiness of the Church that we constitute as Christians, but also its sinfulness, because we live in this sink of evil that we all contribute to. The Holy Spirit acts with us, not independently of us.

Tritheism

Dz-H 112-115; 804f;
2828. This belief conceives of the divine persons with the same characteristics as human persons, as substances or subjects independent in their being, in their life and in their action. It was condemned in 1215 by the 4th Lateran Council.

Jn 17:21-22. It is easy to fall into this error by thinking that in God there is a community or a family, or that the divine persons reach an agreement or unite their efforts. It comes from thinking of the Trinity with psychological criteria and judging the divine persons as if they were human persons.

The communion of the divine persons, even supposing that it has existed forever in terms of their way of thinking, feeling and acting, is not only insufficient, it also contradicts divine oneness, because it supposes that each divine person is an independent personal being, different in his acting.

Even though we are called to intra-Trinitarian communion, our union with God is not the same as the unity of the divine persons. Only between psychological persons can there be common

union —communion, because only they open up to one another, exist with one another and live for one another. The union that faith professes of the divine persons in God is not so much union as perfective entitative unity, not moral union.

Many authors relied on selected Biblical texts to put together a doctrinal system that later led them to lose sight of the overall message. Catholic doctrine is characterized by considering the whole collection of texts and interpreting them in the light of others, thus accounting for our faith in a complete and coherent way.

Gnosticism

The term has a positive meaning. It comes from the Greek word “*gnosis*,” which means knowing, knowledge, and St. Paul attributes it all spiritual people. Christian Gnosticism grows in the understanding of God’s love as revealed in Christ, so that Christians can live it more deeply and give themselves more to Christ in others. This knowledge gives life, unifies, encourages; it is the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit and becomes contemplative theology that renews the world. Γνωσις.

“True knowledge is [that which consists in] the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved without any forging of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine,

Irenaeus,
Adv Haer IV, 33,8.

and neither receiving addition nor [suffering] curtailment [in the truths which she believes]; and [it consists in] reading [the word of God] without falsification, and a lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures, both without danger and without blasphemy; and [above all, it consists in] the pre-eminent gift of love, which is more precious than knowledge, more glorious than prophecy, and which excels all the other gifts [of God].”

But the word also had an unorthodox usage. It referred to an exaltation of knowledge believed to offer salvation and justification by means of the science of a group of enlightened believers who dedicated their lives to philosophy and asceticism. It had dualistic and eschatological tendencies. These currents of thought were pre-Christian and appeared in Jewish theology. Paul fights against them in the Letter to the Colossians and in the Pastoral Epistles. Gnosticism was a serious attack on the Church's faith.

Another contemporary error consists in not giving importance to the Trinitarian message, thinking that it makes no difference to switch the terms: “three gods and one person,” as if the Trinitarian message were not firmly rooted in the Gospel and Christian life, or as if Jesus' message were comparable to that of any important figure.

It is also a Trinitarian and Christological error to speak of the Word, or of the Second Person of the Trinity as someone other than Jesus.

Activities

- Take a look at the world around you and notice how Trinitarian faith is lived; try to point out any of the heresies mentioned in this section.
- Why do you think the Church forbade representing the Holy Trinity as three equal persons?

One author says: Catholics are actually tritheists, except that since Jesus was monotheist, they do not want to give up monotheism. If the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct, and each one is God, then they are three gods, just as Peter, Andrew and James have the same human nature and are three men. Anything else is mere nominalism. Trinitarian doctrine is Greek speculation, and does not correspond to our mindset and culture.

11.3 Syntactical norms for Trinitarian expressions

A. The nouns that designate the divine essence should be used in the singular: omnipotence, wisdom, mercy. It must not be said, for example, that in God there are three wisdoms, omnipotences, or mercies. We can say that Jesus is God, and the same goes for the Father and the Holy Spirit, although not separately, but it is not right to say that God is Jesus, or that God is the Holy Spirit. Dz-H 542.

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.”

Augustine, De Trin V, 8,9. There should be no equation established between God and Jesus.

Dz-H 529. It should not be said that in God the same “You” occurs three times because that would be three independent centers of reference, operation or decision and therefore three gods. When we refer to God as one “You,” we are implicitly referring to the three persons. And when we address one of the divine persons, we are implicitly referring to the other two. It cannot be said that in God there are three “I’s,” because the concept “I” makes reference to consciousness, to the person as a center of action and reference, which in the divine persons does not occur independently the way it does in the human person.

Dz-H 2697, 2830. What suits the divine persons should not be applied to the Trinity; the Trinity is not the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit; the three are the Trinity, but the Trinity is not each one of them. The three-person God is the origin when it comes to creatures, but the Father is the origin with respect to the Son, and the Father and the Son are the origin with respect to the Holy Spirit, which does not mean that he is a creature.

Dz-H 415, 441. **B.** Articles and pronouns are used to designate the divine persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When we refer to God we do not use articles except to distinguish or contrast him to other gods, for example: the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob.

C. Adjectives may be used in the plural (*Translator’s Note: this refers to languages like Spanish*

and Portuguese that have plural adjectives) when they apply to the divine persons, for example: the Father is all-powerful, the Son is merciful, or both are all-powerful and merciful. And they should be used in the singular when they are applied to the divine nature or essence: one all-powerful and merciful God. The divine nature is not shared because it is one and indivisible. It is possessed by the three persons in its entirety.

The divine attributes are common to the three persons and should not be applied to any one of the persons exclusively. These attributes designate the divine unity; for example, if we say that God is holy, good, love, spirit, life, light, etc., we are referring to the three persons, or to the one true God. It is not right to say: the Father is the one God *par excellence*, because unity and oneness, and all the attributes, inhere equally in the three divine persons: God is not triple, but triune. Dz-H 75, 529.

D. Adjectives, participles and adverbs are not used to designate nature: it is not right to say triple-person God, or God existing in the Trinity; the appropriate expression is that the one God is the Trinity, but triune God is also acceptable. When we say that God is spirit, we affirm it as something proper to the divine essence and therefore, common to the three persons. We do not say that God is the Holy Spirit. Dz-H 528.
Augustine,
De Trin VIII, 12.

E. The properties of each person cannot be applied to the divine nature: it is not right to say that the divinity or the divine nature begets, is born or dies, but rather that the Father begets, the Son is born, the Spirit proceeds. Dz-H 804.

But when the properties are taken in a personal sense, we can say that God is born, or dies in Jerusalem, or we can refer to the child God, or God the child, although the phrases lend themselves to misinterpretation.

F. There are some typical or “stock” phrases to express the faith: the Father begets, the Son is begotten or sent, the Spirit proceeds. It is not right to say that the divine persons have an equal essence; they have one and the same essence, because the essence is not common, but one. Essence in God is not an abstraction of what the three persons are; essence is God’s reality that has existed forever in three persons. The nature is one and common; there are not three natures, essences or divine substances.

It is not right to refer to three diverse persons, but to three distinct persons. Nor is it right to speak of a solitary God, because by nature he is one.

G. It is not right to say that the divine persons form a community, society, council or family, because they are not persons in the psychological sense. Only Jesus, as a historical human person, is the expression and incarnation of his divine and eternal personal being, and only Jesus belonged to a family, together with Joseph and Mary.

H. In God there are three subsistents: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but not three substances. Given that the actions *ad extra* that the Trinity carries out are common to the three divine persons due to efficient causality, a given

action can be attributed to each one of them, but at the same time it is important to bear in mind their personal characteristics; for example: creation, redemption, sanctification and glorification.

The incarnation, even though all three persons are involved, is exclusive to the Second Person. We can say that the Second Person, who is Jesus, was truly born, suffered, died and rose again; but we cannot say the same about the three-person God. Dz-H 367.

“Those things which belong absolutely to God as an essence —eternity, immortality, omnipotence, etc.— are spoken of the Trinity in the singular,” i.e., of God as one, and of the three persons, but not separately. When we say that God is Spirit, we say it of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Likewise when we say that God is Lord, it is not to be understood as excluding any of the divine persons. *“For there is nothing else of the divine essence besides the Trinity”* and *“in the Trinity there is but one God.”* Augustine, De Trin V, 8,9; 10,11. Augustine, De Trin VII, 6,11; V, 8,9.

I. There are privileged prepositions in Trinitarian language. We say that everything proceeds **from** the Father, **through** the Son, **in** the Holy Spirit, or that our prayer is addressed to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Dz-H 421, 680, 3326.

Following St. Bonaventure (+1274) we can make the following numerical game:

In God there is

One common nature, essence or substance for the three persons; it is one and the same.

Two processions: the Son's and the Holy Spirit's.

Three persons —hypostases or subsistents—: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Four relations: fatherhood, sonship, active and passive spiration. These are four properties by which the persons are characterized in their personal being. Active spiration is not a personal property because it is not differentiated from fatherhood and sonship.

Five notions —notes by which we know the divine persons and distinguish among them—: unbegotten, fatherhood, sonship, active spiration and passive spiration.

Activities

- Attend a Eucharistic celebration and listen for examples of proper Trinitarian syntax. Write them down, including the moment when you heard them.
- Point out five Biblical attributes that can be used to designate the three divine persons.
- Point out those that can be used for each one of the divine persons.

11.4 Trinitarian concepts

All affirmations of faith make sense only in a certain context, in a whole set of concepts and in a system of ideas and reflections. This underscores the importance of knowing the context of dogmatic formulations, the history of Christian thought, the controversies that gave rise to it. In order to grasp the meaning of what is being affirmed and to preserve the faith, it is often necessary not just to remember what is said, but to know how to express it in different words. Perhaps nowhere is this more urgent than in the treatise on the Trinity.

Faith in the Trinitarian God demands not only faithfulness to a formula; we are called to be faithful to the truth of God who, when he revealed himself, used an expression in a certain time and culture, and who now must find another expression for the same message to be understood. Thus, for example, when we say that in God there are three persons, the truth that we want to profess and that was defined in the Councils of Nicaea, Ephesus, Chalcedon and Constantinople no longer corresponds to what we understand today by the word *person*. This means that in our eagerness to remain faithful to dogma, we turn the dogmatic affirmation into a heretical expression if we believe that in God there are three persons like human persons.

Revealed content cannot continue being the same unless it is translated into our language, mindset and culture. Only when we reflect on the original meanings can revelation continue to be

the same. When the times and language change, if we want to believe and express the same thing, we have to do it differently, but this difference does not necessarily consist of new concepts. It is more important to understand and explain the old concepts; only then will we know if we are believing the same thing and preserving the faith.

Explanation of Trinitarian terms

The tradition of the Church has used a collection of technical words to express its faith in the Trinity. They are theoretical, Greco-Latin instruments to express something about God, concepts that belong to a certain way of thinking, that come from a certain philosophy and as such, are not directly revealed. They do, however, help us to express our faith; they are something akin to a language of faith. But a particular philosophy cannot be an object of faith. The object of faith is the reality that these words try to express. Speaking about the Trinity has generated a sort of “philosophy of faith,” not so much because that specific philosophy is indispensable, but because the fact is that it has been the way of thinking used from the start to express and reflect on our faith.

Substance: This is the reality that permanently supports all the differentiations that are derived from it, about it or in it. Category that answers the question: What is this? It is defined as being in itself, i.e., that needs no subject of inhesion. What makes something be what it is— that is what we call substance.

Divine substance is what sustains the three persons. In the physical realm substances manifest themselves in accidents or characteristics; when it comes to God, there are no accidents. We speak of God as a substance by analogy with physical substances.

Nature: This designates substance insofar as it is a principle that gives rise to something, a principle of activity. Divine nature differentiates itself and takes concrete shape in three real subsistents, which are the three Persons. Nature personified in three different ways, which act inwardly and outwardly of the Trinitarian circle, create the universe, gradually manifest themselves, save, sanctify and glorify those who open themselves to God. In the physical realm, nature is deduced by actions and effects. We speak of divine nature by analogy with physical natures.

Essence: This is the intimate reason of being, by which a thing is what it is. God's essence —divinity— is what constitutes God in himself, and makes him different from any other being. Essence indicates substance, and therefore also answers the question What is this? If we ask this question about God, we are asking what he means as distinct from all other beings. We call essence **nature** when it is conceived as a principle of operations. With our senses we perceive only perishable beings subject to time and space, and through them we manage to make out their transcendent origin, which is God. He is existence itself, he who exists in himself and by himself.

*Ipsium esse
subsistens.*

CEC 251-252. Originally the concepts of substance, nature and essence were cosmological concepts taken from physical reality, but later they were also applied to God and became necessary elements for expressing faith. God is more than substance, essence or nature, because everything we say about God is an analogous predicate that we can only apply to him as a figure of speech.

When we refer to the essence, nature or substance of things, we refer to an abstract concept that in itself does not exist —concepts only occur in the mind— but when we refer to God with these concepts, we designate the most concrete, the most existing reality of all, albeit with a different, non-physical kind of existence, because it is the foundation and origin of all reality. God's essence, nature or substance is one and unique, and thus not an object of abstraction, but a way of designating God's being.

When it comes to God, nature, essence or substance is the way we refer to God's oneness and uniqueness, to his reality, his existence and his life, to what is common to the three persons. But thanks to analogy we can speak of God in our language, with parables, images and metaphors; and we can certainly say true things about God, for example, that God is love, mercy and goodness, better than any human mother and father.

Before the metaphysical concepts of essence, nature and substance, some hagiographers and Church Fathers used other terms to refer to what is common to the three persons, such as "*God is love*," "*God is light*," that is, kindness and good-

1 Jn 4:8.

ness, “*and in him there is no darkness*”; “*God is Spirit*.” These attributes refer to the one and only God in Three Persons, to whom we refer when speaking about an indivisible nature, essence and substance that are common to the three divine persons. 1 Jn 1:5. Jn 4:24.

In other words, God is a reality —substance— that exists in and of itself —independently. God is a nature because he causes and gives rise to all other reality —he is communicable. He is an essence because he is an immutable reality, different from any other, unique, personal, fatherly, merciful.

Appropriation: This term comes into play when what is common to the three persons is attributed to one of them, such as creation to the Father, or sanctification to the Holy Spirit; in the same way power is attributed to the Father; wisdom, to the Son; love, to the Holy Spirit.

The incarnation, which implies temporal life, death and resurrection, is not an appropriation of the Second Person of the Trinity because it is not common to the other persons, and because it is an essential and constitutive element of the Second Person, who is the one sent to live a temporal life. Thus Trinitarian theology links divine sonship in a profound way with mission and incarnation, life, death and resurrection. Only the Son could become incarnate and serve as the Father’s revealer. And through the Son all of creation returns to the Father —proceeds from, has to do with, returns to, and finds its place in God—.

Circumincession: Spelled with a “c”, it comes from the Latin word *inaccedere*, and means indwelling, interpenetration; and the word refers to intra-Trinitarian presence and action —the dynamic aspect. It is almost a synonym of the word *circuminsession*.

Circuminsession: Spelled with an “s”, it is the Latin translation of the Greek word “*perochore-sis*” and is made up of the roots *circum* and *sedere* or *sessio*, meaning *seated* or *having a seat*; the word refers to the fact that one person is in another, filling him with his presence —a static aspect that is also dynamic, active. It corresponds to St. John’s text: “*The Father is in me and I, in the Father.*”

περι-χορέυω. Jn 10:38; 17:21; 10:30; 14:11.

These words refer in the first place to the mutual indwelling of the three divine persons, but also to the indwelling in Christians, and of Christians in the three divine persons, i.e., in God. We live in God much more than we can imagine, like the prodigal son in the Father’s heart.

Jn 17:21.

Communication of properties: This expression refers to the presence and action of the three divine persons in that which is proper to each one. For example, the sanctification of Christians is proper to the Holy Spirit, but in it the Father and the Son are included and involved.

Communicatio idiomatum.

Active spiration: This corresponds to the Father and the Son so that the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the two and is sent by them to the world, is poured out within the Trinity.

Passive spiration: This is what the Holy Spirit receives from the Father and the Son, and it constitutes him as a distinct Person, by which he is sent with the purposes explained earlier.

Divine economy: The succession of events by which God reveals himself and gives himself for our salvation. God's project, or salvific plan, is the way we understand that this series of events is what God has wanted forever. Divine economy is the origin of our knowledge about God. οἰκονομία.

Sonship: This is the word used to characterize the Son with respect to the Father, and to distinguish him from the Holy Spirit, and it is the exact expression to express faith in Jesus, Son of God.

Generation: The word used to characterize the Father in himself as origin of the Son, by which God is Father with respect to the Son and the Holy Spirit, and with respect to all people. God is Father with respect to the Holy Spirit for begetting the Son, not the Holy Spirit, who is not the son of the Father, but rather proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Hypostasis: The word designates the personal particularity as distinct from all others. We say that each divine person exists in himself, distinct from the other two. The particularity is what explains the distinction among the divine persons. For the Father it is eternally begetting; for the Son, being begotten; and for the Holy Spirit, being poured out —communicated, given—.

Person: The word designates rational individuality, the spiritual subject, who possesses himself.

Naturae rationalis
divinae incommuni-
cabilis existentia.

PL 196, 964.

This term is used to mean the objective existence of the three persons in God. It was a highly metaphysical term that gave rise to the term *person* in a psychological sense, but when applied to the Trinity it has a very different meaning. Richard of St. Victor (+1173) defined the divine persons as follows: “*the person in God is the incommunicable existence of divine nature.*”

Even in reference to God the concept of person is generic, and the three, even though they are equal in terms of their nature, are different as Persons; the Father is not a person in the same way or for the same reason as the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Persons: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The divine essence —nature and substance— is really, truly and fully in each person. It is this essence, together with the common divine attributes, that manifests God’s Unity; the relations manifest the Trinity. What is common in God is the Unity; what is particular is the Trinity.

Perichoresis: From the Greek (περι-χορεύω), etymologically the word means *to dance together, hand in hand around something*. It first referred to the relation between Jesus’ two natures. Later it came to express the fact that any one of the divine persons includes the other two. Each one implies the others in its being and action.

Procession: Trinitarian life consists of an eternal proceeding that we also call “begetting” when it is about the Father with respect to the Son, and “spiration” when it is about the Father and the

Son with respect to the Holy Spirit. Procession is not the fruit of an action that is carried out; it is not a “doing” or a “making.” God does not make himself. The processions allude to a divine dynamism: God is not static. The dynamism consists of begetting the Son and breathing out the Holy Spirit, of sending the Son and pouring out the Spirit.

Properties: The word refers to that which is recognized in one person as different from the others. The properties are fatherhood, sonship and passive inspiration. The Father is characterized as being origin-less —*innascibilitas*, *agenesia*—.

Subsistence: The Latin term for the Greek word *hypostasis*. Each divine person is a subsistent, has an objective existence insofar as he exists in himself, incommunicable as such. God is existence *par excellence*: God cannot make another God, he communicates himself in fullness, without ceasing to be the Father, he begets the Son. Substance, nature and essence in God is one, but occurs in three subsistents or persons. The subsistent is not an independent subject —isolatable, conscious or free with respect to the other two subsistents; otherwise there would be three gods. Each subsistent is characterized by a different property: being in and of himself, the giving being —the Father—; or being received and sent —the Son—; finally being in common with the Father and the Son, and being given —the Holy Spirit—.

Mission: This is the word used to designate the role of the Son and the Holy Spirit in the History of Salvation.

Notions: These are the notes by which we know or distinguish the divine persons; they are the same as the properties.

It is customary to distinguish between:

The immanent Trinity, i.e., the way God is in himself, and

The economical Trinity, i.e., the way that God progressively manifests himself and communicates. But in reality they are the same: we know the way God is because he has revealed himself to us and communicated with us.

We speak of God's action

Ad intra, which is what occurs within God, or what God is in and of himself;

Ad extra, which is what God does in creation, in the universe. This is a distinction to explain God's action in time and in space: inside and outside are imprecise and artificial expressions, because can there really be anything aside from, at the margin or outside of God? The incarnation, for example, is something *ad extra* of God that totally affects God *ad intra*. In God there is no inside and outside, because he is not bound by space or time. In terms of our mindset, in God what occurs outside occurs inside and forever.

Cf Cc Lateran IV,
Dz-H 804-806.

God is not the opposite of the world; if he were, he would be limited by the world and would be

finite. God is transcendent and immanent at the same time.

Activities

- Why do you think that it is important that our faith includes a particular way of expressing itself?
- What do you think would happen if we did not have a shared creed, conceptualized and verbalized?
- Look up in an ordinary dictionary what people mean by essence, substance, nature, person, etc. Compare and distinguish these concepts with the ones used in the treatise on the Trinity.

11.5 By way of epilogue

The study of the God who has revealed himself to us in the History of Salvation as a God in Three Persons has led us not only to know God's way of being, but also to realize that our notion of God involves Jesus of Nazareth and with him all of humankind, meaning all people from all times and places. In Jesus we are included, which means that everything that is truly human is on that very account divine, and everything that is divine is on that very account human. In Paul's language, the head of Christ is God, and the head of all of us is Christ. 1 Co 11:3.

We can speak of God's great love for all people, of God's **philanthropy**, at the same time that we speak of loving God above all things. φιλανθρωπία.
Tt 3:4.

God the Father has told us how he is in Jesus of Nazareth —concrete, limited by time, space, his culture and his conditioning factors. He is the concrete and visible form in which the eternal and unfathomable God reveals himself to us. This Jesus of history continues to make history in each one of us. God is communion, not just among the three divine persons, but with us too. God is love because he shows it to us throughout the History of Salvation and for that reason he has told us that the first of all the commandments is love. If God is love, humans are also love, and the only way they are happy, the only way they fulfill themselves and their purpose, is in love.

The Holy Spirit gradually makes us similar to Jesus Christ. He has been sent to our hearts to configure us like Christ. He is the principle of life and communion with Christ. St. Paul wrote:
1 Co 6:17. *“Anyone who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him.”*

Regarding the Holy Spirit, we hope that he will *“renew the face of the earth,”* and he will not do it without us. What characterizes the Holy Spirit is that he gives us light and life, and moves us.

By faith and love, and all the virtues derived from them, we make a reality of our consecration and inclusion in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. By baptism we are consecrated to him as the One God in Three Persons. By him we live, move and exist. And we hope that he will ultimately grant us full participation in his glory communion with the Three-Person God. But in

the meantime we live united by faith in a Church that is hobbled by our shortcomings, limitations and false commitments, but not abandoned by God. He unites, sanctifies and breathes life into his Church, which is us, together with our pastors, to announce his Gospel to all nations, people and cultures, and he will be with us in multiple ways until the limits and end of the world.

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