

# **FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING**

**VOLUME I**

**A Complete Course in Theology**

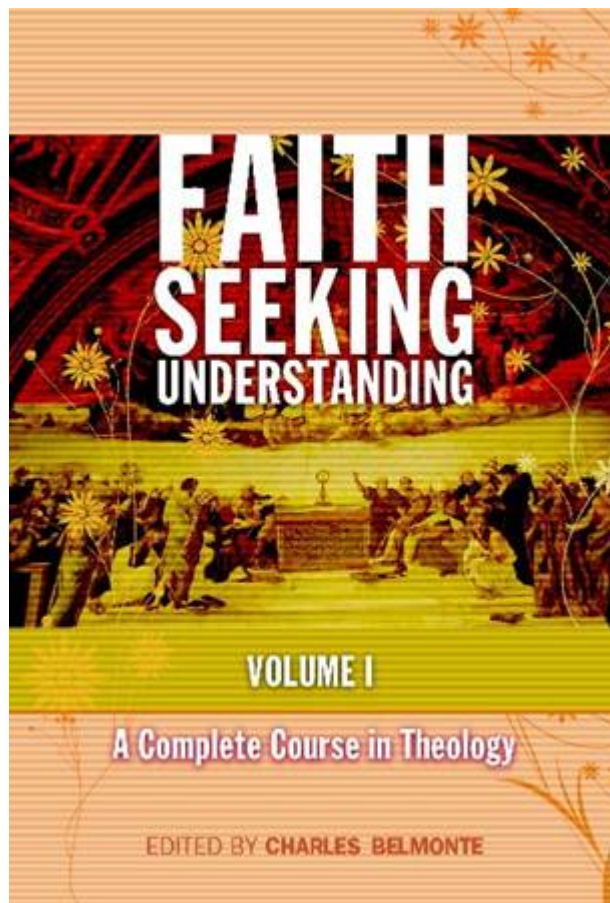
**EDITED BY CHARLES BELMONTE**

# Faith Seeking Understanding

Volume 1

*A Complete Course in Theology*

Edited by Charles Belmonte



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ISBN: 971-91060-4-2

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# Introduction to Theology

by José Miguel Otero

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# **Introduction to Theology**

by José Miguel Odero

## 1

# Faith and Theology

BEFORE EXAMINING THE nature of theology, it is worthwhile to consider its place in the context of Christian life: Theology stems from faith and plays an important role in salvation.<sup>1</sup>

# **1. Faith and the Divine Plan of Salvation**

From the beginning of creation, God freely chose to elevate man by calling him to a supernatural end.

Through this calling, the Blessed Trinity invites us to be members of the divine family, to really partake of divine nature, to live in intimate communion with God, to become Godlike to the fullest extent possible.<sup>2</sup> Salvation consists precisely in these.

God desired humanity to be free and responsible in the achievement of its supernatural end. Each person should take an active part in his own salvation, even though this target surpasses his intellect and energy.

Without divine guidance, attaining sanctity and salvation would be impossible. To save mankind, God decided to reveal himself, that is, to step into history and address his word to us. He does so first through the prophets and ultimately through his Son. In this way, he would explain to us his plans for salvation, invite us to follow him, give us the means to reach him, and show us the obstacles to be avoided.

The revelation of God, our Lord and Creator, must be received with faith. Believing in God (faith) means receiving his revelation with full obedience, accepting the plan of God, and allowing ourselves to be guided by his wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

Faith also implies a commitment to cooperate with God in the salvation of humanity. Following the Gospel, the Church teaches that “faith is the beginning of man’s salvation, the foundation and source of all justification.”<sup>4</sup>

Faith is the light God gives us to reach eternal life because it enables us to know God intimately, recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd, and follow his commandments (cf. Jn 10:4). These qualities of faith reveal that Christian faith has an intellectual dimension.

Faith is a deep disposition that can trigger the most intimate movements of the heart. We should realize, however, that it cannot be reduced to vague religious sentiment: “To believe is immediately an act of the intellect, because the object of that act is the truth, which pertains properly to the intellect.”<sup>5</sup>

Holy Scripture repeatedly teaches that salvation begins in the intellect. By our faith in revelation, God enlightens us so that we may be saved: “Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart” (Ps 97:11). “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (Is 9:2).

Jesus Christ, the fullness of God’s revelation, was announced thus: “... the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death...” (Lk 1:78–79). The brightness of the “sun of faith” opens our eyes to a new and joyful dimension of reality.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Faith: The Core of Theology

Faith combines a great light with an unavoidable darkness. The light is the possession of a great truth, which can fill our mind and guide our life. Darkness is present necessarily because that great truth cannot clearly be seen in this life, where we cannot see God face to face.

Sacred Scripture says that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Thus, when we believe God, we believe in his word; “we believe that what he has revealed is true.”<sup>7</sup> We are as sure of these truths as if we knew them through scientific demonstration, in spite of the fact that they remain obscure and not evident to us. This surety is the specific trait of faith.

As Christians, we know that in faith we hold the truth that can save us; faith is the seed, the foretaste, and the substance of the salvation we expect. In heaven, when God gives himself fully to us, we will see with complete clarity what we now believe. “For now we see in a mirror dimly,” St. Paul tells the believers, “but then face to face” (1 Cor 13:12).

Believers meditate on what they believe, but not because they entertain any doubt. On the contrary, they are so sure of the word of God, they strongly desire to know God more closely, until they finally come to see him face to face. As St. Augustine puts it, “We eagerly desire to better understand and comprehend what we have believed.”<sup>8</sup> Faith includes the desire to see God, and it moves the faithful to develop the wealth of knowledge contained in revelation.

Faith’s tendency toward its own development (the contemplation of God) can be pursued in two ways: the spiritual or mystical way, and the intellectual or theological way.

The spiritual or mystical way is followed by those who want to know God more intimately. This can be achieved with the help of the Holy Spirit, by meditating on the word of God. “The same Holy Spirit constantly perfects faith by his gifts, so that Revelation may be more and more profoundly understood” (cf. 2 Cor 3:18).<sup>9</sup>

The intellectual or theological way can be followed at the same time as the mystical way. It consists in using all of one’s intellectual faculties and



cultural resources to understand divine revelation. Not all can follow this way to the same extent.<sup>10</sup>

The desire to know more fully what one believes is a sign of a living faith. “When a man’s will is ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes; he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof; thus, human reason does not exclude the merit of faith but is a sign of greater merit.”<sup>11</sup>

Christians should aim at progressing in their faith using both ways at the same time, according to each person’s own capabilities. In this way, Christian theology is born.

Faith moves the believer to exercise an intellectual effort to know God better through his word. Many passages of Sacred Scripture teach us to exercise our intellect: “Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight” (Prv 4:7). And St. Paul argues: “Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised” (1 Cor 15:12–13).

### 3. Faith Seeking Understanding

Theology stems from faith; thus, we can affirm that theology is *fides quaerens intellectum*—faith seeking understanding.<sup>12</sup>

Theologians are not motivated by doubts of faith but by the certainty that God has entrusted us, in Christ, and with “infinite treasures of love” and wisdom. To acknowledge and appreciate these treasures is a way of worshipping God “in spirit and in truth.” Offering him a rational sacrifice is a “spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). “Faith,” John Paul II says, “is the lasting and vital root of a theology that springs from a questioning and seeking what is intrinsic to faith itself.”<sup>13</sup>

The Church teaches:

Insofar as possible, each of us should study the faith seriously, rigorously—all of which means theology. Ours should be the piety of children and the sure doctrine of theologians.

Our desire to advance in theological knowledge, in sound, firm *Christian doctrine* is sparked, above all, by the will to know and love God. It likewise stems from the concern of a faithful soul to attain the deepest meaning of the world, seen as coming from the hands of God.<sup>14</sup>

Experience shows that spiritual life withers when a deep knowledge of the faith is lacking: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6). The lack of effort to acquire theological formation is a clear sign of a weak, wavering, or tepid faith.

Not everyone needs to achieve the same level of scientific knowledge of doctrine, but these words of St. Peter are addressed to all: “Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pt 3:15).

Theological formation is especially vital in our days; we often meet difficult situations demanding a Christian answer, an answer based on faith. Without solid theological formation, it is extremely easy to be confused and influenced by fashionable views and prevailing lifestyles.

Nor should Christians attempt to isolate themselves from the world, refusing to understand and help their contemporaries, for in doing so, they would fail to be the salt and light of the earth (cf. Mt 5:13–16). The Second Vatican Council has reminded Catholics of the need to have a solid doctrinal formation.<sup>15</sup>

The need for a doctrinal religious formation should lead us to heed this advice:

Study. Study in earnest. If you are to be salt and light, you need knowledge, capability.

Or do you imagine that an idle and lazy life will entitle you to receive infused knowledge?<sup>16</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 94–95.
2. Cf. DV, 2; St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 8.
3. Cf. DV, 5.
4. DS 1532.
5. ST, II-II, q. 4, a. 2.
6. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 279, 575.
7. *Dei Filius*, 3: DS 3008.
8. St. Augustine, *De Trin.*, 4,1.
9. DV, 5; cf. CCC, 2014.
10. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 282.
11. ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 10.
12. St. Anselm, *Proslogion*, 1; cf. CCC, 158.
13. John Paul II, “Address to Theology Professors.” *L’Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 20, 1982.
14. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 10.
15. Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis Momentum*, 10; AA, 29.
16. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 33.

## 2

# Nature of Theology

THEOLOGY IS NECESSARY for Christian life because it is a natural consequence of faith. Faith has an intellectual dimension, and it makes the saving truth available to humanity. Through theology, man probes deeper into this truth. Thus, theology is an instrument for cooperating with God in one's own salvation.

Born from a life of faith, theology can be described as the science of Christian faith. Since faith is the beginning of salvation, theology is also the science of salvation. But what is the nature of this science? What is its object, purpose, and relation to other sciences?

## 4. Definition of Theology

The term *theology* comes from the Greek *theos-logos*, which means “word, teaching, doctrine, or science of God.”

Theology is different from the philosophical science of God (natural theology or philosophical theology). Here, we refer to the science of revelation: the scientific knowledge of divine revelation. The fruits of this science—that is, the truths about God deduced by Christian theologians—are also part of theology.

“Theology,” John Paul II says, “is a cognitive process through which the human mind, illuminated by faith and stimulated by love, advances in the immense territories that divine Revelation has thrown wide open before it.” Theology can thus be defined as “a science through which the Christian’s reason, which receives certitude and light from faith, by reasoning strives to understand what it believes, that is, the revealed mysteries and their consequences.”<sup>1</sup>

Christian theologians aim at partaking of the divine science, that is, of God’s knowledge of himself and of all things; theology is like an imprint of divine science. The theologian strives to understand the divine word, which is God’s intimacy, and to get closer to the very source of all truth: God himself. The theologian shares in a most excellent way of the very knowledge of God.<sup>2</sup>

## 5. A Short History of Theology

The first recorded use of the term *theology* is found in Plato.<sup>3</sup> He applied it to poetical myths about the gods and to the scientific discoveries of the philosophers who sought the truth about God. Aristotle used the term *theological philosophy* to refer to the study of the final causes of being, that is, the core of metaphysics or “first philosophy.”<sup>4</sup> This natural theology or philosophical theology reached very few, but very valuable, truths about a distant, far-away God.

Christianity completely changed that situation. Through Christian faith, God gave us clear knowledge of his personality and transcendence with respect to the world. Our faith announces God’s decision of making us his children.<sup>5</sup>

The early Christian writers used the term *theology* with caution because of its pagan connotations at that time. In the fourth century, St. Athanasius and the historian Eusebius of Caesarea were the first to apply that term to the knowledge of the main mysteries of the faith (especially the mystery of the Blessed Trinity). Dionysius the Areopagite applied the term to the spiritual knowledge of God (*mystica theologia*). In the fifth century, St. Augustine denounced the opposition of the pagan theologies (or rather theogonies) to the true theology, which is Christian doctrine; the only true knowledge about the intimacy of God is what the Church possesses and teaches.

Among the first Christian theologians of the second century, St. Justin (a converted professional philosopher), St. Irenaeus of Lyons, and St. Clement of Alexandria are worthy of note. St. Clement taught in the first theological school of ancient times, the Catechetical School of Alexandria. Origen, the most important theologian of the third century and the writer of *De Principiis* (the first systematic theological treatise) belonged to this school. The most outstanding theologians of the fourth and fifth centuries were St. Athanasius and, above all, St. Augustine.

In the Middle Ages, schools of theology emerged in the main cathedrals and religious houses; the main theologians of this period were St. Anselm, Peter Lombard, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, and Bl. John Duns Scotus. Universities grew up around the chief schools of theology.

During the transition into modernity, theology underwent gradual fragmentation into specialized studies, just as fields of concentration in universities diverged and separated. Some outstanding modern theologians are Francisco Suarez (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries), M.J. Scheeben, and J.H. Newman (nineteenth century). In the last two centuries, the Church had to correct the following misconceptions of the nature of theology: semirationalism, modernism, fideism. We will study each of these later on.

## 6. The Object of Theology

Theology, like any other science, can be defined by identifying its unique object:

- The specific realities it studies. This is the subject (*subiectum*) or topic, which some authors call the material object.<sup>6</sup>
- The kind of objects it studies, and the aspect of reality in which it is interested (formal object *quod*).
- The point of view from which the scholar approaches reality (formal object *quo*).



## 6a) Material Object of Theology

Theologians always refer to the reality of God. They aim at a science that is proper of God; thus, the subject matter of theology is always God.<sup>7</sup> Theology is a strictly theocentric science; everything is referred to God as to its principle.<sup>8</sup>

By focusing on God, theology does not leave out created beings. Every being can be a subject of theological inquiry, since all that exists has been created by God. Since the created bear the mark of his creative power, they necessarily refer to God: They are instruments for the knowledge of God. Thus, theology is the science of God and of creatures insofar as they are related to God as their principle and end. Theology considers everything *sub ratione deitatis*—from the point of view of divinity—relating everything to God.

The theologian's interest in God's creations is different from that of other scientists. A physicist, for example, will study fire as a state of matter whose properties can be described and explained within the framework of a general theory of the universe. The theologian will also be interested in fire, but from a different point of view. The theologian studies it as a creature of God that expressly reflects some aspects of his nature and human salvation.

Among creatures, man deserves special attention from the point of view of theology. Man not only bears the mark of God; he is made in the image and likeness of God, and is destined for eternity. "Theology itself," John Paul II says, "imposes this question of man in order to understand him as the recipient of grace and the Revelation of Christ."<sup>9</sup>

Theology, the science of salvation, is also the science of revelation, whose purpose is the salvation of mankind. Only in Christ—in revelation—can man find the definitive answer to the meaning of life: the divine vocation to the supernatural end.<sup>10</sup>

## 6b) God, the Proper Object of Theology

The proper object, or formal object *quod*, of theology is, as Pope John Paul II has declared, “the *mystery of God*, of the Trinitarian God who in Jesus Christ has been revealed as God-Love.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, theology studies things in their relation to God, from the point of view of God, *sub ratione deitatis*. That is the formal object *quod* of theology.

Faith tends toward the beatific vision. The Lord taught us, “And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (Jn 17:3). It is only natural that theology is specifically interested in knowing Yahweh, the living God.

Since God revealed himself in Jesus Christ, in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9), theology is also the science of Christ. There is no other way through which mankind could get to know the Father and reach God with confidence (cf. Jn 1:18; 14:6, 8–11, 16). Christ is, therefore, the special object of theology. Sound theological reasoning must always bear reference to Christ and to the Kingdom of God; theology is necessarily Christological and Christocentric.<sup>12</sup>

The words of the Christmas preface come to mind: “In the mystery of the incarnation your eternal Word has brought to the eyes of our faith a new and radiant vision of your glory. In him we see our God made visible and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see....” Christ is the true way or method—*methodos*—of every theological research because he is the Way (Jn 14:16) through which God has come to us and through which we can reach God. He sustains your studies; he is the center of your life and of your prayer. Follow this “way” with enthusiasm, sustained by faith and love!<sup>13</sup>

## 6c) Formal Object *quo* of Theology

The specific viewpoint of theology is a synthesis of faith and reason. The formal object *quo* of theology is the believing reason: reason enlightened and supported by faith—*ratio fide illustrata*, reason that desires to be guided and led to God by faith.

Only faith leads to the revealed God (cf. Heb 11:6); faith is, thus, the characteristic trait of the theological viewpoint. On the other hand, reason probes into revealed doctrine through study and human effort.<sup>14</sup> Theology is the science of faith because faith is the soul of theology. At the same time, theology is the work of reason because it must be configured and framed by reason.

Theological subjects should be taught in the light of faith, under the guidance of the magisterium of the Church, in such a way that students will draw pure Catholic teaching from divine revelation, will enter deeply into its meaning, make it the nourishment of their spiritual life, and learn to proclaim, explain, and defend it in their priestly ministry.<sup>15</sup>

St. Paul reminds us that without faith, the Gospel cannot appear to the human mind as what it really is: the revelation of God and the announcement of the only salvation (cf. 2 Cor 4:4).

Human intellect is open to all truth, including the divine truth (transcendence). Therefore, the proponents of a self-enclosed reason—cold and self-sufficient—fall into an error called rationalism in theology. They approach religion by trying to confine the grandeur of God within human limits.

Then reason, the cold, blind reason that is so different from the mind imbued with faith and even from the well-directed mind of someone capable of enjoying and loving things, becomes irrational in a person's attempt to reduce everything to his cramped human experience. Thus is superhuman truth impoverished, and man's heart develops a crust that makes it insensitive to the action of the Holy Spirit. Our limited intelligence would be completely at a loss then if the merciful power of God did not break down the barriers of our wretchedness. "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ez 36:26).<sup>16</sup>

Thus, theology cannot be defined as merely "reason applied to the data of faith." For the theologian, faith is not just a set of data, pieces of information like any others. Above all, it is the motor of his or her research and the light that will make it possible. Faith is not just the "raw material"

for the theologian; it is his instrument as well. Faith, organically united to reason, is necessary for understanding divine revelation.

Here, we should make a distinction between the content of faith (the revealed truths, or *fides quae*) and the light of faith (the virtue of faith—*fides qua*—that makes the act of faith possible). It is not enough for the theologian to know the revealed truths; he also needs the light of faith in order to understand and interpret them properly. For example, a nonbeliever could scientifically study Christianity and revealed truth in order to establish its differences with other religions. However, this would not be theology, but one of the sciences of religion (history, phenomenology, or philosophy of religion). Without the virtue of faith, it is not possible to learn true theology. The scholar without faith can only grope in the dark, unable to penetrate or appreciate the word of God.

## **7. Functions and Limits of Theology**

In order to get a more precise idea of the nature of theology, we will outline some ideas that will be studied later more in detail.

## 7a) Functions of Theology

- Theology delineates a list or catalog of the truths of faith (catechism or symbol of faith), specifying all the aspects and details that Holy Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium attest about each truth of the faith.
- It studies the content of each revealed truth and explains it through analogies and examples in order to penetrate its meaning.
- It reflects on the whole set of revealed truths in order to show their harmony and unity. This implies comparing the truths to reveal their interrelations, so the intellect can see the revealed truths as a structured body.
- It critically analyzes the objections that, in each historical period, have been brought against the truths of faith in order to show their fallacy.
- It studies culture and life from the viewpoint of faith in order to judge them with the knowledge about creation given by revelation. Thus, we can incorporate the positive elements of culture in Christian wisdom and denounce the antihuman corruptions that may have crept into them.<sup>17</sup>

The First Vatican Council, by affirming that faith does not conflict but harmonizes with reason, affirmed these functions.<sup>18</sup> Theology is thereby at the service of faith. It reveals the treasures of truth, goodness, and beauty contained in our faith.

## 7b) Limits of Theology

Theology can never reach a perfect understanding of the faith. Thus, the theologian can never abandon the guidance of faith. He or she cannot attempt to demonstrate the revealed truths, that is, to make them evident to human reason. The Magisterium of the Church has explicitly declared that such pretense (called semirationalism) is seriously opposed to the teachings of revelation.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the truths revealed by God are natural truths, therefore accessible to human reason. Others, however, are mysteries of faith, that is, supernatural truths that transcend the intellect of creatures. We cannot know these truths without revelation; even with revelation, we can never understand them completely. As the First Vatican Council solemnly teaches:

Divine mysteries of their own nature so excel the created intellect that even when they have been given in Revelation and accepted by faith, that very faith still keeps them veiled in a sort of obscurity, as long as “we are exiled from the Lord” in this mortal life, “for we walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor 5:6ff.).<sup>20</sup>

Sacred Scripture often refers to such mysteries of faith. St. Paul, for example, describes faith as a paradoxical knowledge that the wise of this world find strange and even scandalous (cf. 1 Cor 2:6–10).

Faith must be as present in the theologian as it is in any other faithful. The theologian must not cease to believe; the more he gets to know about the faith, the more conscious he must be of the fathomless depth of wisdom contained in it. The deeper he probes the revealed mysteries, the more aware he must be of our intellect’s limitation to understand and express the faith.

The theologian is not a believer who has gone beyond the attitude of mere faith, who can say that he now sees what before he could only believe. The theologian is a Christian who can explain the contents of his faith with greater detail and scope. Like any other Christian, the theologian trusts in God and, acknowledging his supreme authority, thanks him for the gift of faith. We should not forget that faith, though presupposing humility, does not humiliate but raises the believer, since it makes him participate in the very knowledge of God.<sup>21</sup>

## **8. Theology as Science and Wisdom**

The importance and dignity of theology is shown in the fact that it is rigorously scientific in nature and able to guide human culture and behavior; it is true supernatural wisdom.



## 8a) Theology, a Science

Supernatural theology is properly a science. Peter Abelard, a twelfth-century theologian, hinted at this fact. St. Thomas Aquinas was the first to establish that the Aristotelian concept of science, “knowing with certitude through causes,” strictly and properly applies to theology. Science is an explanatory knowledge of things through their real causes that allows us to know why things are the way they are, and it allows us to know the truth of our statements about them.<sup>22</sup> This definition of science applies perfectly well to theology. The statements of theology:

- are extraordinarily certain, since they share in the supreme certainty of faith;
- explain things through their real causes: the divine will and God’s nature;
- respect all the rules of logic, which enables the theologian to account for his knowledge and allows others to verify his conclusions.

Still, theology is a science not only on account of the correct use of logic in its proceedings. Theology is a science primarily because the revealed truths are real truths. Through them, the theologian can know the deep reality of man, the world, and God. The scientific character of theology hangs on the truth of its principles—the truths revealed by God.

St. Thomas observed that the principles of theology, though not evident for us, are evident for other persons—the saints in heaven. He affirmed that theology is related to the science of the saints, who see God face to face (this is the *scientia beatorum*).

Theology, as the science of faith, shares in the light of faith, and also in its relative imperfection; in heaven, faith will give way to vision.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the theologian holds the principles of this science within the humility and strength of faith; faith brings to the theologian the very principle of divine knowledge.

Schools of thought that deny the scientific value of the sciences of the spirit also reject the scientific character of theology. Among these are positivism (which erroneously limits the scope of certainty to sensible, experimental evidence) and fideism (which rejects the value of reason as a source of knowledge).

## **8b) Theology as Wisdom**

Wisdom is the knowledge of all things through their ultimate causes. These two elements—maximum scope and depth—are also found in theology:

- As the science of God (who is the beginning and end of all things and the most radical of all causes), theology studies the deepest causes of being and the destiny of man and cosmos.
- Like philosophical theology (theodicy), theology studies God. Unlike the former, however, theology obtains all the truths it teaches from that same God, who revealed himself. Based on the revelation of the divine intimacy, theology partakes of divine science and thus reaches the eternal reasons of all things.

Theology is not just one more wisdom among the human lore; it is Wisdom. It is knowledge through the highest cause, through the very principle of the order of history and the world.

## 8c) Theology, Culture, and Life

Aristotle pointed out that it is proper for a wise man to have the capacity of effectively directing others. Thus, theological knowledge should enable man to give the proper orientation to all human sciences and activities. As St. Thomas Aquinas writes:

This doctrine is wisdom above all human wisdom, in an absolute manner. We call wise one who judges according to the highest principles of his discipline or science. Thus, in a building, he who plans the form of the house is called wise and architect, in opposition to the laborers who merely trim the wood and fit the stones. St. Paul says: “As a wise architect I have laid the foundation” (1 Cor 3:10).

Again, in human life, a prudent man is called wise, because he directs his acts to a fitting end: “Wisdom is prudence to a man” (Prv 10:23).<sup>24</sup>

Theology should be held as the highest of all sciences, not as an encyclopedic science that covers all human knowledge, but because of its foundation: the revealed truth. Only faith and theology provide the fundamental criteria to judge the certainty and dignity of every human knowledge, and the meaning and value of every ideal or undertaking.

Sacred Scripture attests: “The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one” (1 Cor 2:14–15).

All human activities and sciences can be aimed toward salvation through theology. For this reason, the Church encourages all the faithful to acquire theological formation:

Christian wisdom, which the Church teaches by divine authority, continually inspires the faithful of Christ to endeavor zealously to relate human affairs and activities to religious values in a single living synthesis. Under the direction of these values, all things are mutually connected for the glory of God and the integral development of the person, a development that includes both corporal and spiritual well-being.<sup>25</sup>

## 8d) The Defense of the Faith

Being supernatural wisdom, theology can intellectually defend itself against those who challenge its principles, that is, against those who attack the faith. Mysteries of faith cannot be demonstrated, but they can be defended in an indirect way. A theologian can show that those attacking the faith contradict themselves; thus, he protects the truth by a reduction to the absurd. Theology functions in this defense because it:

(i) shows that faith is a reasonable and legitimate element in human life, and a source of true and proper knowledge. It also emphasizes the credibility of Christian revelation; that is, it demonstrates the preambles and credibility of faith.

(ii) defends the Magisterium against those who would deny its relation with the apostolic teachings; it shows that the teachings of the Church are contained in the sources of revelation.

(iii) argues, in ecumenical dialogue, against those who deny some truths of faith while accepting others. Theology shows that, given the intimate relationship among the articles of faith, accepting one implies accepting all.

(iv) analyzes attacks against the truths of faith and exposes their inconsistencies. It shows that the truths of revelation, although not evident, are in no way contradictory.

(v) gives reasons of congruence or fittingness for the revealed truths.<sup>26</sup> These do not demonstrate the revealed truths, but show the intimate connection they keep—in spite of their transcendence—with natural knowledge, and provide a powerful motive of credibility.<sup>27</sup>

1. John Paul II, "Homily to the Roman Pontifical Universities." *L'Osservatore Romano*, Nov. 9, 1981.
2. Cf. J.L. Illanes, *Gran Enciclopedia Rialp*, s.v. "Teología," 22:233.
3. Plato, *Republic*, 379a5.
4. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* E 102a19; K 1064b3.
5. Cf. J.L. Illanes, *Gran Enciclopedia Rialp*, s.v. "Teología," 22:233.

6. Like faith, theology does not study ideas, but realities: "The symbol mentions the things about which faith is, insofar as the act of the believer is terminated in them, as is evident from the manner of speaking about them. Now the act of the believer does not terminate in a proposition, but in a thing. For as in science we do not form propositions, except in order to have knowledge about things through their means, so it is in faith" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2).
7. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 1, a. 7; I, q. 14, aa. 5–8, 11.
8. Cf. St. Bonaventure, *In IV Sententiarum*, 1, *proemium*, q. 1.
9. John Paul II, "Address to Spanish Theologians." *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 20, 1982.
10. Cf. *GS*, 22.
11. John Paul II, "Address to Spanish Theologians." *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 20, 1982.
12. Cf. J.L. Illanes, "Teología y método teológico en los documentos del Concilio Vaticano II," *Scripta Theologica*, 12 (1980): 783.
13. John Paul II, "Address in the Pontifical Gregorian University." *L'Osservatore Romano*, Jan. 21, 1980.
14. Cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 45, a. 1, ad 2.
15. *OT*, 16.
16. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 165.
17. Cf. J.L. Illanes, *Gran Enciclopedia Rialp*, s.v. "Teología," 22:237.
18. Cf. DS 3016.
19. Cf. Gregory XVI, Brief *Dum Acerbissimas*: DS 2738–40; Pius IX, Brief *Eximiam Tuam*: DS 2828–31; Letter *Gravissimus Inter*: DS 2850–61.
20. DS 3016.
21. J.L. Illanes, *El Saber Teológico* (Madrid, 1978), 49.
22. Cf. Antonio Millan Puelles, *Léxico Filosófico* (Madrid, 1986), 129; J.G. Colbert, *Gran Enciclopedia Rialp*, s.v. "Ciencia," 5:597.
23. Cf. J.L. Illanes, *Gran Enciclopedia Rialp*, s.v. "Teología," 22:241.
24. *ST*, I, q. 1, a. 6.
25. John Paul II, Ap. Const. *Sapientia Christiana*, May 25, 1979: *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 4, 1979; cf. *GS*, 43ff.
26. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 32, a. 1, ad 2.
27. Cf. J.L. Illanes, *Gran Enciclopedia Rialp*, s.v. "Teología," 22:248–49.

# 3

## Method and Unity of Theology

THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD is the organized body of principles and procedures that theologians use in order to study the faith. Science properly proceeds by argumentation; it uses what is already known (premises) to reach new truths (conclusions). The goal of theology is to formulate new propositions about God (theological conclusions) based essentially on God's own revelation; it also uses logic and other resources of human culture to aid in this purpose.

Theology is not the same as religious philosophy. It would be highly improper for a theologian to mechanically analyze revelation with a philosophical method. That is the work of the philosophy of religion.

The use of immanentistic philosophy (trying to grasp the evidence of Christian faith from an initial or methodical doubt) would be even worse.

It is as easy now as it was at the time of Jesus Christ to say *No*, to deny or to put aside the truth of faith. You who call yourself a Catholic have to start from *Yes*.

Later, after some study, you will be able to explain the reasons for your certainty, and that there is no contradiction—there can be none—between Truth and science, between Truth and life.<sup>1</sup>

Since theology is the science of revelation, theological argumentation has characteristics that are distinct from the methods used to argue other sciences. An important difference is its extensive use of the argument of authority. Theology usually bases its conclusion on the personal testimony of God, on the authority of that same God who reveals it. In using this technique, theology does not limit itself to reasons intrinsic to the subject matter, which are mediately or immediately evident in themselves. Theology's strongest argument is *Deus dixit*—"God said so."

Faithfulness means—it must be—a resolute and stable orientation that inspires research and follows it closely. Faithfulness means putting the word of God, which the Church “listens to religiously” (cf. *DV*, 1), at the very origin of the theological process and referring to this word all the acquired knowledge and conclusions gradually reached. It implies a careful and permanent confrontation with what the Church believes and professes.<sup>2</sup>

Arguments of authority (backing a proposition on the testimony of a prestigious authority in the field) carry little weight in the human sciences. Although frequently used in ordinary life, their scientific value is only provisional. They are not science, but merely prudent opinion. In theology, however, arguments based on the authority of God have full scientific validity. They produce a stronger certitude than any argument based on intrinsic reasons.<sup>3</sup>

Certitude based on God himself, through the word of God, rests on the most solid and unshakable foundation that can be found. It does not rest on the fallible truth of created beings perceived through a created intellect, but on the First Truth, the source and origin of all truth. This Truth is perceived through faith—a participation of divine light, much higher than the light of human reason.

## **9. Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition**

The immutable foundation of the theological method is divine revelation: the Gospel of salvation, the word of God that the Church presents to the faithful, which can be received through faith. The specific method of theology is to go, time and time again, to the faith of the Church, to recall and to meditate upon the word of God in order to reach the knowledge of God (cf. Lk 2:19, 51).

Note that the theologian does not scrutinize Sacred Scripture and other testimonies of divine revelation because he doubts the accuracy of ordinary, simple faith. Before starting to research, the theologian is completely convinced that, by merely listening faithfully to the Church, he has all the knowledge required for salvation.

Despite this conviction, studying the sources of revelation with scientific rigor is not, for the theologian, a mere academic exercise where no important discovery is expected. On the contrary, the theologian's research may discover new aspects or nuances of revelation, not explicitly realized, that can fruitfully enrich the catechesis and life of the Church.



## 9a) The Church and the Transmission of the Gospel

How can the theologian have access to revelation? Christ made sure that his saving revelation—the Gospel—could reach all people in its integrity. By divine will, the content of revelation (the revealed truths and institutions, moral precepts, the way of praying, sacraments) is transmitted through people, through the Church, as an inviolable deposit of faith.<sup>4</sup>

The Church continues the mission of the apostles, faithfully transmitting the Gospel of Christ to mankind generation after generation. This task of transmitting revelation is called Sacred Tradition.

The Tradition of the Church is sacred because the Church received supernatural assistance from God to transmit the Gospel: “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20); “and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). To clarify this truth, Pope Pius VI declared, “The proposition, ‘In the last centuries the most important truths of religion, which were the foundation of the faith and moral doctrine of Jesus Christ, have been darkened’ is heretical.”<sup>5</sup>

The word *tradition* comes from the Latin *tradere*, which means “to hand over.” It requires faithfully transmitting the deposit of revelation—the word of God, which is the object of faith. The Second Vatican Council describes Tradition by saying: “The Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.”<sup>6</sup>

Because of Tradition, the Gospel is conserved faithfully and without error in the Church. Thus, the Second Vatican Council teaches:

The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (cf. 1 Jn 2:20 and 27) cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when, “from the bishops to the last of the faithful” they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals. By this appreciation of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (*Magisterium*), and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God (cf. 1 Thes 2:13), the faith once for all delivered to the saints (cf. Jude 3). The People unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.<sup>7</sup>

This characteristic of the people of God is called the *sensus fidelium* (the “sense of the faithful”) because it enables them to recognize the true faith of the Church in an instinctive way.

## 9b) Tradition as a Source of Theology

The theologian must be certain that any new formulation of the faith remains faithful to the true meaning transmitted by the Church. The testimonies of faith from the first Christian generations—their liturgy, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and their archaeological remains—are especially useful in this regard. These and other sources of Tradition (in its passive meaning) are the object of Sacred Liturgy, Church history, patrology, and canon law.

- i) Liturgy is a living witness of the faith and practice of the Church. It is absolutely necessary in order to understand the Christian spirit.<sup>8</sup> Ecclesiastical prayers and sacramental rites express the faith of the Church with full authority.<sup>9</sup> The liturgical and canonical practice of the Church is a decisive argument for the theologian in matters like the sacraments, morals, or spirituality. For example, in matters referring to the Baptism of children, indulgences, or veneration of images, it provides definitive answers.<sup>10</sup>
- ii) Many of the events in the history of the Church have been prompted by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit sheds light on the unsuspected scope of Christ's teachings. Thus, the life of the Church contains elements that can spur theological research, such as Marian devotion, the lives of the saints, and lay spirituality.
- iii) The Holy Fathers, or Fathers of the Church, are saints of the early Church; by a special grace of God, they left us, in their writings, a privileged testimony of the living Tradition of the Gospel. To the Church, they are like fathers and doctors of the faith: "Fathers of the Church is the name rightly given to those saints who, by the power of their faith, the depth and riches of their teachings, gave her new life and great increase in the course of the first centuries" (cf. Gal 4:19; St. Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium* 1.3). They are truly Fathers of the Church; through the Gospel preached by them, the Church received life (cf. 1 Cor 4:15). And they are builders of the Church as well, since they built the primary structure of the Church over the only foundation laid down by the Apostles: Christ."<sup>11</sup>

The Church recognizes the Fathers of the Church as such if they meet the following conditions:

- i) Antiquity. The Patristic age was closed in the East with St. John Damascene (d. circa 749). In the West, the last Fathers are St. Gregory (d. 604) and St. Isidore (d. 636). With St. Augustine and St. Benedict, they are the spiritual teachers of the High Middle Ages.
- ii) Holiness.
- iii) Eminent doctrine. They produced outstanding insights, in perfect communion with the Church, and with some approval by the Magisterium (councils, popes).

Some ancient authors who lack one or more of these conditions (like Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea) are called simply ecclesiastical writers.

The first Fathers, who were active during the first century and beginnings of the second, were the disciples of the apostles themselves: St. Clement of Rome, St. Ignatius of Antioch, and St. Polycarp of Smyrna. These men are called the Apostolic Fathers.

The Second Vatican Council teaches that “the sayings of the Holy Fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of this Tradition, showing how its riches are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and her prayer.”<sup>12</sup>

The Fathers of the Church have exceptional doctrinal authority. For an issue to fall under this authority, it must refer to faith or morals, and their stand must be in agreement with the teaching of the Church. Their unanimous agreement (*unanimis consensus Patrum*) on one issue is a sure rule of faith, showing the true sense of the Church’s interpretation of revelation. However, only their moral consensus on a point of doctrine is required; there may still be some dissenting voices among them. The real value of the doctrine of the Fathers lies not in being their personal interpretations, but in the fact that the doctrine they produce transmits the faith they received from the Church.

Saints who played an eminent role in the doctrinal life of the Church are honored with the title “Doctors of the Church.” St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John of the Cross, and St. Alphonsus of Liguori are such saints.

## **9c) Sacred Scripture as a Source of Theology**

The four Gospels and the other sacred books of the New Testament were written during the life of the apostles, by special divine providence, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They contain the essentials of the apostolic teachings. The Church believes that God is truly the author of these books, as well as those of the Old Testament, and that Sacred Scripture authentically contains the word of God.<sup>13</sup>

The essential trait of Sacred Scripture is that it is inspired by God, not that it is a religious writing, or that it relates the history of revelation. God is the true author of every sacred book through the hagiographer or human writer. Consequently, the sacred books cannot contain any error (inerrancy). The Bible does not simply contain revelations from God; it is the word of God, written by God, for our salvation. The Bible is a form of salvific revelation.

The Church preserves and transmits to all people the sacred texts inspired by God. It determines the canon, or list of sacred books, and gives their authentic interpretation with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

“The ‘study of the sacred page’ should be the very soul of sacred theology,” the Second Vatican Council says.<sup>14</sup> Pope John Paul II stresses it again: “The study of Sacred Scripture is, as it were, the soul of Sacred Theology, which rests upon the written word of God together with the living Tradition, as its perpetual foundation.”<sup>15</sup> Theologians should always have recourse to Sacred Scripture to stimulate, inspire, and adjust their intellectual work.

Still, Sacred Scripture is not the only source of theology; it is not fruitful to restrict oneself to this source exclusively. The Second Vatican Council teaches that “Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the Church.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, “sacred theology relies on the written word of God, taken together with sacred Tradition, as on a permanent foundation. By this word it is most firmly strengthened and constantly rejuvenated, as it searches out, under the light of faith, the full truth stored up in the mystery of Christ.”<sup>17</sup>

## 10. The Magisterium of the Church

Christ promised his Church personal assistance in its task of the evangelization and salvation of mankind. Ordinarily, he lends that assistance through the pastors who, as his vicars, lead the Church in his name. Christ gave this assistance first to the apostles, then to the bishops, who succeeded them in the pastoral ministry.<sup>18</sup>

One of the functions that Christ entrusted to the pastors of his Church is the Magisterium, the teaching of the Gospel of Christ in the name of Christ, who is the only teacher and pastor of our souls: “He who hears you hears me” (Lk 10:16).

The Second Vatican Council declared: “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone.”<sup>19</sup> The Magisterium of the Church is an explanatory source of theology because it interprets revelation without adding or removing anything from the deposit of faith. The Magisterium is subordinate to Sacred Scripture.

Since the Church alone authentically preaches and faithfully interprets the word of God, the Magisterium—although not the ultimate standard of theological truth—is the proximate and universal standard of truth. It is the theologian’s safest guide for understanding salvific truth.

There are three groups of truths to which the believer adheres.

- i) The first group (**divinely revealed truths** or **doctrines de fide credenda**) is constituted by all those truths contained in the word of God, whether written or handed down in Tradition. The Church infallibly sets forth these truths to be believed as divinely revealed by either the extraordinary or the ordinary Magisterium. These truths require *an assent of theological faith* by the faithful. Whoever doubts or denies them falls into heresy.
- ii) The second group (**truths of Catholic doctrine** or **doctrines de fide tenenda**) includes everything *definitively* proposed by the Church regarding faith and morals. This is infallibly set forth by either the extraordinary Magisterium (by a *defining* act) or taught—also infallibly—by the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Church (a *non-defining* act) as a truth that is to be held definitively and

absolutely—*sententia definitiva tenenda*. Every believer is to give *firm and definitive assent* to these truths. The assent is based on faith in the Holy Spirit's assistance to the Magisterium and on the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the Magisterium.

Thus, Church teaches that a doctrine belongs to the **first or second** group by:

- a *defining* act: In an *extraordinary* and solemn way when the pope, on his own—when he speaks *ex cathedra*—or the college of bishops gathered in an ecumenical council, define some truth of faith that must be believed by all Christians;
- a non-defining act: When a doctrine is taught infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the bishops dispersed throughout the world who are in communion with the successor of St Peter. Even without a formal definition, this doctrine belongs to the inheritance of the *depositum fidei* and is to be understood as having set forth infallibly. Such a doctrine can be confirmed or reaffirmed by the Roman pontiff—even without the recourse to a solemn definition—by explicitly declaring that it belongs to the teaching of the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Church as a truth of the first or the second group. In this case, it is not a dogmatic definition, but a formal attestation of a truth already possessed and infallibly transmitted by the Church.

iii) The third group includes all those teachings on faith and morals that are set forth by the ordinary and universal Magisterium but not proposed as definitive. These teachings require a *religious submission of the will and intellect*. A proposition contrary to these doctrines is to be qualified as *erroneous* or, in the case of teachings of the prudential order, *rash or dangerous*.<sup>20</sup>

One of the most important historical responsibilities of the Magisterium is composing the *symbols of faith* (creeds) and the *catechisms*, which contain and summarize the basic truths of revelation. The oldest and most revered symbols are the *Apostle's Creed*, the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, and the *Athanasian Creed*.<sup>21</sup>

The ordinary Magisterium is also a source of theology.<sup>22</sup> Theologians often consult anthologies of texts of the Magisterium that have been compiled in order to facilitate their task.<sup>23</sup> The theologian's fidelity to the

Magisterium of the Church is shown in his willingness to accept and preserve the fundamental notions that the Church has used to define dogmas. These are especially authoritative formulas of the faith of the Church.<sup>24</sup>

We should also keep in mind that “sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”<sup>25</sup> All three are complementary elements of the divine plan for the conservation and integral transmission of saving revelation throughout the centuries.



## 11. The Two Stages of Theology

Theology is the science that aims at the understanding of the faith—*intellectus fidei*. In order to reach that goal, theologians must first listen to revelation, then try to understand its meaning in more depth. There are two stages or moments in the theologian's work: the speculative thought (*intellectus*) must be preceded by the attentive listening to the Gospel (*auditus*). This twofold nature of theological study leads to the distinction between positive and speculative theology.

## **11 a) Positive Theology**

Positive theology is the task of scientifically determining, with precision and intellectual rigor, the actual content of revelation and the order followed by God in revealing the great theological themes. For this, the theologian must study disciplines such as biblical history, Hebrew, Greek, the history of dogmas, and the history of theology.

## 11b) Speculative Theology

Once the content of revelation is clearly determined, the theologian must go deeper. This deeper exploration is speculative theology—the intellectual effort to penetrate revelation and show the order and harmony between the different revealed truths. It is also referred to as systematic or Scholastic theology.

The roles of speculative theology are:

- to precisely determine the meaning of the concepts and images that God uses in revelation;
- to penetrate the inner logic of God's plan of salvation and the pedagogical meaning of the history of salvation;
- to develop the typologies that God used in revelation (in theology, a type is a person, event, or thing that prefigures another: Joseph, in the Old Testament, is a type of Jesus);
- to try to understand the divine mysteries through analogies drawn from human experience;
- to draw the conclusions that logically follow from revealed truths;
- to systematize the mysteries of faith according to their intrinsic order; and
- to interpret and evaluate, in the light of the Gospel, the signs of the times, the facts and traits that characterize a certain historical and cultural moment.<sup>26</sup>

While trying to grasp the inner logic of God's design, we should keep in mind that “it is not the logic of necessity, but of a love and freedom going beyond what is strictly due,” and we are facing “the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom 11:33).<sup>27</sup> Therefore:

The reasons that support the truths of faith are not demonstrations that can bring ultimate vision to the human intellect; thus, these truths remain not self-evident. But these reasons remove some obstacles, by showing that the truths of faith are not impossible; thus, such reasons do not diminish the merit or the measure of faith.<sup>28</sup>

This type of reason is an argument of fittingness. It helps us to grasp the truth, but lacks the strength of a logical demonstration.

Rather than distinguishing two types of theology, it would be more appropriate to think in terms of two different moments or stages—a positive

stage and a speculative stage—of the theological work. Both stages are necessary for theology.

## **12. The Theologian and Philosophy**

A theologian should use all the cultural resources that might help to understand revelation better. Philosophy is a privileged and necessary tool for fruitful theological work. Several questions about the relationship between theology and philosophy arise. One may ask, “In what terms can the theologian make a legitimate use of philosophy? What are the relations between philosophy and theology?”

## 12a) Theology Assumes Philosophy

Philosophy is a natural human wisdom in itself, but it can also become a servant of theology—*ancilla theologiae*. It is a servant and collaborator of theology, not to betray natural truth, but to shed light on the word of God. Philosophy is at the service of theology because the theologian knows when and how philosophy should be used.

To describe remote lands, a traveler must compare them with the landscape of his own land.<sup>29</sup> To understand the divine realities, theologians must create analogies with facts of experience; philosophy can supply this factual knowledge. This mixture of faith and philosophy, says St. Thomas, is not watering down the good wine of the word of God, but making the miracle of Cana: transforming the water of human knowledge into God's wine. "Moreover, the Church herself not only urges but even commands Christian teachers to seek help from philosophy."<sup>30</sup>

The Magisterium of the Church has especially recommended that theologians study metaphysics, without which even the terms of the dogmatic formulas could be misinterpreted.<sup>31</sup>

## 12b) The Preambles of Faith

Christian theology has a high regard for the efforts of reason to reach some knowledge of God, since God himself endowed mankind with the capacity to know its Creator. Theologians consider this capacity, together with other philosophical data, preambles of faith—*preambula fidei*. These truths prepare and bring man closer to faith. The existence of God, the spiritual nature of the human soul, man's capacity to know the truth, human freedom, and the need for religion are such truths.

The First Vatican Council solemnly acknowledged the usefulness for the faith, not only of natural theology, but of the best philosophical culture as well:

Faith and reason can never disagree; but more than that, they are even mutually advantageous. For right reason demonstrates the foundations of faith and, enlightened by the light of faith, pursues the science of divine things. Faith, on the other hand, sets reason free, guards it from errors, and furnishes it with extensive knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

Protestant theologians, on the other hand, reject any role of human culture in the preparation for faith or in the development of theology. This radical view greatly impairs theology, which is then reduced to a commentary on Sacred Scripture, and easily leads to a flawed interpretation of the Bible.

Theologians need philosophy “to make modern man understand these *prolegomena fidei*, that are the basic norms of human thought. Without them, the acceptance of faith degenerates into imperfect and outmoded forms of nominalism, pragmatism, or sentimentalism. It is necessary to restore to man's spirit, thought, and heart, that fundamental aptitude that transforms him into a screen where the light of faith can be projected.”<sup>33</sup>

Some philosophical truths—those called *preambula fidei*—are so important for the faith that the Magisterium has specified them among its most important definitions. Thus, among the truths confessed in the *Creed of the People of God*, Paul VI included the conviction that our intellect “reaches that which is, and not merely to the subjective expression of the structures and developments of consciousness.”

## 12c) Theological Critique of Philosophy

Philosophical knowledge and principles must be evaluated from the standpoint of the supreme certitude of faith. Therefore, “the positive values in the various cultures and philosophies are to be sought out, carefully examined, and taken up. However, systems and methods incompatible with Christian faith must not be accepted.”<sup>34</sup> Theologians who accept philosophical systems without assessing them in the light of faith are like “children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles” (Eph 4:14).

Not all philosophical systems contain the same degree of wisdom. It is not just a matter of how close their conclusions come to reality; often, their very principles are tainted by error. Therefore, the Church has issued guidelines on some philosophical systems that, containing serious natural errors, cannot help theologians illumine the faith. If a theologian were to use a philosophical system weighted down by error, he would easily reach a mistaken interpretation of the faith. The so-called philosophies of immanence have proved especially dangerous and harmful when used in theology.

St. Paul already warned the first faithful not to be duped “by philosophy and empty deceit” (Col 2:8). The Fathers of the Church also warned that many heresies stemmed from wrong philosophical interpretations of revelation. The Church now warns that faith “is absolutely incompatible with any epistemological, moral, or metaphysical relativism; with any materialism, pantheism, immanentism, subjectivism, and atheism.”<sup>35</sup>

On the positive side, the Church establishes that “philosophical formation must be based upon the philosophical heritage that is *perennially* valid.”<sup>36</sup> The perennially valid is “that sound philosophy, that is like a heritage received from the preceding Christian generations, and that, therefore, is endowed with a greater authority, because the Magisterium of the Church itself has used its principles and main tenets.”<sup>37</sup> This expression of the Magisterium refers to “the principles of St. Thomas.”<sup>38</sup>



## 12d) The Theological Authority of St. Thomas Aquinas

Since theology plays an essential role in Christian life, there is a certain amount of danger that it could cause serious harm to souls. Thus, the Church has repeatedly set a model and master for theologians to follow as they learn how to think in the light of faith: St. Thomas Aquinas. The Church calls him *Doctor Communis*, the “common or universal doctor” of all theologians.

Since St. Thomas’s canonization in 1323, the popes have recommended the study of his doctrine. Councils—from Florence to Vatican II—have used his doctrine, often quoting him explicitly. The First Vatican Council and all the popes of the last century have recommended the teaching of St. Thomas as the guide for theological education.

The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed St. Thomas as master of theologians. When talking about theological education, the Council declares: “To throw as full a light as possible on the mysteries of salvation, the students should learn to examine more deeply, with the help of speculation and with St. Thomas as teacher, all aspects of these mysteries, and to perceive their interconnection.”<sup>39</sup>

The Council encourages all Christians to keep the unity of faith and reason in mind during their doctrinal formation. In Catholic universities, students should be taught in such a way “that a progressively deeper understanding of them may be achieved, and by a careful attention to the current problems of these changing times and to the research being undertaken, the convergence of faith and reason in the one truth may be seen more clearly. This method follows the tradition of the doctors of the Church, and especially St. Thomas Aquinas.”<sup>40</sup> As Paul VI noted, “this is the first time that an Ecumenical Council recommends a specific theologian, St. Thomas.”<sup>41</sup>

The *Code of Canon Law* of 1983 carries the same recommendation: Theological studies should be undertaken “with St. Thomas in particular as their teacher.”<sup>42</sup>

Pope John Paul II has stated that the doctrine of St. Thomas will always be valid, since it is based on the immutable principles of reality: “It

is from this proclamation of being that the philosophy of St. Thomas derives its ability to grasp and affirm all that shows itself to the human intellect (what is given by experience, in the widest sense) as a determinate existing being in all the inexhaustible richness of its content.”<sup>43</sup>

These declarations of the Magisterium place St. Thomas Aquinas in a privileged position:

- He has greater authority than all other theologians and doctors.
- The value of his theology is recognized, and his theology is proclaimed as a model for the explanation and rational development of revelation.
- His theological method is praised and recommended.
- His theology is adopted as the guide for teaching this subject in institutional ecclesiastical studies.

## **13. Theological Qualifications and Censures**

Progress in the understanding of revelation is often expressed as new judgments or propositions, called theological conclusions. Theological conclusions do not have the absolute certainty of faith, but participate in that certainty to a greater or lesser degree. However, if these conclusions are explicitly revealed, or have been defined as revealed by the Church, they possess maximum certainty. Since theologians also use statements taken directly from revelation, they should be careful to always state the epistemological value of their statements.<sup>44</sup>

The categories used by theologians to gauge the certainty of theological conclusions are called theological notes or qualifications. Conversely, when theologians must judge erroneous statements that explicitly contradict revealed truths, they use parallel categories called theological censures.<sup>45</sup> The primary theological qualifications and censures are the following:

### **13a) Truth of Divine Faith (*de fide*)**

Truths of faith are immediately revealed truths, clearly contained in Sacred Scripture or Tradition. The assent due to them is based on the authority of God who reveals them (*de fide divina*).

If they are definitively proposed by the Magisterium of the Church as revealed truths—or if they are declared dogmas of faith—they are also called *de fide credenda*.

If truths are defined by a solemn judgment of faith (called definition) of the pope or a general council, they are *de fide definita*.

## 13b) Catholic Truths (*de fide ecclesiastica*)

“Catholic truths” (*veritas catholica*) and “Church doctrines” (*doctrina ecclesiastica*) are those truths and doctrines defined by the Church not as immediately revealed, but as intrinsically connected with the truths of revelation, so that their denial would undermine the revealed truths. They are to be accepted with a faith that is based on the sole authority of the Church (*de fide ecclesiastica*). These truths are as infallibly certain as dogmas proper if the Church definitively proposes them (*de fide tenenda*).

Propositions that formally contradict a truth of faith are censured as *heretical*. The *Code of Canon Law* specifies the assent due to truths of faith:

Those things are to be believed by divine and catholic faith which are contained in the word of God as it has been written or handed down by tradition, that is, in the single deposit of faith entrusted to the Church, and which are at the same time proposed as divinely revealed either by the solemn Magisterium of the Church, or by its ordinary and universal Magisterium, which in fact is manifested by the common adherence of Christ’s faithful under the guidance of the sacred Magisterium.<sup>46</sup>

However, it is licit only to censure erroneous propositions when there is evidence that they are contrary to a truth of faith. In this regard, canon law establishes that “no doctrine is understood to be infallibly defined unless this is manifestly demonstrated.”<sup>47</sup>

### **13c) Truth Proximate to Faith (*fides proximum*)**

Teachings *proximate to faith* are generally regarded by theologians as revealed, but have not yet definitively promulgated as such by the Church. A proposition that contradicts them is censured as *proximate to heresy*.

The recent Magisterium has abandoned this way of qualifying doctrines. It usually gives explanatory declarations. The theological qualification is derived from the affirmations and observations included in the documents.

## 14. Dispositions for the Study of Theology

As a science, theology is the fruit of reason. Its study, therefore, requires the same disposition as any other science: love and respect for the truth, perseverance, careful application of the proper method (*acribia*), and prudence and magnanimity to accept—with a critical and loyal attitude—the contributions of other scientists.

The Second Vatican Council stresses the need for this attitude in the study of theology: “The teaching method adopted should stimulate in the students a love of rigorous investigation, observation and demonstration of the truth, as well as an honest recognition of the limits of human knowledge.”<sup>48</sup>

Above all, theology is the fruit of faith; faith makes possible, encourages, and continuously supports theological research. As science of divine revelation, theology requires an attitude of openness to the infinite greatness of God, to the Mystery that freely gives himself to us out of love. God hides his wisdom from the so-called “wise and prudent,” but reveals it to the “small ones,” to those who are humble (cf. Mt 11:25).

What, then, will be the right attitude for man, called to an inconceivable intimacy by God’s antecedent love? The answer is not difficult. It is an attitude of *deep gratitude, combined with sincere humility*. So weak is our intelligence, so limited our experience, so short our lives, that what we can say about God seems more like the babbling of a child than dignified discourse, exhaustive and conclusive. Augustine confessed his trepidation on preparing to speak of the divine mysteries, are well known: “I, a mere man, am going to talk about divine things; I, a being of flesh, talking about spiritual things; I, who am mortal, talking about eternal things” (*In Io. Ev.* tr. 18, 1).

This is the fundamental conviction with which the theologian must approach his work; he must always remember that, whatever he may be able to say about God, it is always words of a man, and therefore of a tiny finite being, who has ventured upon exploration of the unfathomable mystery of the infinite God.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the results reached by the greatest geniuses of Christianity seemed completely inadequate to them compared with the transcendent Term of their investigation.... How could we fail to recall, in this connection, St. Thomas’s answer to his faithful secretary, Brother Reginald of Piperno, who was exhorting him to continue the composition of the *Summa*, interrupted after a particularly overwhelming mystical experience. Biographers report that, in reply to his friend’s urging, he limited himself to a laconic: “Brother, I cannot go on; everything that I have written seems to me straw.” Thus, the *Summa* remained unfinished.<sup>49</sup>

True theology is always interwoven with admiration, humility, and gratitude. The theologian must always have an attitude of adoration and humility. Theology demands a constant struggle to raise one's mind to the greatness of God, without falling into the trap of limiting that greatness to the narrow molds of our concepts.

How could we fail to mention here the famous prayer that St. Anselm put at the beginning of his *Proslogion*? It is such a simple and beautiful prayer that it can be a model of invocation for anyone preparing to “study God”: “God, teach me to look for you, and show yourself to me who am looking for you, since I cannot either look for you or find you if you yourself do not show yourself” (*Proslog.* 1).

A true theological commitment—let us say so frankly—can neither begin nor conclude except on one's knees, at least in the secrecy of one's interior cell, where it is possible “to worship the Father in spirit and truth” (cf. Jn 4:23).<sup>50</sup>

To bring this about it is necessary that you have an interior balance, strength of mind and spirit and, above all, a profound humility of heart that will make all disciples attentive to the truth and docile hearers of God's word which is authentically interpreted by the Magisterium. St. Thomas warns us that the proud “cannot stomach the excellence of truth, but delight in their own excellence” (*ST*, II-II, q. 162, a. 3 ad 1).<sup>51</sup>

A practical consequence of this attitude of humility is that the declarations of the Magisterium will always be received with appreciation and veneration. Also, if there is sincere humility, the duty of teaching the faith and giving clear orientations to the faithful cannot be seen as a limitation of freedom.

“Faithfulness to the Pope includes a clear and definite duty: that of knowing his thought, which he tells us in encyclicals or other documents. We have to do our part to help all Catholics pay attention to the teaching of the Holy Father, and bring their everyday behavior into line with it.”<sup>52</sup> This norm especially applies to theologians, who should always be faithful to, support, and defend the Magisterium of the Church with their science.

Revelation is not a set of impersonal ideas; rather, it is the Creator's word and invitation to mankind. Theologians must, therefore, pay special attention to his word, and give it the consideration due to the living God. Thus, theology implies an attitude of prayer, since prayer is the human word uttered in response to the word of God. Prayer is the most effective way to impel, inspire, and verify any understanding of the faith—*intellectus fidei*. A prayerful theologian imitates St. Mary, Mother of the Church, who kept divine revelation in her heart: “Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19).



In theological research, prayer, understood as everyday practice and as the spirit of faith and contemplation, takes on fundamental importance. It must become habitual in the life of a Christian scholar. This is the point; one must study the truth of the Lord with bowed head. This truth is taught and preached as an overflow of the soul that believes it, loves it, and lives from it. Thus, one should often recite the prayer that expresses the choice of the author of the Book of Wisdom: “I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. I preferred it to scepters and thrones, and I accounted wealth as nothing in comparison with it ... I loved it more than health and beauty, and I chose to have it rather than light, because its radiance never ceases” (Wis 7:7–8, 10).<sup>53</sup>

We cannot separate the seed of doctrine from the seed of piety.

The only way to inoculate your work of sowing doctrine against the germs of ineffectiveness is by being sincerely devout.<sup>54</sup>

As the science of faith, theology requires a living faith, which is kept alive by charity. Charity purges the heart of self-centeredness, allowing it to open to revelation. Love of God and apostolic zeal foster theological research and give it its fullest meaning. Thus, to study theology is to know God, because we love him and we want to make him known to other people so they can love him too.

Pope John Paul II said of St. Thomas: “He had indeed the technical mastery befitting a teacher, but, more important still, his manner of teaching was that of a saint who lives the Gospel fully, of one for whom love is everything.”<sup>55</sup>

Without sincere piety, theological work degenerates into empty intellectualism; without zeal for souls, it becomes unsubstantial logical skill. Spiritual life nurtures theology and safeguards its authenticity. Without contemplative life, theologians could not find any meaning for intellectual consideration of the mysteries of salvation, and would not strive to draw consequences from them. “Wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul” (Wis 1:4).

The gifts of the Holy Spirit of understanding and wisdom sharpen and perfect our faith, identifying us with the mind of God. Thus, they are especially useful to carry out theological research fruitfully, “for the Lord gives wisdom” (Prv 2:6).

Those who become conceited about their science and fail to thank God and ask for further guidance are prone to fall into error. Mankind cannot find its way in divine matters—which surpass human nature and intellect—without the guidance of God. “God opposes the proud” (1 Pt 5:5).

We can say with St. Augustine that, in theology, “the more piously we believe in God, the easier it is to advance in his knowledge; [thus,] we must devotedly ask God to open our understanding.”<sup>56</sup>

## 15. The Intrinsic Unity of Theological Science

Theology has its own object, which is the basis for its unity: the theologian studies everything from the point of view of the divine—*sub ratione deitatis*. Still, the peculiar characteristics of this object make theology an especially unified science. God, who reveals his intimate essence and his plan of salvation, is infinitely simple and supremely one. He has no parts, no composition of any kind. He understands everything with a single Word, who is not different from his own substance. All that refers to the Being of God and to his plans for salvation bears a strong imprint of unity and harmony.<sup>57</sup>

We have an example of this unified and theocentric concept of theology in the great Scholastic treatise prepared by St. Thomas, the *Summa Theologiae*. It consists of three parts. The first part studies the intimacy of God, one and Triune, then goes on to analyze how creatures proceed from God, who is the principle of all things: creation and creatures—angels, man, and material beings. The second part focuses on the return of creatures to their end, God. Since this return depends partly on mankind, human behavior (moral theology) is studied in this part. The third part considers the way for man to reach God as end. This way is Jesus Christ (Christology), and to follow him, man has to be united to him through the sacraments (sacramental theology).

## **16. Theological Disciplines**

The theological fields are closely interrelated. None can be studied properly when isolated from the others. Strictly speaking, there is no room in theology for specialization; theologians must always strive to master the whole of theology if they want to study one of its aspects in depth.

Yet, throughout its history, theology has branched into different theological treatises or disciplines. These are studies of some aspects of God or his work of salvation that can be considered separately with a certain degree of thematic unity. Theology can be divided according to the research method and subject matter.

## **16a) Method**

As we saw earlier in this chapter, we can distinguish positive theology (which includes all the historical, Biblical, and philological disciplines) from speculative theology according to the method used.

## 16b) Subject Matter

We can distinguish the following theological disciplines according to the subject matter studied:

- Dogmatic theology studies the speculative content of revelation. The main dogmatic treatises are: God, one and Triune; creation and elevation to the supernatural order; Christology; Soteriology (study of grace and salvation), ecclesiology; Mariology; and the treatise on the sacraments.
- Moral theology studies revelation as the rule of human behavior so that man can attain salvation. The main moral treatises are: fundamental morals (the study of the final end of man and human acts in general), special morals (treatise on the three theological and four cardinal virtues), and sacramental morals (the moral obligations related to the sacraments).
- Spiritual theology (also called ascetical or mystical theology) studies the increase of charity in Christian life.
- Pastoral and catechetical theology studies the pastoral activity of the Church. It is especially concerned with religious pedagogy and pastoral care—the criteria governing the activity of those who partake in Christ's role as Pastor of souls.
- Fundamental theology focuses on the sapiential dimension of theology rather than its scientific value. It studies the intellectual value of the mysteries of revelation and faith—the foundations of theology—in close dialogue with philosophy and culture. With a method similar to that of dogmatic theology, fundamental theology studies the credibility of revelation and the reasonable character of Christian faith. Fundamental theology studies the theoretical foundations of theology as science and wisdom. In this way, it provides the framework for apologetics (the art of writing Christian arguments that show the credibility of dogmas under attack) and the reasonable nature of Christian faith. Apologetics shows that faith is not incompatible with reason, but attractive and logically demonstrable in many instances.

Since theology is wisdom, all theologians feel the responsibility to cultivate this apologetic dimension in their respective areas of concentration. On the other hand, given the scope of modern culture,

apologetics cannot be the concern of theologians alone; it must be the concern of all Christians.<sup>58</sup> Each individual must use his or her professional formation to detect the cultural elements that could make the Gospel more accessible, easier to understand, and more attractive. Fundamental theology is limited to studying the theoretical foundation of apologetics and, therefore, cannot substitute for apologetics, but fundamental theology can show the way to begin.

1. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow*, 572.
2. John Paul II, "Address to the Pontifical Lateran University," *L'Osservatore Romano*, Mar. 10, 1980.
3. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 1, a. 8.
4. Cf. *CCC*, 74–100.
5. Pius VI, "Condemnation of the Synod of Pistoia": DS 2601.
6. *DV*, 8.
7. *LG*, 12.
8. Cf. *SC*, 14.
9. Cf. Pius XII, Enc. *Mediator Dei*, Sep. 20, 1947.
10. Cf. DS 600–3.
11. John Paul II, Ap. Letter *Patres Ecclesiae*, Jan. 2, 1980: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Feb. 25, 1981.
12. *DV*, 8.
13. Cf. DS 1501, 3029; *CCC*, 101–141.
14. *DV*, 24.
15. John Paul II, Ap. Const. *Sapientia Christiana*, Apr. 25, 1979, 67.1: *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 4, 1979.
16. *DV*, 10.
17. *Ibid.*, 24.
18. Cf. DS 3050–52; *CCC*, 81.
19. *DV*, 10; cf. *CCC*, 85.
20. Cf. *CIC*, c. 750; *LG*, 25; J. Card. Ratzinger, "Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the 'Professio Fidei,'" *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 15, 1998.
21. Cf. *CCC*, 185–197.
22. Cf. *CIC*, 752–753; *LG*, 25.
23. The best known compilation is that of Henrico Denzinger, later expanded (32nd ed.) by Adolf Schoenmetzer: *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum* [DS].
24. Cf. Pius XII, Enc. *Humani Generis*, Aug. 12, 1950: DS 3881–83; Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei*; *CCC*, 88–90.
25. *DV*, 10; cf. *CCC*, 97.
26. Cf. *GS*, 4.
27. J.L. Illanes, *Gran Enciclopedia Rialp*, s.v. "Teología," 22:250.
28. *ST*, II-II, q. 2, a. 10 ad 2.

29. Cf. M.J. Scheeben, *Dogmatik*, 862; *The Mysteries of Christianity*, 107, 3.
30. Leo XIII, Enc. *Aeterni Patris*, Aug. 4, 1879.
31. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Const. *Sapientia Christiana*, May 25, 1979, art. 72; cf. *OT*, 14.
32. First Vatican Council, Dogm. Const. *Dei Filius*, 4: DS 3019.
33. Paul VI, *Address to the International Theological Commission*, Oct. 11, 1972.
34. John Paul II, Ap. Const. *Sapientia Christiana*, May 25, 1979, 68.2: *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 4, 1979; cf. *OT*, 15.
35. Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *On the Teaching of Philosophy*, 1972; cf. Paul VI, Letter *Lumen Ecclesiae*, Nov. 20, 1974, 18; Pius XII, Enc. *Humani Generis*, Aug. 12, 1950: DS 3894; John Paul II, *Address at the Pontifical Gregorian University*, Dec. 15, 1979.
36. *CIC*, 251. Author's emphasis.
37. Pius XII, Enc. *Humani Generis*, Aug. 12, 1950: DS 3892. Cf. Leo XIII, Enc. *Aeterni Patris*, Aug. 4, 1879.
38. Cf. S.C. of Seminaries and Universities, *Answer*, Dec. 20, 1965; quoted in note to *CIC*, c. 251, University of Navarre edition.
39. *OT*, 16.
40. *Gravissimum Educationis Momentum*, 10.
41. Paul VI, Letter *Lumen Ecclesiae*, Nov. 20, 1974, 24.
42. *CIC*, 252.
43. John Paul II, *Address at the Angelicum University*, Nov. 17, 1979, 6: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 17, 1979; cf. *Address to the VIII International Thomistic Congress*, Nov. 13, 1980.
44. Cf. J.L. Illanes, *Sobre el Saber Teológico* (Madrid: 1978), 66–67.
45. For an authoritative systematic listing, cf. Prospero Cardinal Lambertini, *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* (1734/1738).
46. *CIC*, 750, which is a near literal quotation from the First Vatican Council, Dogm. Const. *Dei Filius*, 3: DS 3011. The Code continues: "Heresy is the obstinate denial or doubt, after baptism, of a truth which must be believed by divine and catholic faith" (*Ibid.*, 751). It should be noted that the teachings of the ordinary Magisterium of the pope or the college of bishops that are not intended as definitions of faith are Catholic truths, but not truths of faith. Nevertheless, "while the assent of faith is not required, a religious submission of intellect and will" should be accorded to them (cf. *Ibid.*, 752).
47. *CIC*, 749.
48. *OT*, 15.
49. John Paul II, "Address to the Pontifical Universities of Rome," 2: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Nov. 19, 1979.
50. *Ibid.*, 4.
51. John Paul II, "Address at the Pontifical Gregorian University," 9: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Jan. 21, 1980; cf. *ST*, II-II, q. 162, a. 3 ad 1.
52. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 633; cf. 133, 581, 585.
53. John Paul II, "Homily at the Mass for the Pontifical Roman Universities": *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 1, 1980.
54. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 918.
55. John Paul II, "Address at the Angelicum University": *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 17, 1979.
56. St. Augustine, *Contra Adversarium Legis et Prophetarum*, 1, 10; *De Trin.*, 8.1.
57. Cf. John Paul II, "Homily to the Roman Pontifical Universities," 5: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Nov. 9, 1981.
58. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 338.



## 4

# Theology in the Life of the Church

THEOLOGIANs RECEIVE REVELATION from the Church and receive faith within the Church.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, theology is extremely important for the life of the Church. Besides its scientific value, theology shares in the salvific function of Christian faith. Theologians have a special ecclesial responsibility; they must make sure that the talent they have received—the capacity to penetrate deeper into the deposit of faith with their intelligence—yields fruit for the glory of God and the benefit of souls.

In the Church, theologians are “teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11–12). A good theologian should feel this responsibility and be aware that this scientific work is also a service to the Church: “Theology is an ecclesial science because it grows in the Church and works on the Church. Thus, theology is never the private affair of a specialist, cut off in a kind of ivory tower. Theology is a service of the Church; the theologian should feel himself dynamically involved in the mission of the Church, particularly in her prophetic mission.”<sup>2</sup>

“A deep ecclesial awareness,” teaches Pope John Paul II, “will be the most certain criterion to safeguard you from the risk of building on a foundation other than the one laid by God.”<sup>3</sup> Further, he states, “Nobody can make of theology, as it were, a simple collection of his own personal ideas; everybody must be sure of being in close union with the mission of teaching the truth for which the Church is responsible.”<sup>4</sup>

A clear manifestation of this ecclesial outlook, “feeling with the Church” (*sentire cum Ecclesia*), is the willingness to correct any personal opinion that may break with the Magisterium of the Church.<sup>5</sup> “The role of the theologian is geared to the building up of ecclesial communion, so that the people of God may grow in the experience of faith.”<sup>6</sup>

## **17. Theology and the Magisterium of the Church**

The Magisterium of the Church is one of the sources of theology. The Holy Spirit guides his pastors so that, enlightened on the riches of revelation by theology, they authoritatively bring a deeper understanding of the Gospel to the life of the Church. The fruits of salvation are then more abundant. Theology provides the Magisterium with support, inspiration, and food for preaching, catechesis, missionary work, and even new definitions of faith.<sup>7</sup>

Theology and the Magisterium are complementary Church ministries. They are not opposing forces, representing contrary interests in a dialectical struggle. It would be a serious mistake about the nature of both to think of them as such.

We do not wish that a mistaken suspicion unduly take hold of your mind: that there is a rivalry between two primacies, that of science and that of authority. There is only one primacy in the field of divine doctrine: that of the revealed truth, that of the faith, to which both theology and ecclesiastical Magisterium want to give diverse, though converging, approvals.<sup>8</sup>

## **18. Ecclesial Dimensions of Theology**

Theology has the capacity and responsibility to enlighten the pastoral activity of the Church and the apostolate and spiritual life of each Christian.

The task of the theologian is an ecclesial mission, a participation in the evangelizing mission of the Church, and a pre-eminent service to the ecclesial community. Hence the grave responsibility of the theologian, who should always have in mind that the People of God—particularly the priests and future priests who will have to educate them in the faith—have the right to have explained to them without ambiguities or reductions the fundamental truths of the Christian faith.<sup>9</sup>

## 18a) Spiritual Dimension

Theological knowledge facilitates dealing with God and recognizing his will. Theology should be credited, explains St. Augustine, “only with begetting, nurturing, defending, and strengthening the faith; the saving faith, which leads to true happiness.”<sup>10</sup> Theology improves our knowledge of revelation, God in himself, and his plan of salvation.

Therefore, all Christians need to acquire a certain degree of theological culture, each according to their circumstances. Piety and apostolate are closely related to doctrinal formation.

Theology is also a practical science: “It is not a science at all if it has no value for piety; and any piety lacking the capacity of discernment of science is utterly useless.”<sup>11</sup> Without becoming a preacher, the theologian should place his science in contact with Christian life. The Church establishes that “theological formation ... is to be imparted in such a way that the students learn the whole of catholic teaching, based on divine Revelation, that they make it a nourishment of their own spiritual lives, and that in the exercise of the ministry they may be able properly to proclaim and defend it.”<sup>12</sup>

“We are to be pious then, as pious as children, but not ignorant. Insofar as possible, each of us should study the faith seriously, rigorously—all of which means theology.”<sup>13</sup> Studying doctrine is a way of preserving the faith.

## **18b) Apostolic Dimension**

Theological knowledge prepares for and confirms the transmission of the Christian message to other people. It is also helpful for understanding the preaching of the faith in all cultures. It defends the doctrine of faith against any doubts or attacks that may arise in each historical period.

Without the help and guidance of theology, apostolate could fall into superficiality, error, and activism. An essential part of Christian apostolate is the apostolate of doctrine: fighting religious ignorance, drowning error in an abundance of light and true doctrine. “A few are wicked, and many are ignorant: that is how the enemy of God and of the Church reigns.”<sup>14</sup> Theology nurtures and guides the apostolate, but it is not apostolate, since it pursues a theoretical purpose. We can neither reduce theology to preaching nor understand the apostolate as mere theological information or discussion.

There is an urgent need for doctrinal, theological formation, so that the laity can face the varied problems and situations of the apostolate active in the world. “You need interior life and doctrinal formation. Be demanding on yourself! ... Your interior life and your formation include the piety and the principles a child of God must have in order to give flavor to everything by his active presence there.”<sup>15</sup> “There is an urgent need for spreading the doctrine of Christ. Store up your training, fill yourself with clear ideas, with the fullness of the Christian message, so that afterwards you can pass it on to others. Do not expect God to illuminate you, for he has no reason to when you have definite human means available to you: study and work.”<sup>16</sup>

## 18c) Pastoral Dimension

Theology offers sure guidance for preaching and spiritual direction. “The Council urges theologians to develop a theology that would be no less pastoral than scientific.”<sup>17</sup>

The differences and similarities of theology and pastoral care are those of theoretical and practical knowledge, of science and art. It is the difference between the knowledge of a biologist and the knowledge of a farmer, or a mineralogist and a construction worker. Hence, there is a responsibility of those entrusted with pastoral or apostolic activities to acquire a solid theological formation. As St. Thomas pointed out, “Men of higher degree, whose business is to teach others, must have fuller knowledge of matters of faith, and believe them more explicitly.”<sup>18</sup>

Theologians have great influence in the life of the soul. Therefore, their ecclesial responsibility should lead them to be extremely prudent in the publication and diffusion of their conclusions; they must avoid any scandal or confusion among the faithful in matters of faith or morals.

The faithful have the right not to be troubled by theories and hypotheses that they cannot judge, or that are easily reduced or manipulated by public opinion for ends that are opposed to the truth. On the day of his death, John Paul I stated: “Among the rights of the faithful, one of the greatest is the right to receive God’s word in all its entirety and purity....” (September 28, 1978). It behooves the theologian to be free, but in that freedom must be openness to the truth and to the light that comes from faith and from fidelity to the Church.<sup>19</sup>

Aware of the influence that their research and their statements have on catechetical instruction, theologians and exegetes must take great care not to pass off questions that are matters of opinion or of discussion among experts as certain.<sup>20</sup>

Those who are teachers of the faith should avoid bewildering people and using confusing language that may lead to ambiguity. Theologians and those who work with them should teach the Christian people to understand well the events and situations of doctrinal confusion in which their Christian faith and vocation are placed under practical challenge.... The treatises of theologians should render the faith more lucid; theology is not merely to be consigned to weighty volumes and *Summas* (however valuable), but to be lived in a simple—I dare say—“popular” fashion.<sup>21</sup>

## **18d) Ecumenical Dimension**

Theology always has an ecumenical dimension. As it penetrates ever deeper into divine revelation, it manifests the value and appeal of the truth about God, man, and the world, which only the Catholic Church possesses completely and without error. Further, the Church desires that ways of helping our separated brethren be sought in the study and exposition of the doctrine of faith.

It is important that future pastors and priests should have mastered a theology that has been carefully elaborated in this way and not polemically, especially in what concerns the relations of separated brethren with the Catholic Church... The manner and order in which Catholic belief is expressed should in no way become an obstacle to dialogue with our brethren.<sup>22</sup>

However, we should not compromise the purity or integrity of the faith: "It is, of course, essential that the doctrine be clearly presented in its entirety. Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism which harms the purity of Catholic doctrine and obscures its genuine and certain meaning."<sup>23</sup>



## 18e) Missionary Dimension

Theology is also a most effective aid in the missionary work of the Church. Mother Church must preach the Gospel to all peoples and cultures of the world. The evangelization of peoples with very different cultures faces a serious problem: making them understand, love, and practice the immutable Gospel in a familiar language.

Transplanting the content of revelation into the mindset of a pagan culture is a delicate business. It demands clear awareness of what is essential and immutable in the faith. It requires the capacity to discern, in the light of faith, which elements of the pagan culture can be used to convey the Gospel and which must be rejected as incompatible with faith. Theology can shed light on this work of evangelization.

1. Cf. John Paul II, "Homily at the Mass for the Roman Pontifical Universities": *L'Osservatore Romano*, Nov. 9, 1981; CCC, 168–169.
2. John Paul II, "Address at the Pontifical Gregorian University": *L'Osservatore Romano*, Jan. 21, 1980.
3. John Paul II, "Homily to the Roman Pontifical Universities": *L'Osservatore Romano*, Nov. 9, 1981.
4. John Paul II, Enc. *Redemptor Hominis*, 19: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Mar. 19, 1979.
5. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 840.
6. Paul VI, "Letter to the Rector of the Louvain University," Sep. 13, 1975.
7. Cf. Pius XII, Enc. *Humani Generis*, Aug. 12, 1950: DS 3886; Pius IX, *Inter Gravissimas*, Oct. 26, 1870; Paul VI, "Address to the International Congress of Theology of Vatican Council II," Oct. 1, 1966.
8. Paul VI, "Address to the International Theological Commission," Oct. 6, 1969.
9. John Paul II, "Address to Theology Professors in Salamanca, Spain": *L'Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 20, 1982.
10. St. Augustine, *De Trin.*, 14.1.
11. St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, 35, 45 (PL 75:547).
12. *CIC*, c. 252.1.
13. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 10; cf. 81.
14. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 635.
15. *Ibid.*, 450.
16. *Ibid.*, 841.
17. Paul VI, "Letter to the International Congress of Theology of the Second Vatican Council," Sep. 21, 1966.
18. *ST*, II-II, q. 2, a. 6.

19. John Paul II, “Address at the Catholic University of America”: *L’Osservatore Romano*, Nov. 5, 1979.
20. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Catechesi Tradendae*, Oct. 16, 1979, 61 (in *More Post-Conciliar Documents*, p. 800).
21. John Paul II, “Address to Belgian Bishops”: *L’Osservatore Romano*, Oct. 25, 1982.
22. *UR*, 10–11.
23. *Ibid.*, 11; cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 393–397; *The Forge*, 456, 580, 726, 863, 959.

5

# Theology, Culture, and Life

## 19. Theology in the Dialogue between Faith and Culture

The First Vatican Council solemnly affirmed that no real discrepancy between what faith teaches and what right reason discovers is possible. It also taught that faith and reason help each other.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout her history, the Church has fostered the development of the arts and sciences. However, she has also warned of the dangers of scientific research that oversteps its limits.<sup>2</sup> Theology, as supernatural wisdom, can both point out these limits and expose errors presented as scientific discoveries.<sup>3</sup>

The Second Vatican Council has declared that there is a close and harmonious relation between Christian faith and human culture. Culture, according to the Council, is any reality with a human or humanizing value; it is not everything that mankind creates or produces, or the traditional customs of each people, but only what is useful for developing, perfecting, and humanizing mankind. The Church wants to enter into a dialogue with the entire human family about the problems besieging modern society. “The Council will clarify these problems in the light of the Gospel and will furnish mankind with the saving resources which the Church has received from her founder under the promptings of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

The following aspects of the relation between faith and culture are worth considering in depth:

- Faith is not merely a cultural product.
- The supernatural end of the Church is evangelization.
- Theological pluralism has limits.
- Faith should be expressed in the language proper to each culture.
- Theology guides the inculturation of the faith.

## **19a) Faith is Not a Cultural Product**

Faith is essentially theological, divine; it comes from God and tries to divinize human life. Since it is not the product of a specific culture, it has the intrinsic capacity to inform any culture. As the Council affirms:

The Church has been sent to all ages and nations and, therefore, is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, to any particular way of life, or to any customary practices, ancient or modern. The Church is faithful to her traditions and is at the same time conscious of her universal mission; she can, then, enter into communion with different forms of culture, thereby enriching both herself and the cultures themselves.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted (the Biblical world or, more concretely, the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived), nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down [through] the centuries.<sup>6</sup>

## **19b) The Supernatural End of the Church: Evangelization**

Revelation brings many benefits to human civilization: the elimination of the errors and evils arising from the permanent seduction of sin, the continuous purification of people's morals, and the strengthening and perfecting of the spiritual qualities and traditions of each people. However, civilization receives these benefits only when the Church applies herself in earnest to her supernatural end: evangelization.

“In this way the Church carries out her mission,” says Vatican II, “and in that very act she stimulates and advances human and civil culture, as well as contributing by her activity, including liturgical activity, to man's interior freedom.”<sup>7</sup> The Church builds up culture strictly because she pursues a higher (and strictly supernatural) end. We should not forget that the end of the Church is evangelization, not civilization. She civilizes only in order to evangelize. “Whether she aids the world or whether she benefits from it, the Church has but one sole purpose—that the Kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race may be accomplished.”<sup>8</sup> “The Church is not motivated by an earthly ambition but is interested in one thing only—to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

## **19c) Faith Expressed in the Language of Each Culture (Inculturation)**

Faith can and should “become culture.” The inculturation of faith involves faithfully translating and incarnating faith and Christian life in the language proper to each culture, assimilating their valid elements, rejecting the harmful ones, and developing from the faith their implicit potentialities.<sup>10</sup> In this way, culture and the most spiritual elements in man are offered up to God (cf. 2 Cor 10:5).

“Indeed,” teaches Pope John Paul II, “the Church’s mission of spreading the Gospel not only demands that the Good News be preached ever more widely and to ever greater numbers of men and women, but that the very power of the Gospel should permeate thought patterns, standards of judgment, and norms of behavior; in a word, it is necessary that the whole of human culture be steeped in the Gospel.”<sup>11</sup> We should also note “the purely instrumental character of cultures, which, under the influence of a very marked historical evolution, are subject to deep changes: ‘The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever’ (Is 40:8).”<sup>12</sup>

## **19d) Theology Guides the Inculturation of the Faith**

Theology leads, encourages, and guides the assimilation of human culture. As a premise for this inculturation, theology—which achieves a deeper and deeper understanding of revelation—has to answer the “questions arising from the development of thought”<sup>13</sup> that are in some way related to human salvation.

Therefore, the Church establishes that students of theology “should learn to seek the solution of human problems in the light of revelation, to apply her eternal truths to the changing conditions of human affairs, and to express them in language which people of the modern world will understand.”<sup>14</sup>



## **19e) The Responsibility of the Whole Church**

The great social task of inculturation can be achieved only through the living faith of all the faithful. Therefore, it is urgent that lay people prepare for this work by acquiring solid doctrinal and theological formation. Such extensive lay formation was responsible for the building of Western civilization.<sup>15</sup>

The first contribution of theology to the dialogue between faith and culture is the necessary doctrinal formation of the faithful. The faithful will then be able to integrate their human knowledge in their Christian life, as the Church wishes:

The faithful ought to work in close conjunction with their contemporaries and try to get to know their ways of thinking and feeling, as they find them expressed in current culture. Let the faithful incorporate the findings of new sciences and teachings and the understanding of the most recent discoveries with Christian morality and thought, so that their practice of religion and their moral behavior may keep abreast of their acquaintance with science and of the relentless progress of technology: in this way they will succeed in evaluating and interpreting everything with an authentically Christian sense of values.<sup>16</sup>

In order to achieve this ideal, the Church would like to see more lay people take up theological studies: “It is to be hoped that more of the laity will receive adequate theological formation and that some among them will dedicate themselves professionally to these studies and contribute to their advancement.”<sup>17</sup>

## **19f) Dangers of Inculturation**

In the pursuit of the inculturation of the faith, one should keep in mind that not all expressions of human cultures (customs, ways of thinking, new technological possibilities, doctrines) are morally upright and compatible with faith. The Magisterium warns that, in the combination of revelation with scientific discoveries and cultural values, “all syncretism ... is to be excluded.”<sup>18</sup> That is to say, one must avoid any element that is incompatible with the Gospel.

The Church teaches that “the positive values in the various cultures and philosophies are to be sought out, carefully examined, and taken up. However, systems and methods incompatible with Christian faith must not be accepted.”<sup>19</sup>

Sometimes, these incompatibilities and deviations are readily apparent to the majority of the faithful. In other cases, their discernment requires deeper doctrinal formation and a more detailed study. Hence the warning of the Council:

With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the whole people of God, particularly of its pastors and theologians, to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and to interpret them in the light of the divine Word, in order that the revealed truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and more suitably presented.<sup>20</sup>

In order to achieve this, “theological research, while it deepens knowledge of revealed truth, should not lose contact with its own times, so that experts in various fields may be led to a deeper knowledge of the faith.”<sup>21</sup>

## **20. Theological Pluralism and Progress**

### **20a) Theological Progress**

Progress in theology does not mean substituting new dogmas for the ones transmitted by the Church. On the contrary, intellectual progress in theology is possible because its principles—the truths of faith—always retain their value. Theological progress is, thus, a homogeneous progress, which is part of the organic progress of the Church in the understanding of the faith.<sup>22</sup>

In positive sciences, new discoveries may well cause a new theory or formulation of natural laws to displace older ones. In theology, however, it is not possible to discover new ways of salvation; the definitive revelation for salvation has been given in Christ.<sup>23</sup>

Primarily, theological progress takes place in two directions:

- Toward a better understanding of the deposit of revelation.
- Toward a right interpretation—from the standpoint of faith—of the events of human history and of the new problems that arise in human life. This interpretation is essential if we want to give Christian answers to new problems as they develop.

In this progress, theologians must be careful to distinguish what belongs to the faith of the Church (truths of faith) from common theological sentences and the mere opinions of some theologians. Put simply, matters of dogma must be clearly distinguished from debatable matters left to the free discussion of theologians. In doing this, theology must avoid two erroneous extremes:

- (1) Modernism or progressivism, a revolutionary position that breaks the continuity of the united and homogeneous Tradition of the Church.
- (2) Ultraconservatism, a position that wants to impose on the faith its own personal conservative convictions, not wanting to accept the action of the Holy Spirit, who governs the Church and perfects the understanding of revelation through his gifts. This is the position of the “Old Catholics” and of many non-Catholic Christians who accept only the definitions of the councils of ancient times.

## **20b) Legitimate Pluralism in Theology**

The Magisterium has always defended and supported legitimate theological pluralism in all matters related to the deposit of faith that admits diverse, and even opposing, interpretations.<sup>24</sup>

There are several reasons for this pluralism:

- The human intellect has limitations in the way it grasps and explains questions, especially those touching on the infinite perfection of God.
- Many approaches, scientific instruments, and philosophical instruments are available to researchers (Aristotelianism, Platonism, etc.).
- The starting points of theology, though all belonging to revelation, may be different, admitting different perceptions and insights. This is true in the field of Christian spirituality also.
- Theologians live in different cultural environments and different Christian traditions, which can affect their modes of investigation. Thus, in ancient times, there were differences between the Alexandrian and Antiochene theological schools and, in general, between the Eastern and Western schools.<sup>25</sup>

## 20c) Limits of Theological Pluralism

Theological pluralism does not refer to dogma (dogmatic pluralism) or to doctrines definitively settled by the Church. The truth revealed by God and taught by the Church as such is as immutable as God himself.

In referring to the object of faith, “any meaning of the sacred dogmas that has once been declared by Holy Mother Church must always be retained.”<sup>26</sup> Questions that are properly *de fide* are no longer subject to free interpretation; any opinion different from the sense defined by the Church would no longer be a valid theological opinion, but a heresy. “There must never be any deviation from that meaning on the specious ground of a more profound understanding.”<sup>27</sup>

“The due freedom of theologians must always be limited by the word of God as it is faithfully preserved and expounded in the Church and taught and explained by the living Magisterium.”<sup>28</sup> Theologians should strive to go deeper into revelation and understand it better, confident that intellectual rigor and the guidance of the Holy Spirit will go hand in hand. They will never be led to the extreme of having to doubt or contradict what the Church had already conclusively defined with divine certitude.

A traditional formula sums up the golden rule of theological research: Unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is debatable, charity in everything (*In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*).

## **21. Consistency Between Culture, Theology, and Life**

Theology binds faith and culture, but it also binds faith and moral life. Thus, theological formation reinforces the unity of life. On the one hand, theology supplies the principles and criteria needed to “bring our life into line with our conscience, a well-formed conscience.”<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, theology corrects the possible disagreements between the ideas we may form about God, man, and the world, and what faith teaches us about them.

## **21 a) Consistency Between Faith and Life**

When faith is no longer alive, it does not govern life with its norms of conduct. It is then that life takes the upper hand, imposing itself on faith, trying to alter or destroy it.

In a person, theoretical and practical convictions go together, but the latter are the ones that govern moral behavior. In behavior, the individual follows the judgments of his conscience. Alternately, when a person is not willing to comply with them, he tends to corrupt his conscience. Consistency between thought and action is a tendency of the human person. Likewise, a person tends toward consistency between beliefs and the practical criteria that actually govern his actions. The person—the ultimate subject of our actions—is the principle that unifies all aspects of human activity, relating them, and causing them to affect one another. Faith underlies this unity of life; through faith, the believer starts to partake of the divine life, which is infinitely simple and undivided. This unity explains how a life of piety and doctrinal formation are necessarily related.

Theology allows man to:

- realize with scientific clarity the danger that a disorderly moral life poses to faith;
- perceive how attractive it is to behave like children of light, like children of God;
- expose the fake glitter of the idols that man forges in every age.

The study of theology is thus a very important means to acquire a properly formed conscience.

## 21b) Consistency Between Faith and Culture

The unity of the life of redeemed man demands harmony between the teachings of faith and the convictions of reason, between religious culture and human culture. There are three main pitfalls to avoid while maintaining this harmony: rationalism, agnosticism, and fideism.

### (1) *Rationalism*

Strict rationalism consists in judging everything solely and exclusively according to philosophical or scientific reason. Reason is considered the only valid rule to discern the truth, even in religious matters. There is no room for faith; any faith is deemed superstition. Still, some rationalists admit a natural, rational religion, based on philosophical theology (deism). We can easily apply the words of Scripture to this error: “There is a cleverness which is abominable, but there is a fool who merely lacks wisdom.... There is cleverness which is scrupulous but unjust” (Sir 19:23, 25).

### (2) *Agnosticism*

Agnostics hold that God and religious matters are beyond the capacity of the human intellect, and so faith is irrational. There is no room for religious truth or for true religion, and this leads to religious indifferentism. Agnosticism claims that culture must be built solely on rational foundations; faith should not have any part in it. Religious matters are relegated to the intimacy of one’s conscience, and Christian life is reduced to sentimental, pietistic practices.

### (3) *Fideism*

Religious fideism consists in accepting religious beliefs without grasping their intellectual content, without seeing the reasons that make them believable, without seeing their connection with other realities, and without acknowledging the right to intellectual life to which faith is entitled. Fideism is compatible with philosophical agnosticism.

The Church has condemned these three errors through their most vicious manifestations: *atheism* and *modernism*.<sup>30</sup>

Theology avoids the creation of two independent worlds in the believer’s life: what he believes and what he knows, commitment to God and ordinary life, religious practice and human experience. This lack of



unity can cause only serious conflicts, detrimental to the life of faith. Consistency between faith and culture both presupposes and reinforces consistency between faith and life. A person who strives to live according to Christian faith is in a position to set Christ at the top of human culture.<sup>31</sup> The believer comes to think, feel, wish, and want according to this unity of life.

Cultural formation where theology is absent is like the rocky ground of the Gospel parable. The growth and development of the divine life sown in the soul are impeded, and will eventually wither (cf. Mt 13:20–21). Theology is the science of faith; it unifies the mind, heart, and behavior of the Christian, thus fostering the fullness of Christian life: the life of faith (cf. Gal 3:11).

1. Cf. First Vatican Council, Dogm. Const. *Dei Filius*, 4; cf. CCC, 154–161.
2. Cf. First Vatican Council, Dogm. Const. *Dei Filius*, 4.
3. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 974.
4. *GS*, 3.
5. *Ibid.*, 58.
6. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Catechesi Tradendae*, Oct. 16, 1979 (in *More Post-Conciliar Documents*, p. 800).
7. *GS*, 58.
8. *Ibid.*, 45.
9. *Ibid.*, 3.
10. Cf. CCC, 172–175; 854. One of Boethius’s mottos, which guided medieval culture, was: “Unite faith and reason as much as possible.”
11. John Paul II, Ap. Const. *Sapientia Christiana*, May 25, 1979; *L’Osservatore Romano*, June 4, 1979; cf. Paul VI, Ap. Ex. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19–20.
12. John Paul II, *Address to the Pontifical Biblical Commission*, Apr. 26, 1979; *L’Osservatore Romano*, May 7, 1979.
13. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 11.
14. *OT*, 16.
15. Cf. *GS*, 44.
16. *Ibid.*, 62.
17. *Ibid.*
18. John Paul II, Ap. Const. *Sapientia Christiana*, May 25, 1979; *L’Osservatore Romano*, June 4, 1979.
19. *Ibid.*

20. GS, 44.
21. *Ibid.*, 62.
22. Cf. DS 3020; *DV*, 8.
23. Cf. *DV*, 2, 4.
24. Cf. Paul V, *Decretum*, Nov. 5, 1607: DS 1997; Clement XII, Bull *Apostolicae Providentiae*, Oct. 2, 1733; Pius XI, Enc. *Studiorum Ducem*, June 20, 1923: DS 3666.
25. Cf. *UR*, 17.
26. DS 3020.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decl. *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, June 24, 1973 (in *More Post-Conciliar Documents*).
29. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 148.
30. Cf. DS 3021–25; St. Pius X, Enc. *Pascendi*: DS 3475ff.
31. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, 636.

# Fundamental Dogmatic Theology: Revelation and Faith

by Enrique Moliné

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# **Fundamental Dogmatic Theology: Revelation and Faith**

by Enrique Moliné

**6**

Introduction

# 1. Faith and the Way Leading to Faith

*Faith is an assent to the truths that God proposes to us.* These truths have a supernatural character, or, at least, they are presented to us in a supernatural manner; thus, *the assent must also be supernatural.* Faith cannot be attained through a person's natural powers alone, but only through the elevation of his powers to the supernatural order. This is what God does in the intellect through the supernatural virtue of faith.

Nevertheless, this assent is not forced upon the human intellect, whose autonomy is duly respected. The principle stating that grace does not destroy nature, but rather presupposes and perfects it, applies in this case. Certainly, one cannot reach faith through natural reasoning, no matter how rigorous it may be. Neither do we believe certain things because reason comprehends them with absolute certainty, nor because they are believable, but by the authority of God who reveals them. However, certain more or less explicit arguments make it reasonable for us to believe these truths.

Such arguments convince us that it is God who communicates certain truths to us. With this conviction, one finds it reasonable to accept these truths, as long as one has a clear idea of who God is: that God can neither deceive nor be deceived. The aim of this study is to show the scientific path to the conviction that God himself teaches us some definite or particular truths.

Although not all those getting ready to believe need to follow these arguments step by step, such logic is somehow always present as human confidence in the wisdom and goodwill of the person teaching the faith.

*These arguments are only a preparation to receive the faith.* We need special assistance from God to assent to a supernatural truth: the virtue of faith. As the First Vatican Council declares, faith is "a supernatural virtue. By that faith, with the inspiration and help of God's grace, we believe that what he has revealed is true, not because we see its intrinsic truth with the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God who reveals it, of God who can neither deceive nor be deceived."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Faith and Theology

Faith gives us our supernatural religious knowledge. Since faith is not a product of human reasoning, supernatural religion does not have to be demonstrated by reason. Actually, it is not even possible to do so. However, it is possible to demonstrate that it is reasonable to believe what faith teaches (and that it is unreasonable to reject it); this is the goal of fundamental theology.

The role of reason in the field of religion does not end here. It is possible, fitting, and even necessary for reason—without attempting the impossible task of demonstrating religion “from within”—to try *to understand faith as best as it can. Reason must study the truths of faith, see how they are related to one another, order them, and study them in relation to other known natural truths.* This is the object of theology, which starts off from the datum of faith and can arrive at credible conclusions only by being loyal to faith, its foundation. Thus, a theology that questioned the faith, doubted it, was openly disloyal to it, or tried to create it out of its own reasoning would not make any sense at all. Its conclusions would be worthless.

### **3. Outline of this Work**

We will consider the possibility of God's revealing anything to humanity. After answering this question in the affirmative, we will examine if God actually revealed something, and the reasons for affirming such a conclusion. The conclusion will be that God revealed exactly what the Catholic religion teaches, that these teachings are contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, and that they are authentically interpreted and made available to us by the Magisterium of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

1. DS 3008.
2. Cf. CCC, 26–198.

# 7

## The Notion of Revelation



## 4. The Notion of Revelation

The verb *to reveal* generally means to unveil, to remove the veil that hides something, to manifest or make known that which is hidden or invisible. Here, we use it to denote *God's manifestation to humans of truths that were concealed from them*. These truths may refer to God or to creatures, and reveal the origin and destiny of men and of the world.

## 5. Natural Revelation

### 5a) Notion

*Natural revelation* is what God communicates simply through the existence of creatures. When God creates, he imprints a mark in the creatures, and through that mark, we can learn something about God.

Actually, everything that is—insofar as it is—in some way reflects the self-subsistent Being (*ipsum esse subsistens*) who created it and keeps it in its being through continuous action. Similarly, the being of an artificial thing reflects something of the being of its maker: the existence of the craftsman, his talent and skill, his aesthetic appreciation, and moral judgment.

Since God's creative action is stronger and deeper than the transformations achieved by man, the likeness between God and his creatures is deeper than the likeness between man and his artifacts.

On the other hand, since the distance between the self-subsistent Being and a being by participation is infinitely greater than the distance between man and his products, the information that creatures give us about their Creator is infinitely less proportionate than what man's products tell us about man. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the information that creatures reveal about their Creator is essentially true.

## **5b) The Scope of Natural Revelation**

Natural revelation includes only those divine attributes reflected in creatures: the existence of God and his attributes of goodness, unity, simplicity, infinity, wisdom, and omnipotence.

## **5c) Acquisition of the Natural Knowledge of God**

Knowledge of the contents of natural revelation is reached simply *through natural reason's reflection* on the positive characteristics of the being of things (its “perfections”) and on what we could call its negative characteristics (limitations or “imperfections”).

Reflection of natural reason is the route followed, for example, by the Five Ways of St. Thomas, which demonstrate the existence of God and his attributes.

*Moral uprightness and good intentions are necessary* to reach these truths, since they are not concerned with realities that are known through immediate evidence, but are attained by means of more or less complicated reasoning. If good will is lacking, one's resistance could easily mislead his intelligence.

## **5d) Scientific and Common Knowledge of Natural Revelation**

Natural knowledge of God and other truths of natural revelation is accessible not only to the smart, trained philosopher with sufficient moral dispositions. *It is within the reach of everyone* who has not been influenced by distorted ideas and who has some good moral dispositions.

The objective value of the argument leading to knowledge of the existence of God and some of his essential properties may be different for the philosopher and the layman. However, the objective truth of the conclusion (as well as its validity for the person) is the same in both cases, regardless of the reasoning followed in each case.

Natural revelation is the root of what is commonly called “natural” religion: there is a God, only one God who remunerates; man has to obey him and show him respect by accepting him as his Creator, and man has to do this internally and externally, individually and collectively. The acceptance of natural revelation is a necessary condition for admitting supernatural revelation.

## 5e) The Existence of Natural Revelation

Faith teaches us that *God can be known with certainty through his creatures by the natural light of human reason*. The existence of God and some characteristics (attributes) of the divine Being can be known by simply observing reality, reflecting on it, and drawing rational conclusions from what one sees.

This is what St. Paul's words refer to when he says, "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:20). He fully explains this idea in preceding and subsequent verses. The Church has formally taught this in the First and Second Vatican Councils.<sup>1</sup>

## 6. Supernatural Revelation

### 6a) Concept

*Supernatural revelation* is God's manifestation to mankind, no longer through the mere existence of creatures, but through words or interventions in events in history.<sup>2</sup> God communicates these words to a person; he enlightens him with these interventions. The person receives this revelation *immediately*, or directly from God himself, and not through creatures. When this person transmits the revelation to other people, they receive it *mediately*, that is, through that person.

This revelation is not a discovery of reason, as in natural revelation, but man's acceptance of a truth that God communicates to him.

## 6b) Supernaturally Revealed Truths

God may reveal a supernatural reality, something that cannot be communicated to a creature in a natural way. The revelation of these supernatural truths is called *supernatural revelation because of its content (quoad substantiam)*. No human or other created intelligence can have natural knowledge of such realities. People can receive these truths only through supernatural elevation.

It also may happen that God reveals some truths that are not supernatural in themselves, but belong to the order of what can be naturally shared by creatures. These truths can also be known in a natural way. Examples of these truths are the immortality of the soul and the fact of creation. The revelation of this second group of truths is called *supernatural only in the manner that is brought about (quoad modum)*.

Although the supernatural truths *quoad modum* are, by nature, communicable and accessible to man, a supernatural elevation is still needed to receive them through revelation. God transmits them in a manner beyond the capacity of the creature's nature.



## **6c) Supernatural Revelation and Inspiration**

Supernatural revelation is not the same as the “inspiration” through which the sacred writers wrote the Bible. Inspiration does not necessarily imply or exclude revelation. Thus, St. Matthew did not need any revelation to tell us what happened in the Last Supper, since he was present. But he wrote about the Last Supper under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; he had the special assistance of the Holy Spirit to write exactly what God wanted to be written.

## 6d) Definition of Supernatural Revelation

Thus, supernatural revelation can be defined as *a divine action that manifests far beyond the natural order a truth that was previously hidden*.

The word *revelation* indicates not only the action itself, but also the result and the contents—the truths communicated. Thus, when we talk about the “deposit of revelation,” we refer to communicated truths. It is easy to discover which meaning is intended from the context.

1. Cf. DS 3004, 3026; *DV*, 3; *CCC*, 27–49.
2. Cf. *CCC*, 50–73.

# 8

## The Possibility of Revelation

## **7.     Revealable Truths**

Studying the possibility of revelation is especially urgent and relevant due to current theories doubting or altogether denying it. The appearance of such theories has even influenced the way the subject is approached. Beside this reason, studying the possibility of revelation will help us understand it better.

The traditional approach to studying the possibility of revelation consists in finding out if there is any obstacle to the transmission of revealable truths:

- on the part of the truths themselves, considering the intellectual capacity of man to receive them, or
- on the part of God who reveals them.

## 7a) Natural Truths

Certain truths hidden from men are “natural,” accessible to natural reason. These are called *natural mysteries* (from “*mysterion*,” something hidden). Though hidden, they are natural and, in themselves, do not pose any problem for being communicated to—or understood by—mankind.

Among these truths, some pose even fewer problems due to their simplicity, for they can be perfectly understood once they are communicated. For example, the creation of Eve after Adam or Jerusalem’s impending destruction are such truths. These truths are called *mysteria late dicta*.

Other natural truths, due to their depth and closer proximity to God, evade people’s complete understanding as a result of limited human intelligence.

Thus, using reason, people can discover that God knows a person’s actions before the act occurs. (This truth can also be received by supernatural revelation.) One can also discover that people are free to perform or not perform these actions. However, one cannot grasp how God’s foreknowledge and man’s freedom are compatible with each other.

The same can be said of our knowledge of God’s being infinitely just and infinitely merciful and the identity between his justice and his mercy. Reason tells us that it ought to be so, but we fail to understand how such an identity is possible, since from a human point of view, justice and mercy seem opposed. Such examples abound.

These truths are usually called “mysteries in a certain way” (*mysteria secundum quid*). They are mysteries from our point of view because they are much beyond our limited capacity of understanding. The angelic intelligence, being superior to ours, understands these truths better, but not perfectly.

## 7b) Supernatural Truths

There is a third category of hidden truths (or mysteries) that, by their nature, are far beyond the reach of any created or could-be-created being. These are *supernatural mysteries*; they cannot be communicated to a contingent being as something proper to it, as something in a certain way flowing from its very nature, because they are proper and exclusive to the self-subsistent Being (*ipsum esse subsistens*).

For the same reason, these supernatural mysteries cannot be known by any created or could-be-created intelligence. They are called *absolute mysteries* (*mysteria absoluta*).

These truths include, for example, the existence of three divine Persons in one God, the divinity of Jesus, that the sacraments give grace, and the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

At first glance, revelation of this type of mystery does not seem possible. We could say that, since a person is incapable of knowing these truths, the most he can do is understand the words, but not their meaning. How can our intelligence grasp things that we acknowledge to be beyond our reach? Like the Immanentist Philosopher, we could ask ourselves, “Can those things that are unthinkable for us exist?”

## **7c) The Existence of Supernatural Truths**

Human reason alone can answer this immanentist question: Not only can *mysteria absoluta* exist, they do, in fact, exist. The mere consideration of God's infinite perfection, which we know through human reason, makes us see the impossibility of reproducing all of the richness of his Being in created beings. Thus, even if we were capable of understanding all of created nature, we would still not be able to know God perfectly.

Similarly, even if we recognize the existence of the wide range of truths that escape our natural reason, we cannot pinpoint, identify, or advance any sound hypothesis about any of these mysteries. If we could, that specific truth would not be an absolute mystery at all.

## 7d) Can Supernatural Truths Be Known?

Once we know that absolute mysteries exist and cannot be known by any created or could-be-created intelligence, we should consider why we actually talk about the Blessed Trinity and other such mysteries.

Absolute mysteries are not unintelligible in themselves. On the contrary, they are the most intelligible, because *being* is intelligible insofar as it *is*. Thus, the richer its content, the greater its intelligibility. God is, thereby, the most intelligible being. We cannot know these mysteries because of their excessive clarity, which blinds our limited and created intelligence. We are, St. Thomas says, like an owl blinded by sunlight.

On the other hand, the created intellect has a basic and radical capacity to be elevated beyond its own natural powers. Upon being elevated, it can understand supernatural truths (although not perfectly) in proportion to the intensity of its elevation, that is, in proportion to the sanctifying grace received in this life and to the “*lumen gloriae*” received in the next.

We realize that the intellect is capable of being elevated beyond its natural powers because some supernatural truths have actually been revealed to us. Still, in theory at least, we could discover the existence of this capacity even if no supernatural revelation had taken place.

This capacity is similar to the capacity of a marble block, which can be carved into a statue through the work of a sculptor. Marble does not, and cannot, transform itself into a statue. However, its nature is such that it is capable of receiving another being’s operation and so become a statue. It is merely a passive capacity, but a real one, stemming from the very nature of marble. Such a capacity is wanting, for example, in water.

This passive but real capacity of a being to receive something beyond its nature is usually called *obediential potency*. The words clearly indicate a capacity (potential) to receive (to obey, obediential) an agent’s action.

We affirm the existence of an obediential potency in the created intellect based on the existence of revelation, a fact that we do not want to ignore. Now, we should try to understand how is it possible that the created intellect has an obediential potency to be elevated to the perception of absolute mysteries. In other words, we must investigate why we can affirm that the intellect’s condition with regard to absolute mysteries resembles that of marble toward a statue rather than that of water.



The proper object of the human intellect is the essence of sensible things (with the appropriate modifications, this reasoning can be applied to any created intellect). However, its “appropriate” or exact object—that which is perceivable by an intelligence because it is intelligent (not because it is this or that being’s intelligence)—is the truth in its entirety. In the same way, the sense of sight perceives color in general, although different animal species may see a greater or lesser range of specific colors.

Truth in its entirety corresponds to being in its entirety. Therefore, it does not seem contradictory that a created intellect may be elevated to perceive some naturally veiled areas beyond the visible spectrum. It is not contradictory because the intellect is generally open to being and the truth. Further, those areas of being, though veiled, are the type of function for which the intellect is fit. This is much like the case of human sight with regard to the invisible areas of light’s spectrum, such as the infrared.

## **8. God's Power to Reveal Natural and Supernatural Truths**

If revelation is possible on the part of the very nature of revealable truths and on the part of man's receptive capacity, it is obviously possible on God's part also. He is the Author of revelation; he knows these truths perfectly, and he has the infinite power to elevate human nature and to communicate the truths to mankind. The only things God cannot do are evil (which is a non-being) and that which contradicts itself (which is likewise a non-being). Moreover, this is not a real limitation—the inability to make a non-being is not a limitation.

Moreover, revelation is not unbecoming to God, since it does not imply any imperfection in him. It is just another sign of the fullness of his completely free love for his creatures.

## **9. Possibility and Fittingness of Mediate Revelation**

Mediate (i.e., by means of a human person) revelation is fitting and possible inasmuch as it does occur.

Still, we can easily understand the possibility of mediate revelation even before we discover its existence. God not wanting to communicate directly with each individual does not bespeak any imperfection in him. Rather, it is proof of his wisdom and gentleness in dealing with humanity, since he acts in accordance with humanity's social nature.

Thus, every person receives revealed knowledge from other people, in the same way that the individual receives life and culture from others. Humanity, as guardian and transmitter of that divine treasure, takes part in God's action and is exalted. The receiver is not debased either, because the transmitter speaks in God's name, not in his or her own, and in believing the transmitter, the receiver really believes God.

At the same time, a special intervention by God ensures the effectiveness of revelation. This action is necessary since, abandoned to human transmitters, revelation could be adulterated. This special act of God, guaranteeing the faithful transmission of revelation, is perfectly possible for him and befits his dignity.

## 10. Some Errors

The following currents of thought deny the possibility of revelation:

- *Atheism*, as expected, does so by denying the very existence of God.
- *Agnosticism*, not unlike the former in its practical consequences, denies the possibility of knowing anything about God and, therefore, brands as useless any inquiry into divine matters.
- *Pantheism* likewise denies the possibility of revelation. It identifies God with the world.
- *Deism* deems the intervention of God in the world unworthy of God's wisdom, since it would mean tampering with the order that he himself had given the world upon creating it.
- *Naturalism* is the pure and simple negation of the supernatural order.
- *Rationalism* accepts only that which human reason is capable of understanding.
- Some *relativistic* theories seek to justify religious pluralism:

The roots of these problems are to be found in certain presuppositions of both a philosophical and theological nature, which hinder the understanding and acceptance of the revealed truth. Some of these can be mentioned: the conviction of the elusiveness and inexpressibility of divine truth, even by Christian revelation; relativistic attitudes toward truth itself, according to which what is true for some would not be true for others; the radical opposition posited between the logical mentality of the West and the symbolic mentality of the East; the subjectivism which, by regarding reason as the only source of knowledge, becomes incapable of raising its "gaze to the heights, not daring to rise to the truth of being"; the difficulty in understanding and accepting the presence of definitive and eschatological events in history; the metaphysical emptying of the historical incarnation of the Eternal Logos, reduced to a mere appearing of God in history; the eclecticism of those who, in theological research, uncritically absorb ideas from a variety of philosophical and theological contexts without regard for consistency, systematic connection, or compatibility with Christian truth; finally, the tendency to read and to interpret Sacred Scripture outside the Tradition and Magisterium of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, "the theory of the limited, incomplete, or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, which would be complementary to that found

in other religions, is contrary to the Church's faith.”<sup>2</sup> “As a remedy for this relativistic mentality, which is becoming ever more common, it is necessary above all to reassert the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

1. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decl. *Dominus Iesus*, 4. Aug. 6, 2000.
2. *Ibid.*, 6.
3. *Ibid.*, 2.

# 9

## The Credibility of Revelation

## 11. Criteria to Know if a Truth is Revealed by God

If a person is aware that God has revealed something, the most reasonable reaction will be to receive it with gratitude. One may understand well what is revealed (these are the *mysteria late dicta*), not fully understand it (*mysteria secundum quid*), or remain completely ignorant of the innermost logic of the transmitted truth (*mysteria absoluta*, also called *mysteria stricte dicta*).

Gratitude is the only reasonable reaction because God can neither deceive nor be deceived. It is not just that God will not do it; it is indeed impossible for him to do so.

A human being needs some evidence to confirm that it is God who reveals a truth; otherwise, it would not be reasonable to believe with the absolute certainty required by faith. Then, the right thing to do would be to believe only to the extent that reason shows the truth of some particular statement, or according to the amount of trust in the wisdom and good faith of the informant. None of these grounds warrant too firm an assent; a firm assent would be a faulty one, since it would entail an excessive, childish credulity. If this were the case, it would be sound to believe only up to a certain point.

Therefore, we have to know in some way that God is the one speaking. It cannot be known from the content of the revealed truth, since it is not self-evident for us; if it were, it would not be a matter of faith. *We need some external testimony*, similar to the way external signs vouch for the authenticity of a document: a seal, or the signatures of a notary public and some witnesses, even if it can also be confirmed by its content.

*It is reasonable to accept a revelation when it meets certain criteria that identify it as such*, that is, as something said by God. This is what the First Vatican Council teaches:

For the submission of our faith to be consonant with reason (cf. Rom 12:1), God has willed that external proofs of his Revelation, namely divine acts and especially miracles and prophecies, should be added to the internal aids given by the Holy Spirit. Since these proofs so excellently display God's omnipotence and limitless knowledge, they constitute the surest signs of divine Revelation, signs that are suitable to everyone's understanding. Therefore, not only Moses and the prophets but also and preeminently Christ our Lord performed many evident miracles and made clear-cut prophecies. Moreover, we read of the Apostles: "But they went forth and

preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the preaching by the signs that followed” (Mk 16:20).<sup>1</sup>

The same document adds later:

For all the many marvelous proofs that God has provided to make the credibility of the Christian faith evident point to the Catholic Church alone. Indeed, the Church herself, because of her marvelous propagation, her exalted sanctity, and her inexhaustible fruitfulness in all that is good, because of her catholic unity and her unshaken stability, is a great and perpetual motive of credibility and an irrefutable proof of her own divine mission.<sup>2</sup>



## 12. Motives of Credibility

### 12a) Definition and Classification

In the above quotations, we find a list of the principal motives of credibility, that is, of the criteria used to prove that certain affirmations are made by God or, what is the same, by men who speak with authority in God's name, and are transmitted to us completely and without error. The principal motives of credibility are miracles, prophecies, and the marvelous life of the Church.<sup>3</sup>

The motives of credibility are usually classified as follows:

(1) *Motives external to man*

- i) Extrinsic to revealed truth itself
  - a. Miracles
  - b. Prophecies
- ii) Intrinsic to revealed truth itself
  - a. The sublimity of revealed doctrine
  - b. The marvelous life of the Church

(2) *Motives internal to man*

- i) Common to all: The admirable satisfaction of human aspirations toward justice, sanctity, and God
- ii) Individual: The personal experience of a profound peace that the world cannot give (cf. Jn 14:27)

We will have the occasion to review some of these criteria in Chapter 13. Meanwhile, we can focus our attention on the first two: miracles and prophecies.

## 12b) The Notion of Miracle

The original meaning of the word *miraculum* (miraculous occurrence) is something admirable, something that causes astonishment. In theology, *a miracle is an extraordinary and sensible fact that escapes the laws of nature*. This definition follows the text of the First Vatican Council quoted in section 11 of this chapter. Miracles—external proofs of God’s revelation—display God’s omnipotence; they do not have any possible natural cause. They can have only God himself as their immediate cause.

As the definition indicates, only sensible miracles—only those occurrences that can be ascertained by the senses—qualify as criteria for credibility. Thus, for example, the miracle of transubstantiation does not have any demonstrative value because it is not observable by the senses.

To qualify, it must, likewise, be evident that a miraculous fact cannot be attributed to any natural power, corporeal or spiritual (angels and demons).

## **12c) The Possibility of Miracles**

Those who deny the existence of God or his transcendence (his being really different from the world) also deny the possibility of miracles. Their reasoning is clear: If God does not exist, he cannot act; and if he is part of nature, he cannot act outside of it.

Conversely, God's transcendence and omnipotence sufficiently explain the possibility of miracles since, as we said earlier, God can do anything that is not metaphysically impossible or morally evil.

Likewise, it is not unbecoming for God to perform miracles. These interventions do not imply that the natural laws that he has given the world are so uncertain and imperfect that corrections or exceptions are required in some cases. Miracles are simply spectacular or extraordinary signs of God's power, which he uses in order to call our attention to something important for our salvation.

## 12d) Can We Know the Existence of Miracles?

Some deny the possibility of knowing whether something is a miracle or not. They claim that since we do not know all of nature's power and laws, we cannot know if a specific event is beyond or against them.

Although this could well occur in many hypothetical cases, the miracles performed by God evade these dangers of confusion. Take, for example, Moses' staff being converted into a serpent and back again into a staff. The discovery of a law accounting for it is highly improbable, even if all natural laws become known.

Miracles can be classified in three types, according to their degree of evidence. Two bodies occupying the same space, like Jesus' entry into the Upper Room while the doors were closed, is a miracle of the first type. The resurrection of a dead person (like that of Lazarus or the Naim widow's son) and giving sight to the blind belong to the second type. The third type includes the instantaneous conversion of water into wine and the multiplication of the loaves of bread.

*The supernatural nature of all the above miracles is known with metaphysical certainty once their existence is known.* On the other hand, there are other miracles of the third type (such as the calming of the storm) that, after their existence is known, are generally known with moral certainty, only, that is, through the circumstances that accompany them.

We should not overlook the clause "after their existence is known," since the existence of a miracle (the fact that Lazarus was resurrected from the dead, for example) is not known with metaphysical certainty. Witnesses know it with physical certainty; those who hear about it know about it with moral certainty only. It is exactly the same with other historical events.

## 12e) Prophecies

The word *prophet* originally meant “he who speaks for another.” It comes from a Hebrew term meaning “he who talks to man in the name of God.” It is in this sense that we speak of Christ’s prophetic function. In this case, the terms *prophet* and *teacher* are equivalent.

The prophets frequently announced future events that could not be foreseen by human means. These predictions are called *prophecies* in apologetics. Moreover, the term *prophecy* has a broader sense, equivalent to *revelation*.

Prophecies are also mentioned in the text of the First Vatican Council, quoted in section 11, among those actions displaying God’s limitless knowledge.

Prophecy can be defined more precisely as *an infallible prediction of a contingent future event, which can be foreseen with certainty only through supernatural illumination*.

Thus defined, a prophecy is an intellectual miracle, and its author can be only God, who uses it as a sign, as he does with the sensible miracles. Many of the considerations applicable to the latter are also applicable to prophecies. Prophecies can be distinguished from simple conjectures.

### **13. The Force of the Motives of Credibility**

Miracles and prophecies (and other motives of credibility) give us a moral certainty that the truths taught to us come from God without alteration or corruption by whomever performs these miracles or utters the prophecies. In other words, we know that what we are told is revealed by God.

Objectively speaking, the greatest certainty is offered by the external and extrinsic motives of credibility (miracles and prophecies). External and intrinsic criteria produce less certainty, internal ones even less. Among the internal criteria, the experience of a profound peace that the world cannot give is the weakest of all, due to its subjectivity and incommunicability.

Subjectively speaking, however, the order may be inverted; the last of these criteria may be the starting point of the path leading to faith for someone.

On the other hand, the intellect knows the motives of credibility with moral (not physical) certainty. Thus, it does not necessarily feel constrained to accept revelation as coming from God.

However, in the words of the First Vatican Council, these criteria, “especially miracles and prophecies ... constitute the surest signs of divine Revelation, signs that are suitable to everyone’s understanding.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the moral certainty that they elicit is strong enough for the will to reasonably command the intellect to accept revelation as coming from God.

Usually, moral certainty is enough for people to responsibly make capital decisions. The certainty produced by these criteria is so strong that the will’s failure to order the intellect to assent would be a very serious fault.

## **14. The Motives of Credibility and Personal Dispositions**

As in the case of natural revelation, certain personal dispositions are needed for a person to admit that something is supernaturally revealed by God. Religious truths affect the innermost part of man and dictate his whole behavior. Then, the will can pay more attention to some considerations that are alien to the fact of revelation itself, but affected by it. These truths are jointly presented by the intellect, which leads the will to admit or reject that God reveals something, although culpably in the latter case.

A person may accept the fact of revelation, or reject it. Sin and all its train push for rejection. Love for the truth and the desire to find God incline a person to accept the fact of revelation, though this entails numerous demands.

1. DS 3009.
2. DS 3013.
3. Cf. *CCC*, 156.
4. DS 3009.

10

## The Structure of the Act of Faith



## 15. The Notion of the Act of Faith

Once we are sure that God is teaching us something, we can make it ours and believe it through an act of faith.

*The act of faith is a supernatural assent of the intellect through which a truth revealed by God is believed on the authority of God who reveals it. It is certain and free at the same time.*

Faith is the *assent of the human intellect*, not mysterious religious sentiment. The intellect is our only faculty or power that can know things beyond the scope of the senses, beyond the material appearance. Still, this assent is subject to the will. The truth is not accepted because it appears self-evident to the intellect, since, as we have seen, it is not self-evident; *the act of faith is free*.

The act of knowing a self-evident truth (for instance, that two and two make four) is also free, for the intellect may or may not be commanded by the will to consider a truth. However, once considered, the intellect admits the truth of a proposition by itself without any need for the will's command. On the other hand, a truth of faith cannot be admitted without the will's mandate, because it is not self-evident. Thus, the act of faith has a greater degree of freedom. In other words, it depends more closely on the decision of the will.

Moreover, *the act of faith is supernatural*, that is, it requires the help of grace from the start, because the motive for believing is always supernatural, and, in many instances, so are the truths to be believed.

*The act of faith is most certain* for two reasons: because its formal object is the authority of God—the source of the revelation, who can neither deceive nor be deceived—and because the will orders the intellect to assent fully under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This certitude is much stronger than that of natural knowledge.

We can summarize all this with the First Vatican Council's definition of the virtue of faith, already quoted in the introduction. It focuses on the act of faith, since virtues are defined by their acts: "Faith ... is a supernatural virtue. By faith, with God's inspiration and the help of his grace, we believe that what he has revealed is true, not because its intrinsic truth is seen with the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God who reveals it, who can neither deceive nor be deceived."<sup>1</sup>

## 16. Faith, Science, and Opinion

We can determine that knowledge through faith is superior by comparing it with knowledge that is obtained through other means.

We speak of *science*, or the knowledge of something (*scientia*, plainly “knowledge”), when we know it with certitude, with the same natural evidence that something known is present in our intellect. Science admits several degrees, which affect this knowledge’s perfection more than its certainty. Its highest degree is the knowledge of something through its causes (not only the efficient cause, but all causes: material, formal, efficient, and final).

*Opinion*, on the other hand, is imperfect knowledge of something; the intellect adheres to such a truth after pondering several reasons, not ruling out the possibility of being mistaken. The truth is accepted provisionally, just until more evidence is available.

Knowledge by *faith* (we do not refer here to supernatural faith) is based not on the known truth’s being manifest to our intellect, but on the testimony of another. The very word *faith* (*fides* in Latin) refers to the fact that the formal motive for accepting such knowledge is confidence in the source. The amount of trust we place in the source’s wisdom and truthfulness will determine the strength and certainty of our intellect’s assent. Although the intellect does not perceive the truth in question as evident, that confidence can reasonably warrant certainty ranging from a mere opinion to profound certainty. In fact, knowledge by faith is how we acquire the bulk of our natural knowledge.

In the case of faith based on God’s authority (*supernatural faith*), it is clear that our confidence cannot be better justified: God *cannot* deceive himself or deceive us. Thus, it is not the same to say “I believe,” referring to this faith founded on God’s testimony (“I believe in everlasting life”), as it is to say it as an opinion (“I believe it is so”). The word *believe* is used here in an equivocal sense. In the second case, belief is opposed to certitude. The first refers to knowing by divine authority and, therefore, with absolute certainty. Christian beliefs are not subjective opinions.

## 17. The Process of the Supernatural Act of Faith

The analysis of the logical steps involved in the act of faith is rather complex.<sup>2</sup>

The act of faith is preceded by some speculative *credibility judgments*, which show, at a merely theoretical level, that “this is believable because God reveals it.” These judgments are based on the above-mentioned motives of credibility.

These are followed by a speculative-practical judgment of credence, *credendum judgment* (*credendum* being the Latin for “it must be believed”). The intellect concludes that “this has to be believed because it is revealed by God.” Both credibility and credence judgments are necessary preparation for the act of faith.

The following step consists of another judgment of credence that is *practical*: “I want to believe,” “I have to believe this here and now.” This judgment requires the help of supernatural grace. Therefore, the act of faith cannot simply be a consequence of human reasoning, since it leads to supernatural action.

The last step is the *act of faith proper*: “I believe this.”

We can summarize the four steps as follows:

- i) Speculative credibility judgment: “This is believable,” “I can believe,” “It is reasonable to believe this.”
- ii) Speculative-practical judgment of credence: “This has to be believed,” “This must be believed.”
- iii) Practical judgment of credence: “I want to believe this.” The will’s decision and its command to the intellect take place in this step.
- iv) Intellect’s final assent: “I believe,” which is the act of faith proper.

## 18. Motive and Object of the Act of Faith

The *motive* of the act of faith, the reason why one believes, is the authority of God who reveals and who can neither deceive nor be deceived. It is, therefore, a supernatural motive, belonging to a higher level than any creature, real or possible.

The *object* of faith—that which is believed—is everything revealed by God.

The object of faith is:

- God himself, considered as God—*sub ratione deitatis*. He is the object of faith, not as cause of the creatures, but in himself, as God. It is according to his innermost life, which most exceeds the natural knowledge of any possible created intellect, and which can be known only through divine revelation;
- all the truths that can be known only through revelation, except those pertaining to the innermost life of God. These are the mysteries of the Incarnation, Redemption, grace, Holy Eucharist and the other sacraments, the supernatural virtues, beatific vision, etc. All these derive from, and are ordained to, the innermost life of God;
- all the natural truths specially revealed by God. They are revealed in order to confirm and strengthen our knowledge of them. Among these are all the truths related to our natural knowledge of God and the existence and immortality of the soul.

## 19. Modernist Errors on Faith and Revelation

As stated in the “Oath against Modernism” prescribed by St. Pius X in 1910, the modernist errors regarding faith and revelation consist in understanding faith as “a blind sentiment of religion welling up from the depths of the subconscious under the impulse of the heart and the motion of a will trained to morality.” According to modernists, the external proofs of revelation, miracles, and prophecies are not the surest signs of the divine origin of Christian religion, nor are they well-adapted to the understanding of all people and of all times, including ours.<sup>3</sup> The Holy Office, in its 1907 decree *Lamentabili*, condemned some modernist propositions, among them one stating that any assent of faith would ultimately be founded on a sum of probabilities. The decree also condemns other related errors denounced in St. Pius X’s encyclical *Pascendi*.<sup>4</sup>

1. DS 3008.
2. Cf. CCC, 154–156.
3. Cf. DS 3537–3542.
4. Cf. DS 3475–3500, especially 3475, 3499–3500.

# The Fact of Revelation: Historical Testimonies

## 20. Revelation: Old and New

“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb 1:1–2). The beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews stresses both the essential unity of the Old and New Testaments—their author is God—and the difference in quality between God’s messengers: first the prophets, and finally his own Son.

In the New Testament, the Old is presented as preparation for this ultimate revelation. *The religion of Israel was ordained to become the Christian religion.* Although it also came from God, it should give way to the latter with our Lord’s coming in the fullness of time.

There is no need to dwell on how the religion of Israel was of divine origin, not a discovery of man or a result of the evolution of the religious ideas and practices of a certain people, more or less under the influence of their neighbors. Therefore, we will go directly to Jesus’ times.

First, we will consider what historical records say about Jesus.

## **21. The Testimony of the Gospels Concerning Jesus**

The writings that give us the most information about Jesus are the four Gospels. In this chapter, we will not take into account their exceptional importance as divinely inspired writings. Let us assume the viewpoint of a person who has never heard about Christianity who is, at the same time, totally free from religious prejudices. Let us study the Gospels as if they were merely historical documents. From this perspective, our main questions will be: Did the events narrated in the Gospel really happen? Is the alleged historical background of these events so obscured by legends and additions that they are almost unrecognizable, and we cannot know to what extent they are accurate?



## 21 a) Transmission of the Text of the Gospels

How have these four literary documents reached us?

There are more than 4,000 fragments of manuscripts written in Greek, the original language of the four standing narrations. Many of them are in excellent condition and date back to the fourth century. Quotations included in other early Christian literary sources, such as liturgical texts and writings of the Fathers, render evidence of the existence of the Gospels in the second and third centuries.

Papyrus fragments offer further evidence. Some of them are of considerable length. One of them, dating from about A.D. 200, contains almost the entire first 14 chapters of St. John's Gospel. Another short fragment from before A.D. 150 proves that the Gospel of John (the latest of the four) already existed at that time.

This evidence has refuted the theories of some nineteenth-century rationalists who claimed that the Gospels were written so late that they cannot claim the slightest historical value.

*Textual criticism*, by comparing the oldest and best copies, has proven that the transmission of the original text is extraordinarily faithful. It has been pointed out that the number of variations found in the extant texts exceeds the total number of words contained in the Gospels. Most, however, are just spelling variants, changes in the order of words, or copyist's errors that are often quite easy to detect. There are extremely few significant variations, and they do not diminish in the least the correctness of the text that has reached us.

## 21b) Date of Composition

### (1) *Synoptic Gospels*

The composition date of the Acts of the Apostles is usually taken as a reference to date the *synoptic* Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Acts ends abruptly before St. Paul's release from captivity in Rome, which was in approximately A.D. 62, as we gather from his epistles. Acts must have been completed before that year. The Gospel of Luke is an earlier work, since it is mentioned in Acts, and was probably written between A.D. 60 and 62. St. Mark's Gospel is even older, written perhaps between A.D. 50 and 60. The earliest of the synoptics seems to be the Aramaic version of St. Matthew's Gospel, which is not extant (only the later Greek version has reached us.). Thus, the three synoptic Gospels were written well before Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70.

### (2) *The Fourth Gospel*

The Gospel of St. John is very different from the other three; it presupposes their existence. It was not written to *substitute* for them (theory of supplantation), but to *complete* them.

Its author shows great familiarity with the places and dates of the events narrated. He thinks like a Jew and introduces himself as "the disciple whom the Lord loved" (cf. Jn 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). Tradition dates this Gospel to the end of the first century and identifies this disciple as St. John. Only his great authority would explain why the early Christians accepted an account that was so different from those already known and well established.

## **21c) The Authors of the Gospels**

The tradition attributing the authorship of the Gospels to Sts. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is very old. We have the witness of Papias, who wrote in about A.D. 130, and of the so-called *Murator*i fragment from approximately A.D. 200. Internal analysis of the Gospels' texts also supports this attribution. Many personality traits of each of the Evangelists are revealed.

It should be noted that two of the Evangelists were disciples of Jesus and eyewitnesses of the events they narrate (the apostles Matthew and John), while the other two were disciples of the apostles.

## 21d) The Writing of the Gospels

The Gospel texts seem to be the result of an earlier pre-literary development.<sup>1</sup> The synoptic authors would not have freely written down their memoirs. Rather, they would have made use of existing short narratives already incorporated into Tradition. These narratives were used in the primitive Christian community in preaching, catechesis, and liturgy to expound Jesus' deeds and words.

The Gospel text reveals the existence of a previous oral tradition. There are graphic comparisons, witty aphorisms, and short, easy-to-remember stories. The style is concise with rhythmic expositions and repetitions. Passages are summarily linked by words that do not imply a chronological sequence.

From this, some authors deduce that the Evangelists merely gathered the legends that had developed. If this were the case, their accounts would not allow us to know the real Christ—what they call the *historical Christ*—but rather a literary figure whom they call the *Christ of faith*. It would be impossible to recognize the historical Christ in the Gospels, and we could only theorize about him. Even so, this does not seem to bother these authors; within their immanentistic framework, it does not matter who Jesus actually was, only who we think he was or who the early Christians thought he was.

## **21e) Jesus and the Historical Truth of the Gospels**

The thesis that the Gospels reflect only the image of the Christ of faith is unacceptable. Legends take time to develop. The Gospels' date of composition is too close to Jesus' death to allow sufficient time for the formation and spreading of a legend. Moreover, many of his disciples were still alive when the Gospels were written.

If the Gospels talk of Christ with faith, that faith is based on historical facts, not on myths. Further, if the Evangelists respected some already widespread formulas when they wrote about what they themselves had witnessed or knew through first-hand testimonies, they did not do so as mere compilers of anecdotes. Rather, they did so intentionally to reinforce the prior and true catechesis by insisting on the same formulas.

The Evangelists were not trying to write a chronologically arranged biography, packed with details of our Lord's life that would satisfy our curiosity. Nonetheless, they recorded historical facts and announced that this was precisely their purpose. This is shown, for example, in the prologue of St. Luke's Gospel, in the abundance of data on places and times found here and there in a completely unaffected manner, and in the occasional and apparently frivolous mention of trivial circumstances that are consigned simply because they are remembered.

The Gospels were not invented by self-deluding exaltation in order to create a myth. On the contrary, their historical truth is the foundation of the faith of the early Christians. The Evangelists do not sidestep even the most arcane events that they themselves could not understand. They did not conceal the weaknesses of the apostles, not even those of St. Peter, the first witness of Christ's Resurrection, whom the early Christians must have venerated greatly.

We can add to this the Evangelists' exact knowledge of the political and social atmosphere in Palestine, of the existence and the characteristics of the different Jewish parties, and of their daily life, their customs and traditions. After the destruction of Jerusalem, that way of life disappeared.

Besides, the Gospels do not reflect the situation of the Christian community at the time of their composition. They even fail to mention some doctrinal points that, as we gather from Acts and the epistles of St. Paul, were hot topics at that time. The Gospels speak only of the period in

which Jesus lived—an additional proof of the Evangelists' extraordinary fidelity to Tradition.

## **22. The Testimony of the Acts of the Apostles**

The Acts of the Apostles also exposes a very clear intention to be faithful to history; this intention is, perhaps, even clearer here than in the Gospels. It can be seen in the use of Aramaic terms and archaisms in the first chapters, which recount the earliest events, such as the speeches of St. Peter.

In this book, we can see that apostolic preaching was aimed at showing, first of all, that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. He is often called “the Lord.” The early Christian community based its faith on the truth of the events it came to know and had to transmit. The apostles, chosen to be witnesses of Christ, immediately took care of filling the vacancy left by Judas, and the one elected was also a witness to all that happened among them since the beginning.

## **23. The Testimony of St Paul**

There are few concrete details about the life of Jesus reported in the writings of St. Paul, but they sufficiently show that he knew Jesus' life and based his faith on it. St Paul's faith is founded on the existence of a real person. The postulation that he is concerned chiefly with the Lord Christ and does not care about Jesus of Nazareth is groundless.

It is highly revealing that St. Paul—a faithful Jew, but with a Hellenistic background, who waged a lifelong struggle to extricate Christianity from the observances and practices of the Jewish law—had the same faith in Christ as the early Judeo-Christian community at Jerusalem. Had his faith been the result of an evolving myth, it could not possibly have led to the same outcome under such antipodal influences. The only explanation is that in both St. Paul and the early Christians' cases, the faith in Christ was founded on the same historical facts, understood in the same manner.



## 24. Extra-Biblical Testimonies Concerning Jesus

There are also some extra-biblical pieces of information about Jesus that have reached us.

First, we have the *Apocryphal Gospels*, which often borrow from the canonical ones. Still, in themselves they offer no guarantee of the authenticity of their affirmations, even the most plausible ones.

The Jewish *Talmud* devotes little attention to this period, seldom mentioning Jesus. When it does, it always tries to tarnish his image. Even so, some of its attestations confirm the Gospels' narrative regarding Jesus' preaching, Passion, and death.

*Flavius Josephus* was a well-known Jewish historian who settled in Rome. In his *Jewish Antiquities* (written about A.D. 93) he talks about "James, the brother of Jesus whom they call the Christ." There are other very clear passages about Jesus, both in this work and in his *Jewish Wars*, but their authenticity is doubtful. His works seem to contain an original nucleus that was later corrupted by a copyist's additions. This could have happened by incorporating some scholar's gloss or footnote into the text.

Some *pagan witnesses* refer more or less directly to Jesus. Around A.D. 116, *Tacitus* mentions Christ and his death in his *Annals* in connection with Nero's persecution of A.D. 64. *Suetonius* makes several allusions to Christ in his *Lives of the Caesars*, written around A.D. 120. Lastly, *Pliny the Younger*, Governor of Bytania in Asia Minor, mentions "those who worship Christ as God" in a letter written to Trajan in A.D. 112.

1. Cf. CCC, 126.

12

# The Divine Mission of Jesus

## **25. Jesus Affirmed that He Had Been Sent by God**

After establishing the historicity of the Gospels, we know that they narrate real events. But what did Jesus say of himself?

That Jesus affirmed that he had been sent by God is particularly clear in the Gospel of John. The expression “he who sent me” appears more than 20 times. Jesus calls himself “he whom God has sent” five times. He affirms, “I came from the Father” (Jn 16:28), and, “I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me” (Jn 8:28).

This affirmation clearly appears in the synoptic Gospels also. Jesus’ actions are the fulfillment of a divine mission. Either the expression “for this I have come” or a rephrasing of that expression appear at least eight times. He acts as someone with authority; accepting him or his words amounts to accepting the One who sent him.

Jesus acts with great freedom, and, at the same time, his obedience to the Father is unshakable.

Jesus is aware that the different moments of his life are mapped out. Thus, he tells his followers that his time has not yet come, that it is drawing near, or that it has arrived.

This mission of Christ entails the obligation to announce the “Good News”—the Gospel. He knows this and regularly acknowledges it in his speech.

## **26. Jesus Affirmed that He Was the Messiah**

Jesus did not reveal his Messianic character to everyone, or reveal it from the beginning. He revealed it progressively, only to those who could understand it or had some sort of right to demand a clear admission from him. Given the then-prevailing misconceptions about the Messiah, a more open avowal would have obscured and jeopardized his mission.

Thus, his answers to the emissaries of John the Baptist, his apostles near Caesarea Philippi, and Caiaphas during his interrogation at the beginning of the Passion reveal that the Messianic signs were already present in him.<sup>1</sup>

## 27. Messianic Titles Claimed by Jesus

Jesus accepted the title of *Messiah* (“anointed” in Hebrew) and used it himself (the Greek text of the Gospel uses *Christ*, which is the Greek term for “anointed”). Likewise, he accepted the title of *Son of David* during his triumphal entry in Jerusalem. At the same time, Jesus refuted the ideas about the Messiah commonly held at the time. He explicitly rejected its strong political and nationalistic connotations: He said that what belongs to Caesar has to be given to Caesar, he refused to judge the partition of an inheritance, and he fled from the crowd when they wanted to proclaim him king. In spite of this rejection of popular conceptions of the Messiah, Jesus did embrace his true Messianic role and, in doing so, set himself above the law.

Nevertheless, Jesus preferred the title *Son of Man*—the one he frequently gives to himself. This expression appears about 70 times in the synoptics and ten times in St. John’s Gospel. It is seldom used in the other books of the New Testament. This offers further proof that it was used by Jesus, not merely attributed to him by the Evangelists (who wrote when the term was no longer in use). This ancient Messianic title was not completely forgotten in Jesus’ time. It allowed him to connect with Messianic connotations without evoking that time’s misconceptions about the Messiah. The Son of Man is endowed with great authority (he is Lord of the Sabbath, whoever confesses him before men will be saved, etc.). He is the Servant of Yahweh who will offer himself up in reparation for our sins, and he will come at the appointed time to judge the living and the dead.

## **28. Jesus' Relationship with the Heavenly Father**

Likewise, Jesus' relationship with his Father calls for special consideration. Jesus often referred to him as "my Father who is in heaven" and "your Father who is in heaven," never as "our Father." Thus, he prevented any confusion between his own filiation and that of his disciples, which belonged to different levels.<sup>2</sup>

He went even further than affirming that he was the Son of God; he said that whoever sees him sees the Father, that he and the Father are one. He performed deeds reserved to God in his own name—he forgave sins, and promulgated laws: "You have heard that it was said ... but I say to you ..." (Mt 5:27–44). He had power over nature, sickness, and death. He even demanded full love and self-surrender from his followers and allowed himself to be adored.

Finally, Jesus made strong statements about himself: "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:35), "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), "I am the good shepherd" (Jn 10:11), and, "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12). In other more profound affirmations, he used a term that is usually reserved to God alone: "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he" (Jn 8:28); "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am" (Jn 8:58). "I am" is precisely the divine name that was revealed to Moses (cf. Ex 3:14).

## **29. Weight of Jesus' Testimony About Himself**

Jesus confirmed the truth of his testimony about himself with his life (“he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil,” St. Paul summarizes in Acts 10:38), his wisdom, and his doctrine, which astonished all those who saw and heard him. Moreover, he confirmed his testimony with the miracles and prophecies he performed and through the Messianic prophecies fulfilled in him.

## **29a) Miracles**

The Gospels report many miracles, which were performed by Jesus or his disciples. They are so intertwined with his preaching—not merely juxtaposed—that they cannot be cut out without destroying the whole meaning.

Some miracles were used to support a lesson, others to show a superhuman power. They engendered his disciples' and other people's admiration, as well as his enemies' disapproval. The miracles are soberly described, without the frills and exaggerations common in legends. Jesus himself often presented his miracles as a sign of his divine mission: "Even though you do not believe me, believe the works" (Jn 10:38); "The works that I do ... they bear witness to me" (Jn 10:25).



## **29b) Prophecies**

The Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christ. He unveiled their fulfillment to the doctors of the Law (cf. Jn 5:39), and he explained it to the disciples of Emmaus after his Resurrection, referring especially to his Passion (cf. Lk 24:13–35).

Great prudence is required to decide which Old Testament prophecies have real Messianic character. We should interpret them in the light of what happened in the New Testament. Any prophecy is better understood in hindsight, after its fulfillment. The fulfillment is like its completion and perfection. Moreover, the New Testament itself explicitly affirms that what was foretold in the Old Testament has been fulfilled in Christ (cf. Mt 1:22–23).

The fulfillment of Jesus' own prophecies (such as the future destruction of Jerusalem, his own Resurrection, and St. Peter's martyrdom) further prove his divinity and the value of his doctrine.

## 30. The Resurrection of Jesus

The Resurrection of Jesus deserves separate study, not only because of its central significance to the faith, but also because it is the strongest evidence of Jesus' divine mission. The Resurrection is so important that the first Christians already relied heavily on it: "If Christ has not been raised ... your faith is in vain" (1 Cor 15:14). It is one of the first truths mentioned in preaching by St. Peter after Pentecost and by St. Paul in Athens, among many other places.<sup>3</sup>

Enemies of Christianity try to disfigure and deny Christ's Resurrection, as the Jewish authorities of the time did, realizing that it is the greatest obstacle preventing the acceptance of the naturalistic explanations they propose.

Their theories range from that of conscious fraud on the part of the apostles to the gradual rise of the conviction that Christ's Resurrection explains the empty sepulcher. Some even say that we should not study whether the Resurrection took place, since it is impossible to know for certain, but rather how the primitive belief in the Resurrection arose, since this is a real historical fact.

Yet, the only historical records we have (the Gospels) carefully show that the disciples refused to believe what they saw. To say that they were the ones who, consciously or not, "invented" the Resurrection is a completely gratuitous and arbitrary hypothesis that contradicts all the available data.

The Resurrection is recorded in the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Essentially, all these reports coincide about finding the empty sepulcher when the women went to anoint the body of the Lord and in the real and repeated apparitions of the Lord to his disciples. When it comes to accidental details, they also have their brief and schematic accounts of the events in common. Thus, it is not possible to draw a clear chronology of the events narrated by the different authors from them.

Still, this very lack of precision vividly portrays the state of confusion and disbelief among the disciples during these first moments. This is yet another proof of the veracity and spontaneity of the Evangelists and St. Paul, for they did not even bother to make a unified global narration.

1. Cf. CCC, 440.
2. Cf. *Ibid.*, 443.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 638–658.

13

# The Christian Religion Was Taught by God

## 31. Christianity Satisfies the Highest Human Aspirations

Since Jesus taught the Christian religion, it is of divine origin, and it is the religion that God himself has taught us. Consequently, the truths it teaches (*dogmas*) are indeed true, none other than what God wants us to know, and its commandments (*morals*) are the ones God wants us to obey.

This fact can be confirmed by the internal motives of credibility, which were mentioned in Chapter 9. The motives of credibility can confirm the truth about the divine origin of Christian religion; their force of proof is not as strong as that of the Gospels' miracles and prophecies, but they still have a unique value.

Christianity satisfies the highest human aspirations; no other system or doctrine can stake a similar claim.

With perfection surpassing the wildest human expectations, only the doctrine of Christ can satisfy the soul and meet all the following human aspirations: longing for self-fulfillment, for stability and serenity, for goodness, for freedom from moral imperfections and sin; aspirations toward a spotless, peaceful and fruitful life, toward sincere and faultless love, toward loving and being loved without any taint of selfishness; yearnings to understand, to find an explanation for the world around us, especially for suffering and death; and above all, the possibility of an everlasting life full of happiness.

Many would not agree that the above list is an accurate representation of human aspirations. Some would take issue with it because they do not have such aspirations themselves, or consider them unattainable. Others have set trifling goals for themselves on the grounds that any goals beyond those would be foolish illusions, mere wishful thinking. These objections do not invalidate the argument, just as a deaf person's criticism cannot discredit a beautiful symphony.

## **32. The Sublimity of Christian Doctrine**

Another argument in favor of the divinity of Christianity is the sublimity and internal harmony of Christian doctrine, its perfect balance between doctrine and life (that is, between theory and the possibility of putting it into practice), the corporeal and the spiritual, the natural and the supernatural, what is personal and what is social.

All this is found in Christian doctrine, and it had already caused wonder in Jesus' times. The Gospels are filled with the wonderment produced by Jesus' words and deeds. Perhaps two of the most significant illustrations are the reaction of the crowds after the Sermon on the Mount, who "were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Mt 7:28–29), and the amazement of the Sanhedrin constables sent to seize him, who returned empty-handed because "no man ever spoke like this man" (Jn 7:46). The first case corresponds to the beginning of his public life, and the second to the pinnacle of his preaching.

### 33. The Marvelous Life of the Church

The last proof Christianity's divine origin is the marvelous life of the Church and the surprising vitality of this institution in spite of human defects.

At the dawn of Christianity, as well as in later days, the Church spread in spite of a hostile environment, opposing ideas and customs, and an initial group of propagators who had very little social or intellectual influence. They were just a few groups of uneducated Jews of no account, scattered in the midst of an overbearing society.

Later, the Church grew despite the hostility of society and the persecution of civil authorities. It had to face serious internal and external problems of every kind, often lacking suitable supporters.

Through nearly two thousand years, in all places and in very different cultures—even during periods of extremely fast change in human thought and institutions—the Church has remained faithful to herself and, thus, to God. She never allowed any adulteration of her doctrine. She never lacked eminent instances of sanctity to offset the infidelities of others. She has waged a continuous war against deforming influences in order to retain her authentic, pristine, and yet proximate shape (this is the meaning given in the Church to the term *reform* since very remote centuries), refusing to be deceived by the decoy of innovative changes.

The charges that can be brought against these arguments do not withstand serious historical analysis. They are usually based on either the failure of many Christians to lead a truly Christian life, the shortcomings we humans contribute to the life of the Church, or what some call the “social inefficiency” of Christianity.

The truly marvelous life of the Church has developed against a background of catholic unity: she has variety in what is accidental, and is respectful toward cultures, but is firm in her teaching of faith, dogma, and morals, and her discipline and organization.

We can summarize with the words of the First Vatican Council: “The Church herself, because of her marvelous propagation, her exalted sanctity, and her inexhaustible fruitfulness in all that is good, because of her catholic unity and her unshaken stability, is a great and perpetual motive of credibility and an irrefutable proof of her own divine mission.”<sup>1</sup>

1. DS 3013.



14

# Christian Revelation: Mode and Object

## **34. The Object of Revelation is to Draw People to God**

People can get to know God through natural reason alone by looking at God's creation. However, God freely wanted to reveal and give himself to man. God revealed his mystery, his compassionate plan of salvation for humanity.

The object of revelation is to draw people to God. In revealing himself, God wants to make his children capable of responding to him, knowing him, and loving him beyond what their own capacities would allow.

It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known to us the mystery of his will (cf. Eph 1:9). His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (cf. Eph 2:18; 2 Pt 1:4). By this revelation, the invisible God (cf. Col 1:15; 1 Tm 1:17), from the fullness of his love, addresses men as friends (cf. Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14–15), and moves among them (cf. Bar 3:38), in order to invite and receive them into his own company.<sup>1</sup>

## **35. God Reveals Himself through Words and Deeds**

God reveals himself through both words and deeds. The two are inseparable.

This economy of Revelation is realized by deeds and words, which are intrinsically bound up with each other. As a result, the works performed by God in the history of salvation show forth and bear out the doctrine and realities signified by the words; the words, for their part, proclaim the works, and bring to light the mystery they contain. The most intimate truth which this revelation gives us about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of Revelation.<sup>2</sup>

## 36. The Different Steps of Revelation

Christ is the climax of divine revelation. Still, this perfection, or fulfillment, of God's word to humanity had a long gestation period. It was first addressed to all in a direct—though oblique—way; then, to the people of Israel in a more explicit manner; and later, through the people of Israel, to the whole of humanity.

- i) Originally, he manifested himself to our first parents, giving them grace and original justice.
- ii) After their fall, God's promised them redemption.
- iii) He established an alliance with Noah after the Deluge. To limit the pride of mankind, who sought unity by the tower of Babel, God decreed that they should be divided into a plurality of nations. Polytheism and idolatry were constant threats in their moral lives.
- iv) To gather mankind, God chose Abraham. The descendants of this patriarch—the people of Israel—were to prepare the gathering of all the children of God in the unity of the Church.
- v) God saved Israel from slavery in Egypt, and established the [Old] Covenant of Sinai through Moses. He gave them the Law.
- vi) Through the prophets, God instructed his people in the hope of salvation, in the hope of a *new covenant*. This covenant will be *everlasting and directed to all people* (cf. Is 2:2–4), *engraved in their hearts* (cf. Jer 31:31–34; Heb 10:16). The holy ones in Israel kept this hope alive; the purest among them was Mary of Nazareth.<sup>3</sup>

God, who creates and conserves all things by his Word (cf. Jn 1:3), provides men with constant evidence of himself in created realities (cf. Rom 1:19–20). And furthermore, wishing to open up the way to heavenly salvation, he manifested himself to our first parents from the very beginning. After the fall, he buoyed them up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption (cf. Gn 3:15); and he has never ceased to take care of the human race. For he wishes to give eternal life to all those who seek salvation by patience in well-doing (cf. Rom 2:6–7). In his own time God called Abraham, and made him into a great nation (cf. Gn 12:2). After the era of the patriarchs, he taught this nation, by Moses and the prophets, to recognize him as the only living and true God, as a provident Father and just judge. He taught them, too, to look for the promised Savior. And so, throughout the ages, he prepared the way for the Gospel.<sup>4</sup>

## 37. Revelation Culminates in Christ

The fullness of revelation is found in Christ, in his Person, deeds, and words. What preceded Christ was preparation for this ultimate revelation.

After God had spoken many times and in various ways through the prophets, “in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son (Heb 1:1–2). For he sent his Son, the eternal Word who enlightens all men, to dwell among men and tell them about the inner life of God. Hence, Jesus Christ, sent as “a man among men,” “speaks the words of God” (Jn 3:34), and accomplishes the saving work which the Father gave him to do (cf. Jn 5:36; 17:4). As a result, he himself—to see whom is to see his Father (cf. Jn 14:9)—completed and perfected Revelation and confirmed it with divine guarantees. He did this by the total fact of his presence and self-manifestation—by words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by his death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and finally by sending the Spirit of truth. He revealed that God was with us, to deliver us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to eternal life.”<sup>5</sup>

This is the definitive revelation. Thus, “the Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definite covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord, Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the theory of the limited, incomplete or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, which would be complementary to that found in other religions, is contrary to the Church’s faith. Such a position would claim to be based on the notion that the truth about God cannot be grasped and manifested in its globality and completeness by any historical religion, neither by Christianity nor by Jesus Christ...

Thus faith requires us to profess that the Word made flesh, in his entire mystery, who moves from incarnation to glorification, is the source, participated but real, as well as the fulfillment of every salvific revelation of God to humanity, and that the Holy Spirit, who is Christ’s Spirit, will teach this “entire truth” (Jn 16:13) to the apostles and, through them, to the whole Church.<sup>7</sup>

## **38. The Immutability of the Deposit of Revelation**

It follows from the above that the deposit of revelation (the body of truths revealed to us) has been definitively established and placed under the custody of the Church.

In the words of the First Vatican Council, “The content of faith—revealed by God—has not been presented to men as a philosophical system to be perfected by human ingenuity; it was presented as a divine trust given to the bride of Christ to be faithfully kept and infallibly interpreted.”<sup>8</sup>

## 39. The Object of Revelation

The purpose of God's revelation is to make manifest to us the mysteries of his innermost life and eternal decisions concerning the salvation of men. Thus:

By divine Revelation God wished to manifest and communicate both himself and the eternal decrees of his will concerning the salvation of mankind. He wished, in other words, "to share with us divine benefits which entirely surpass the powers of the human mind to understand."

The sacred Synod professes that "God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world, by the natural light of human reason" (cf. Rom 1:20). It teaches that it is to his Revelation that we must attribute the fact "that those things, which in themselves are not beyond the grasp of human reason, can, in the present condition of the human race, be known by all men with ease, with firm certainty, and without the contamination of error."<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, revelation contains truths of a primarily supernatural character, but it also contains natural truths especially associated to these, which without revelation would have been accessible only to a selected few, without certainty, and not without admixture of error.

1. *DV*, 2; cf. *CCC*, 51–52.
2. *DV*, 2; cf. *CCC*, 53.
3. Cf. *CCC*, 54–64.
4. *DV*, 3.
5. *Ibid.*, 4; cf. *CCC*, 65–67.
6. *DV*, 4.
7. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decl. *Dominus Iesus*, 6, Aug. 6, 2000.
8. DS 3020; cf. *CCC*, 66–67.
9. *DV*, 6.

15

Christian Revelation:  
Transmission and  
Conservation



## 40. The Transmission of Revelation in Apostolic Times

The communication of revealed truths to mankind in the course of history, especially through Jesus, would have been useless had God not assured their incorrupt transmission through all ages.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the transmission of revelation in apostolic times, we can say, quoting Vatican II, that:

God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations. Therefore, Christ the Lord, in whom the entire Revelation of the most high God is summed up (cf. 2 Cor 1:20; 3:16–4,6), commanded the apostles to preach the Gospel, which had been promised beforehand by the prophets, and which he fulfilled in his own person and promulgated with his own lips. In preaching the Gospel they were to communicate the gifts of God to all men. This Gospel was to be the source of all saving truth and moral discipline. This was faithfully done: it was done by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received—whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned at the prompting of the Holy Spirit; it was done by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing.<sup>2</sup>

Tradition, Scripture, and Magisterium were, thus, present right from the beginning:

In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them “their own position of teaching authority.” This sacred Tradition, then, and the sacred Scripture of both Testaments, are like a mirror, in which the Church, during her pilgrim journey here on earth, contemplates God, from whom she receives everything, until such time as she is brought to see him face to face as he really is (cf. Jn 3:2).<sup>3</sup>

## 41. The Deposit of Faith: Sacred Scripture and Tradition

There is only one source of revelation: God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The content of divine revelation is found in Sacred Scripture and Tradition as a single deposit (the deposit of faith): “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thes 2:15).

Sacred Scripture is the word of God—written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—contained in the collection of sacred books that have God as their author, and it was entrusted to the Church as such.<sup>4</sup>

Tradition is the word of God—received from Christ himself through the apostles—that was transmitted to us without alteration, as it were from hand to hand, by the Church with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Thus, revelation is kept alive in the midst of the Christian community and is handed down from generation to generation. This is the origin of the word *Tradition* (from *traditio*, “handing down”).

The beliefs of the Church, unchanged for centuries, are either included in Scripture or belong to Tradition. It is often possible to find testimonies of Tradition dating back to the first centuries. Testimonies that are not explicitly contained in Sacred Scripture have been preserved in either ancient liturgical or disciplinary texts and practices, or the writings of early Christian authors.

## 42. Relationship Between Sacred Scripture and Tradition

Through Tradition, we know which books are inspired by the Holy Spirit, that is, the list or canon of the books that make up Holy Scripture.

Tradition was ignored by early Protestants; they tried to rely on Scripture alone. Tradition is, however, of primordial importance. In a certain sense, Tradition is prior to Scripture, since many revealed truths were not written immediately, but much later. This is the case in the teachings of Christ found in the Gospels.

Thus, the word *Tradition* is also used to encompass the entire deposit of revelation; the Second Vatican Council uses it in this sense:

The apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time. Hence the apostles, in handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to maintain the traditions which they had learned either by word of mouth or by letter (cf. 2 Thes 2:15), and they warn them to fight hard for the faith that had been handed on to them once and for all (cf. Jude 3).<sup>6</sup>

The same Council also reminds us that although the deposit of faith is already complete and no increase is to be expected,<sup>7</sup> our understanding of it does increase. This is sometimes called the *homogeneous evolution of Christian dogma*.

The Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. This comes about in various ways. It comes through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts (cf. Lk 2:19 and 51). It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth.<sup>8</sup>

Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal. Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And Tradition transmits in its entirety the word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching. Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence.<sup>9</sup>

## 43. Deposit of Faith and Magisterium

The Magisterium of the Church performs a very special function in the conservation and transmission of the deposit of revelation.

*The Magisterium is the contents of the official teaching of the Church as well as the exercise of her teaching role.* This role is entrusted exclusively to the hierarchy of the Church, which was established by Christ and received his pledge of the special assistance of the Holy Spirit in order to prevent any error in the exercise of her magisterial function. Moreover, the Church can proclaim as revealed truths only those already contained in the deposit of revelation, that is, in Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

The Second Vatican Council explains it:

The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for our belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.<sup>10</sup>

- The Magisterium infallibly acts in an *extraordinary* and solemn way (this is a *defining* act) when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* or the college of bishops (with its head, the pope) gathered in an ecumenical council define some truth of faith that must be believed by all Christians.
- A doctrine is taught by the *ordinary* and universal Magisterium (this is a *non-defining* act) when it is proposed by the pope and the bishops dispersed throughout the world who are in communion with him. This Magisterium is also infallible when it proposes that a truth is to be held *definitively*.

There is a certain order among the truths contained in the deposit of faith.

- i) The first group (divinely revealed truths or doctrines *de fide credenda*) is constituted by all those truths contained in the word of God—whether written or handed down in Tradition—that the Church infallibly sets forth to be believed as divinely revealed either by the extraordinary or the ordinary Magisterium (doctrines *de fide*

*credenda*). These truths require *an assent of theological faith* by the faithful. Whoever doubts or denies them falls into *heresy*.

- ii) The second group (truths held definitively or doctrines *de fide definitive tenenda*) includes everything *definitively* proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals. This is set forth infallibly either by the extraordinary Magisterium (by a *defining* act) or taught—also infallibly—by the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Church (a *non-defining* act) as a truth that is to be held *definitively* and absolutely—*sententia definitive tenenda*. Every believer is to give *firm and definitive assent* to these truths (doctrines *de fide tenenda*). The assent is based on faith in the Holy Spirit's assistance to the Magisterium and on the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the Magisterium.

The Church teaches that a doctrine belongs to the *first or second* group with an act that is either a *defining* act (of the extraordinary Magisterium) or a *non-defining* act (of the ordinary Magisterium). Even without a formal definition, this doctrine belongs to the inheritance of the *depositum fidei* and is to be understood as having set forth infallibly. Such a doctrine can be confirmed or reaffirmed by the Roman pontiff, even without the recourse to a solemn definition, by declaring explicitly that it belongs to the teaching of the ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Church as a truth of the first or the second group. In this case, it is not a dogmatic definition, but a formal attestation of a truth that is already possessed and infallibly transmitted by the Church.

- iii) The third group includes all those teachings—on faith and morals—set forth by the ordinary and universal Magisterium but not proposed as definitive. These teachings require a *religious submission of the will and intellect*. A proposition contrary to these doctrines is to be qualified as *erroneous* or, in the case of teachings of the prudential order, *rash or dangerous*.<sup>11</sup>

One of the most important historical responsibilities of the Magisterium is composing the *symbols of faith* (creeds) and the *catechisms*, which contain and summarize the basic truths of revelation. The oldest and most revered creeds are the *Apostle's Creed*, the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, and the *Athanasian Creed*.<sup>12</sup> Not all the revealed truths are included

in the dogmas defined by the extraordinary Magisterium of the Church. Usually, the pastors define only the truths that are controverted.

It is clear, therefore, that, in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church, are so connected and associated that one cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.<sup>13</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 74–100.
2. *DV*, 7.
3. *Ibid.*
4. DS 3006.
5. Cf. DS 1501; *DV*, 9.
6. *DV*, 8.
7. Cf. *DV*, 4.
8. *DV*, 8.
9. *Ibid.*, 9.
10. *Ibid.*, 10.
11. Cf. *CIC*, c. 750; *LG*, 25; J. Card. Ratzinger, “Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the ‘*Professio Fidei*’”: *L’Osservatore Romano*, July 15, 1998.
12. Cf. CCC, 185–197.
13. *DV*, 10.

# Introduction to Sacred Scripture

by Charles Belmonte

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**INTRODUCTION TO SACRED SCRIPTURE**  
by Charles Belmonte

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The Source of Divine  
Revelation



# 1. The Word of God

God manifests himself to humanity through works of creation (*natural revelation*). He also reveals himself to us directly (*supernatural revelation*) by speaking to all mankind through some chosen individuals. This is properly called *revelation*.

There is only one source of revelation, namely, God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

God the Son, the divine Word, became man to save mankind. Likewise, to reveal himself to humanity, God speaks to them with human utterances. All these utterances can be summarized in only one word—the divine Word. Jesus Christ is the original revelation of God.<sup>1</sup>

Through revelation, God has unveiled certain truths about himself and his salvific plan for mankind. Some of these truths exceed all created intellect; others are accessible to the human mind on its own (natural truths).

This revelation constitutes a *sacred deposit* entrusted to the Church for her to guard and transmit: “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you” (1 Tm 6:20).

The content of divine revelation is found in Sacred Scripture and Tradition: “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter” (2 Thes 2:15).

*Sacred Scripture* is the collection of sacred books, written through the promptings of the Holy Spirit, that have God as their author, and, as such, they are entrusted to the Church.<sup>2</sup> Sacred Scripture is the word of God, written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

*Tradition* is the word of God that was received from Christ himself through the apostles, and was *handed down* (transmitted) to us without alteration by the Church, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

The first Christians were aware of the importance of Sacred Tradition: “Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells within us” (2 Tm 1:13–14). Also: “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed...” (1 Cor 11:23). “What you

have learned from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tm 2:2).

[Christ] ... commanded the apostles to preach the Gospel ... and ... communicate the gifts of God to all men. This was faithfully done: it was done by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received—whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit; it was done by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing.<sup>4</sup>

Both Sacred Scripture and Tradition are “bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal.”<sup>5</sup>

“Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the Church.”<sup>6</sup>

To interpret the Sacred Scripture correctly, one must find out what the human authors wanted to affirm and what God wanted to manifest through their words. Thus, Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted with the same Spirit in which it was written.<sup>7</sup> The Holy Spirit is the legitimate interpreter of the Sacred Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

Christ himself wanted his Church to have a *living Magisterium* with the task of authentically interpreting the divine word, whether written or orally transmitted, exercising its authority in the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> “Yet this Magisterium is not superior the word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith.”<sup>10</sup>

“In the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one cannot stand without the others. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, is the only authentic interpreter of Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

## 1a) Sacred Tradition and Human Traditions

We find in the Bible two kinds of religious traditions: divine and human.

God wanted *divine Tradition* preserved and honored because he made it part of the deposit of faith. As St. Paul affirmed, “I commend you because you ... maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you” (1 Cor 11:2; cf. 2 Thes 2:15; 3:6). Arguing against this, Protestants claim that all Tradition is man-made, not coming from God, but made by those in the Church who have the power to teach.

Christ accused the Pharisees of being too concerned about *traditions of men* (which had their origins in the opinions of earlier teachers) and neglecting the divine traditions of God’s Law: “You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the traditions of men” (Mk 7:8). With these man-made traditions, the Jews were forever adding little precepts and interpretations to the Law of God. Instead of helping its fulfillment, these human traditions suffocated and contradicted it. Jesus challenged these innovations and denounced the hypocrisy and insincerity of the teachers of the Jews. Something similar happens nowadays with the innovations of different religious sects.

As in any other institution, however, some human traditions—those that help us to fulfill God’s Law—can also be found in the Church. Still, these traditions have only a temporary value. Moreover, the Church is able to distinguish the enduring word of God from human traditions that are of only transient worth.

## 2. Names To Designate Sacred Scripture

There are several terms that we can use to refer to the written word of God:

i) *Sacred Scriptures.* This term is biblical in origin. The New Testament refers to the books of the Old Testament as *the Scriptures* or *Holy Scriptures* (cf. Mk 12:10; Lk 4:21; Rom 1:2). The Fathers of the Church used these expressions during apostolic times to refer to all inspired books, both Old Testament and New Testament. The Bible is sacred because it is the written word of God.

ii) *Bible.* This term is a simple transcription of the Greek word *biblia*, which etymologically means “books.” It signifies more than a mere collection of books; it signifies the unity of all these books. The Bible is more than an anthology; it is the Book of Books.

iii) *Old and New Testaments.* The entire collection of the Bible is divided into two parts: The Old Testament contains the books written before Christ’s coming, and the New Testament is composed of books written after Christ’s death.

*Testament* (in Hebrew *berith*) is synonymous with *pact*, *alliance*, or *covenant*. God made two pacts with mankind. The first covenant was with Abraham and was formally established with the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai. By virtue of this first covenant (agreement), God would fill Israel with blessings as long as they remained faithful to the Law. The covenant was repeatedly broken by the Jews.

Yet, God had promised a new covenant (cf. Jer 31:31). When the fullness of time came (cf. Gal 4:4), God made a new covenant with mankind through Jesus Christ; Jesus sealed it with his blood. Under this covenant, we have received a superabundance of graces, especially the liberation from sin and the definitive opening of heaven for us.

These two testaments, the Old and New, signify the books related to the first and the second covenant.

iv) *Inspired Books.* In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul calls the Scriptures “inspired by God,” and in 2 Peter 1:21, we are told that the ancient prophets wrote “moved by the Holy Spirit.” Hence, we use the word

*inspiration*, which refers to that divine act by which the writer becomes an instrument of God in the composition of the Bible.

### **3. Books that Constitute the Bible**

By means of the apostolic Tradition, the Church knew what writings constituted the list of sacred books.<sup>12</sup> This list is called the “canon” of the Scriptures. It is composed of the books of the Old and the New Testament.<sup>13</sup>

# Old Testament

*Pentateuch (which means “five books” )*

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy

*Historical Books*

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, \*Tobit, \*Judith, Esther, \*1 and \*2 Maccabees

*Didactic Books*

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Qohelet (or Ecclesiastes), Song of Songs, \*Wisdom, and \*Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus)

*Prophetical Books*

Major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah (including Lamentations), \*Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel

Minor prophets: Hosea (or Osee), Joel, Amos, Obadiah (or Abdias), Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah (or Sophonias), Haggai (or Aggeus), Zechariah, and Malachi

(Catholics, in accordance with the computation of the Council of Trent, recognize 45 books. Lamentations may be included in the Book of Jeremiah. The Jews accept only 39 books and the Protestants follow this Jewish tradition. Books questioned by Jews and Protestants are marked with an asterisk.)

# New Testament

## *Historical Books*

Four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; and Acts of the Apostles

## *Didactic Books*

14 Epistles of St. Paul: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews

7 Catholic Epistles: 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, \*James, and Jude

## *Prophetic Books*

Apocalypse of St. John (or Revelation)



## 4. Excellence and Usefulness of the Bible

Sacred Scripture is God's word. The Church has always venerated Sacred Scripture as she venerated the Body of the Lord.<sup>14</sup> The Bible is superior to any human book for three reasons:

- i) Its divine origin: God's authorship
- ii) Its content: the supernatural truths
- iii) Its end: the salvation of all people

The Bible is extremely useful: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tm 3:16). The Church offers Sacred Scripture to the faithful. In it, she distributes the one table of the word of God and the Body of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

The Fathers of the Church and the Magisterium recommend the Bible:

- for the spiritual life: nourishment for the soul;
- for preaching: sermons, catechism, and the like, and
- for theology: based on Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

Man must respond to God's gift of Sacred Scripture. One should accept the Bible joyfully and exert effort to delve deeply into the divine mysteries revealed in these books.

- 1. Cf. CCC, 101–141.
- 2. DS 3006.
- 3. Cf. DS 1501.
- 4. *DV*, 7.
- 5. *Ibid.*, 9.
- 6. *Ibid.*, 10.
- 7. Cf. *DV*, 12.
- 8. Cf. CCC, 109ff.
- 9. Cf. *Ibid.*, 888–892.
- 10. *DV*, 10.
- 11. *Ibid.*, 11.
- 12. Cf. *DV*, 8.

13. Cf. *CCC*, 120–127.
14. Cf. *DV*, 21; *CCC*, 102–104.
15. Cf. *DV*, 21.

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# Supernatural Character of the Bible

## **5. God is the Author of the Bible: Inspiration**

“The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of Sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup> The divine origin of the Bible is a truth of faith. This belief must be a starting point. When we read the Bible, we must remember that God is its author. We must read it not as we would read a novel; rather, we must carefully search out what God wanted to manifest to us.

## 5a) The Magisterium of the Church Speaks on Inspiration

All the documents of the Church—professions of faith, councils, encyclicals<sup>2</sup>—affirm the truth of biblical inspiration. Often, these documents have been written to defend the truth against certain heresies:

- *Dualism* claimed that the Old Testament is not inspired.
- *Protestantism* rejected certain books of the Old Testament.
- *Modernism* said that God is not the author of the Bible.

## 5b) Inspiration Mentioned in the Old and New Testaments

The Bible gives testimony to its divine origin. In the Old Testament, the divine origin is still somewhat veiled. For example, in the Book of Maccabees, the Law (the Pentateuch) is called “holy” (2 Mc 8:23), as are the other books of the Old Testament (cf. 1 Mc 12:9).

The divine inspiration is even clearer in the New Testament. There are three very important passages:

i) “All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tm 3:16).

St. Paul tells Timothy to be faithful—to persevere, with the help of other people—in the faith he received as a child, thanks to Sacred Scripture. The Scriptures produce fruit because they are inspired by God.

Protestant exegetes interpret the Greek word for “inspired” in an active sense only, as in “the Bible inspires divine things.” Catholics understand Sacred Scripture as the product of God’s action (*inspiration* in the passive sense); he is the principal author, and thus, the Bible leads to piety (*inspiration* in the active sense).

ii) “First of all you must understand this, that ... no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man [private interpretation], but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pt 1:20–21).

St. Peter speaks of the second coming of Christ. He gives two arguments to support this truth: The first argument is Christ’s transfiguration, of which he was an eyewitness (cf. 2 Pt 1:17–18); the second argument is the Messianic prophecies of the Bible. This second argument is more convincing for the Jews. He reminds them that these prophecies must be interpreted according to their divine origin. Prophecy means more than foretelling future events; it entails all that is contained in the Old Testament. A prophet speaks in God’s name.

St. Peter’s statement affirms:

- the fact of inspiration: Scripture comes from the Holy Spirit;
- the nature of inspiration: It reveals that God is the principal author, that humans are merely instruments, and that the books did not come

- about from the “impulse of men”;
- that divine authority is needed to interpret the Bible correctly and validly.

iii) “And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures” (2 Pt 3:15–16).

This text is important because it refers to the inspiration of the New Testament. St. Peter alludes to inspiration as “according to the wisdom given him.” He also equates the New Testament to “the other scriptures,” that is, the Old Testament.

## **5c) The Fathers of the Church on Inspiration**

The Fathers of the Church are also unanimous on the divine origin of the Bible.



## 6. What Is Inspiration?

Inspiration is a divine and supernatural action whereby God raises the human writer above his natural capacity in order to make him an instrument in the composition of the sacred books.

The Magisterium of the Church speaks of *God as the author of Sacred Scripture*; Sacred Scripture is attributed in a special manner to the Holy Spirit. God's action does not belong to the natural order but to the supernatural order. It is part of God's *extraordinary providence*. Inspiration surpasses what all human intelligence could reach. People cannot be inspired by their own power.

## 6a) God, the Principal Author of the Sacred Scriptures

Even though the human writer (called the *hagiographer*) is involved in writing the sacred books, God is the primary author; without him, Sacred Scripture would never have been written.<sup>3</sup> Like all the *ad extra* works of God, inspiration is done by the three divine Persons in common, but it is attributed to the Holy Spirit since it is a work of love—a work of salvation, like the performance of miracles.

Often times, the Fathers of the Church compared the action of God in inspiring Sacred Scripture to that of a writer using a pen, the human writer being analogous to the pen. The hagiographer was the *instrument* God used to write the Bible.

In every action caused with the use of an instrument, we can observe that there is a principal cause (or agent) and the instrumental cause (or instrument). The agent raises the instrument above its nature when the agent applies it to the action.

In the writing of the holy books, God is the principal cause, and the hagiographer is the instrumental cause. God acts by his own perfection, since he is infinitely wise and omnipotent. God uses the hagiographer as an instrument: He makes him capable of writing something beyond natural human capabilities. Inspiration involves an elevation of humanity, not a degradation of God.

Furthermore, any instrument has two actions: a *proper* action, according to its nature (to make strokes is proper of a pen); and an *instrumental* action, influenced by the main agent (to write a poem). In this way, the writer's activity is at the service of God, without losing his particular traits.

God acts in a fuller sense than the hagiographer does. God is more the cause of the Bible than the human writer is. When we say, “the Gospel according to St. Mark,” we mean that God used St. Mark as an instrument to write the Gospel.

This gift of inspiration is not something permanent; rather, it is a transitory gift to the sacred writer. He can act as an instrument only when God moves him to write (inspiration).

Sacred Scripture is entirely a product of divine wisdom, in spite of the human writer's intervention. We cannot study the Bible from a purely empirical way, as if it were another scientific book. Inspiration is a *gratia gratis data*—a grace to benefit others, not the receiver.

## 6b) The Charisma of Inspiration Moves the Hagiographer

As Leo XIII taught, “With a supernatural power, the Holy Spirit so moved and impelled the hagiographers to write—He was present to them—that the things that He ordered, and only those, they first *rightly understood*, then *willed faithfully to write down*, and finally *expressed in apt words and with infallible truth*. Otherwise it could not be said that God was the author of the entire Scripture.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, in the hagiographer, inspiration implies the following:

- The *enlightening of the mind*. It is a new light to the hagiographer to propose the truth in the name of God. Often, the truths are infused by God into the hagiographer’s mind.
- The *movement of the will*. God also moves the hagiographer’s will to write without going against his freedom.
- The *assistance to the executive faculties*—the memory, imagination, external senses, muscles, head, or mouth. God gives positive assistance to the human faculties.

## 7. The Extent of Inspiration

An inspired book is the result of divine action; it contains all that God wanted to be written, and only that.

The divine action of inspiration is present in the entire Bible and in each one of its parts. We cannot dissect the Bible into parts—some supposedly written by God and others not—nor can we say that the Bible is inspired only when it speaks on “matters of faith and morals.” God is the principal author of the book, even its most minute details.

Divine inspiration affects not only the concepts, but even the very words used (*verbal inspiration*).

However, only the original text is directly inspired by God. The translations are inspired only insofar as they are in conformity with the original. Thus, a Christian should be prudent in choosing a version of the Bible.

It is hard to believe that God, who made sure that the original text was inspired, would not assure that it be communicated integrally through the ages. Thus, it is valid to conclude that the original text was transmitted faithfully in some copy. Here, the Church plays a vital role: she defined the Latin version of the *Vulgate* (and later the *New Vulgate*) as the *purest* text, and approved it as juridically authentic.

## 8. Some False Notions of Inspiration

- i) *Ecstatic inspiration*: Proponents of this theory claimed that the writer wrote in ecstasy: He lost the use of his senses and other faculties. This is contrary to Tradition: Some hagiographers tell us how long it took them to write, and some mention the research work they did.
- ii) *Mechanical dictation*: This notion denied the work of the hagiographer, who became an automaton, mechanically writing down what God dictated. The theory's proponents identified the concept of revelation (*locutio Dei*) with inspiration. In revelation, only God acts, whereas in inspiration, God uses a person (as a free being) to write.
- iii) *Subsequent approval*: This heresy claimed that the sacred books were written by people, and later approved by the Church.
- iv) *Negative assistance*: Supporters of this theory claimed that God did not influence the hagiographer, inspiring him to write; he merely preserved the writer from error.
- v) *The modernist heresies of the early twentieth century*: These were condemned by St. Pius X. They claimed that the Bible was simply a collection of religious experiences of some exceptional men who had high religious sentiments.

## 9. Supernatural Content of the Bible

We have seen that the Bible is supernatural because it is of divine origin. It is supernatural also because of its content.

The Bible contains “the hidden treasures of God’s being, of His wisdom, and of His mercy.”<sup>5</sup> However, compared with God’s perfection, the Bible is only a faint reflection of the infinite Truth.

The Bible contains two kinds of truths:

- i) *Supernatural truths.* Through revelation, God has made his intimate life and the eternal decrees concerning human salvation known to us.
- ii) *Natural truths.* Through revelation, God also shows fundamental truths, necessary for the salvation of man that human intelligence can, nevertheless, reach on its own. Because of revelation, man can know these truths easily, with absolute certainty, and without error.

All these truths are intertwined, but the natural truths are ordained to the supernatural truths.

The Old Testament reveals two main truths: the nature of God and the nature of man.

The books of the New Testament reveal the mystery made known to the apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit; it was revealed so that they could preach the mystery of the Gospel, stir up faith in Jesus Christ, and bring the Church together.

- 1. *DV*, 11; cf. *CCC*, 105–106.
- 2. Cf. *DV*, 11.
- 3. Cf. *CCC*, 106.
- 4. Leo XIII, Enc. *Providentissimus Deus*. Nov. 18, 1893: DS 3293. Author’s emphasis.
- 5. *Ibid.*

# 18

## Properties of Sacred Scripture

BECAUSE OF ITS divine origin, the Bible has the following properties:

- Unity
- Veracity and inerrancy
- Sanctity



## **10. Unity of the Bible**

### **10a) The Inspired Books Form a Unity Because of their Divine Origin**

There is only one principal author of the sacred books: God, infinite Wisdom. Thus, there cannot be internal contradictions in his work, and God is not subject to change, so whatever he writes is final forever.<sup>1</sup>

It follows that all the hagiographers necessarily taught the *same truth* and do not contradict one another.

The unity of the sacred books is reflected by their Latin name, which is in feminine singular: *biblia*. It is one book, the Book of Books.

## **10b) The Analogy of Scriptural Faith**

As a consequence of the absolute unity among the truths contained in the Bible (all these truths are mutually in harmony with one another), they illustrate and shed light on one another. Each truth helps us to understand the other truths and the total plan of revelation. This principle is called “the analogy of faith.” This criterion must be applied in the interpretation of the Bible, as we will study in Chapter 21.

## 10c) Unity Between the Old and New Testaments

One aspect of the Bible's inner unity is the close relationship between the two Testaments: Both Testaments refer to Christ.<sup>2</sup> "All the pages of both Testaments move toward Christ as to their center" (St. Jerome).

"God, the inspirer and author of both Testaments, wisely arranged that the New Testament be hidden in the Old, and the Old be made manifest in the New" (St. Augustine). Thus, the Old Testament contains prophecies and events (called types) that became reality in the New Testament. The New Testament explicitly reveals and really contains what was only foretold in the Old Testament. Thus, the New Testament completes and perfects the Old Testament.

### (1) *The Old Testament announced the New Testament through prophecies.*

There are three texts of the New Testament relevant to this matter:

- i) Luke 24:44. Christ tells the disciples gathered in the Upper Room: "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Our Lord is referring to the three parts into which the Jews divided the Old Testament.
- ii) John 5:39. Here, Jesus discusses his right to be called the Son of God by the Jews. He backs up this right by appealing to four witnesses: St. John the Baptist, his miracles, the Father, and the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament. About the latter, he says, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me."
- iii) 1 Peter 1:10. This passage refers to the ecclesial character of Old Testament prophecies. St. Peter speaks of salvation, of which the prophets had already spoken: "The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation."

### (2) *The Old Testament announced the New Testament through events.*

The Old Testament announced the New Testament not just through words, but also through the events it narrates, the persons involved in those events, and physical things described in the narrations.

These events or persons are called *figures* or *types*; they anticipate some aspects of the person and deeds of Christ. For instance, Noah's ark figures the Church, within which salvation is to be found. The Eucharist is figured in the manna.

(3) *The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.*

Christ is the fullness of revelation. To see Jesus is to see his Father (cf. Jn 14:9). Jesus perfected revelation and completed it:

He did this by the total fact of his presence and self-manifestation—by his words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by his death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and finally by sending the Spirit of truth. He revealed that God was with us, to deliver us from the darkness of sin and death, and to raise us up to eternal life.<sup>3</sup>

The ultimate and total sense of revelation is contained in the New Testament: "The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definite covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord, Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Tm 6:14; Ti 2:13)."<sup>4</sup>

## 11. The Veracity and Inerrancy of Sacred Scripture

The Bible's veracity and inerrancy are direct consequences of its inspiration and divine origin. God is the principal author of the Bible (inspiration); since God is the Supreme Truth, he cannot deceive us (he always speaks only the truth), and he cannot be deceived (he can never be in error). Nevertheless, Christian faith is not a "religion of the Book." Christianity is the religion of the *word* of God—not of a mute, written book, but of the living, incarnate Word.<sup>5</sup> Referring to Sacred Scripture, we can speak of its:

- *veracity* (that it contains the truth positively): Sacred Scripture teaches the truth firmly and faithfully (with certainty);
- *inerrancy* (that it is free of error): Sacred Scripture teaches the truth without error.

Inerrancy may be considered "in fact," and "by its very nature." Any particular passage of the Bible is free of error "in fact." This also happens in writings that are purely human. However, *inerrancy by nature* can be found only in the Bible; the very nature of the inspired books implies inerrancy.

## 11a) Basis of Biblical Inerrancy

### (1) *Sacred Scripture itself*

Inerrancy has basis in Sacred Scripture itself. Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the Jews considered the arguments based on Sacred Scripture final and unquestionable; the expression “it is written” is often used. Jesus also said: “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be broken), do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said ‘I am the Son of God’?” (Jn 10:34–36).

### (2) *Tradition*

The Fathers of the Church taught the doctrine of inerrancy unanimously.

### (3) *Magisterium*

The First Vatican Council solemnly defined the inspiration of Sacred Scripture as a dogma. The ordinary Magisterium has always taught the veracity and inerrancy of Sacred Scripture as part of our faith.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, most attacks on scriptural authority were against the fact of inspiration. Thus, the First Vatican Council dwelled on this matter. After this council, the attacks were against the *inerrancy* of Sacred Scripture in the descriptions of physical natural phenomena. The doctrine on this matter was settled by the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) of Leo XIII.

After 1893, attacks were directed against the *historicity* of the events narrated in the Bible. This attack was more serious, since our Christian faith is historical in character, and we believe in a historical person: Jesus Christ, God-made-man.

Finally, the Second Vatican Council defended the doctrine of inerrancy. After declaring the fact of inspiration, the document *Dei Verbum* continues, “Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.”<sup>6</sup>

## **11b) Inerrancy in the Description of Physical Realities**

The inerrancy of Sacred Scripture in the descriptions of physical phenomena was asserted by Pope Leo XIII in *Providentissimus Deus* in the following terms:

- i) Sacred Scripture describes physical events, natural events, or phenomena not directly with the intention of describing them, but only as they are useful to manifest a religious truth.
- ii) When the Holy Spirit inspired the hagiographers, he did not try to explain the intimate essence and constitution of natural phenomena. The writers described these phenomena in the usual way men speak of them, as they sensibly appear, and as it is expressed in everyday language. Thus, in Genesis, the sky is described as a solid dome.
- iii) At times, the hagiographer used metaphors to describe physical phenomena, e.g. “the stars shone in their watches, and were glad” (Bar 3:34). He does not imply that the stars have souls.
- iv) There is no error in the biblical description of natural phenomena. Because the hagiographer’s intention is not to scientifically describe these phenomena, and because God is the author, there can be no real conflict between biblical passages and genuine science.

## 11c) Inerrancy in Historical Events: Historicity

Inerrancy in the description of historical events implies that everything that the hagiographers claimed really happened. This truth must be accepted as truly historical.

The historicity of Sacred Scripture is relevant to the faith because most of the revealed truths are intimately related to historical events that actually occurred in a particular time and place. Thus, creation, original sin, the Incarnation, Redemption, the Passion and death of our Lord, the foundation of the Church, and the institution of the seven sacraments are all historical events.

There have been some incorrect theories about the nature of biblical inerrancy:

- *Theory of the “history according to appearances.”* Falsely applying the same rule of physical phenomena, this theory stated that some historical events in the Bible are historical only in appearance, that events are described according to popular versions of them.
- *Theory of the implicit quotations.* This theory claims that a tacit or implicit quotation does not declare its author, or is not even marked as a quotation. Its veracity is endorsed by the original author, not by the one who includes the quote. According to this theory, the Bible would be full of implicit (unmarked) quotations. Thus, the hagiographers were only quoting what they thought somebody said. This theory would indiscriminately introduce doubts and lack of confidence in the passages of Sacred Scripture. One could never be sure if a passage contained an implicit quotation.



## **11d) Literary Forms in Sacred Scripture**

Literary forms (or genres) are ways of writing that have their own rules and are often used in a given historical period to express different thoughts.

The following criteria should be used to determine the literary forms of Sacred Scripture:

- Any literary form may be found in Sacred Scripture, provided it does not contradict the truth and sanctity of God.
- God used several literary forms to better manifest the complexity of his revelation.
- The expression of truth is not identical in every literary form, e.g., the truth of a historical narrative cannot be compared to that of a parable. In the latter form, while the conclusion is true, the characters involved are fictitious.

We find the following literary forms in the Sacred Scripture: historical, juridical, prophetic, apocalyptic, wisdom literature, poetry, and epistle.

## 12. The Sanctity of Sacred Scripture

Sanctity of the Bible refers to the moral perfection of the doctrine contained in it. This prerogative stems from three aspects:

### (1) *Its divine origin*

In its negative formulation, sanctity implies the absence of moral error. This does not imply that the Bible speaks only of good things—it may narrate evil deeds, but they are explicitly or implicitly condemned. Evil is rejected and good is upheld.

Even though the Old and New Testaments are equally holy and free from all moral error, the New Testament possesses a greater moral perfection since it perfects the Old Testament.

### (2) *Its purpose*

The purpose of the Bible is the salvation of all.

In the Old Testament, God revealed some knowledge of the salvific truth, but he did not explicitly establish the institutions to obtain justification (or grace); the rites of the Old Testament did not give grace by their own power. Yet the Old Testament prefigured the New Testament with its deeds, and promised salvation with words. The people who lived under the Old Testament could obtain grace by having faith in what was promised.

In the New Testament, the salvific truths were revealed explicitly: Christ instituted the Church, equipped with the channels of grace—the sacraments. The New Testament facilitates, in a more perfect and abundant way, the reception of grace and, with it, the attainment of the end of man, which is salvation.

### (3) *Its precepts*

Adam knew the natural law and transmitted it to his children after the fall. However, the natural light of reason grew dimmer due to their sins. Thus, God chose to reveal a series of precepts (of both supernatural and natural law) to Abraham and Moses. These precepts are contained in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, Christ perfected the moral precepts of the Old Testament with his deeds and doctrine, thus shedding light on the moral law itself. Christ perfected the moral precepts of the Old Testament by:

- declaring their true meaning,
- establishing the best way of fulfilling them, and
- adding advice to achieve greater sanctity.

## 12a) Moral Perfection of Apparent Evils

### (1) *Curses*

We find curses (or wishing harm to another) in some passages of Sacred Scripture: “Do to them as thou didst to Midian, as to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon, who were destroyed at Endor, who became dung for the ground... Let them be put to shame and dismayed for ever; let them perish in disgrace” (Ps 83:9–17). We also find vengeance (cf. Ps 35:3) and desire of death (cf. Ps 52:5). “Cursed be the day on which I was born!” (Jer 20:14).

To explain these passages, we must remember that these curses are not uttered because of any personal hatred, but rather as an appeal to God that his judgment may be imposed. These curses are the result of a sense of justice, which is good, but imperfect when compared with the law of charity that Christ taught us. These curses never express the desire for a spiritual evil, but for a material and temporal one, and even this evil is desired only to reach a greater good: the conversion of the penitent or the fulfillment of God’s justice.

### (2) *Description of sinful acts*

Biblical characters are ordinary human beings like us with the same passions. We see our own life depicted in their lives, and are led to personal conversion. Thus, after his adultery and homicide, David repented and wrote the hymn *Miserere* (cf. Ps 51), a model act of contrition. Nevertheless, we can make the following statements:

- The fact that sinful acts are narrated does not mean that they are praised or approved.
- The gravity of the act is clearly shown with its corresponding punishment.
- The malice of the act may be easily grasped when considered under the light of natural law or the Mosaic Law. Thus, the unity of marriage asserted in Genesis 2:23 is contrasted with the polygamy of Lamech (cf. Gn 4:19).
- When a person is praised in general, it does not imply that all his or her deeds are approved. Judith is praised for her heroism in saving her people, but not for her imprudence with or the deceit of Holofernes.

(3) *Divorce*

The Mosaic Law never promulgated the *licitness* of divorce; it simply *limited its application*. Due to the weaknesses of men—their “hardness of heart” (Mt 19:8)—the limitation of divorce was a necessary norm at that time to avoid greater abuses. Thus, the separation of husband and wife could not be done without securing “a bill of divorce” (Dt 24:1). Meanwhile, there was a chance that the couple would reconcile. Moses even insisted that the repudiated wife could not be taken back afterwards, forcing people to reconsider before divorcing.

(4) *Polygamy*

The Mosaic Law did not authorize or forbid polygamy; it dwelt on it only to avoid some major aberrations, such as marrying two sisters (cf. Lv 18:18) and the multiplication of wives by the king (cf. Dt 17:17). Some Fathers of the Church explain that God permitted polygamy to the patriarchs of the chosen people because “at that time, it was good for the patriarchs to have many children, to conserve and propagate the chosen people of God, who were to receive and transmit the promises about Christ.” However, with Christ’s coming, this dispensation had no reason to continue. Christ pronounced the unity of marriage again and cancelled all dispensations.

(5) *War*

In some cases, God ordered the destruction of a city or the extermination of a nation (cf. Nm 21:2–3; Dt 7:1–5; 1 Sm 15). Such divine orders, aimed exclusively at the Canaanites, were punishments for their sins (cf. Wis 12:3–6). God chose to sacrifice the material goods of the Canaanites—giving them all the opportunities to repent—in order to avoid having the Israelites influenced by the Canaanites and thereby fall into idolatry and moral corruption. God is the absolute Lord of life and death, and he can use some people as instruments to administer his justice.

1. Cf. CCC, 112.
2. Cf. CCC, 128–130.
3. *DV*, 4.
4. *Ibid.*

5. Cf. St. Bernard, *Hom. Miss.* 4, 11; *CCC*, 107–108.
6. *DV*, 11.

19

## The Canon of the Bible

### 13. Meaning of Canon: Criteria of Canonicity

The word *canon* in Greek means “measuring rod” or “ruler.” The expression “canon of the Bible” indicates the list—established by the Church—of inspired books that form the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Thus, we distinguish them from the non-inspired books. The canonicity of a book presupposes that it was inspired. It is canonical because it is inspired, not vice versa.

The earliest complete list of the inspired books is mentioned in the writings of the provincial Council of Hippo (A.D. 393) and the Third and Fourth Councils of Carthage (A.D. 397 and 419). St. Augustine was present at these councils. The documents were sent to Rome for confirmation and approval.

In A.D. 405, Pope Innocent I confirmed the traditional canon in reply to the request of a French bishop.

In 1441, the Council of Florence confirmed the canon of the African councils and Innocent I.

Strangely, doubts lingered on. So, the biblical canon was solemnly declared by the Council of Trent (1546) to combat Protestant errors, and it was declared again by the First Vatican Council (1870).

The biblical canon is not found in the Bible itself. It is part of the deposit of revealed truths kept by the Church. Through the *Apostolic Tradition*, the Church knows the catalog of inspired books with certainty.

The Protestants rejected the authority of the Church. Thus, they lost solid objective criteria to establish the canon. They developed subjective criteria.

Luther classified the books of the New Testament according to their supposed conformity with his own doctrine of “justification through faith alone.” Thus, he rejected St. Jude’s epistle, Apocalypse, St. James, and Hebrews. Calvin had a different criterion, as did other Protestant leaders. They could not accept that Tradition is the basis for determining the canon—this would go against their theory of *sola scriptura*.



## 14. History of the Old Testament Canon

It is believed that Moses substantially wrote the first five books of the Old Testament (the *Pentateuch*), ordered them to be read in public every seven years, and required that a copy of them be placed in the Ark of the Covenant (cf. Dt 31:9–13).

In 700 B.C., King Hezekiah compiled the proverbs of Solomon and ordered that the Psalms of David be sung in the temple.

In the fifth century B.C., Nehemiah built a library and ordered the books of Kings, Prophets, and David to be placed in it (cf. 2 Mc 2:13).

By the time of our Lord's coming, the canon of the Old Testament was established, with the books divided into three parts: the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nebi'im*), and the Writings (*Ketubim*).

The three parts of the Old Testament appear as such in the Septuagint (a Greek version of the Old Testament made in Alexandria) in the second century B.C. This version was used by the apostles and the early Christians.

The Jews of Palestine had the same canon of Old Testament as those of Alexandria. However, after the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70), the scribes and Pharisees excluded some books from their canon, based on the following arbitrary criteria:

- Antiquity
- Original language of composition
- Conformity with their interpretation of the Law

After both the Levitic priesthood and the temple had ceased to exist and the Christian Church was established, an official decision was made by the Jewish Synod of Jamnia (A.D. 95–100) to exclude Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, 1 and 2 Maccabees, and fragments of Esther and Daniel from their canon. These books were later called *deuterocanonical*; the rest are called *protocanonical* books.

In the Catholic Church, the complete canon (following the Septuagint) was accepted from the beginning of her existence.

The Protestants of the sixteenth century went back to the ruling of the Jewish Synod of Jamnia. They rejected the deuterocanonical books, calling them *apocryphal*.

## 15. The History of the Text of the Old Testament

The original language of Abraham was Hebrew. During the Babylonian exile (586–536 B.C.) the Jews learned Aramaic, the language of a nomadic people of the Middle East. Aramaic became dominant in Syria and Mesopotamia. After the conquest of Alexander the Great, Aramaic gave way to vulgar Greek, *koiné*. Thus, Greek was the language of the Jews of the Diaspora (dispersion), and it was the working language of Rome until A.D. 150.

Three languages were used in the Old Testament:

- i) A large part of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew.
- ii) A small portion was in Aramaic: Daniel 2:4–7:28; Esdras 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26.
- iii) Two books were written in Greek: Wisdom, 2 Maccabees.

The texts were often written on scrolls of papyrus (a kind of paper made from a plant abundant in Egypt) or parchment (goat skin). The codices (singular: *codex*) are very much like our books.

None of the original texts have reached us. The oldest texts we possess are dated after the second century B.C.: the *Nash Papyrus* (found in Egypt in 1902), and the scrolls from *Qumran*, discovered near the Dead Sea between 1947 and 1956. Dating from the second century B.C. up to the first century A.D., these scrolls contain fragments of most of the books of the Old Testament in Hebrew.

Vowels were not usually indicated in written Hebrew. When Hebrew was still a spoken language, the vowel pronunciation was transmitted orally. Between the sixth and tenth centuries—when Hebrew was a dead language—the Massoretes (Jewish scholars of tradition) collected and arranged the old texts. To facilitate the correct reading of the text, they added the assumed vowels and other grammatical punctuation; they also numbered the verses. The document they produced is called the *Massoretic version*.

In 1445, with the advent of the printing press, the Hebrew text began to be published without the Massoretic notations. This is the usual text now. The first printed text of the Old Testament in Hebrew is the Spanish *Complutensian Polyglot Bible* (1520).

## 16. History of the New Testament Canon

Tradition is clear about the New Testament books. They were written between A.D. 40 and 100. After the death of the last apostle (St. John), the canon of the New Testament was complete.

Between the first and second centuries, the canon of the New Testament was consolidated, as the *Muratorian Canon* (end of the second century) attests.

Between the third and fourth centuries, the canonicity of seven New Testament books (Hebrews, Apocalypse, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude) was doubted in some places. These books are the deuterocanonical books of the New Testament. The doubts were due to:

- difficulties in communication;
- the existence of apocryphal books written by heretics; and
- the lack of a dogmatic definition.

## 17. History of the New Testament Text

The Gospels are the heart of the Sacred Scripture “because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Saviour.”<sup>2</sup> There are three stages in the formation of the Gospels:

i) *The life and teaching of Jesus* until the day when he ascended into heaven. The historicity of the events cannot be doubted.

ii) *The oral Tradition*. “The apostles handed on to their hearers what he [Jesus] had said and done, but with that fuller understanding which they, instructed by the glorious events of Christ and enlightened by the Spirit of truth, now enjoyed.”<sup>3</sup>

iii) *The written Gospels*. “The sacred authors, in writing the four Gospels, selected certain of the many elements which had been handed on, either orally or already in written form, others they synthesized or explained with an eye to the situation of the churches, the while sustaining the form of preaching, but always in such a fashion that they have told us the honest truth about Jesus.”<sup>4</sup>

St. Matthew wrote his version of the gospel in Aramaic. The rest were written in Greek *koiné* with some Semitic influences.

More than 4,970 codices related to the New Testament currently exist; 53 contain the entire New Testament. Among them are the *Codex Alexandrinus* (fifth century), the *Vatican Codex* (fourth century), the *Sinaiticus* (fourth century), and the *Beza* codices. The first printed text of the New Testament in the original Greek is the *Complutensian Polyglot* (1520).

There are also parts of the New Testament quoted by the Fathers of the Church and ecclesiastical writers.

1. Cf. CCC, 120.
2. *DV*, 18.
3. *Ibid.*, 19.
4. *Ibid.*

# 20

## Principal Versions of the Bible

VERSIONS OF THE Bible are translations from the original languages.

## **18. The Septuagint**

The Septuagint (from the Greek word for 70, the alleged number of translators) version is a Greek translation of the Old Testament done in Alexandria around 250 B.C. It was the version used by the Jews of the Diaspora living in Greek-speaking areas. It includes the deuterocanonical books. Its importance is derived from its extensive use by the early Church.

## 19. The Hexapla

Differences in some versions of the Septuagint began to be introduced by the Jews. Thus, Origen (A.D. 240) composed the *Hexapla* version, setting the main Hebrew and early Greek texts in six columns side by side.

## 20. The Vulgate

Beginning in A.D. 383, at the bidding of Pope Damasus, St. Jerome rendered the complete Bible into Latin. He made extensive use of the oldest Hebrew and Greek texts of each book. Thus, he provided an authoritative and uniform version for the Church up to the Council of Trent.

In 1546, the Council proclaimed the juridical authenticity of the Latin Vulgate and ordered the publication of a correct edition of its text.

Vernacular Bibles could be used, but only with the *imprimatur* of the bishops. The main objections to the vernacular versions were: (a) errors were inserted into the text due to imprudence or deceit by enemies of the Catholic Church, and (b) indiscriminate reading led to private interpretations of Sacred Scripture, and consequently to the rejection of Sacred Tradition and the Church's teaching authority, or Magisterium.



## **21. Printed Editions**

In 1452, Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press, and the first printed book was the Latin Vulgate. This was half a century before the Protestant Reformation. Many more editions of the Bible came out of presses in every country before Luther was even born.

The first printed vernacular version of the Bible (1466) was in High German. By December 31, 1500 (when Luther was 17 years and two months old), there were 134 Latin editions of the Bible, 15 in German, 13 in Italian, 11 in French, 2 in Bohemian, one in Dutch, and one Spanish edition in print: a total of 177 editions of the Bible (according to Peddler, a Protestant writer).

From 1466 to 1520, 47 editions of the Bible in several vernacular languages (German, Italian, French, Bohemian, Dutch, Spanish, and Russian) account for more than 25,000 copies of the Bible. Portions of the Bible in the vernacular that were printed from 1462 to 1520 totaled 100,000 single copies. The oft-repeated story that Luther was the first to give the Bible to the people in their own language is a myth.

## **22. English Versions**

Even before the invention of the printing press, the first English Bible (the lost version of St. Bede) was produced. At the end of the fourteenth century, the heretic John Wycliffe produced his English version of the Bible.

## **22a) Protestant Versions**

The first Protestant Bible printed in English was the Tyndale version (1525), followed by that of Coverdale (1535). In 1611, the *King James Version* (KJV) was published; it is the most widely known and used version. It was revised in 1952, and the result was the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV).

Other modern versions are the *New American Standard Bible* (NAS), published in 1963; the *Good News Bible: Today's English Version* (TEV), which is not a literal translation, published in 1976; and the *New International Version* (NIV), published in 1978.

## 22b) Catholic Versions

The first English Catholic Bible was prepared by exiled scholars from Oxford and printed in France. The New Testament was published at Rheims in 1582, followed by the Old Testament at Douay in 1609. Thus, we have the *Douay-Rheims* version.

The Douay-Rheims Bible was revised by Bishop Challonier between 1749 and 1752. The most famous modern version of this text is the *Confraternity Edition* (1941), a revision of the original translation.

The *Msgr. Knox Version*, a totally new translation from the Vulgate, was published in 1945.

The *Jerusalem Bible* (JB) was published in 1966. It was first prepared by a group of French Catholic scholars in 1956. At some difficult passages, its editors claim that “the text is corrupted,” and proceed to modify the text. These modifications should be studied cautiously.

The *New American Bible* (NAB) was published in 1970.

There is also a *Revised Standard Version (Catholic Edition)* of the Bible (RSV-CE), which follows the RSV with necessary corrections.

These versions have the *imprimatur* of a bishop, but this does not assure that the translation faithfully renders the true meaning of the original word of God. It means only that the text does not contain a doctrinal error.

## **23. The New Vulgate**

The Second Vatican Council ordered the publication of a new Latin version of the Bible. The new version follows the Vulgate of St. Jerome, with some corrections. Completed in 1977, the *New Vulgate* has the juridical endorsement of the Magisterium for the universal Church.

## Right Interpretation of Sacred Scripture (Hermeneutics)

THE BIBLE IS free from error. Still, this fact does not guarantee the results of every kind of reading; one must find the sense that was intended by the Holy Spirit and expressed by the human writer. Hermeneutics is a science—it is the study and establishment of the principles by which the biblical text is to be interpreted.

Exegesis is the result of applying the rules of hermeneutics to a biblical text.

Hermeneutics is usually divided into noematics, heuristics, and prophoristics.

## 24. The Different Senses of the Bible (Noematics)

Meaning is the idea (or ideas) inherent in a word, independent of the writer's intention. A writer uses a word in a specific sense according to the context. Sense is the specific concept the author intends to express with the word.

Thus, the Hebrew word *ruah* may mean "spirit," "wind," "breath," "principle of life," or "force." The human author of Scripture uses this word in the specific sense wanted by God. In some cases, it is used in the biblical sense of "Holy Spirit."

Noematics is the part of hermeneutics that studies the senses of the Bible. We find two kinds of senses in the Bible: literal and spiritual.

Luke 24:44–46 offers an example of the literal sense. Our Lord said: "Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled ... that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead." The sense of these expressions is what the words directly describe.

Our Lord used the spiritual sense when he alluded to figures of the Old Testament in order to explain the mysteries of his death and Resurrection. Thus, he mentioned Jonah's sojourn in the belly of the fish to explain his sojourn in the tomb for three days (cf. Mt 12:39). He used the bronze serpent of Moses in the desert that healed the Israelites to explain our salvation through the cross (cf. Jn 3:14).

The apostles compared Adam to Christ (cf. Rom 5:14) and the salvation of Noah from the waters of the Deluge to the saving effects of Baptism (cf. 1 Pt 3:21). Additionally, the Fathers of the Church and the Scholastic theologians spoke of the literal and spiritual senses of the Bible.

The Magisterium of the Church has defined the existence of the two senses present in the Bible as a truth of faith.<sup>1</sup>

## **25. The Literal Sense**

The literal sense is everything that the Holy Spirit—the author of the Bible—intended to express with the words themselves.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis is on the principal author (the Holy Spirit); he could have expressed something of which the hagiographer may not have been aware.



## 25a) Different Types of Literal Sense

### (1) *Proper literal sense*

The words are taken in their usual ordinary meaning, e.g., “God created heaven and earth.” To create means to make something out of nothing.

### (2) *Improper literal sense (or metaphorical)*

The words are taken in their figurative (or metaphorical) meaning.

There are several kinds of improper literal sense, some of which refer only to individual words:

- *Synecdoche*: The part is used to refer to the whole thing, e.g. “And the word was made flesh [man].”
- *Metonymy*: Something is designated by another thing. Thus, what is contained is designated by the container, e.g. “This chalice [blood] is the New Testament.”
- *Metaphor or simile*: A word refers to another by comparison. Thus, in the expression “the Lamb of God,” *lamb* does not refer to an animal but to the spotless and meek victim offered as a sacrifice.
- *Hyperbole*: This is a sort of literary exaggeration: “I will make your descendants as numerous as the grains of sand.”

Scripture also employs metaphors that are whole sentences or stories:

- *Parable*: A story illustrates a moral or spiritual truth (e.g., Mt 13:3–33).
- *Allegory*: This is a prolonged metaphor (e.g., Jn 10:11–16).
- *Fable*: This is a story that is not based on facts—and with animals or plants as characters—that illustrates a moral lesson (e.g., Jgs 9:8–15).

The literal sense can be explicit or implicit. Thus, “Mary is the mother of Jesus” (explicit) is true, and since Jesus is God, one may say, “Mary is the Mother of God” (implicit).

A large number of truths are deductions—a rational premise is added to the biblical data to reach a conclusion. The resulting conclusion is a theological conclusion, or consequent sense.

Many passages of the Bible suggest that God intended a deeper or more abundant sense than that derived from the text alone. Thus, it was

unknown to the human author in its implications. This is called the plenary sense.

In other passages, something said of a group of persons may be applied to one person in an eminent sense. Thus, the statement “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren” (Dt 18:15) may be said of any of the prophets, but it applies primarily to Christ.

## **25b) Some Principles Ruling the Literal Sense**

- Every part of Sacred Scripture has a literal sense (either proper or metaphorical). This is how people speak—they use words in a literal sense.
- One must first discover the literal sense of an expression before looking for the spiritual sense.
- The literal sense admits several interpretations, each with a greater degree of understanding. There can be a plurality of literal senses.

## 26. The Spiritual Sense

God is the main author of both the Old and the New Testaments. In his infinite wisdom, God disposed the events and words of the Old Testament in such a way that these things of the past prefigured (or signified) those that were to come in the New Testament. The spiritual sense is signified by the figures of the Old Testament. This sense is also called typical or mystical.<sup>3</sup>

The person, event, or thing described in the Old Testament that signifies a future reality is called type, image, or figure. The reality of the New Testament, which was prefigured in the Old Testament, is called antitype, reality, or figured.

Hence, manna—the food that God gave the Israelites in the desert—is the type (type, image, or figure) of the Holy Eucharist (antitype, reality, or figured) in a spiritual sense. Likewise, the sacrifice of the lamb in Egypt (and the sprinkling of its blood), which saved the Israelites from the avenging angel, is the type or figure; Christ, who saved mankind from sin by shedding his blood on Calvary, is the antitype or reality.

The human writer was not aware of the production of the spiritual sense. The spiritual sense was placed there by God without the human writer's knowledge.

Three elements enter in the definition of the spiritual sense:

- i) The real existence of the person, things, or events of the Old Testament. Metaphors, allegories, or parables are never types; they have no historical reality.
- ii) The similarity between the type and what is prefigured by the type (the antitype).
- iii) God's intention to prefigure something. We attribute intention through the Bible itself, Tradition, or the Magisterium of the Church.

## **26a) Errors**

- The dualistic heresies claimed that there was no connection between the Old Testament (made by a stern demigod) and the New Testament (made by a merciful God).
- The liberal Protestants rejected the spiritual sense, claiming that it was a figment of the imagination without biblical basis.

## **26b) Kinds of Spiritual Sense**

- Proper allegorical sense (typical, or dogmatic): In it, the antitype (or reality) is Christ or his Kingdom.
- Moral sense (or tropological): In this sense, what happened to Christ is the antitype of the moral acts required of a Christian.
- Anagogical sense: In it, the events of the Old Testament or New Testament are figures of future life in heaven. Thus, the possession of the Promised Land is a figure of access to heaven.

Not all the senses are present in every passage of the Bible. Although the spiritual sense is always based on the literal sense, several spiritual senses may coexist. Thus, the entry of the Hebrews into the Promised Land (literal sense) not only foreshadows the entry of the Gentiles into the Church (allegorical sense) and the admittance of the elect into heaven (anagogical sense), but it also teaches the necessity of faith and the misery of unbelief (moral sense, see Heb 4:1–11).

## **26c) Principles Concerning the Spiritual Sense**

- It is a sense proper to the Bible. The Holy Spirit used this sense to reveal the truth.
- It is exclusive to the Bible; only God knows future events.
- It is always based on the literal sense and proceeds from it.
- There is nothing found in the spiritual sense necessary for salvation that is not clearly stated elsewhere in the Bible in a literal sense. Thus, we find the ark of Noah (cf. Gn 6) in the Old Testament the prefiguring the Church as the only source of salvation in a spiritual sense, but this truth is also stated clearly in a literal sense in the New Testament (cf. 1 Pt 3:20–21).

## 27. Reading of the Bible (Heuristics)

Heuristics is the part of hermeneutics that tries to discover the true sense of passages in the Bible.

The Bible is a human document, written by people for people. Thus, we must follow certain rational principles to understand the sense of the words.

Moreover, the Bible is a divine document, written by God to reveal supernatural truths needed by all for one's salvation. As such, the Bible was entrusted to the Church, its official guarantor and interpreter. To interpret the Bible, one should strive to discover what the human author tried to affirm and what God wanted to manifest through their words.<sup>4</sup>

To properly understand the content of the Bible, the following are needed:

### (1) *The light of faith*

Faith is not just something useful to know the Bible; it is the essential condition. Faith is all the more necessary because of man's darkened intellect, which is a consequence of sin.

### (2) *Moral uprightness*

The right dispositions (especially humility) are needed in the exegete. Then, the student of Scripture is ready to learn from God and does not become attached to false, personal criteria.



## 27a) The Exegetical Method

Biblical exegesis is a branch of theology. Thus, both share the same method and goal: to reach to the divine truth, penetrating into the mysteries, using human reason illumined by faith.

Biblical exegesis uses additional criteria to accomplish its task:

### (1) *Human criteria*

To discover the intention of the human authors of the Bible, it is necessary to take into account the conditions of the time and culture, the “literary forms” used at the time, and the customary and characteristic patterns of perception, speech, and narrative that prevailed at the time that the sacred writer wrote. The exegete wisely uses certain sciences as auxiliary means of discovery, such as metaphysics, biblical languages, study of literary forms, and history.

### (2) *Dogmatic criteria*

Since Sacred Scripture is inspired, it “must be read and interpreted with its divine authorship in mind.”<sup>5</sup> The Second Vatican Council specifies three criteria that should be used to interpret Sacred Scripture according to the Spirit that inspired it:

- i) Attention should be paid to the content and unity of the whole of Sacred Scripture.
- ii) The Tradition of the entire Church should be taken into account. It is not legitimate for the exegete to interpret the Bible contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers of the Church. The Church keeps the living memory of the word of God in her Tradition, and the Holy Spirit gives her the spiritual interpretation of Scripture.
- iii) “The analogy of faith” should be kept in mind (cf. Rom 12:6).<sup>6</sup>

## 27b) The Analogy of Faith

Of the dogmatic criteria to interpret Sacred Scripture, the analogy of faith is the harmony or agreement of the revealed truths among themselves and within the total project of revelation. Thus, each revealed truth sheds light upon the rest, and there is no contradiction among them.

Moreover, “seeing that the same God is the author both of the Sacred Books and of the doctrine committed to the Church, it is clearly impossible that any teaching can by legitimate means be extracted from the former, which shall in any respect be at variance with the latter.”<sup>7</sup>

### (1) *Characteristics of the exegetical method*

- In those passages where there is neither an authentic interpretation of the Magisterium nor unanimous consent of the Fathers, the exegete should follow the analogy of faith. Thus, the expression “brothers of Jesus” cannot be interpreted without taking into account the passages on the perpetual virginity of Mary; it should be interpreted as “relatives of Jesus,” which, coincidentally, is the meaning of the original Aramaic word.
- The analogy of faith often applies negatively. If any interpretation suggested by the exegete contradicts Church doctrine, it must be rejected as false.
- In a positive sense, the analogy of faith marks the way to interpret a text within the true context of revelation (see no. 10b).

### (2) *The foundation of Catholic exegesis*

The analogy of scriptural faith must be the foundation of any serious Catholic Bible study (exegesis).

This was the constant practice of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. They looked for scriptural passages that are very clear in order to shed light on those passages that are less clear. They also denounced heretics who chose one passage of Sacred Scripture, twisted its sense, and interpreted it in opposition to other passages of the same Scripture.

One example of the analogy of faith is this: In 1 Corinthians 6:12, St. Paul says: “All things are lawful for me”—*omnia mihi licent*. Some interpreted this wrongly by saying that anything one is inclined to do is licit. But St. Thomas related this passage to another in the New Testament,

Matthew 14:4, where John the Baptist tells Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have her,” referring to Herod’s brother’s wife. St. Thomas concluded that St. Paul’s phrase means that all is licit that is within limits set by the divine law.

St. Augustine expressed the rule thus: “When interpreting the more ambiguous passages of Scriptures, we must consult the rule of the faith, which is taken from the clearer passages of Scripture and the authority of the Church.”<sup>8</sup>

Vatican II warns, “Since sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted with its divine authorship in mind, no less attention must be devoted to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the Tradition of the entire Church and the analogy of faith, if we are to derive their true meaning from the sacred texts.”<sup>9</sup>

### (3) *The harmony of the sacred texts*

In a negative sense, the analogy of scriptural faith means that there can be no contradiction among the passages of the Sacred Scripture. If there seems to be a contradiction, it is only apparently so—it may be due to a misinterpretation of the sense of some passage.

“Hence it follows that all interpretation is foolish and false which either makes the sacred writers disagree one with another, or is opposed to the doctrine of the Church.”<sup>10</sup>

For example, in John 14:28, our Lord said during the Last Supper, “the Father is greater than I,” and in John 10:30, Jesus said, “I and the Father are one.” There is no contradiction between these passages. The first text declares that Christ as man is below the Father, and the second declares the unity of nature between Christ as God and the Father.

## **28. The Explanation of the Text (Prophoristics)**

Prophoristics (from the Greek word meaning “to present”) is the part of hermeneutics that studies the manner of explaining the Bible to others. The following methods are used to accomplish this task:

## 28a) Scientific Methods

- Vernacular versions are translations, and the Church has always encouraged reading the Bible. During some historical periods in certain places, vernacular versions of the Bible were forbidden from being used in order to avoid spreading errors transmitted in the vernacular versions made by heretics.
- Biblical theology is the exposition of the doctrine of the Bible as a unity. It offers a consolidated view of the Christian mystery contained in the written word of God.
- A commentary is the exposition of the sense of a book, passage, or several related passages of the Bible.
- A catena is a set of short biblical commentaries from the Fathers forming a series or chain.
- A gloss is a brief explanation of an obscure word in the text.
- A scholion is a brief explanation of an obscure passage.
- A paraphrase is the restatement of the meaning of the original text in clearer words.
- A postilla is a short explanation placed after some word of the text.

## 28b) Pastoral Methods

- Reading of the Sacred Scripture takes place within the Mass (Liturgy of the Word).
- A Bible service is a reading of the word of God, outside the Mass, often followed by a commentary of the text.
- Catechism class is an explanation of Christian doctrine by means of short questions and answers.
- A homily is a simple explanation of a biblical or liturgical text within the Mass.

1. Cf. Pius XII, Enc. *Divino Afflante Spiritu*; CCC, 115–119.
2. Cf. CCC, 116.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 117.
4. Cf. *DV*, 12; cf. CCC, 109–114.
5. *DV*, 12.
6. Cf. *Ibid.*
7. Leo XIII, Enc. *Providentissimus Deus*, 14.
8. St. Augustine, *De Doct. Christiana*, 3.2.
9. *DV*, 12.
10. Leo XIII, Enc. *Providentissimus Deus*, 14.

# God One and Triune

Prepared by a team of professors of Dogmatic Theology

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# **God One and Triune**

Prepared by a team of professors of Dogmatic  
Theology

## **Part I**

### **THE UNITY OF GOD**

THE MYSTERY OF God, known through revelation and accepted by faith, is the first problem discussed by dogmatic theology. God is “the first and the last” (Is 44:6), the beginning and end of everything.

Reason, enlightened by faith, faces this mystery and strives for a deeper understanding of what God is, his nature and operations, and how to describe his unity (God is one and there is only one God) and trinity of persons. The theological treatise in question has two parts:

The One God, which studies God’s being and his perfections

The Blessed Trinity, which deals with what is proper to each of the divine Persons, having studied what belongs to them in common.

The unity and trinity of God is the central mystery of the Christian faith. This explains the importance of this treatise: All other treatises, in one manner or another, will be founded on this one.

A deep and rigorous theology of God, One and Triune, is extremely important for Christian piety. Christian hope is grounded in knowing and loving God more and more in this life so as to enjoy his company forever in the next.



# Knowledge of the Existence of God

# 1. Natural Knowledge

Each person is, by nature and vocation, a religious being. We come from God and go continually to God; thus, we will not live a real human life if we do not choose freely to live this bond with God.

Every person has been created to live in communion with God; happiness is found in God. “When I abide by you with all my being, there will be no more sorrows or trials for me. My life—full of you—will be fully accomplished.”<sup>1</sup>

One can arrive at the knowledge of the existence of God in two ways: by the light of reason and by the grace of faith. Using reason (natural knowledge), listening to the message of the creatures, and listening to the prompting of conscience, a person can reach the certainty of God’s existence.<sup>2</sup>

The Catholic Church professes that “God, the origin and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason, through the things that he created.”<sup>3</sup> This is dogma, that is, a revealed truth solemnly defined by the Magisterium of the Church.

The Church had a double aim in defining this truth. First, she wanted to teach—once again and with her full authority—that the truth of the natural knowledge of the existence of God has always been part of her doctrinal heritage. It is clearly taught in Sacred Scripture (cf. Wis 13:1–9; Rom 1:19–21) as well as Tradition. She also wanted to condemn, with the same authority, the agnostic errors that were widespread during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Sacred Scripture describes the knowledge of God as mediate (obtained through created things), natural (reached through the light of the intelligence), universal (accessible to all people), certain (since creatures indubitably lead us to the Creator), and easy to attain (because it requires only the natural use of reason). The definition of the First Vatican Council quoted above underscores these characteristics.

## **2. The Existence of God Can Be Proved by Reason**

Can we demonstrate God's existence? The First Vatican Council specified only that one can know God naturally. Nevertheless, the possibility of proving God's existence is included implicitly in the dogmatic definition. This was the mind of the Council, as later teachings of the Magisterium show. Among the documents relevant to this topic, the motu proprio *Sacrorum Antistitum* (issued by St. Pius X in 1910) is especially significant. It states: "God, the origin and end of all things, can be known and demonstrated with certainty by the natural light of reason starting from the created world, that is, from the visible works of creation, as a cause is known through its effects."<sup>4</sup>

These words speak of the starting point of the proof (the visible works of creation) and its basis (as a cause from its effects), namely, the principle of causality, which is the experience of causality analyzed philosophically.

### 3. Proof of the Existence of God

The Church affirms that the existence of God can be demonstrated rationally. The best proof of this assertion is the existence of such demonstrations. Philosophers and theologians have developed multiple demonstrations throughout the centuries. All have great relevance and speculative interest to the current discussion. Those of St. Thomas Aquinas are among the most popular. They are known as the *Five Ways*. He used arguments from earlier authors (mainly Aristotle, but also Plato, St. Augustine, St. John Damascene, and Avicenna) in his demonstrations. Nevertheless, he was not merely a compiler; he was able to leave the imprint of his own genius and peculiar style in the proofs. Before studying the Five Ways, we must mention other arguments that are worthy of study as well. These include St. Augustine's argument and the ontological proof of St. Anselm (whose demonstrative force is contestable). The ontological proof was later recast by other authors, such as Descartes and Leibniz.

The Ways of St. Thomas<sup>5</sup> are five metaphysical arguments based on the rational development of sensory data. The development uses very specific concepts in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, such as the notions of *esse* (or *actus essendi*), causality, and participation. To understand the Ways of St. Thomas properly, it is necessary to be familiar with these notions. This is a requirement to understand the proofs according to the spirit of their author, as scientific rigor demands. Only in this way can the solidity and eternal value of the proofs truly be appreciated.

The first key to the understanding given by the Ways is the multiplicity of beings we find in the world. The existence and variety of creatures bear witness to a real distinction between their *essence* (what they are) and their *esse* or act of being (that by which they are). This fact, in turn, requires the existence of a Supreme Being whose very essence is to be, thus possessing the power to communicate *esse*—the act of being—to other things. We know from experience that no existing being has, in itself, its own reason for being, since nothing can give the act of being to itself. No finite being is capable of accounting for the act by which it is. This lack on the part of finite beings means that a “First Cause” of the act of being of each thing must exist. The composition of *essence* and *esse*, proper of

limited beings, is not found in this “Cause.” The *essence* of this “Cause” should precisely be his *esse*.

The second metaphysical key to the Ways is the notion of causality. In Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, causality is not merely an external action that transforms a passive object. Rather, it is a relation by which an agent actualizes a pre-existent potential in a passive object. Causality is the union of active intervention and a passive disposition. Because it is a union, causality requires a cause of the agent’s causality in the agent, that is, a cause of its being. With this in mind, it is possible to understand why the principle of causality (“every effect has a cause”) leads to God, since secondary causes cannot account for their own causality. There must be a First Cause, the cause of causality. That cause is God.

The notion of participation is the basis for the Fourth Way. It is closely connected to the two previous notions. It can be defined as simply the partial possession of an act or perfection possessed fully by another. If we apply this notion to the act of being, we conclude that all things possess the act of being in a partial, participated way. Therefore, a “Being by essence” in which all other beings participate must exist. This Being possesses the full perfection of Being as his own and is, therefore, the cause of the partial possession of Being in others. This Being by essence is God.

The five ways are similar in structure, and their elements may be summarized as follows:

- Starting point: a fact of experience, metaphysically considered
- Application of the principle of causality to this starting point
- Recourse to infinity in a series of subordinate causes is discarded (in the first three ways)
- Conclusion: God exists

We will now develop the First and Fifth Ways and outline the other three.

### 3a) The First Way

*Starting point:* We start from the experience of motion. “It is certain,” writes St Thomas, “and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion.”

*Motion*, in this context, is the passage from potential to act. Potential is what could be something but is not that something yet. Act is what already is. All finite beings are composed of potential and act.

*Application of the principle of causality:* “Now whatever is in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion unless it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act... Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects.... It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, i.e., that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another.”

Once motion is defined as the passage from potential to act, applying the principle of causality is simple: Whatever moves is moved by another. As St. Thomas shows in the above quotation, if we claimed that something moved itself, we would go against the principle of non-contradiction (a thing cannot be itself and another at the same time in the same sense), which is a first principle of our knowledge and understanding of reality.

*Impossibility of proceeding ad infinitum:* “If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs be put in motion by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover; seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are put in motion by the first mover.”

At this point, the reasoning proceeds as follows: Every effect (what is moved) has its proper cause. This cause also moves, and, therefore, is moved, and, therefore, has in turn its own cause and so on for the third, fourth, and succeeding causes. These causes are essentially subordinated in the present; they all have to act in the present for the effect to take place. For example, for a stone to move, it has to be pushed by a staff, which in turn is held by a hand, and so on. They all have to act at the same time.

This type of subordinate cause is different from those accidentally subordinated in the past. Causes of the latter type do not have to act all at the same time in order to produce the effect. For example, for a man to exist, it is not necessary for his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather to exist all at the same time.

It is not possible to proceed to infinity in the first way because it would require eventually denying the very existence of motion. Subordinate movers cause movement only insofar as they themselves are moved. This demands the existence of a first mover who is not moved by any other, that is, an unmoved mover.

*Conclusion:* “Therefore, it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.” This unmoved mover is God because he moves without himself being moved, that is, he acts without passing from potency to act, so he is always in act. He is his own activity and his own Being. This subsistent *esse*, this pure act of Being, is God.

### 3b) The Fifth Way

*Starting point:* We start from the experience of purpose in the world—everything moves toward an end. “We see that things that lack intelligence (such as natural bodies) act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end not fortuitously, but designedly.”

Beings endowed with intelligence are capable of knowing what is good for them and moving toward it. They know both the end and the means, and they act intentionally, for a purpose. However, those lacking adequate knowledge cannot direct themselves to their end. Nevertheless, they also act for an end. This demands a cause that can explain such behavior.

*Application of causality:* “Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move toward an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence, as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer.”

The evidence of purpose and governance in the world implies the existence of an intelligent being who knows the end and the means to reach it. This explains why irrational beings always act in the most appropriate way to reach what is good for them.

*Conclusion:* “Therefore, some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are ordered to their end, and this being we call God.” This supreme intelligence, whose being is his intelligence, is God—the pure act of Being.



### **3c) Outline of the Other Ways**

The Second Way starts from efficient causality and reaches God as the Uncaused Cause.

The Third Way begins with the experience of generation and corruption and shows that God is the only being necessary in itself.

The Fourth Way starts by observing that some creatures are more perfect than others and concludes that God is the source of all perfection.

We should consider now whether the Five Ways are absolutely conclusive, that is, whether or not they can prove the existence of God to everybody. In fact, some people dismiss them as inconclusive. The arguments, however, are solidly grounded and logically irrefutable. Sometimes, the rejection is due to ignorance of the philosophy on which they are based. Another factor that sometimes leads to their rejection is the prevalent role of human freedom in our knowledge of God. As they prove the existence of God, the Five Ways of St. Thomas call for a personal commitment to this truth. This involves certain concrete obligations toward the Creator at a personal level. If a person is not willing to accept dependence on God, he will voluntarily reject any argument proving his existence.

## **4. The Existence of God is Also an Object of Faith**

God has revealed his existence. Thus, this truth is also an object of faith. God is One; this second truth—rooted in the Old Testament—is inseparable from the fact of his existence.

Sacred Scripture reveals the personal nature of God, his infinite power in creation, oneness, infinite perfections, and Trinity of Persons. God revealed himself to Israel as the One. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Dt 6:4–5). Through the prophets, God invited Israel and all nations to turn to him. “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other... To me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear. Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength” (Is 45:22–24; cf. Phil 2:10–11).

Jesus confirmed that God, the Lord, is One, and that he should be loved with all one’s heart, with all one’s soul, with all one’s mind, and with all one’s strength (cf. Mk 12:29–30).

The acceptance of revelation through the gift and commitment of faith is a source of knowledge about God’s existence. The sacred books do not offer any formal demonstration of his existence, although several proofs are implicit. They are not needed since God is the main protagonist of the Bible. His active presence is constant and evident from the very first verse to the last. Scripture itself calls the person who does not recognize God in all his works a “fool” (cf. Wis 14).

## **4a) God's Name**

God revealed his name to his people, Israel. A person's name expresses his essence, identity, and sense of his life. God has a name. He is not merely "an anonymous force."

God revealed himself gradually and with diverse names, but the fundamental revelation of his name was to Moses through the burning bush on Sinai: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex 3:6). God is the God of the ancestors, the One who called and guided the patriarchs in their wanderings. He is faithful and compassionate; he remembers his people and promises; he comes to liberate his people from slavery. Since God is almighty and loves his people beyond space and time, he will use all his might for this purpose.

## 4b) “I Am Who I Am”

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’: this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.” (Ex 3:13–15)

God revealed his mysterious name “I am who I am” or YHWH. It reveals God as he is, much above anything we may say or understand. He is “a God who hidest thyself” (Is 45:15); God’s name is “wonderful” (Jgs 13:18); still, he is a God who becomes intimate with people.

In revealing his name, God also reveals his fidelity. As he was faithful in the past (“I am the God of your father”), he will be faithful in the future (“I will be with you” [Ex 3:12]) for the sake of his people.

Out of respect for God’s sanctity, the people of Israel do not utter the name of God. While reading Sacred Scripture they say God’s title “Lord” (*Adonai* in Hebrew, or *Kyrios* in Greek) instead. Jesus was acclaimed with the same title, which revealed his divinity: “Jesus is Lord.”

## 5. Principal Errors Regarding the Existence and Natural Knowledge of God

### 5a) Atheism and its Moral Responsibility

The Second Vatican Council clearly states in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* that atheism is not something spontaneous in man.<sup>6</sup> It is, rather, an unnatural development that has both intellectual and moral causes. Knowing and loving God is the first commandment of the Law of God, positively prescribed by the natural law written in the hearts of mankind. Its fulfillment is necessary for salvation. The unnatural passage into atheism presupposes the mystery of sin, which turns the hierarchy of values of the person upside-down. The First Vatican Council mentions a negligent training in the faith, sidestepping important matters, and defective explanation of the doctrine—rendering it either trivial or unintelligible, unable to inspire one’s life—as some causes of atheism.

As for the intellectual roots of modern atheism, foremost among them is the theory of immanence. Essentially, immanentism reduces the reality of things to their being known by a subject. Thus, being is reduced to a mere mental structure. The theory of immanence could be summarized as “Without thought, there is no being,” or “To be is to think.”

Atheism appears with several façades. One frequent form is practical materialism, which limits human needs and ambitions to space and time. Another form is atheistic humanism, which falsely considers man as the end of himself, the sole maker and creator of his own history (*propriae suae historiae solus artifex et demiurgus*).<sup>7</sup> Finally, the common current form of atheism expects man’s salvation by a kind of earthly economic and social liberation for which “religion, of its very nature, thwarts such emancipation by raising man’s hopes in a future life, thus both deceiving him and discouraging him from working for a better form of life on earth.”<sup>8</sup>

## 5b) Agnosticism

Agnosticism is a philosophical tenet that denies the ability of human reason to transcend the limits of sensorial experience. This leads to erroneous consequences regarding the natural knowledge of God; if it were true, human reason would not be able to attain knowledge of God and prove his existence. Consequently, agnostics propose the suspension of judgment regarding God and the last end of man. The most representative agnostic school is Kantianism, which was singled out and condemned by the First Vatican Council in the dogmatic definition *Dei Filius*. This error greatly influenced modernism, which was in turn condemned by St. Pius X in his encyclical *Pascendi*.<sup>9</sup>

The agnostic refuses to deny God, allowing for the existence of a transcendent being who cannot reveal himself and about whom no one can say anything. Agnosticism frequently results in indifference and escapism from moral responsibility.

## **5c) Fideism and Traditionalism**

Fideism and traditionalism have agnostic traits. They both deny the ability of human reason to reach transcendent truths. One holds instead that faith alone can give certainty (i.e., fideism of Bautain). For the other, the only source of certainty is the tradition of a primitive revelation, kept and transmitted from generation to generation (i.e., traditionalism of Bonnetty).

In either context, “transcendent truths” are not just the strictly supernatural truths, which human reason cannot know by its own power. They also include the fundamental truths of the metaphysical, moral, and religious order. It is regarding the latter that both schools disqualify human reason. Hence, they were condemned by the Church in documents of Gregory XVI and Pius IX.<sup>10</sup>

## 5d) Ontologism

Ontologism postulates that human reason immediately perceives the Absolute Being. God himself would be the proper object of the mind; that is, the intellect would immediately know the infinite Being and, through him, all the other things. Hence, this erroneous theory holds that the immediate knowledge of God is essential to the intellect and without it no other knowledge is possible. It contradicts both sound philosophical reason and the Christian doctrine on the power of our created mind. Ontologism leads to serious errors in other fields as well. This error was condemned by the Church in a decree of the Holy Office in 1861.<sup>11</sup> The doctrines of its most representative proponent, Rosmini, were condemned by the decree *Post Obitum* in 1887.<sup>12</sup>



## **6. Our Knowledge of God Is Analogical**

As we have seen, God can be known by created intellects, but he is also incomprehensible because his being and the mysteries of his intimate life infinitely surpass the capacity of human reason. Man cannot fully comprehend God, but he can acquire a certain knowledge of the essence of God, even in the present life. This knowledge is *mediate and analogical*.<sup>13</sup>

## **6a) The Analogy of Being**

Our analogical knowledge is based on the analogy of being. The analogy of being is the likeness or similarity between all beings by participation and the Being by essence. As a result of the total causality of God, all creatures bear a certain likeness to him. All agents bring out effects similar to themselves (as the philosophical adage puts it) and, consequently, all effects bear some resemblance to their causes. Accordingly, all creatures have a certain degree of similarity with the Creator, and this similarity varies according to the degree of perfection of their being.

## **6b) Univocity and Equivocity**

Analogy is intermediate between univocity and equivocity. In a comparison, analogy entails both similarity (univocity) and dissimilarity (equivocity). In the case of the analogy of creatures with God, the similarity is minimal (although real, i.e., based on causality) and the dissimilarity is infinite. The human mind can discover something about God through the similarity between creatures and him. It is very little, but it is something really found in God; otherwise, it would not be found in the creatures, which were made by God out of nothing. We can, therefore, speak about God on the basis of the perfections found in creatures.

The perfections found in creatures cannot be attributed univocally to God because these same perfections are found in God in an infinitely superior way. Still, it is not an equivocal predication either, because these perfections are not totally different in God and in creatures—they maintain some resemblance. Therefore, the predication must be analogical—halfway between univocity and equivocity.

## **6c) Affirmation, Negation, and Eminence**

Our analogical knowledge of God includes the ways of affirmation, negation, and eminence.

The way of affirmation is the first step in our analogical knowledge of God. It implies attributing all the pure perfections that are found in creatures (such as truth, goodness, beauty, life, and intelligence) to God. The concept of pure perfection excludes any imperfection whatsoever.

The second step is the way of negation, by which we deny that these pure perfections are found in God in the same way as they are found in creatures, whose perfections are always limited.

Consequently, it is necessary to proceed to the way of eminence: We admit that these same perfections are in God but in an ineffable and eminent way, being infinite and identified with the divine essence. These ways are not three different ways to God through creatures, but rather three consecutive stages in a rational path to God.

The pure perfections of the creatures are predicated of God in a proper sense because they are really present in him at an infinitely greater scale. The mixed perfections, however, are necessarily mingled with imperfections because they are exclusive of creatures, and can be attributed to God only in an improper or metaphorical sense.

## 6d) Analogical Knowledge Is True but Imperfect Knowledge

Knowledge is true when it agrees with the reality of the known object. In other words, there is true knowledge when the idea produced by the mind in the act of knowing is an accurate representation of the known object. In the case of our analogical knowledge of God, the divine perfections are the known object. This knowledge is based on the real and true likeness between the creatures' perfections and God's. In this case, human reason really reaches God through analogy. However, given the infinite distance between God and creatures and the infinite dissimilarity implied in the analogy between them, this type of knowledge is necessarily imperfect. We know God truly, but his essence is infinitely richer than whatever degree of knowledge we may acquire about it.

1. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.28.39.
2. Cf. *CCC*, 27–30, 44–46.
3. DS 3004, 3026; cf. *CCC*, 36–38.
4. Cf. DS 3538; *CCC*, 31–35.
5. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 3; cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.13.
6. Cf. *GS*, 19–21; cf. *CCC*, 2123–2126.
7. Cf. *GS*, 20.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Cf. DS 3475–3500; *CCC*, 2127–2128.
10. Cf. DS 2751–2756 for Bautain, DS 2811–2814 for Bonnetty.
11. Cf. DS 2841ff.
12. Cf. DS 3201ff.
13. Cf. *CCC*, 39–43.

23

## The Divine Nature

## 7. Introduction

As we said before, through revelation, God has made known his being and operations, his intimate life and the eternal designs of his will regarding the salvation of all mankind. This section will focus on the nature of God,<sup>1</sup> that is, his being and operations. We will refer to them as the *essence* and *attributes* of God. Philosophically, the word *essence* means “what a thing is,” that which is common to all individuals of the same species. In the case of people, the essence is “humanity.” All the individuals of the same species are able to carry out the operations proper to that species; they act similarly in what is specifically proper to them. For example, all people act by means of their intellect and free will. It can be said, therefore, that things act according to what they are, that is, according to the characteristics of their essence. As philosophers traditionally put it, “Operation follows being, and the manner of operation follows the manner of being.” This is why the essence of a thing is called its *nature* insofar as it is the principle of its operations.

Therefore, the study of the divine nature means studying the essence and operations of God. The divine essence—what God is in himself (the Deity)—is not fathomable by the human intellect. Not even reason enlightened by faith can grasp the divine essence, although with faith, the starting point is much higher, for reason relies on the help of grace. Unaided reason can reach only an analogical knowledge of God’s perfections based on the perfections of his creatures. Through faith, however, we arrive at God himself because faith is a participation in God’s knowledge of himself. Still, this is not clear and evident knowledge of the divine essence, but just a mysterious image. The divine essence is too elevated for the human intellect to grasp it fully, even when aided by faith.

Combining the knowledge gained through faith with the power of natural reason, we have a remarkably high starting point, the help of grace, and the most adequate rational tool, which is the way of analogy. Theological knowledge of God is the fruit of this union—or rather, in this way, we build knowledge little by little, following a path illumined by faith up to the outer limits of our intellect. This is the method we will follow in our study of God: Given a certain truth, perfection, or work revealed by

God about himself, we will use our reason to try to understand it better and accurately express his nature and perfections.

The *divine attributes* are the perfections proper to the nature of God. They are known through his works and revealed words. They can be expressed, up to a certain degree, through analogy. A distinction is usually made between *entitative* and *operative* attributes depending on whether they refer to perfections of the divine essence considered in itself or in its operations.



## **8. The Divine Essence**

### **8a) Physical and Metaphysical Essence**

The totality of the divine perfection in its mysterious unity constitutes the *physical essence* of God, which is incomprehensible and ineffable to us. The *metaphysical essence* of God is that perfection, which, from our revelation-based standpoint, is the foundation of all his other perfections. This is both what infinitely distinguishes God from all the creatures and what is absolutely specific to him. Theologians often call this exclusive property of God the “formal constitutive element of the Divinity.”

## 8b) The Metaphysical Essence of God

In the Book of Exodus, God revealed to Moses: “I am who I am.” When Moses queried what he was to say about the One who sent him to free the Hebrews from the slavery of Egypt, God added: “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Ex 3:14). With these words God revealed his proper name: Yahweh, i.e., “I am,” “he who is.” They give the starting point of Christian thinking: What does this proper name of God mean? What does it reveal about God himself?

The words of Exodus carry a religious message—not merely a philosophical one—although the consideration of such revelation gave birth to philosophical work of great importance. In Exodus, the greatest Christian thinkers have found the answer to the puzzle of the metaphysical essence of God. They concluded that God’s essence can be expressed by saying that God and Being are identical: God is the subsistent Being, whose essence is to be. In spite of general agreement on this point, different authors have at times understood the notion of Being differently. This partly explains the divergence of various theological developments.

The interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas stands out from the rest, having received the widest acceptance in the history of theology. The key to his work lies in the real distinction between *essence* (“what a thing is”) and *act of being* (“that by which it is”). Every real thing has its own essence and act of being. With this in mind, St. Thomas interprets the words of Exodus in the following way: God is “he who is,” the necessary being not requiring any cause of his existence. There is no distinction between essence and act of being in him—his essence is his act of being. God is his Being and can, therefore, be called self-subsistent Being (*ipsum esse subsistens*). Accordingly, the great majority of the followers of St. Thomas say that the metaphysical essence of God is *aseity* (the quality of being *a se*, “by himself”), a term that summarizes the perfection of his Being.

## 9. The Divine Attributes

After studying the notion of divine attributes and its division into entitative and operative attributes, we will examine each of them in particular. Before going into that, we must study the distinction between them.

All the attributes and perfections of God are properties of his essence. They are found in him in infinite degree and without any element of potentiality, because God is pure act and nothing potential or merely possible can be present in him. We may say that these perfections are present in God, but it is more accurate to say that these perfections are God himself.

The perfections are mysteriously identified with the divine essence, forming a wonderful unity. Now, since they are identical to the divine essence, they are also identical to one another. Nevertheless, it is possible to talk about their distinctions with respect to the essence and with respect to one another.

The notion of essence is distinct from the notion of goodness, truth, or any other perfection; each of them is the intellectual expression of a different reality. Actually, in creatures, goodness is different from truth, truth from beauty, etc. Therefore, their corresponding notions are different as well. However, God's perfections are completely included in the unity of his essence. Therefore, the distinction can exist only in their notion—a purely rational distinction that would usually correspond to a distinction in reality, although there is none in this case.

The First Vatican Council gave a summary of the divine perfections:

The Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Roman Church believes and professes that there is one true and living God, the creator and Lord of heaven and earth. He is all-powerful, eternal, unmeasurable, incomprehensible and limitless in intellect and will and in every perfection. Since he is one unique spiritual substance, entirely simple and unchangeable, he must be declared really and essentially distinct from the world, perfectly happy in himself and by his very nature, and inexpressibly exalted over all things that exist or can be conceived other than himself.<sup>2</sup>

## 9a) Summary of the Principal Entitative Attributes

### (1) *Simplicity*

In God, there is no composition of any kind, physical or metaphysical; he is absolutely simple. There is no physical composition in him because he is not material. He is pure spirit, both as divine revelation teaches us (cf. Jn 4:24; Hos 11:9; Dt 4:15–19) and as reason can prove.<sup>3</sup> There is no metaphysical composition in God either. In all creatures, the mind can discover a composition of act and potential at different levels: composition of matter and form, essence and act of being, nature and subject, and substance and accidents.

Theology demonstrates that none of these can be found in God, because they imply potentiality, and God is pure act of being. He is absolutely simple, thus utterly one and indivisible. Simplicity, therefore, means that the infinite divine perfections are identical with the divine essence, although we cannot understand how. Each of the perfections really exists infinitely in God. God's perfections do not exist in composition, but in the absolute simplicity of identity with the divine essence.

### (2) *Goodness*

Sacred Scripture states that “no one is good but God alone” (Lk 18:19), and we can clearly see that his goodness spreads without limits.

Creation is, as the Church teaches, the fruit and manifestation of this divine attribute. As the First Vatican Council stated, God created *bonitate sua et omnipotente virtute*: through his goodness and omnipotence.<sup>4</sup>

In Sacred Scripture, divine goodness is found united to mercy and compassion. The works of God are always good, and he shares his goodness with all creatures, since he is goodness itself. Philosophically speaking, good is that which all things desire, that which attracts the will because it possesses perfection, and perfection is anything that is in act. God is the Supreme Being and is, therefore, the Supreme Good. He is good by essence in the same way that he is Being by essence. Goodness in creatures is only a participation in the divine goodness. Therefore, we should affirm that God is goodness itself and the source of all goodness.

### (3) *Unicity*

There is only one God because there can be only one infinitely good and perfect being. If there were two, they would differ in something, and that would already imply an imperfection in one or both. Based on the perpetual teaching of revelation, the *Roman Catechism*<sup>5</sup> and theology<sup>6</sup> use this simple reasoning to prove the uniqueness of God.

The sacred books are a witness of the one and unique God who addresses the people of Israel saying: “You shall worship no other god” (Ex 34:14); “the Lord is God; there is no other besides him” (Dt 4:35).

In history, the revealed monotheism of Israel and Christianity sharply stands out against the deformed conceptions that led to the polytheistic cults of other peoples. Polytheism is not the first stage of the naturally religious soul of man; rather, it is the consequence of an intelligence and will that are wounded by sin. They seek God without grace’s aid, thereby confusing man with creatures or his own desires.

Something similar can be said about the error of dualism: By seeking the root of evil in something different from the mystery of sin, it ends up believing in a sort of evil god that, if not evil itself, would at least be the cause of evil. Both errors illustrate the plight of the human soul when it tries to seek God without the help of grace.

### (4) *Immutability*

In connection with the spiritual nature of God, Sacred Scripture talks about the immutability of his being and operations. No change is possible in God. He always remains the same, unlike creatures, which are changeable (cf. Mal 3:6; Ps 102:26–28; Is 51:8; Jas 1:13–18).

From a metaphysical point of view, the immutable does not undergo change; its reality is to never change. In this sense, the only absolutely immutable reality is Being itself because it could change only into non-being, which is nothing. God, who is Being itself, is immutable by essence. Whatever proceeds from his will partakes of this perfection: the love that he has for his creatures, the eternal law that governs the whole of creation, the natural law (which is man’s participation in the eternal law), and the revealed truths. All these realities are as immutable as their author.

Immutability should not be understood as absence of activity. On the contrary, it means infinite activity without the slightest degree of passivity. God is pure act, cause of all causes, and the Unmoved Mover. His

immutability is infinite activity without, of course, undergoing change—that is, without passage from potency to act.

(5) *Eternity*

In some biblical passages, God is called the Eternal One (cf. Gn 21:33; Is 40:28), He who has no beginning or end, before or after.<sup>7</sup> “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God,” says the psalmist (Ps 90:2). St. Paul declares that God is the “King of ages” (1 Tm 1:17). In the inspired words of St. John, God is he “who is and who was and who is to come” (Rv 1:4; 1:8; 4:8).

According to Boethius, eternity may be defined as the “simultaneously whole and perfect possession of unending life,”<sup>8</sup> which means a personal life in absolute present, not subject to time—with neither past nor future. Eternity is a kind of fullness of life, which can belong only to the immutable Being in whom there is no motion, no change, no passage from one stage to another. God lives without being subject to time. He is placed over and above history, although he continually acts in it and directs men to the fullness of salvation.

Everything in God is eternal: his plans, his decisions, his knowledge of all things, which are “open and laid bare to the eyes of him” (Heb 4:13).<sup>9</sup> Hence, each moment—the smallest moment of time—is important for someone who is trying to orient his or her life toward God. No matter how small, it is always in the sight of God. Thus, Christian sanctity is but the sum total of thousands of moments of sanctity.

(6) *Omnipresence*

“Am I a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth?” (Jer 23:23–24). These and many other such inspired words in Sacred Scripture explicitly reveal the omnipresence of God. The words pronounced by St. Paul in the Areopagus allude to the same reality: “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Omnipresence is an exclusive property of God, founded on his absolute causality. Our reason relates it to his infinity, immensity, and ubiquity. God does not have limits, since he is Being itself, and Absolute Being admits no limits. He fills everything; he is pure spirit, without the

slightest trace of matter. He is neither local nor universal, nor does he occupy any span of time. In other words, God is *absolutely transcendent* in the sense usually given to that term in Christian doctrine—that is, distinct, excellent, far superior to whatever form of being we may imagine.<sup>10</sup>

The true notion of God, however—the one taught by the Church—points out his intimate presence in the being of things along with the divine transcendence. This presence is called the *divine immanence*. Catholic theology has named the divine omnipresence “presence by immensity,” and has explained this notion on the basis of creation. From that point of view, we can easily understand the radical dependence of the creature on God. God is the Absolute Cause of the being of all creatures, which he has brought forth from nothing.

This presence by immensity is studied by theology in three different levels:

- i) By *presence*, insofar as everything is open before God’s eyes
- ii) By *power*, since his power and providence extend to all creatures
- iii) By *essence*, since God is in all things giving them being

This third level includes the other two and explains God’s intimate presence in things insofar as he is the first and Absolute Cause of being.

Aside from the universal presence of immensity, there can be other types of divine presence in rational creatures, in accord with their specific nature. One of these is the “intentional presence,” by which God is present in the intellect as the known object and in the will as the desired object. Another type is the “indwelling presence,” which essentially consists of the presence of the Most Blessed Trinity in the soul in grace, where he dwells as in a temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; Gal 4:6; Eph 2:19–22; Jn 14:17; 14:21–26).

## 9b) Summary of the Principal Operative Attributes

### (1) *The Divine Intelligence*

In many ways and on many occasions, Sacred Scripture states that God limitlessly knows everything that refers to him and creatures (cf. Ex 3:14; Sir 1:2–3; Ps 50:11). His knowledge and wisdom are mysterious to man (cf. Rom 11:33), and reach into the depths of the heart of each person (cf. Jer 12:3; Rom 8:27; Rv 2:23). Being God, he knows future events (cf. Is 45:21).

Human reason by itself is also capable of proving the knowledge of God, as can be seen in the Fifth Way of St. Thomas. This proof leads to the existence of an intelligent being who governs all things, that is, an ordering intelligence that leads all things to their proper end.

God knows himself in an infinite manner. Since he is pure act of Being, he is utterly knowable: There is no matter in him, and immateriality is the root of knowledge. At the same time, he is infinitely cognizant, because there is no potentiality whatsoever in him. The proper object of his knowledge can be only something equal in excellence to his pure act so that it could actualize his intellect. However, there is no such object other than God himself. His own essence is the only proper object, the only intelligible thing capable of actualizing his divine intellect. Therefore, God knows himself in a perfect and immediate way. Moreover, since there is no composition in him—he is absolutely simple—his intellect and his essence are one and the same. In God, and only in God, to be is both to know and to be known at the same time.

God also knows all things outside of him because he is the First Cause of all beings. Before creating them, God knew them as possible participations of Being. Things somehow pre-existed in the divine intellect—not as really existing beings, but as intelligible beings—because God, in knowing himself, knows all the infinite possibilities of participation in being. Out of this infinite number of possible beings, some are created by his will and omnipotence, and others never exist. In this regard, theologians usually distinguish between God's knowledge of vision (the divine knowledge of real things, whether past, present, or future) and his knowledge of simple intelligence (knowledge of merely possible beings).



God's infinite knowledge must be credited with the knowledge of all real particular beings, since he is the Creator of them all as well as of all future realities. As the First Vatican Council taught, this includes contingent realities too, i.e., those that depend on the free activity of creatures.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the relationship between the infallible knowledge of God and the freedom of man (an important question debated by theological schools in the course of history), we must mention that it is, in itself, a mystery far beyond the reach of human reason. God, who directs all things to their end in accord with their own nature, does not impede the freedom of man. On the contrary, he is its very basis.

## (2) *God as the Supreme Truth*

The notion of truth implies two basic elements: a known thing and an intellect that knows. Truth is defined as the perfect agreement of both. This definition leads to two distinct manners of considering truth:

- i) *Ontological truth* is the perfect agreement of each thing with an idea in the divine intellect according to which the thing has been created. Ontological truth is the actual being of the thing insofar as it is knowable.
- ii) *Logical truth* is the agreement of the human intellect with the known thing.

We can also speak of a *moral truth*, which is the agreement between one's words and the contents of one's mind.

God is always the first truth in any of the above mentioned orders of truth.<sup>12</sup> He is the first truth in the ontological order (*Veritas Prima in essendo*) because he is pure subsistent Being, and, since he is the first being, he is also the first truth. The truth of God is his wisdom, which creates and governs the world.

God is the first truth in the logical order (*Veritas Prima in cognoscendo*) because his knowledge is not the consequence of the agreement of the divine intellect with the being of things. Rather, it is the creative cause of reality. Created things are what God freely wanted them to be. His knowledge is previous, creative, and infallible.

Lastly, God is also the first truth in the moral order (*Veritas Prima in dicendo*) because, being God as he is, he can neither deceive nor be deceived.<sup>13</sup> God is truthful when he reveals himself; the teaching that

comes from him is a doctrine of truth (cf. Mal 2:6). He sent his Son to the world “to bear witness to the truth” (Jn 18:37).

God is truth itself; man can entirely rely on his fidelity. The beginning of sin and man’s fall was the lie of the tempter that induced man to doubt God’s word, benevolence, and fidelity.

### (3) *The Divine Will*

Countless passages of the Old Testament tell us of God’s desires, the constant manifestation of his will, his law, and his designs. These are different ways of referring to God’s will, which, as it unfolds in his works, reveals his infinite love toward creatures. Still, it is in the New Testament where the revelation of the existence of God’s will—which must be loved and fulfilled by all mankind—reaches its highest point. Jesus Christ affirmed that his food is “to do the will of him who sent me” (Jn 4:34), and that the one who will enter the kingdom of heaven is “he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 7:21). In the Lord’s Prayer, Christ taught his disciples to say: “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10).

The Church teaches that the divine will is infinite,<sup>14</sup> meaning that it acts with infinite love and with such an infinite freedom that nothing can curtail it. The Magisterium of the Church stresses that this will is made clear for everyone in the commandments and precepts of the law of God and the Church.<sup>15</sup>

*Will* is defined as the rational appetite that inclines the spiritual being toward the good known by the intellect. In other words, it is the tendency to attain a good known as such. The existence of a will necessarily implies the existence of a knowing intellect. Thus, human reason can discover the existence of the divine will because God is a personal being of an intellectual nature, and therefore, he must also have a will. “In every intellectual being there is will, just as in every sensible being there is animal appetite. And so there must be will in God, since there is intellect in him.”<sup>16</sup>

The exercise of the will—in any creature endowed with one—is directed to the attainment of the good, and this movement toward good is called love. God’s love is, first and necessarily, love for himself: He is the only infinite good toward which his will should be directed. This love is not

selfish because selfishness would imply the existence of a good greater than God, not having its origin in him.

In loving himself, God infinitely and freely loves all creatures, and he manifests his love by distributing his goods among them. Creation—carried out with absolute freedom—Redemption with all the benefits coming from it, and all the other works of God reveal a generous and unfailing love prior to any corresponding love on the part of creatures.

The love of God is the cause of goodness in creatures; it is the cause of their perfections. From this, we can see that God's love is orderly: He loves some creatures more than others because it is evident that he created some with more perfections than others.

Sacred Scripture shows that God's love is gratuitous (cf. Dt 4:37; 7:8; 10:15). It is like the love of a father for his son (cf. Hos 11:1); it is stronger than the love of a mother for her children (cf. Is 49:14–15). God loves his people more than a spouse loves his beloved (cf. Is 62:4–5); this love will overcome even the worst infidelities (cf. Ez 16; Hos 11) and will give the most precious gift: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16). St. John says, “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8, 16).<sup>17</sup>

The end for which God acts can be none other than his own glory, as a dogma of faith on the work of creation affirms.<sup>18</sup> Neither is the glory of God something egotistic; it is but the rightful honor and praise due, because he is the Supreme Good and the only truth.

The will of God is always fulfilled, even though in some cases, as in the case of man, it may seem not to be so. The reward or punishment resulting from man's free actions are a manifestation of the divine will, which wants the good—and respects the freedom—of the rational creature.

#### (4) *Divine Providence*

Essentially, divine providence is the divine ordinance of each creature to its own end, i.e., the good proper to its nature. It is eternal in its conception and temporal in its execution. It includes:

- i) the preservation of all creatures in being,
- ii) the government of the entire creation according to the laws established by the creative decree, and
- iii) the universality of divine action through secondary causes.

Providence reaches as far as divine causality: It extends to all creatures, to their specific as well as their individual principles.<sup>19</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 199–213.
2. DS 3001.
3. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 3, a. 1.
4. DS 3002; cf. CCC, 214.
5. Cf. *Roman Catechism*, 1.2.7; cf. CCC, 200–202.
6. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 11, aa. 3–4.
7. Cf. CCC, 205, 212–213, 220.
8. Boethius, *De Consolatione*, 3.2; cf. *ST*, I, q. 10, a. 1.
9. Cf. DS 3003.
10. Cf. DS 3001.
11. Cf. DS 3003.
12. Cf. CCC, 215–217.
13. Cf. DS 3008.
14. Cf. DS 3001.
15. Cf. CCC, 890, 1785; *Roman Catechism*, 4.4.11.
16. *ST*, I, q. 19, a. 1.
17. Cf. CCC, 218–221.
18. Cf. DS 3025.
19. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 22, a. 2; CCC, 302–314.

## Part II

# THE BLESSED TRINITY

## 24

### The Mystery of the Blessed Trinity

THE MYSTERY OF the Most Blessed Trinity is the apex of God's revelation to mankind: He revealed the existence of three distinct Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—in the one true God. These three Persons are not three gods, nor are they three different historical manifestations of God; rather, they are three personal realities subsisting in the one divine essence.

*The Trinity is One.* We do not profess the existence of three gods, but of one God in three Persons: the consubstantial Trinity.<sup>1</sup> The divine Persons do not divide the one Godhead among themselves; each of them is entirely God: “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, that is one God by nature.”<sup>2</sup> “Each of the Persons is that reality, i.e., that divine substance, essence or nature.”<sup>3</sup>

The divine Persons are truly distinct among themselves. “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” are not merely names to designate modes of the same divine Being; these Persons are really distinct: “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.”<sup>4</sup> They are distinct among themselves because of their *processions*, or relations of origin. “The Father is who generates,

the Son who is generated, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds.”<sup>5</sup> *The divine unity is Triune.*

The Trinitarian mystery is a manifestation of the most intimate aspect of God’s being. It is the greatest of all revealed mysteries and, consequently, the most important truth of the Christian faith.

It is also, therefore, the center of Christian life, the end of which is the incorporation of baptized persons into the life of Christ (God the Son made man) and their identification with him through the action of the Holy Spirit (by participating in his death and Resurrection) in order to merit a share in the glory of God the Father.

The path to the joy of eternal life in the company of God—the end to which we are all called—begins for Christians in this earthly life with the gratuitously received knowledge of the sublime mystery of the Trinity. Our piety and meditation should, therefore, be centered on this mystery.

## **10. Human Reason and the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity**

### **10a) The Mystery of the Blessed Trinity is a Truth of Faith**

The existence of three distinct Persons in the one true God is a truth of faith, known only through supernatural revelation.<sup>6</sup> Human reason could never have discovered it by itself. Even after discovering it through revelation, reason remains incapable of understanding, much less proving it. The natural light of reason can reach only what pertains to the unity of God, e.g., his existence, and some knowledge of his perfections—what can be known through the perfections found in creatures. Through analogy between God and creatures, as was previously seen, reason can ascend from creatures to God. Still, our analogical knowledge of divine attributes is just limited knowledge about the properties of God's essence, and cannot go very far. Therefore, the Trinity's existence in the unity of the essence of God is completely inaccessible to mere human reason.

Revelation gives us knowledge of this mystery and even allows us to acquire some understanding of it with faith's assistance. However, reason will never be able to fully comprehend or prove it because supernatural truths, by their very nature, surpass the capacities of any created intellect.

The supernatural mysteries known through faith cannot be demonstrated. However, arguments that contradict these truths of faith can be rationally disproved. None of the contents of the faith are impossible; nothing contradicts the principles of reason, even though these truths are above human reason.

## **10b) Human Reason Can Understand the Trinitarian Mystery by Way of Analogy**

Once the mystery is known and its content is established by the teachings of the Church, theology tries to explain it as accurately and profoundly as possible.<sup>7</sup> All the theological treatises on the Blessed Trinity are more or less successful attempts to shed the light of reason on what we know about the divine Persons: their essential equality, the mutual distinction of the Persons, the origin of the Persons, and the relationships between them. Among the many authorities in this field, the unsurpassed masters are (and always have been) St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Their analysis is based on the analogy between the operations of the human spirit and the operations of God.



## 11. The Revelation of the Mystery of the Blessed Trinity

### 11a) The Blessed Trinity in the New Testament

Certain passages of the New Testament reveal the Trinity of Persons in God, and many others refer to each Person in particular. Among the former, the more significant ones are the following:

- Luke 1:35—the Annunciation, in which the three Persons are mentioned in the following way: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.”
- Matthew 28:19—Jesus’ mandate to his disciples to go and preach, in which the proper names of the Persons are mentioned, and their mutual distinction is accentuated by the use of the conjunction *and* followed by the definite article *the*: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”
- 2 Corinthians 13:14—“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God [the Father] and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

There are innumerable texts that mention each one of the Persons separately. To cite a few:

#### (1) *Revelation of God the Father*

At times, the term *Father* is applied to the Triune God in order to emphasize that he is the primary origin of everything. In the language of faith, the term indicates two aspects: God’s transcendent authority and his paternal attitude toward all his children. The term *Father* is revealed explicitly as the name of the first Person of the Blessed Trinity, particularly in passages dealing with the relationship between the Father and his Son, Jesus. Jesus calls him “Father” when he prays (cf. Mt 11:25; Lk 23:34), at times even calling him “*Abba*” (“Daddy”). Significantly, Christ has always stressed his unique dignity as the Son—his natural filiation to the Father, so different from the adoptive filiation of the rest of humanity—by means of expressions like “my Father” and “your Father” (Jn 20:17).<sup>8</sup>

(2) *Revelation of God the Son*

The Son, one of whose revealed names is the Word, is the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. The New Testament is the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, his earthly life, redemptive work, and doctrine. St. John calls him “the only Son from the Father” (Jn 1:14); his divine filiation is absolutely singular and unique. His intimate relationship with the Father is clearly shown in passages revealing their common nature and identical power. All of this can best be summarized in Jesus’ own words recorded by St. John: “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30).<sup>9</sup>

(3) *Revelation of God the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, distinct from the Father and the Son, and one God like them. He is revealed in some texts (especially the synoptic Gospels) as the highest gift without which mankind cannot reach salvation (cf. Mt 3:16; Lk 3:22; 4:1; 10:21; Mt 12:28; Mk 13:11).<sup>10</sup> Both in these passages and the rest of the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is revealed as a personal and divine being who carries out the task of sanctifying the Church and all humanity, thus bringing the redemptive work of Jesus Christ to its fullness (cf. Jn 14:16; 15:26; 16:7; Rom 8:14–16; 1 Cor 3:16; Gal 4:6; Eph 4:30).

## 11b) Traces of the Trinitarian Mystery in the Old Testament

St. Augustine wrote: “*Novum in Vetere latet et in Novo Vetus patet*,” which roughly means that the fullness of revelation, which was to come with Jesus Christ, was latent in the Old Testament, and what was written in the sacred books of the Old Testament acquires its full meaning in the New Testament.<sup>11</sup> Traces and glimpses of the Trinitarian mystery can be found in the Old Testament in the light of the full revelation of the Trinity contained in the New Testament.

These glimpses appear in passages dealing with the Son of God. In Psalm 2:7, we read, “You are my son, today I have begotten you.” Further lights appear in the passages about the divine wisdom, the Word of God, and his Spirit (cf. Prv 8:22–31; Wis 7:25–27; 9:17). Other indirect hints could be the use of majestic plural (“Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness” [Gn 1:26; cf. Gn 3:22; 11:7].) and the use in Hebrew of the plural form for God’s name (*Elohim*, “the Most High”) with singular meaning.

## 12. The Testimony of Tradition

The Fathers of the Church (as early as the second century), the liturgical texts, the creeds or symbols of faith, and the first documents of the Magisterium provide rich testimony of the faith of the Church concerning the mystery of the Triune God. The source of this written Tradition is the revelation of the Trinity contained both in the sacred books and in the preaching of the apostles. The Church studied the revelation under the light of faith, then taught it with exquisite care and profound terminological and conceptual rigor in order to instruct the faithful and defend the dogma against erroneous interpretations.

The highlights in the long and arduous development of this doctrine, made possible with the help of the Holy Spirit, are the following:

- The Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325). The Council was preceded by teachings of the Church Fathers, including St. Justin, St. Irenaeus, and—above all—the first writings of St. Athanasius. In this council, the divinity of Jesus Christ was defined as consubstantial (*homoousia*) with the Father.
- First Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381). The Council was prepared by, among others, the teachings of the Cappadocian Fathers, who asserted the divine nature and personality of the Holy Spirit.

## 13. Errors on the Blessed Trinity

Sometimes the testimony of the Fathers and the definitions of the Magisterium were prompted by the need to combat errors and heresies, which were relatively frequent at the time. The main errors are the following:

- *Monarchianism, modalism, or Sabellianism.* This error tried to save the divine unity by sacrificing the Trinity of Persons. It admits only the divinity of the Father, who manifested himself in different ways, according to different attributes. The Church promptly condemned this heresy.<sup>12</sup> Tertullian and St. Hippolytus demonstrated its incompatibility with Christian doctrine.
- *Subordinationism.* Just like the previous one, this error's main fault is a mistaken notion of monotheism. It claims that the Son and the Holy Spirit are two creatures of the Father, superior to the rest of creation but subordinate to the Father. Origen and Novatian fell into this error. The serious dogmatic consequences of this doctrine were corrected only a century after its apparition, thanks to the teachings of St. Athanasius.
- *Adoptionism.* In general, this doctrine falsely claims that Christ was only a man, inspired by the Holy Spirit, adopted by God as his son, and exalted as "god" because of his obedience in the passion and his moral sanctity. Its main advocate, Paul of Samosata, was condemned on several occasions.
- *Arianism.* Arius conjectured that the Word (Logos) was merely a creature of God, the first of all creatures, and that the Holy Spirit was a creature of the Word. The Word united itself to the man (Jesus), taking the place of his soul, in order to redeem us. Arius was condemned by the First Council of Nicaea, which, as we have seen above, defined the consubstantiality (or identity of nature) between the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ.

- *Macedonianism*. This false doctrine denies the divinity of the Holy Spirit just as Arius denies the divinity of the Son. This heresy was solemnly condemned by the First Council of Constantinople.

## **14. Key Magisterial Documents on the Blessed Trinity**

### **14a) Three Divine Persons in God**

- Symbol of the First Council of Nicaea, A.D. 325 (Nicene Creed)<sup>13</sup>
- Symbol of the First Council of Constantinople, A.D. 381 (Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed)<sup>14</sup>
- *Quicumque* Symbol, fifth century (Athanasian Creed)<sup>15</sup>
- Fourth Lateran Council, 1215 (Profession of Faith against the Albigensians and the Cathari)<sup>16</sup>
- Second Council of Lyons, 1274 (Profession of Faith Prescribed for Michael Paleologus)<sup>17</sup>
- Council of Florence, 1442 (Bull *Cantate Domino*)<sup>18</sup>

The above is not an exhaustive list. Many other documents of the ordinary Magisterium of the Roman pontiffs and provincial councils could be added to this list.

## 14b) Equality of Persons Insofar as They Are the One God

Aside from the above-listed documents, the following must be mentioned:

- Lateran Council of A.D. 649<sup>19</sup>
- Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which condemned the errors of Joachim de Fiore<sup>20</sup>
- Pius IX, Brief *Eximiam Tuam* (1857), which condemned the errors of Anton Günther<sup>21</sup>
- Leo XIII, Encyclical *Divinum Illud* (1897)<sup>22</sup>
- Profession of Faith of Paul VI (1968)<sup>23</sup>

1. DS 421; cf. CCC, 232–267.
2. DS 530.
3. DS 804; cf. CCC, 253.
4. DS 530; cf. CCC, 254.
5. DS 804.
6. Cf. CCC, 238–248.
7. Cf. *Ibid.*, 251.
8. Cf. *Ibid.*, 240–242.
9. Cf. DS 3015, 3016, 3041.
10. Cf. CCC, 243–248.
11. Cf. *DV*, 16.
12. Cf. DS 112.
13. Cf. DS 125.
14. Cf. DS 150.
15. Cf. DS 75.
16. Cf. DS 800.
17. Cf. DS 851.
18. Cf. DS 1330.
19. Cf. DS 501.
20. Cf. DS 803–805.
21. Cf. DS 2828.
22. Cf. DS 3326.
23. Cf. *Creed of the People of God*, AAS 60 (1968), 433–455.



## The Three Divine Persons: Processions and Relations

## **15. Processions: Origins of the Divine Persons**

### **15a) The Notion of Procession**

Generally speaking, the term *procession* (*processio* in Latin, *ekporeumai* in Greek) refers to the origination of one thing from another. On the authority of divine revelation, we know that some Persons in God proceed from the others in a mysterious way (“I proceeded and came forth from God” [Jn 8:42]; “The Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father”[Jn 15:26]). In this section we will go deeper into our knowledge of the processions in God, give the reasons for their number, and explain their differences. The ultimate purpose, as in any other question of the Trinitarian theology, is to acquire a deeper knowledge of the mystery of the divine Persons, first by studying their processions.<sup>1</sup>

## 15b) Doctrine of Faith

i) God the Father is unbegotten, that is, he does not proceed from any other Person.<sup>2</sup>

ii) God the Son—who, as the incarnate Word, is Jesus Christ—proceeds from the Father by generation (cf. Jn 8:42).<sup>3</sup>

iii) God the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. We can also say that he proceeds from the Father through the Son (cf. Jn 15:26).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, it is a dogma of faith that, in God, some Persons proceed from others, with the exception of the Father, who does not proceed from anyone. On the other hand, it is also *de fide* that the number of processions is two, because the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons and their origins are different.

## 15c) Theological Explanation

The role of theology in this regard is to accept the truth of faith as it is taught by the Church and to seek ways of expressing and explaining it with the greatest possible conceptual rigor. Although we know that theology will never be able to completely dispel the mystery, it is legitimate and even necessary for Christian thinkers to try to find reasons for what the Church believes and demonstrate that the doctrine of faith is reasonable. Catholic theologians have done this in many ways.

The following pages are a summary of what St. Thomas taught on this matter. His theology on the Blessed Trinity is a necessary foundation for anyone entering this field.

The processions of the divine Persons are actions that take place within God and whose terminus is God himself (the Son or the Holy Spirit). They are, therefore, *immanent* (or *ad intra*) processions (the opposite of immanent is *transcendent* or *ad extra*). As such, only processions corresponding to the two immanent operations of the divine nature can exist in God. His is an intellectual nature, the most perfect of all because its degree of perfection is infinite. The operations of his nature are *knowing himself infinitely*, which is the origin of the Son, and *loving himself infinitely*, which is the origin of the Holy Spirit.

The processions are not operations of the divine essence—the essence is not the subject of operations, but the principle through which the subject possessing the essence operates. Therefore, the processions in God are, properly speaking, the operations or actions of the Persons. The Person—not the essence—is the origin of the other Person.<sup>5</sup>

## 15d) Generation

The first procession is *generation*. As the Church teaches, the Son is begotten by the Father, and they are one and the same substance. Theology sheds some light on this aspect of the Trinitarian mystery by the analogy between the intellectual operation of man and that of God. It goes through the following steps:<sup>6</sup>

i) This first procession takes place through the intellect: God the Father knows himself in an infinite manner.

ii) The action of the intellect, in general, produces a concept—the *verbum*, which is a likeness of the known thing and the terminus of the act of knowing.<sup>7</sup> Being the effect of the intellect, it is different from the intellect itself.

iii) God the Father, in knowing himself, produces a *Verbum*, a Word, which will be:

- a. *God*, like the Father, because God's being and understanding are one and the same;
- b. *eternal*, because God knows himself eternally;
- c. numerically and specifically *co-substantial with the Father*.  
To employ an analogy, the more a man understands himself, the closer his concept of himself is to his real self. God's intellect is infinite; the divine Word (concept) is perfectly one with the source without any kind of diversity;
- d. *differing from the Father only because he proceeds from him*; and
- e. *one and unique*, because God knows all other things in knowing himself.

iv) The Word, aside from being God, is the Son of God, as revelation teaches. This means that the first procession is a generation. Generation means the production of a living being from another, receiving from the latter its same specific nature. This concept can be applied in an analogical manner to God. In God, we can speak of the true generation of the Son by the Father because the Son effectively proceeds from the Father and is of the very same substance. The likeness is due to the manner of the procession: The concept of the intellect is a likeness of the known thing.

v) Since the divine Word is unique, we can say that it is the only-begotten Son of God.

Clearly, the above reasoning is analogical. It is based on the similarity between the divine and the human intellect, keeping in mind their infinite dissimilarity. Thus, it agrees with the truth of faith and explains it appropriately through analogy with a human model. However, it does not do away with the mystery because we know what the human intellect and its act of understanding is, but we do not know what the intellect of God or his act of understanding really is. This analogical comparison builds a bridge between God and the creature, but it neither eliminates the distance between them nor confuses the two. Therefore, instead of explaining away the mystery, it emphasizes it even more by expressing it in a true but very limited way.

## 15e) Spiration

The second procession, whose terminus is the Holy Spirit, takes place through an act of the will; thus, it is not generation.<sup>8</sup>

The second immanent divine operation is that of the will. God knows himself and loves himself. God the Father, upon knowing himself, engenders the Son, who is a perfect image of the Father. When he loves himself as the Ultimate Good, he loves the Son, and the Son necessarily loves the Father. There is a bond between them, an infinite love, which receives the revealed name of the Holy Spirit. Since he exists, he is of the same divine nature as the Father and the Son, because in God there is nothing that is not God himself. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is *subsistent love*, infinitely perfect, equal in nature to the Father and the Son, but a distinct Person with respect to either of them.

As revelation teaches, the procession of the Holy Spirit is not generation. This can be explained rationally in the following way: Generation, as we have seen, implies not only a being's proceeding from another being with identity of nature, but also proceeding by producing a likeness. This characteristic is not found in the procession via the will or by way of love; love is not conceived of as an image of the beloved but as an action of the lover going out of himself, tending toward the beloved in order to reach the beloved. This action is not generation; it does not even have a proper name, although we could call it *spiration*, as is traditional, or simply *procession*.

The operation of the will, in the case of man, is not identical to the subject of the operation. But in God, who is absolutely simple, in whom there is no composition, his love is he himself. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, who is the love of God, is also God and a divine Person.

## 15f) The Holy Spirit Proceeding from the Father and the Son

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This is a central point of Catholic dogma, solemnly taught by the Church according to the common stance of the Greek and Latin Fathers. Even though the formulas used in the East (*a Patre per Filium*) and West (*ex Patre Filioque*) differ, they express the same doctrinal content.

The difference in formulas—and, above all, a wrong interpretation of their meaning—has been the cause of the separation of some Eastern churches from the See of Rome, resulting in a serious rift in the Church.

The first symptoms of the approaching separation appeared at the end of the eighth century. It started to erupt at the end of the ninth century, when Photius was Patriarch of Constantinople, and reached its consummation by the end of the eleventh, in the so-called Eastern Schism. The rift continues up to the present day, despite substantial attempts to bridge it.

The Roman Catholic Church has always taught, as a dogma of faith, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son as from one single principle, because this is the doctrine revealed in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. She uses this truth of faith in order to express the distinction between the Son and the Holy Spirit. We know that they are different Persons because it has been revealed. However, we can also understand it because they have different origins and, more specifically, because the Son proceeds from the Father alone while the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Catholic theology emphasizes this doctrine. The best argument to prove that the Son and the Holy Spirit are different Persons—although both proceed from the Father—is the fact that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well.<sup>9</sup>

Photius and his followers, however, accused the Roman See of teaching that the Holy Spirit proceeds from two separate principles. They failed to understand that in the expression *ex Patre Filioque*, the two Persons are mentioned as a *sole principle* of the Third Person.



## **16. The Relations Between the Divine Persons**

### **16a) The Notion of Relation**

The names of the divine Persons—especially that of Father and Son and Love or Gift, which refer to the Holy Spirit—are relative names, that is, they express certain relations between them. These relations derive from the processions, or *relations of origin*.

In God, if one Person is the Father and another Person is the Son, there must be relations of paternity and filiation between them. Because of this, the relations between the Persons allow us to distinguish one Person from another within the same divine nature. This study was initiated by the Greek Fathers, then continued and perfected by the great Latin Doctors. The rational instrument used here is the concept of relation employed analogically.

## **16b) Doctrine of Faith**

- The names of the divine Persons express their mutual relations.<sup>10</sup>
- In God, there are numerically distinct relations.<sup>11</sup>
- The Persons are distinguished only through the opposition between these relations.<sup>12</sup>

## 16c) Theological Explanation

To study the relations between the divine Persons in greater depth, the reasoning of faith should use the philosophical concept of relation. This concept is defined as “the real accident whose being (*esse*) consists in referring one thing to another (*esse ad*),” that is, an accident stands in relation to a subject when something real inheres in a subject without changing it but simply referring it to another. For instance, the relation of paternity that a man has with his son does not change his being, but adds something real to him that he did not possess before: a reference to his son. Because he has a child, he is a father.

As an accident, the proper characteristic of relation—like any other accident—is to inhere in a subject (*esse in*). Its being, its reality, is to be in a subject as in another.

There can be no relation without a subject. For example, a man cannot be a father if he has never begotten a child or if he does not exist himself. In the same way, there will be no whiteness if there are no white things. It is important to distinguish two aspects in the single reality of any relation:

- i) A common aspect as accident; the *esse in* is the common essence of all accidents.
- ii) A specific aspect as pure relation; the *esse ad* is the specific essence of the accident of relation.

As for its specific nature as the accident relation (what distinguishes it from the other accidents), it simply connotes a reference between two things. It is, so to speak, external to the subject and does not enter into composition with it. Other accidents always have a certain meaning in the subject and remain in it. Relation, as such, means referring from one to another. In this light, relation creates a relative *opposition* between the two terms and, therefore, a *distinction* between the two.

These relative oppositions and distinctions are minimal (just as the reality of relation is minimal) but real. Using the same example, the relation “paternity” of the father to the son excludes mutual filiation (the father cannot be son of his son) so it creates a relative opposition between the two. The distinction is relative—one from the other—but real.

Theology analogically applies these concepts to the divine relations:

- The divine relations are true relations, but they are not accidents (they lack the *esse in* of the accidents) because in God there are no accidents. God has no composition of substance and accidents. Everything in him is his pure singular substance, pure subsistent Being. Therefore, we can talk about divine relations only as pure relations (*esse ad*): the pure reference of one Person to another. These divine relations are real because the processions from which they derive are real.
- In God, the divine relations are subsistent, that is, they are identified with the divine essence. In God, there is only his essence, since he is infinitely simple. Whatever is real in him is identical with his essence. Therefore, so are the real relations. This is something mysterious and incomprehensible for the human mind: how something absolute (like the essence) can be completely identical to something relative (like the relations). The relations are not only subsistent; they are God himself because the divine essence is God. This conclusion is certain inasmuch as it is deduced by our reason enlightened by faith, but it does not unveil the mystery.
- Even though, in God, relations are *really* identical with his essence, they are rationally distinct, that is, they are different in our concepts. This means, for instance, that even if the divine essence is really identical to paternity, it is conceptually different from the latter because they have different meanings. This type of distinction is called a logical distinction, or a distinction of reason, not a real distinction.
- Opposed relations are really distinct from one another. This point is important in the development of the argument. Relations that are opposed to each other also mutually exclude each other (like paternity and filiation) and, therefore, are truly distinct. It is a purely relative distinction—the least that can exist—but, nonetheless, a real distinction.
- The real distinctions that exist between the divine relations allow us to logically express the real distinctions between the divine Persons. As our faith teaches, the three Persons are all equal because they are one God, but they are also distinct from one another. How can we express this mystery when the mind cannot fully comprehend it? We can say that the Persons are distinct insofar as they are unique

subjects of a real relation, which is opposed to and distinct from the relations of the other two Persons. Thus, for instance, the first Person, aside from being God, is also Father because the relation of paternity distinguishes him. Only God the Father is the subject of that real relation. In the same way, only the Son is the subject of the relation of filiation, which is opposed to paternity. Only he is the Son in the Blessed Trinity.

- In God, everything is one and the same except that which is distinguished by opposing relations, that is, except the three divine Persons who are really distinct from each other. This statement, a consequence of everything previously said, is a truth of faith formally taught by the Magisterium.<sup>13</sup> It is a fundamental principle of Trinitarian theology.
- In God, there are four real relations. They are derived from the two processions: the generation of the Son and the spiration of the Holy Spirit. Each procession gives rise to two real relations. The relations of *paternity* and *filiation*, which are real and opposed to each other, are borne of generation. The relations of *active spiration* and *passive spiration* derive from spiration. Active spiration is the relation of the Father and the Son (as one sole principle) to the Holy Spirit, and passive spiration is the opposite relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son.
- Of the four real relations, only three are opposed to each other, that is, they exclude each other, and thus distinguish the divine Persons. Active spiration, although opposed to the passive, it is not opposed to paternity and filiation. If they are not opposed, then they are identical because of the principle mentioned above, namely that all things which are not distinguished by opposing relations are the same in God.

## 17. The Divine Persons

The discussion up to now refers to the divine Persons considered in their origins and their relations. This study started with a revealed truth: There are three Persons in one God. Having been able to shed some light on the mystery, we will finally study how to express what the divine Persons are. Thus, the question is centered on the philosophical notion of *person*, understood, as always, in an analogical way.

## 17a) Doctrine of Faith

The Father is one Person; the Son is another Person; the Holy Spirit is still another Person. The distinction in God is found in the Persons.<sup>14</sup>

The Blessed Trinity is one and undivided because of its one divine nature or essence. But it is multiple because of the properties of each Person. The distinction is based on the personal properties of each Person, for there is something proper and exclusive to each one.<sup>15</sup>

The personal properties can be expressed by saying that the Father begets, the Son is begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, *paternity* is proper to the Person of the Father, *filiation* to the Son, and *procession* to the Holy Spirit.

## 17b) Theological Explanation

The philosophical notion of person is based on three fundamental notions: subsistence, individuality, and rationality.

*Person* is traditionally defined as a “subsistent individual of a rational nature” (*rationalis naturae individua substantia*, Boethius). Applying this to God, the divine Person would be defined as a “subsistent individual in the divine nature.” Each divine Person is the single divine essence affected by a personal property that renders him distinct from the other two Persons. Therefore, in order to talk about what each Person is, it is necessary to say what is proper of each Person, i.e., what distinguishes him.

The divine Persons are the subsistent relations of paternity, filiation, and passive spiration (or procession). Actually, if a divine Person is a distinct subsistent in God, only the opposed relations in God fulfill the definition of divine Person. They are subsistent (as we have seen previously), and, because they are opposed to each other, they are distinct. Thus, the Person of the Father *is* the subsistent relation of paternity. The Person of the Son *is* the subsistent relation of filiation. The Person of the Holy Spirit *is* the subsistent relation of passive spiration or procession.

This is the unfathomable mystery of the divine Persons, which the human mind can describe but not comprehend: Relation in God constitutes the Person and is the Person himself. Everything hinges on the divine relations being both distinct and distinguishing. Insofar as they are distinct, each one is a Person. Insofar as they distinguish, it is the property of each Person. Therefore, one can say that the Father is so because of his paternity, or that the subsistent paternity is the Father.

This explanation agrees with revealed truth, which says that there are only three Persons in God, because in him there are only three opposed and real subsistent relations.



## 18. The Missions of the Divine Persons

God is love: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God wants to communicate his glory to mankind; such is the compassionate plan of God, conceived before the creation of the world in his only-begotten Son. “[God] destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:5), that is, “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29), by means of “the spirit of sonship” (Rom 8:15). The divine plan unfolds in the history of creation through the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Church is a continuation of their missions.<sup>17</sup>

The *missions* of the Blessed Trinity are the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the world to carry out God’s plan of salvation. Sacred Scripture explicitly reveals the reality of these missions (cf. Jn 3:17; 14:26; Gal 4:4–5), and this reality is mentioned in Tradition and in the Magisterium of the Church.<sup>18</sup>

Theologically, a mission can be defined as the sending of a divine Person to creatures by the other Person (or Persons) from which the one sent eternally proceeds. The end of the mission is a presence in the world that is different from the presence that that Person already had as God. Only the Son and the Holy Spirit are sent, because they are the only two Persons who proceed eternally in God.

Although they are eternal in the divine design, the missions are carried out in time. They are divided into *visible* and *invisible* missions according to the effects they produce in creatures. The Incarnation and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost are visible missions. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit (and with him, the Father and the Son) in the soul through grace is an invisible mission.

## 19. The Indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the Soul

The Triune God did not just reveal his intimate life to us; he went so far as to transform the soul into a temple in which he dwells: “We will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23); “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16). The reality of this indwelling presence transcends the capacity of our intelligence. Still, we must see that this is the true source, center, and foundation of Christian life.

In the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, Pius XII taught, “The Divine Persons are said to inhabit inasmuch as they are present to intellectual creatures in a way that transcends human comprehension, and are known and loved by them, yet in a way that is unique, purely supernatural, and in the deepest sanctuary of the soul.”<sup>19</sup> It is a kind of supernatural presence (through grace) by which the Blessed Trinity himself, not just his created gifts, becomes present in the soul.

This presence arises as a relation with the divine Persons through supernatural knowledge and love. It takes place without confusing the natures and operations of God with those of creatures. Essentially, it is the same as the presence of the Blessed Trinity in the souls of the blessed in heaven. The only difference lies in the manner in which it is carried out.

The indwelling of the Triune God in the soul is the beginning of a habitual and intimate conversation with each one of the divine Persons. This is the ambitious goal of the life of prayer.

Our heart now needs to distinguish and adore each of the divine Persons. The soul is, as it were, making a discovery in the supernatural life, like a little child opening his eyes to the world about him. The soul spends time lovingly with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and readily submits to the work of the life-giving Paraclete, who gives himself to us with no merit on our part, bestowing his gifts and the supernatural virtues!<sup>20</sup>

We gain this in the present life through dealings with the humanity of Jesus Christ. In order to reach Christ, we Christians count on the sacraments, prayer, and the friendship and intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph.

1. Cf. CCC, 253–256.
2. Cf. DS 75, 1330–1331.
3. Cf. DS 125.
4. Cf. DS 800, 1300.
5. Cf. DS 805.
6. Cf. ST, I, q. 27, aa. 1–2.
7. The concept is the *verbum cordis*; the sign of the concept is the word, *verbum vocis*. In God, the word remains in himself.
8. Cf. ST, I, q. 27, aa. 3–4.
9. Cf. *Ibid.*, a. 3; q. 36, aa. 2–4.
10. Cf. DS 528, 570.
11. Cf. DS 530.
12. Cf. DS 1330.
13. Cf. DS 1330.
14. Cf. DS 75, 805.
15. Cf. DS 800.
16. Cf. DS 800.
17. Cf. CCC, 257–260.
18. Cf. AG, 2–4; Paul VI, Ap. Ex. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 6ff.
19. Pius XII, Enc. *Mystici Corporis*: DS 3814–3815; cf. CCC, 260.
20. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 306.

# God the Creator

by Francisco Varo

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# **Creation and Elevation to the Supernatural Order**

by Francisco Varo

## **Part I**

# **CREATION**

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## **Creation**

WHEN WE RECITE the Creed, immediately after professing our faith in God the Father Almighty, we affirm that he is “the Creator of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.”<sup>1</sup> In order to know the content of this truth of faith with precision, we should know the meaning of the term *creation* and why we say that God created all things.

# 1. The Notion of Creation

The word *creation* is often used in ordinary speech. For example, we may say that a certain novel is a great literary creation, or that the clothes sold in a department store are the creations of a fashion designer. In these cases, the word *creation* is used in a wide sense, and it refers to what could more properly be termed *production* or *transformation*. The genius of the writer in his novel is limited to describing the adventures he has had or those his imagination has conceived, making use of existing words. The high fashion couturier chooses the fabric and design that she considers to be most appropriate for the next season's fashions.

There is a more precise, philosophical meaning of the term *creation*: the production of something out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), not out of any pre-existing substance. This is what we mean when we call God *the Creator*, because he did not make use of any pre-existing being for his work of creation. The writer needs words in order to express his ideas; the fashion designer needs cloth, scissors, needles, and other such tools in order to make clothing. In contrast, God does not need any materials or tools to create. If he wants something to come into being, he simply creates it with his infinite power.

St. Thomas Aquinas defines creation as “the production of a thing in its entire substance, nothing, either uncreated or created by another, being presupposed.”<sup>2</sup>

In a truly creative act, the production should affect the entire substance, that is, the totality of the being and not just one aspect of it, such as color, size, or place. If it did not, it would be a simple modification and not, properly speaking, a creation. In this lies the difference between God's creation and the activity of a creature. A painter does not produce the totality of his painting because the canvass and the colors already existed. The ironsmith does not make the whole ironwork because he did not make the iron from which he forged it. For creation, the production should be made *out of nothing*, that is, without anything presupposed. The starting point of the creative act is the absolute lack of being.

Creation has no *before*, only *after*. It is not a change or a movement, since there is no succession in it. Creation is the production of being.

## 2. The Beginning of the World

*The world had a beginning in time (de fide).*

Throughout history, there have always been some people who think that the world has eternally existed. “They are led to this view because they do not know how to imagine the beginning of the world. They are, says Rabbi Moses [Maimonides], like a boy who immediately after his birth is placed in an island, and remains ignorant of the manner of child-bearing and of infant’s birth. Thus, when he grows up, if one explains all things to him, he will not believe how a man could once have been in his mother’s womb. So also those who consider the world as it is now, do not believe that it had a beginning.”<sup>3</sup>

The Magisterium of the Church has condemned the affirmation that the world has eternally existed as heretical. It has explicitly defined that God created it “from the very beginning of time.”<sup>4</sup>

Sacred Scripture, in the Book of Genesis, mentions the initial moment of creation: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gn 1:1). Creation is the foundation of God’s plan of salvation and the beginning of the history of salvation, which has its apex in Christ. Referring to the vocation with which God calls each Christian, St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). From this expression of the Apostle, it is immediately clear that the world began to exist at a definite moment.

The Fathers of the Church unanimously attest to the belief of the Church on this matter. Origen says, “The Church preaches that this world was made and that it began to exist at a given moment.”<sup>5</sup> St. Basil warns, “Do not think that the visible world did not have a beginning. If the celestial bodies move in circles in the heavens without our being able to ascertain how was the beginning of their movement, beware of thinking that these orbiting bodies did not have a beginning.”<sup>6</sup>

Reason tells us that it is not necessary that the world should have existed always, although such a possibility is not absurd either. Our certainty that it began to exist in time comes to us from our faith. According to St. Thomas, this revealed truth—though perfectly possible—cannot be demonstrated.



Nowadays, astronomical, geological, and physical calculations allow us to establish the age of the universe. The figures quoted are about five billion years for the earth and close to 15 billion for the universe. Nevertheless, the reasoning behind these calculations—mainly the increase in entropy (second principle of thermodynamics) and the continuous expansion of the universe—though highly reliable, is probably not irrefutable, since their formulation is based on experimental data rather than on metaphysical reality. In any case, the teaching of revelation is clear: The universe was created in time.

Creation in time means that if we were able to go back in the history of the cosmos, we would reach an initial point before which there was nothing except God, who is eternal. There would not even be time because time implies change, and to have change, there must be things that change. That is why time begins with creation.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that it is not so important to determine when and how the world came to be or when humans appeared, but rather to discover the meaning of this origin: whether the world and mankind are governed by mere chance, a blind destiny, an unidentified necessity, or, rather, if they are governed by a transcendent, intelligent, and good Being called God.<sup>7</sup> Further, if the world proceeds from the wisdom and goodness of God, why is there evil? From where does evil come? Who is responsible for it? Is there a possibility of being liberated from evil?

### **3. The Biblical Account of Creation**

The Book of Genesis gives us an account in which God's work of creation is distributed over six days (cf. Gn 1:1–31). It is a simple, historical narrative that is easy for all to understand. It does not try to give a scientific explanation of the world's beginning. That could be the subject of an astrophysical or geological treatise, but not of Sacred Scripture. The purpose of Sacred Scripture is to teach people the truths needed for salvation. So, it uses a language that can be understood by all.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Pontifical Biblical Commission was asked the following question: “May one question the literal historical sense of these chapters [Genesis 1–3] when they deal on facts that touch on fundamental points of the Christian religion? To give some examples: the creation of all things made by God in the beginning of time; the special creation of man; the formation of the first woman from the first man; the unity of the human race; the original happiness of our first parents in the state of justice, integrity, and immortality; the command given to man by God as a test of obedience; the transgression of the divine command at the persuasion of the devil in the form of a serpent; the degradation of our first parents from that primeval state of innocence; and the promise of a future Redeemer.”

The answer was “The literal historical sense may not be questioned.”<sup>8</sup> The accounts of these events in Sacred Scripture are not myths or legends, or moralizing fables, but historical narratives in the literal sense. Since there can be no error in the sacred books (because they are inspired by God), and since these events are narrated as having really happened, it follows that they are true. Nevertheless, these accounts should not be considered a scientific explanation of the constitution of the world, which the text itself has never pretended to be.

Many recent discoveries in the natural sciences seem to support the authenticity of truths narrated in Genesis.

Every now and then, monotonously sounding like a broken record, some people try to resurrect a supposed incompatibility between faith and science, between human knowledge and divine revelation. But such incompatibility could only arise—and then only apparently—from a misunderstanding of the elements of the problem.

If the world has come from God, if he has created man in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26) and given him a spark of divine light, the task of our intellect should be to

uncover the divine meaning imbedded in all things by their nature, even if this can be attained only by dint of hard work. And with the light of faith, we also can perceive their supernatural purpose, resulting from the elevation of the natural order to the higher order of grace. We can never be afraid of developing human knowledge, because all intellectual effort, if it is serious, is aimed at the truth. Christ assures us, “I am the truth” (Jn 14:6).<sup>9</sup>

Some centuries ago, a person without faith may have thought that matter was eternal. Nowadays, many scientists consider this stand untenable. As for the theory of cosmic evolution, we should note that it cannot be considered a demonstrated truth in all its aspects. Nevertheless, there is no problem in accepting it as a working hypothesis in scientific research, within the limits pointed out by the Magisterium.<sup>10</sup>

There are several grave errors about creation.<sup>11</sup> *Pantheism* teaches that everything is God, that the world is God, and that the evolution of the world is the evolution of God. Others say that the world is a necessary *emanation* of God that springs from him and returns to him.

*Dualism* and *Manichaeism* teach that there are two eternal principles: Goodness and Evil, or Light and Darkness, which are in permanent struggle.

The *Gnostics* teach that the material world is basically evil—the result of a fall—and thus, it must be rejected and overcome.

*Deism* admits that God has created the world, but it claims that, like a watchmaker, once he did it, he abandoned it to itself.

*Materialism* does not accept any transcendent origin of the world. It sees only the mere interaction of matter, which has always existed.

1. Cf. CCC, 279–421.
2. ST, I, q. 65, a. 3.
3. *The Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 12.
4. DS 800. The First Vatican Council repeated this using the same words: DS 3002.
5. Origen, *De princ.* Praef., 7.
6. St. Basil, *In Hexaem.* hom. 1.7.
7. Cf. CCC, 284.
8. DS 3114.
9. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 10.
10. Cf. Pius XII, Enc. *Humani Generis*: DS 3895–98.
11. Cf. CCC, 285.

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God the Creator

## 4. God is the Creator of All Things

God is the Creator of all things. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that faith confirms this natural truth of creation.<sup>1</sup> To give knowledge beyond the natural knowledge that humanity can have about the Creator (cf. Acts 17:24–29; Rom 1:19–20), God progressively revealed the mystery of creation to Israel. He revealed himself as the one to whom all peoples of the earth belong, as he is the only God “who made heaven and earth” (Ps 115:15; 124:8; 134:3).

In Sacred Scripture, the revelation of creation is inseparable from the revelation and accomplishment of the covenant between the One God and his people. Creation is revealed as the first step toward this covenant; it is the first and universal testimony of God’s almighty love (cf. Gn 15:5; Jer 33:19–26). The truth about creation becomes clear in the message of the prophets (cf. Is 44:24), in the Psalms (cf. Ps 104), and in the Proverbs (cf. Prv 8:22–31).

Among these texts, the first three chapters of Genesis are the most explicit in expressing the truths about creation: its origin, its end in God, its order and goodness, man’s vocation, the drama of sin, and the hope of salvation.

If a person, upon entering a certain house, felt a warmth at the door of the house, and going within felt a greater warmth, and so on the more he went into its interior, he would believe that something within was afire, even if he did not see the fire itself. So also is it when we consider the things of this world. For one finds all things, arranged in different degrees of beauty and worth, and the closer things approach to God, the more beautiful and better they are found to be... Therefore, it must be seen that all these things proceed from one God who gives his being and beauty to each and everything.<sup>2</sup>

## 4a) Creation out of Nothing

*God created the world and everything in it, both the spiritual and material creatures, out of nothing (de fide).*

The Magisterium of the Church has always taught the above doctrine. It is found in the earliest Symbols of the Faith: “I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.”<sup>3</sup>

Later, in the year 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council defined the following: “There is only one true God... Creator of all things visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal, who, by his almighty power, from the very beginning of time has created both orders of creatures in the same way out of nothing, the spiritual or angelic world and the corporeal or the visible universe. And afterwards he formed the creature man, who in a way or another belongs to both orders as he is composed of spirit and body.”<sup>4</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the First Vatican Council, in the dogmatic constitution *De Fide Catholica*, again defined the dogma of creation, closely following the declaration of the Fourth Lateran Council. Further, it added canons condemning those who deny it: “If anyone does not admit that the world and everything in it, both spiritual and material, have been produced in their entire substance by God out of nothing, let him be anathema.”<sup>5</sup>

Sacred Scripture contains the truth of creation in many passages. Genesis 1:1 is perhaps the fundamental text: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” In the Bible, the expression “heaven and earth” is equivalent to the totality of the universe.

God’s act of creation without any previous matter is expressly mentioned in the Maccabean mother’s exhortation to her youngest son, encouraging him to face martyrdom with fortitude: “I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them *out of things that existed*. Thus also mankind comes into being” (2 Mc 7:28, author’s emphasis).

The Fathers of the Church included this belief of creation in the fundamental truths of Christian doctrine. A second century author wrote, “In the first place, believe that there is one God, who created and perfected everything, and made everything out of nothing, so that it may exist.”<sup>6</sup>

While St. Basil compared the divine creative act to that of an artisan, he clearly points out the differences:

In our case, any craft is in need of some matter. The blacksmith, for example, needs iron. The carpenter needs wood. In crafted products, we can distinguish the matter, the form, and that which is formed. The matter is taken from outside, craft introduces the form to the matter, and the resulting product is a composite of matter and form.... On the other hand, when God decided to introduce that which did not exist into existence he created the form and the corresponding matter simultaneously, while thinking at the same time of the shape of the world.<sup>7</sup>

## 4b) God Creates Directly

*God created all things in an immediate way, without use of any instrument (de fide).*

Was it possible that God made use of some created instrument in the work of creation? Did he make use of a creature that, by an assignment from God, took care of creating certain things, thus helping God in his work? We will see that this is not possible.

The Magisterium of the Church, in the aforementioned text of the Fourth Lateran Council, teaches as a truth of faith that only God created: “There is only one true God ... the one and only principle of all things—Creator of all things.”<sup>8</sup>

Many passages of Sacred Scripture teach this truth (cf. Sir 1:8; Rom 11:36; Heb 3:4). Isaiah is particularly clear: “I am the Lord, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone, who spread out the earth” (Is 44:24).

The Fathers of the Church had to defend this truth against heretics who attributed the creation of the world to some kind of intermediate creature between God and man. St. Augustine says, “It is not licit to believe or to say that someone other than God has created any inferior or mortal natures.”<sup>9</sup>



## 4c) Only God Can Create

*Only God can create, since to create something out of nothing requires an infinite power, which only God has (sent. comm.).*

We have seen, based on revelation (Sacred Scripture and Tradition) authentically interpreted by the Magisterium of the Church, that God created everything out of nothing and that he did not make use of any instrument in his work of creation. However, could not creation have taken place in another way?

Natural reason itself, based on our knowledge of physical realities, shows us that such realities could not have been the result of mere chance by which, one day, a supposedly pre-existing matter would have become perfectly organized.

What can we say about the life pulsating marvelously in those minute organisms, in each bacterium, in each cell—extremely complex and perfectly coordinated structures containing a sort of miniature universe unto themselves? Has all this arisen out of mere chance, or does it proceed from a Creator?

What is the probability that if one tossed the loose types into a printing press, they would fall in such an order as to form a great novel? There is no need to try it out, either once or a thousand times. The answer is clear; there is practically no possibility that such a thing would occur. It is even more improbable that the order of the universe could have arisen either by chance or by itself. If it is impossible that the universe should order itself, it is still less likely that it would begin to exist all by itself. Therefore, it is impossible that there should be an uncreated universe. Our intelligence tells us that the whole universe has been created by God.<sup>10</sup>

We still have many other powerful arguments, based on the metaphysical structure of beings. In all creatures, a distinction can be made between its *essence* and its *act of being*. A bird and a man have something in common: They both have an act of being. Nevertheless, they are different because they have different essences: the bird's essence and man's. The act of being of each one of them is limited by its particular essence. Their participation in the perfection of being is limited by the bounds of their respective natures.

God's case is different. His essence consists in having the maximum perfection, or what is tantamount, having the fullness of being. His act of being is infinite, because the divine essence does not impose any limitation to being. God is *Being*, the *ipsum esse subsistens*.

Moreover, whatever is in a thing by participation must necessarily be caused by that which has it essentially (or by essence). For example, hot

soup or coffee participate in heat. Yet, obviously, they are not heated by themselves. Their heat must be received from that which is hot by essence, that is to say, from fire or an incandescent substance.

Let us apply this truth to the order of being. All creatures have being, but only by participation. Therefore, it is necessary for them to have received being from that which is being by essence, from God.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, all things have been created by God.

Creation is a production of something from nothing, that is to say, out of non-being. Passing from nothing to being requires infinite power, which can be possessed only by someone that has being by essence. Thus, only God can create.<sup>12</sup> It is impossible that there could be some creature that can create, which God used as an instrument of creation. God creates all things in an immediate manner. This does not exclude an ulterior evolution of the material world, guided by God's Intelligence.

## 4d) Creation is a Trinitarian Action

*The whole Trinity is the sole principle of the creative action (de fide). It is attributed to the Father by appropriation.*

“In the beginning was the Word ... and the Word was God.... all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made” (Jn 1:1, 3). The New Testament reveals that God created everything through the incarnate Word, his Son. “For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ... all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:16–17). The faith of the Church affirms also the creative action of the Holy Spirit; he is “the Giver of Life” (*Vivificans*), “the Creative Spirit” (*Creator Spiritus*), and the “source of all good.”<sup>13</sup>

In the Council of Trent, the Magisterium of the Church defined it thus: “The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three principles of creation.”<sup>14</sup> The Fourth Lateran Council also spoke in this regard: “The Father is the progenitor, the Son is being born, and the Holy Spirit is proceeding ... they are the one and only principle of all things—Creator of all things.”<sup>15</sup>

The Fathers of the Church—mainly in the confrontations with Gnostics and Arians—frequently expressed the idea that the world was created by the Triune God. For example, St. Basil wrote: “As regards the creation of these [the angels], think about a primordial cause of what has been made, which is the Father; think about a producing cause, which is the Son; think about a cause that communicates the perfection, which is the Spirit. But no one should think that I am affirming the existence of three creating beings. There is only one principle.”<sup>16</sup>

In the Most Blessed Trinity, there are three Persons, but there is only one God, one sole divine nature. Therefore, there is only one principle of operations. All the operations *ad extra* of God—the operations whose object is outside of him (not the relations between the Persons)—proceed from this one nature and are common to the three divine Persons. Creation is one of these *ad extra* operations and is, therefore, common to the whole Trinity.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, by appropriation, creation is attributed to the Father. Since the Father is the principle that begets the Son and from which the Holy Spirit proceeds, he is said to be the principle of all things.

## 5. Motive and Purpose of Creation

### 5a) Creation is Free

*God created the world by a decision of his will, free from any necessity (de fide).*

The Magisterium of the Church teaches that God created the world freely, without having been forced to do so by any kind of internal or external necessity. The First Vatican Council stated, “In order to manifest his perfection through the benefits that he bestows on creatures—not to intensify his happiness or to acquire it—this one and only true God, by his goodness and almighty power and by a *completely free decision*, from the very beginning of time has created both orders of creatures in the same way out of nothing.”<sup>18</sup>

Sacred Scripture shows that God’s desire for something to exist is enough for that thing to receive its being: “And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light... ‘Let there be a firmament ...’ And it was so” (Gen 1:3, 4–7). In the Book of Psalms, the complete freedom of God in creation is clearly mentioned: “Whatever the Lord pleases he does, in heaven and on earth” (Ps 135:6).

Among the Fathers of the Church, St. Irenaeus stated, “He made everything freely, and in the manner that he wanted.”<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine insisted that God did not need to create in order to have greater happiness: “What would have been lacking in Your happiness, which is Yourself for Yourself, if the creatures had not been made or if they had remained in a state that was not yet formed? You have not created them because you had any need of them, but you have made them and given them form because of the superabundant fullness of your graces.”<sup>20</sup>

God, moved exclusively by his love, wanted to create all things in order to manifest his glory and make his creatures share in his happiness. He is all-perfect and he is in need of nothing. He did not have to create in order to obtain some perfection he did not yet possess. That is why he created with complete freedom. He would not have been less God, nor less perfect, nor less good, if he had not carried out the work of creation. God’s freedom of creating or not is called *freedom of contradiction*.

Additionally, God has the *freedom of specification*. This means that, even after deciding to create, he was not obliged to create this particular world. He could have made a completely different one. This world is just one of those possible for the divine omnipotence. Although this world is very good, God could have created other much better worlds. Aside from his infinite power, God's freedom of specification arises from the fact that no creature is necessary in itself. It can exist or not exist. Therefore, God could have made or not made each of the possible creatures at his own discretion.

## 5b) The Purpose of Creation

*God created the world for his own glory, that is, in order to manifest his perfection through the good things that he communicates to creatures (de fide).*

This truth of faith has been defined by the Magisterium of the Church in the First Vatican Council: “If anyone ... denies that the world was made for the glory of God: let him be anathema.”<sup>21</sup> The same council affirms that God created “in order to manifest his perfection through the benefits that he bestows on creatures.”<sup>22</sup>

Sacred Scripture also clearly contains the idea that the whole of creation is ordained to the glory of God: “The Lord has made everything for his own glory” (Prv 16:4). The “Song of the Three Young Men” in the Book of Daniel is quite impressive in this regard; it exhorts all creatures (mountains and rivers, heat and cold, birds and fish, angels and sons of men) to praise God (cf. Dn 3ff).

The same truth is taught in many texts of the Fathers of the Church. St. Ephrem asserted, “God has shown his power as creator by creating everything out of nothing. He has shown the richness of his wisdom by adorning, ordering, beautifying, and crowning all things. He has shown his goodness by gratuitously forming all the beautiful creatures.”<sup>23</sup> Commenting on a text from the Book of Wisdom, St. Cyril of Jerusalem maintained that “the more we know the creatures, the more clearly the greatness of God shines forth.”<sup>24</sup>

The following arguments can shed some light on the freedom of God in creating and ordaining all creatures to the glory of God.

First, we must consider our natural experience regarding the way creatures act. It is proper of a created being to receive some effect from the actions it performs. After walking home from the office, a person receives the effect of his action: He finds himself at the doorstep of his house. A car mechanic receives the payment for his or her repairs and, at the same time, acquires more skill and experience in his job. These effects are the ends sought through the action.

However, God is not trying to acquire anything when he acts, because he cannot acquire anything that he does not already have. Therefore, the end of creation can be nothing but God himself. The only possible purpose

of God's *ad extra* operations are to manifest his perfection—his own goodness—as he communicates it. He is the fullness of Being, and he wants the creatures to have a participated being. This perfection of being in which we find creatures participating manifests the fullness of Being from which it originates. In the same way, the splendor of dawn manifests the nearness of the sun and, generally speaking, every effect manifests or reflects its cause. Thus, it is proper of creatures to manifest, through the goods they have received from their Creator, the perfection of the one who gave them those goods. In other words, it is proper of creatures to give glory to God.



## 5c) The World is Good

*The world is good in itself (de fide).*

Since the earliest times, the Magisterium of the Church has repeatedly affirmed that all creatures are intrinsically good. The Council of Florence declared, “When God willed, in his goodness he created all creatures both spiritual and corporeal. These creatures are good because they were made by the Supreme Good, but they are changeable because they were made out of nothing... there is no such thing as a nature of evil, because every nature insofar as it is a nature is good.”<sup>25</sup>

Sacred Scripture explicitly mentions the goodness of created things. After the narrative of the six days of creation, the Book of Genesis adds, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gn 1:31). St. Paul also clearly remarked that “everything created by God is good” (1 Tm 4:4).

The writings of the Fathers of the Church show an ancient struggle against heretics who posited the existence of naturally evil substances. All the Fathers agreed in defining evil as the lack of a good due in a certain nature. Evil resides in a subject that, in itself, is good. Still, evil is not a substance: It is always an accidental privation.<sup>26</sup>

The good is the being insofar as it is desirable for the will. All creatures—from a grain of sand to the most perfect beings (the angels)—have received their being from God. That is why they are good and manifest the goodness and omnipotence of God.

On the contrary, evil is a privation of something that is due a being. Blindness, for example, is an evil because it is the absence of something due to man: the sense of sight. Nevertheless, a subject that is good will suffer evil, simply because evil exists. In the final analysis, the only real evil is sin—the act of a will that refuses to love what God wills. Still, sin is always committed while seeking an aspect of the good to which sin is united, such as the satisfaction of an impulse of pride or sensuality, the possession of some object, or comfort. Evil—sickness, moral suffering, or sin—is the undue privation of a particular good.

Since all things created by God are naturally good, we ought to love the world in which God has placed us, and work so that the earthly realities may once again clearly manifest the goodness of God. “We must love the

world and work and all human things. For the world is good. Adam's sin destroyed the divine balance of creation; but God the Father sent his only Son to re-establish peace, so that we, his children by adoption, might free creation from disorder and reconcile all things to God.”<sup>27</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 286–289.
2. *The Catechetical Instructions of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 10.
3. DS 6.
4. DS 800.
5. DS 3025; cf. CCC, 296–298.
6. Hermas, *The Shepherd*, Comm. 1.1.
7. St. Basil, *In Hexaem.*, hom. 2.2.
8. DS 800.
9. St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 12, 24.
10. J. Ortiz López, *Palabras de Vida Eterna: Charlas Sobre el Credo* (Madrid: Magisterio Español), pp. 83–84.
11. Cf. ST, I, q. 44, a. 1.
12. Cf. *Ibid.*, q. 45, a. 5.
13. Cf. CCC, 290–292.
14. DS 1331.
15. DS 800.
16. St. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 16. 38.
17. Cf. ST, I, q. 45, a. 6.
18. DS 3002. Author's emphasis; cf. CCC, 295.
19. St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.8.3.
20. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 13.4.
21. DS 3025.
22. DS 3002, cf. CCC, 293–294.
23. St. Ephrem, *Hymn Adv. Haer.*
24. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, 9.2.
25. DS 1333; cf. CCC, 299.
26. Cf. St. Augustine, *C. Julian.*, 1.6.17.
27. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 112.

## Preservation, Providence, and Government

CREATION HAS ITS own goodness and perfection, yet it did not appear fully developed from the hands of the Creator; it was created “in the state of wayfarer” (*in statu viatoris*) and progresses toward an ultimate state of perfection yet to be reached.

Strictly speaking, *divine providence* is God’s plan for all creatures by which each one of them is led to the end or perfection assigned to them by God. *Divine government* is the implementation of his plan: the divine action by which the whole universe and every creature therein are led in a supremely wise and almighty manner to the attainment of the final end. The effects of divine government on the universe are the *continuous preservation* of creatures in their being and the *divine causality* in the activity of creatures. This divine causality is also called the divine concurrence.<sup>1</sup>

## **6. Preservation of Creatures in Being**

Consider a sculptor commissioned to make an equestrian statue of a famous person. Once he has finished his work, he can forget it. Even after he dies, the statue will continue presiding in the city square from its bronze horse and pedestal. This is so because the material used to make the statue—bronze—can maintain the shape it has received.

This is not the case with creation. If God were to abandon the universe, its existence would depend on that from which it was made—nothing. Therefore, it would be instantly annihilated.

## 6a) Preservation

*God keeps all creatures in existence (de fide).*

The being of each creature depends immediately on God, so that if God were to cease causing it, the creature would revert to nothing.

The Magisterium of the Church taught this truth in the First Vatican Council: “By his providence God preserves [*tuetur* in the original Latin] and governs all things that he made.”<sup>2</sup>

We read in Sacred Scripture, “How would anything have endured if thou hadst not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by thee have been preserved?” (Wis 11:25). St. Paul also teaches this truth in his discourse in the Areopagus of Athens, saying, “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Many Fathers of the Church declared that things continue in existence only because God maintains them in their being. St. Jerome is quite explicit: “We know that we would be nothing, if the one who gave us the gift would not conserve it in us.”<sup>3</sup>

For a better understanding of the meaning of this truth of faith, we can go back to our previous analogy. The statue depends on the sculptor for its existence while it is being made. The sculptor is forming the bronze. The sculptor does not give it its being, but merely transforms it. Once the statue is finished, the only relationship it retains with its maker is that of having been sculpted by him.

On the other hand, the creature does not merely have a relationship of origin with God (i.e., to have been created by him) but also, and primarily, their relationship has a definite metaphysical structure. Creatures are characterized by the fact that their “act of being” (*esse*) is received in an essence. The “being” of a creature is not self-subsistent; what subsists is the composite of *esse* and essence. Neither can we say that the being subsists in the substance, nor that the substance gives the being its reality. It is the other way around: The substance *is* through its “being.” Therefore, the “act of being” of the creature is the radical principle of its subsistence. Now, since the creature is not self-subsistent, it is in continual need of the action of the subsistent Being, who is God. This means that the being of the creature, and therefore the whole of it, totally depends on divine action.

Thus, if the preserving action were to be interrupted, the creature would be deprived of its “act of being,” and would be reduced to nothing.

A comparison taken from human experience aids in understanding this: “If I stand in front of a mirror, my image is in the mirror, but only while I stand there. If I go, it goes. Only my continuing presence keeps the image in being. The reason is that the image is not made of the mirror but only in the mirror.”<sup>4</sup> The mirror is completely passive. That is also what “nothing” is. “Nothing” is not some kind of subtle matter out of which God creates. It is completely passive. God creates the things *in* it. Just as one’s image remains in the mirror only as long as one stays in front of it, so the whole universe is maintained in being by the continuous presence of the divine action.

## 6b) Preservation and Creation

*Preservation is the continuation of creation (sent. comm.).*

St. Thomas explained, “The preservation of things by God is a continuation of that action whereby He gives existence, which action is without either motion or time.”<sup>5</sup> Preservation is not a reiteration of the creative action, as if it had to be continuously repeated. Rather, it is the very same uninterrupted act.

On God’s part, there is no distinction between creation and preservation. However, from the point of view of the effect of each action, creation is distinct from preservation, since in the former case, the creature has no precedent to its being, while in the latter, the creature is maintained in its being.

## **6c) Freedom of Annihilation**

*God can annihilate. If he would just cease his influence, the created beings would revert to nothing (sent. comm.).*

This would not require a new operation. All that it requires is the termination of the divine action. Nevertheless, Sacred Scripture does not mention any case of annihilation. Rather, it stresses the stability of being in created things. “A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever” (Eccl 1:4). “I know that whatever God does endures for ever” (Eccl 3:14). Although God can annihilate, it seems more fitting to the divine wisdom not to annihilate anything created.



## **7. Divine Causality in the Activity of Creatures**

God governs the entire world. He sometimes uses the cooperation of his creatures to accomplish this task of government. This is not a sign of weakness on God's part, but of his greatness and goodness. Besides their existence, God gives his creatures the capacity and dignity to act by themselves, to be causes and principles of other creatures; thus, all cooperate with God's designs.<sup>6</sup>

## 7a) The Divine Causality

*God cooperates immediately in every act of his creatures (sent. comm.).*

The *Roman Catechism* of St. Pius V teaches that God does not just preserve whatever exists or merely rule creation with his providence. He also moves creatures in their own movements and actions with an interior force.<sup>7</sup>

This doctrine about the divine intervention in the operations of the creatures appears in Sacred Scripture: “O Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us, thou hast wrought for us all our works” (Is 26:12); “There are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one” (1 Cor 12:6).

The Fathers of the Church frequently explained how God is the cause of the operations both of irrational and free creatures.<sup>8</sup> The heretic Pelagius falsely maintained that Christians could perform salvific works without grace. To explain this, he claimed that God creates the operative potencies, but their exercise depends exclusively on man. To refute his thesis, the Fathers of the Church had to explain how divine causality acts on created causality in detail. They maintained that without divine concurrence, we would be unable to do anything at all. Thus speaking, the Fathers of the Church were referring to salvific actions in general. Nevertheless, they also taught that without the divine cooperation, no creature could perform even its natural operations.<sup>9</sup>

All creatures that are made and preserved in being by God have some operative potentialities—real abilities to act according to the nature the Creator has given them. The nightingale has the capacity to sing and to fly. People can know, love, laugh, and do many other things. Each of these operative potentialities given to creatures by God is ordained to a proper act, which is its operation—the song of the nightingale, the thought of a person. That act, as something more perfect, has a certain entity (i.e., more “being”) added to the potential. Therefore, it must be caused by God. Only he can supply that “being” added to the potential, since creatures cannot create (produce being), but only modify or transform things that already exist.

The divine intervention in the operation of the creatures (cooperation) is so profound that it directly and immediately reaches the operations of all created beings.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the immediate causal presence of God does not obliterate the proper causality of the creature. The effect is at once totally God's and totally the creature's, though in different planes. Creatures cause their own operations as secondary and particular causes; the very same operations come from God as first and universal cause. But how is this possible?

## 7b) The Creatures' Causality

*When a creature acts, the effect is produced completely by God and completely by the creature, but on different planes.*

In spite of its limitations, an example may help us. Let us think of a pocket calculator. It has been designed by an engineer and has been programmed to perform a number of arithmetical operations. Nevertheless, in order to perform an operation, it is not enough for the machine to be programmed to perform it. It must be moved to operate by someone pressing the right keys. Something analogous takes place in the case of the creature, differing in that God not only gives it a nature with certain capabilities and operative potencies, but he also gives it its being and preserves it. Still, God has to move these capacities to operate so that they are actualized; otherwise, they would remain inactive.

Created causes act with their own causality. This means they act by means of their being, their nature, and their potentialities. Nevertheless, they receive all those capacities that *allow* them to act from God. God not only gives them the capacities, he also *preserves in being* their nature and the potentialities of their nature, which enable them to act. Besides, they receive from God both the motion by which the subject can *begin to operate* and the application of the potentialities to their objects.

That is why, although the creature acts with its own causality, God is also the total cause of this operation of the creature and the total cause of the effect that follows.

Going back to the calculator analogy, we cannot say that it has done part of the calculation and the operator has done the other part. The calculator did the whole operation, since the operator just keyed in the data and waited for the results. But we can also say that the operator has done the whole thing, since microchips cannot really think. The maker had to build all the indications of how to carry out such an operation into the calculator, and the operator had to give the command to do the calculation.

Therefore, both the calculator and the operator are the cause of the operation, though in different orders.

Divine and created causality should not be thought of as two figures that are added up to reach a total effect. God is not the cause of a part of the effect and the creature of the other part. God is the cause of everything, and the creature is the cause of its whole effect, but in different orders.

## **8. Divine Providence and Government**

Divine providence is the plan that God has for his creatures by which he ordains each one of them to the end he has chosen for it. Divine government is the execution of this plan; it is the actual guiding of each creature to the end of its own nature.

## 8a) The Universal Government of God

*God governs all that he has created (de fide).*

Every creature made by God is also led toward the end for which it was created, that is, it falls under the divine government.

The Magisterium of the Church, in the First Vatican Council, has defined this truth: “By his providence God protects and governs all the things that he made, reaching from end to end with might and disposing all things with gentleness (cf. Wis 8:1). For ‘all things are naked and open to his eyes’ (Heb 4:13), even those things that are going to occur by the free action of creatures.”<sup>11</sup>

As for the teachings of Sacred Scripture, Jesus Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount that the providence of our heavenly Father reaches even to the most insignificant creatures like the birds of the air, the lilies, and the grass of the field. But he takes special care of the rational creatures (cf. Mt 6:26ff). In his first epistle, St. Peter exhorted us to have trust in divine providence: “Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you” (1 Pt 5:7).

The Fathers of the Church defended the reality of divine providence against the fatalism of the pagans and the practice of astrology. St. John Chrysostom, Theodoret, and others wrote entire books about divine providence. In his *Confessions* and in *The City of God*, St. Augustine considered in great depth the providential action of God in individual lives and in the history of peoples.

A glance at the sky on a clear night will show an almost infinite number of celestial bodies. Each one moves in the universe according to a precise law. In spite of their great number, they are all ordered in perfect harmony. If we study the life of the animals and plants in a forest, we would not find less order. Each one of those beings has its own way of life, different from the others, yet they complement one another in such harmony that there is a perfect ecological balance. It would not be reasonable to think that the perfect order of the universe is due to an extraordinary coincidence. From these simple experiences, we can draw a logical conclusion: God did not just create a multitude of beings, without order or harmony. He wants each one of them to fulfill its proper end (to give glory to God) in an orderly way. He has subjected each one of them to most wise laws so that

they may achieve the end fitting their nature. This ordaining plan of God is divine providence.

Divine providence embraces all things. Since all things have received their being from God, they must be subject to the order that he has imposed on all beings.

## 8b) Providence and Freedom

*Divine providence embraces all things and is infallible, but it directs all things according to their proper nature—the necessary as necessary and the free as free (sent. comm.).*

Throughout the ages, there have been people who believe in “blind destiny,” “karma,” or fate. These old pagan ideas are opposed to the faith. No power can direct the events and the creatures’ actions contrary to divine government. God has foreseen a plan to bring all things to perfection, and this plan is fulfilled with an infallible certitude, without error.

Modern scientism often uses the word *chance* to refer to the ultimate cause of any event. Strictly speaking, however, chance does not exist, because every effect has a cause. Nothing is uncaused except God. On the other hand, we can speak of chance in relative terms, from the point of view of the inferior causes. However, we cannot really speak of chance with regard to the superior cause, which had already foreseen that a particular event would take place.

We could compare it to a manager who sends his secretary to the bank on some business. A little later, he sends a clerk to the same place to pay some bills. If the secretary and the clerk meet each other at the counter of the bank, they might think that it has been a coincidence. However, the manager would not think so because he sent them both to the same place.

Something similar happens with regard to all the events that occur in the universe. One can speak of fortuitous events from the point of view of the particular cause, but not from God’s point of view. Everything is foreseen by God who, through his providence, ordains everything to the good of his creatures.

We should also note that divine providence and government are not opposed to the freedom enjoyed by creatures endowed with will. When God governs, he does not impose his will on creatures; he moves each one to act according to its natural way of being. He has imposed a law on the quartz crystal, another one on the cypress, and another one on man, each according to its own nature. Therefore, God will never move a quartz crystal to sing or a cypress to fly. Neither will he move man to act against his freedom. Crystal, cypress, and man will fulfill the plan of providence. Minerals, animals, and plants will fulfill it in a necessary manner. Angels and men will fulfill it without being deprived of their freedom, that is, without



violence to their natural manner of action. God moves each creature according to its nature. He has given some the gift of freedom, and he moves them to use it. The exercise of freedom does not escape the plan of God.

## 8c) Second Causes

*On the part of God, providence is immediate with respect to each creature. But in its execution—the government of the world—God ordinarily makes use of other creatures (sent. comm.).*

In divine providence, we can distinguish between the order intended and its execution. The order intended in the development of events depends immediately on God without any mediation. On the other hand, God makes use of created causes for the fulfillment of his plans. These causes act according to the divine plans and by virtue of their own causality. There is a participated causality, created and dependent on God as First Cause.

St. Thomas explains God's way of acting with an argument of fittingness: The purpose of God's government over the creatures is to lead them to perfection. The more perfection God communicates to the governed creatures, the more perfect his government will be. A being is more perfect if, aside from being good, it is also the cause of another being's goodness. In the same way, the government of the universe is more perfect if God makes some creatures govern the others as *second causes* (*causae secundae*).<sup>12</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 301–314.
2. DS 3003.
3. St. Jerome, *Letter* 133.6.
4. F.J. Sheed, *Theology and Sanity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1973), p. 87.
5. *ST*, I, q. 104, a. 1, ad 4.
6. Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 1:2:22.
7. Cf. CCC, 306.
8. Cf. Origen, *In Num.* hom. 23.4; St. John Chrysostom, *In Ioh.* hom. 35.2ff.
9. Cf. St. Jerome, *Contra Pelagium* 1.3; St. Augustine, *Letter* 205.17; *De Civitate Dei* 7.30; *De gen. ad litt.* 4.12.23; 5.20.40; 8.26.48.
10. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *In I Sent.* d. 37, c. 1, a. 1, ad 4.
11. DS 3003.
12. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 103, a. 6; CCC, 306–308.

# Angels

ANGELS ARE PERSONAL, free, and spiritual beings who do not possess either a body like ours or any other kind of corporeal form. They are often represented in pictures or statues with some sensible form, but this is not intended to show reality. These representations merely aid our imagination. Besides, angels have appeared on some occasions in sensible form, as Sacred Scripture narrates.<sup>1</sup>

## 9. The Existence of the Angels

*In the beginning of time, God created spiritual essences [angels] out of nothing (de fide).*

*The number of the angels is very great (sent. comm.).*

In the Fourth Lateran Council and the First Vatican Council, the Magisterium of the Church defined as a truth of faith that God “created both orders of creatures in the same way out of nothing, the spiritual or angelic world and the corporeal or visible universe.”<sup>2</sup>

In Sacred Scripture, angels make their appearance from the very first moments of the history of salvation: “... and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim” (Gen 3:24). On many occasions, angels act as messengers and servants of God, in charge of transmitting divine precepts to people and guiding them according to the will of God.

Some angels have proper names indicating their specific mission, such as the archangels St. Michael (“Who is like God”), St. Gabriel (“Strength of God”), and St. Raphael (“Medicine of God”).

St. Raphael accompanied the young Tobit on his journey and, after the family adventure ended, he revealed his identity: “I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One” (Tb 12:15). St. Gabriel revealed his name to Zechariah after he foretold the birth of John the Baptist: “I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news” (Lk 1:19). St. Gabriel was also sent to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary to announce her future divine maternity (cf. Lk 1:26). St. Michael led the heavenly army in the battle against the evil spirits (cf. Rv 12:7).

Jesus Christ often spoke about the angels. While referring to children, he said, “Their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 18:10). An angel consoled our Lord in his agony in Gethsemane (cf. Lk 22:43). Angels announced the Resurrection of the Lord to the holy women (cf. Mt 28:2–7).

The ease with which the early Christians accepted their guardian angels is reflected in their exclamation “It is his angel!” when told by the maid Rhoda that St. Peter was at the door of the house (Acts 12:15).

Constant references to the angels can be found in Sacred Tradition from the very beginning of the Church. The writings of the apostolic Fathers and many liturgical rites contain such references. The first monographic work on angels, *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, was written shortly after A.D. 500 by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

Since the angels have an incorporeal nature, we could not have discovered their existence with our senses alone. They cannot be seen, heard, or touched since they have no material body. Further, they cannot be known through reason alone since, as we have seen earlier, God is completely free in his act of creation, and he was not bound to make entirely spiritual creatures. Therefore, we can know of the existence of the angels only through revelation.

Nevertheless, once we learn through divine revelation that angels do exist, we realize that their existence is very appropriate for the perfection of the universe.

Through our senses and intellect, we know that there are purely material beings and that man is a union of a material part (the body) and a spiritual part (the soul). Thus, it seems quite fitting for the harmony of the universe that there should also be purely spiritual beings.

The glory given by all creatures to God makes the existence of angels all the more appropriate. All created beings reflect the divine perfection, each one in its own way. The glory they render to God by their mere existence is called *material glory*. In addition to this glory, creatures endowed with will and intellect can give God *formal glory* by knowing and loving him. Since human intellect is rather limited, the formal glory offered to God by the whole universe would be relatively limited if people were the only free and intelligent creatures. It is, therefore, very fitting for there to be pure or angelic intellects, more capable of understanding the universe, and thus able to give a much greater formal glory to God.

## 10. The Nature of the Angels

*The nature of the angels is spiritual (de fide).*

*The angels are by nature immortal (sent. comm.).*

The definitions of the Fourth Lateran Council and the First Vatican Council state that angels are spirits.<sup>3</sup>

The word *spirit*, frequently used in Sacred Scripture to refer to the angels, suggests their immateriality (cf. Mt 8:16; Lk 6:18, etc.). Christ himself, in one of his apparitions after the Resurrection, said that “a spirit has not flesh and bones” (Lk 24:39), that is to say, it does not have a material body.

Although angels have appeared to people on multiple occasions, the “body” with which they appeared was not an actual corporeal body, but an appearance they used in order to communicate with humans in a sensible way. We can deduce the incorporeal nature of the angels from the answer of St. Raphael to Tobit: “All these days I merely appeared to you and did not eat or drink, but you were seeing a vision” (Tb 12:19).

Some Fathers of the Church, such as St. Augustine (possibly because of neo-Platonic influence), were a bit hesitant to describe angels as incorporeal. While they did not attribute common matter to them, they did attribute a kind of ethereal, “aerial and invisible” matter. Even so, the great majority of the Fathers clearly maintained the incorporeal nature of angels and devils.

St. Thomas Aquinas explained that angels are spiritual and subsistent *forms*, which are independent of matter.

We have already seen that one can discern the *essence* (that by which a thing is what it is) and the *act of being* in all creatures. We should also recall that the essence is a composition of matter and form. Think of a steel nail. The essence of the nail does not actually exist by itself—individual nails do. There are many particular nails, but they all have some basic things in common (such as having a sharp point and a flat top). The principle that explains their multiplicity is *matter*. *Form* explains the similarity between individual nails. One single form can be multiplied because it can be applied to different matter. In our example, the form of the nail gives rise to a multitude of individual nails because that form is

received by different matter. Matter individuates the form, making the multiplicity of individuals of the same species possible.

With these metaphysical principles in mind, let us go back to what we know about angels. We established that they have no matter. Thus, their essence has no composition; it is pure *form*. The only composition in the structure of an angel is that of *essence* (identical with the *form*, since it has no *matter*) and *act of being*. Each angel is, therefore, a subsistent form, devoid of matter.

Since they are simple substances (i.e., without composition of matter and form), they cannot lose their act of being by decomposition. Thus, they are incorruptible. Hence, they are immortal and substantially immutable.<sup>4</sup>

## 11. Angelic Knowledge

The knowledge of the angels is highly perfect. Some of Jesus' words can give us an idea of the perfection of angelic knowledge: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven" (Mt 24:36). From this, we can surmise that the angels know almost everything, and they know it rather well.

Although their knowledge is highly perfect, it is limited. By their own natural powers, they cannot know the supernatural mysteries (cf. 1 Cor 2:11), the secret thoughts and desires of others, or future events that depend on created freedom.

In order to understand the special characteristics of the angels' knowledge, let us review our human way of knowing. Human knowledge begins in the senses. Through them, we perceive sensible data, which give us a *dematerialized* image of a thing in front of us. From this sensible image, by a process of abstraction, we get to form an *idea* or *intelligible species*, which is present in our intellect and through which we can know that object.

If, for example, we look at an alarm clock, we perceive a number of data through our senses—shape, color, the shape and arrangement of its pieces, the ticking sound, the sound of the alarm, etc. Through these data, the clock is somehow made present inside of us. Even without looking, we can picture its shape and other characteristics. But we do not actually have the clock with all its wheels, hands, and bells inside us. We have an image, which is *dematerialized*, that is, devoid of matter. From these perceived data we form the abstract concept of alarm clock.

Any intelligent being can know an object when it becomes present to the intellect in an intelligible way, when it is devoid of matter. Since the essence of the angel is purely spiritual, and thus perfectly intelligible, the first thing that an angel knows is his own essence. So the angel knows himself in his own essence in an immediate way. Knowing himself, he knows that he has an act of being, which is a participation of the divine Being. Through this deductive knowledge, the angel has a sure natural knowledge of God.

In order to know other creatures—both material and spiritual—angels, like humans, need to have the corresponding *species* in their intellects. However, since angels do not have a body, and, thus, no bodily



senses, they cannot abstract species directly from objects as humans do. Instead, God implanted the species in the intellect of angels with their nature when they were created.

## 12. Angelic Will

*The angels have free will (sent. certa).*

The will of the angels, which is free in its decisions, adheres to what they have chosen in a fixed and immovable way.

Sacred Scripture asserts that angels are morally responsible for their actions, since they receive the retribution that they deserve: “God did not spare the angels when they sinned” (2 Pt 2:4). If they are morally responsible, it follows that they are free.

The will and freedom of the angels is a necessary consequence of their intellectual nature. Further, it is an essential premise for the dogma of the fall and punishment of the angels, which we will study later.

The intensity of the choice made by an angel is hardly conceivable by human reason. When a person makes a decision, there is first a process of deliberation, which can sometimes be quite long. The subsequent implementation of the decision usually requires an elapse of time and an action of the body. Because of the duration and complexity of this process, there is a possibility for retraction in human decisions. The will can change its decisions in the light of new considerations or findings.

The decision of an angel, on the other hand, is the result of an instantaneous and lucid option. It is so strong that it radically excludes any contrary movement of the will. Once he has made a decision, an angel is immovable—he is either confirmed in goodness or obstinate in evil.

1. Cf. CCC, 328–336.
2. DS 800, 3002; cf. CCC, 328–330.
3. Cf. DS 800, 3002.
4. Cf. ST, I, q. 50, a. 2.

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Man

## **13. The Creation of Man**

In the hierarchy of created beings, man is the apex of creation; he comes after only the angels. Man has a spiritual component—the soul—which is endowed with intellect and will. He is, therefore, responsible and free. He also has a material body that is united to the soul. God created man as a composite of body and soul, matter and spirit.<sup>1</sup>

## **13a) Man as a Creature**

*God created man out of nothing (de fide).*

This truth of faith was defined by the Magisterium of the Church in the Fourth Lateran Council and the First Vatican Council, using the same words: “God created both orders of creatures in the same way out of nothing, the spiritual or angelic world and the corporeal or visible universe. And afterwards He formed the creature man, who in a way belongs to both orders, as he is composed of spirit and body.”<sup>2</sup>

## 13b) The Creation of the First Man

*God created Adam in body and soul by a special intervention (sent. certa as regards the soul, sent. comm. as regards the body).*

Sacred Scripture narrates this truth in detail in the Book of Genesis: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.’ ... So God created man in his own image” (Gn 1:26–27). “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Gn 2:7).

The soul originates directly from God. The definitions of the Magisterium of the Church stating the spiritual and immortal nature of the soul exclude any possibility of the soul’s originating from some pre-existing being. God creates it directly and without mediation. Regarding the body, the traditional interpretation of its origin is that God created it directly out of clay or earth. Nevertheless, the hypothesis that God may have used a living animal organism as a starting point, instead of clay, is not contrary to the faith.<sup>3</sup> In any case, we should be aware that evolutionary theory is often maintained as a matter of principle, rather than as a rigorous scientific conclusion. Besides, even if the evolutionary hypothesis is accepted, one must still acknowledge that the body used by God was previously prepared to receive the human soul by a special divine intervention.

## 13c) The First Woman

*In order to form the body of Eve, God took matter from the body of Adam; her soul, on the other hand, was created directly out of nothing (sent. certa).*

Sacred Scripture narrates the creation of the first woman in the Book of Genesis. “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man” (Gn 2:21–22).

In 1909, the Pontifical Biblical Commission declared that the formation of the first woman from the first man is among the events in Genesis whose historical literal sense should not be doubted, while noting that room for some particular interpretations may exist.<sup>4</sup>

Sacred Tradition points out that the special creation of Eve indicates the essential equality and mutual dependence of man and woman. It also reminds us of the divine origin and the indissolubility of marriage. Jesus Christ himself interpreted this part of Genesis when teaching the essence and properties of marriage (cf. Mt 19:4–8).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that man and woman are *created*, that is, *loved* by God:

- in perfect equality—equal dignity—because both are human persons; and
- in the individual characteristics inherent in being man and woman. “To be a man” and “to be a woman” are realities loved by God that reflect his wisdom and goodness.<sup>5</sup>

Man and woman are loved by God, one *for* the other (cf. Gn 2:18); they were created by him to form a communion of persons in which each is a “helpmate” for the other. They are equal as persons, paired as male and female. United in marriage, they form “one flesh” (Gn 2:24) and are capable of transmitting human life (cf. Gn 1:28). In so doing, they cooperate—as spouses and parents—in a unique manner with the work of the Creator.

## 13d) Man as Image of God

*Because of his spiritual nature, man is a true, though imperfect, image of God (sent. certa).*

Sacred Scripture explicitly says that man was created in the image and likeness of God, a dignity not attributed to any other creature (cf. Gn 1:26ff; 5:1–3; 9:6; Wis 2:23; Sir 17:1, 3). The superiority of man over the other material creatures is due to his rational soul and spiritual powers of intellect and will. His materiality, which he shares with the animals, does not imply any special likeness with God.

The Magisterium of the Church, in the Second Vatican Council, has recently reminded us of mankind's superiority: "All, in fact, are destined to the very same end, namely God himself, since they have been created in the likeness of God who 'made from one every nation of men who live on all the face of the earth.'"<sup>6</sup>

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes how man was created in the image of God: He has the dignity of a *person*; he is not merely something, but someone. Man is capable of knowing himself, possessing himself, giving himself, and entering into communion with other persons. Through grace, he is called to a covenant with his Creator to offer him the response of faith and love that no other being can.<sup>7</sup>

All the Fathers of the Church taught that man is an image of God because he is a spiritual being. St. John Damascene, for example, said, "With his own hands, God made man from the visible and the invisible nature. He formed the body from the earth, and he gave him a rational soul through his breath. This is what we call image of God. Because 'in the image of' refers to the understanding and free will."<sup>8</sup>

Children tend to resemble their parents. This likeness refers to physical traits and expressions and mannerisms that children learn from their parents. When Sacred Scripture says that man was made in the image and likeness of God, this cannot be a similarity of body, since God does not have a material body. It refers to the soul, which is spiritual and subsistent. While the soul was created to be the form of the body (body and soul together compose man), that the soul is subsistent means the soul can continue to exist even when separated from the body by death. Thus, the



soul is immortal, and man is an image of God on account of his soul, which is both spiritual and immortal.<sup>9</sup>

## 14. The Human Body

*The body is a constitutive part of human nature (sent. certa).*

This truth is presupposed in the whole of Christological dogma, since our Lord became “consubstantial with us in his humanity” and he is “perfect man, with a rational soul and human flesh.”<sup>10</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* affirmed that “man may not despise his bodily life; rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and honorable since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.”<sup>11</sup>

When Sacred Scripture narrates the creation of man, it explicitly indicates that God “formed man of dust from the ground” (Gn 2:7). Other passages speak about the “resurrection of the bodies” (cf. 1 Cor 15:35ff), thereby implying that the body is an essential part of human nature.

Reason confirms that the body is necessary to human nature.<sup>12</sup> The body is good, since God created it, yet it can be used for God’s glory or for offending him (cf. 1 Cor 15:42–43ff). St. Paul draws an opposition between the life according to the flesh and the life according to the spirit, but this distinction must be understood in the light of original sin. As a consequence of this sin, the body has to be mortified in order to subdue those tendencies contrary to the Christian life and to make reparation for sins. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that “Jesus’ call to conversion and penance ... does not aim first at outward works ... but at the conversion of the heart, interior conversion.... [which] urges expression in visible signs, gestures and works of penance.”<sup>13</sup> Mortification should not be done out of hatred or disdain for the body.

## 15. The Human Soul

### 15a) The Soul as a Substance

*The human soul is a true substance (sent. certa).*

The Church describes the soul as a substance. The Ecumenical Council of Vienna explicitly stated that the rational soul is a substance.<sup>14</sup>

The Fathers of the Church also affirmed this truth. St. John Damascene, for example, taught: “The soul is a living substance, simple and incorporeal.”<sup>15</sup>

A substance is the reality that is *in itself* and not *in another subject*. This means that a substance has its own act of being, and therefore does not need to be “in another,” as does an accident. For example, the color white is an accident since it does not have its own act of being but has to rely on something else that has its own being, such as paper, snow, or a handkerchief.

A soul can exist independently of matter. Actually, as the Catholic faith teaches, many souls are currently separated from their bodies—all the deceased are waiting for the universal judgment in order to be reunited with their bodies.

Human reason can demonstrate that the human soul is a substance. Operation follows being. Therefore, whatever can operate by itself must have being by itself. The human soul can perform operations that are not dependent on the body (i.e., to reflect on one’s knowledge).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes that some people distinguish between soul and spirit.<sup>16</sup> The Church teaches that this distinction (cf. 1 Thes 5:23) does not introduce two separate realities. “Spirit” means that man is destined to a supernatural end<sup>17</sup> and that his “soul” is able to be gratuitously elevated to communion with God.<sup>18</sup>

## 15b) The Spirituality of the Soul

*The human soul is a spiritual substance (de fide).*

The Magisterium of the Church defined this truth in the Fourth Lateran Council and the First Vatican Council, when it declared that God created out of nothing “the spiritual, or angelic, world and the corporeal, or the visible, universe. And afterwards He formed the creature man, who in a way belongs to both orders, as he is composed of spirit and body.”<sup>19</sup> Also, the Fourth Council of Constantinople refers to the soul as “one rational and intellectual soul.”<sup>20</sup>

Sacred Scripture, as early as the Book of Genesis, suggests that man—created in the image of God—has a spiritual vital principle (cf. Gn 1:26ff). The Hebrew word used to designate the soul means breath, inhalation, or exhalation. The soul is always opposed to the *flesh* and always appears as dominating it (cf. Gn 6:3). The soul is infused by God, and it returns to God when it abandons the body: “And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Eccl 12:7).

The New Testament reiterates the doctrine found in the Old Testament regarding the soul. The following words of Jesus can make sense only if the soul is spiritual: “For what will it profit a man, if he gains the world and forfeits his life?” (Mt 16:26).

The spiritual nature of the soul was consistently taught by the Fathers of the Church. For example, St. John Damascene said that “the soul is a living substance, simple and incorporeal, with a nature that bodily eyes cannot see. It is immortal, rational, capable of thinking.”<sup>21</sup>

Through natural reason, the spiritual nature of the soul can be known.<sup>22</sup> This reasoning starts from the consideration that the operations of the intellect and the will are spiritual in nature. For example, we can know abstract notions like love, loyalty, or friendship. These concepts have not been seen by the eyes, and they were not chemically produced in the brain cells. They must have been made by a spiritual faculty capable of abstracting them from the concrete realities that we perceive. To produce them, the soul—which is the substance behind these spiritual operations—must also be spiritual.

## 15c) The Immortality of the Soul

*The human soul is immortal (de fide).*

Sacred Scripture explicitly teaches the immortality of the soul. Jesus Christ said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (Mt 10:28).

All the texts that refer to the destiny of the soul presuppose its immortality. “And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Mt 25:46). The immortality of the soul can be deduced from the fact that it is a spiritual and substantial being. Since it has its own act of being, it continues to subsist even when separated from the body. And, since the soul is spiritual, lacking the matter-form composition, it is also simple and cannot be divided. Hence, the soul is incorruptible and immortal, just like the angels.

The only way in which a soul could cease to exist is by annihilation. However, as we already have seen in the discussion of the preservation of creatures, this would not happen because annihilation is unbecoming of the divine wisdom and goodness. Besides, in the case of the human soul, divine justice demands that it receive its reward or punishment in the next life, since justice in this life is always imperfect.<sup>23</sup>

## 16. The Union of Body and Soul

*The body and soul are united in such a way that the soul is per se the form of the body (de fide).*

The Council of Vienna (1312) condemned as heretical the teaching that “the rational or intellectual soul is not truly and of its own nature the form of the human body.”<sup>24</sup> With this statement, the Church did not intend to establish the hylomorphic theory (matter-form) of Aristotle as a truth of faith. The Church merely used the terminology of Aristotle, thereby acknowledging that it is appropriate to express the manner in which two distinct principles (the body and soul) are united to form a substantial unity. Pius IX explained this truth by stating that the rational soul is a single principle of life, and that, from the soul, “the body receives all movement, life, and sensation.”<sup>25</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 343, 355–412.
2. DS 800, 3002.
3. Cf. Pius XII, Enc. *Humani Generis*: DS 3896.
4. Cf. DS 3514.
5. Cf. CCC, 369–373.
6. GS, 24.
7. Cf. CCC, 357.
8. St. John Damascene, *De Fide Orth.* 2.12.
9. Cf. J. Ortiz López, *Palabras de Vida Eterna: Charlas Sobre el Credo* (Madrid: Magisterio Español), p. 92.
10. DS 76; cf. 301.
11. GS, 14; cf. CCC, 364.
12. Cf. ST, I, q. 75, a. 4; St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 19.3.
13. CCC, 1430.
14. Cf. DS 902; CCC, 362–368.
15. St. John Damascene, *De Fide Orth.* 2.12.
16. Cf. CCC, 367.
17. Cf. DS 3005; GS, 22.
18. Cf. Pius XII, Enc. *Humani Generis*: DS 3891; DS 657.
19. DS 800, 3002.
20. DS 657.
21. St. John Damascene, *De Fide Orth.* 2.12.
22. Cf. DS 2812.
23. Cf. CCC, 366.
24. DS 902.

25. Cf. DS 2828; Pius IX, Ep. *Dolore Haud Mediocri*, Apr. 30, 1860; cf. CCC, 365.

**Part II**  
**THE ELEVATION TO THE SUPERNATURAL**  
**ORDER**

31

The Natural and  
Supernatural Orders



## 17. Natural and Supernatural Orders

When God created the different creatures, he gave them not only their being, but also an essence or nature. This essence or nature makes them what they are—a sheep, a rock, or a man—and gives them the capacity to perform specific operations befitting their manner of being—to graze and grow wool, to form mountains, or to live, laugh, walk, and think. All these natural operations are ordained to the natural end of each creature.

The *natural order* is the ordination of all creatures to the end proper to each one's nature, together with the provision of the means necessary to reach that end.

The natural end of the intelligent creatures—angels and people—is loving knowledge of God. The natural perfection of mankind consists in:

- the natural knowledge of God,
- the ordination of the will to God, and
- as a consequence, the right order with respect to himself, other people, and other creatures.

However, to know God in his essence is beyond the capacity of any created intelligence. On God's part, there would be no problem to be united to a created intellect. However, the latter does have an incapacity to be so united to God because of its limitations. It would be like having the light of a thousand suns illuminating a human retina. The light would be so dazzling that it would prevent vision, not because of a lack of light, but because of the eye's limitations, which are unable to see in such brightness.

In spite of that, God wants the intellectual creatures to get to know his essence, and he gives them the means necessary to elevate their nature above their own possibilities so that they can achieve this knowledge.

The *supernatural order* is, thus, the ordination of the rational creatures to:

- the knowledge of God in his own intimate life;
- the love of God, which accompanies this knowledge;
- the life flowing from this beatific vision; and
- all the means ordained by God for the creatures so favored to attain their last end. In this case, it is no longer a natural last end but a supernatural one.<sup>1</sup>

## 18. The Supernatural Last End

*God proposed to the rational creatures a supernatural last end (de fide).*

God offered himself to rational creatures in his intimate Trinitarian nature as their supernatural last end. This is a completely free gift exceeding their nature.

The Church has professed this truth throughout her history. The First Vatican Council expressed this constant teaching thus: “God, out of his infinite goodness, destined man to a supernatural end, that is, to a participation in the good things of God, which altogether exceed the human mental grasp.”<sup>2</sup> The Magisterium of the Church also teaches that this supernatural last end consists in the eternal beatitude, that is, in the immediate vision of God. In 1336, Pope Benedict XII answered those who claimed that souls could not enjoy the happiness of heaven while separated from their bodies. He declared that the souls of those who died in grace and who need no further purification in purgatory “have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive and even face-to-face vision, without the interposition of any creature in the function of object seen ... are truly blessed and possess life and eternal rest.”<sup>3</sup>

In Sacred Scripture, St. Paul referred to this beatific vision: “For now we see [God] in a mirror dimly, but then face to face” (1 Cor 13:12). St. John described the ultimate goal of the Christian, saying, “For we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2). Jesus Christ said that the angels also enjoy the beatific vision: “Their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 18:10).<sup>4</sup>

Revelation and the Magisterium, as we have seen, affirm the beatific vision of angels and humans. If we accept that no creature can contemplate the divine essence through its natural powers alone, we must conclude that rational creatures were elevated to the supernatural order by grace.

The elevation of rational creatures to the supernatural order is a separate operation from creation. It belongs to the order of grace (i.e., gratuitous), which is distinct from the natural order.

## **19. The Supernatural Elevation is a Completely Free Gift**

The supernatural last end is completely beyond the reach of any creature relying only on its natural powers. It cannot be known, desired, or reached without a previous elevation by God to the supernatural order.

God could have elevated any creature to the supernatural order, even a stone. As St. John the Baptist said in his preaching, “God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Mt 3:9). However, the stone would first have to cease being a stone. It would have to receive from God an intellect and a will. This means that it cannot be elevated to the supernatural order without a change in its nature.

On the other hand, humans and angels do not have to change their nature to be elevated to the supernatural order because they already have the operative potencies of intellect and will. With these, after being elevated to the supernatural order, they can reach the One and Triune God. They can also partake of the divine processions of the Word and the Holy Spirit, who exist in God according to the intellect and will. Therefore, we can say that both angels and humans are naturally capable of receiving grace.

Still, this capacity does not mean that nature is in any way ordained to grace, as if grace were somehow demanded by nature. Grace is completely gratuitous. It is a strictly unmerited gift that cannot be demanded under any title. God simply wants to pour out his love on the intellectual creature.

## 20. Grace and Nature

*The supernatural elevation presupposes and perfects nature (sent. comm.)*

The ordination to the supernatural life does not suppress human nature. Rather, grace presupposes and perfects nature.

The Magisterium of the Church teaches that “the supernatural order ... not only does not in the least destroy the natural order, but elevates the natural order and perfects it.”<sup>5</sup>

Through elevation to the supernatural order, the operative capacities of nature are confirmed, increased, and perfected. The natural intelligence is strengthened by the light of faith (*lumen fidei*) and is strengthened even more by the light of glory (*lumen gloriae*), in which faith reaches its perfection.

The will, which has a natural inclination to the good, is likewise confirmed in that inclination when supernatural charity causes it to love God above all things and love creatures for the love of God.

When a person or angel is in the state of grace, all his potentialities are perfected by supernatural virtues. He acquires the ability to act with a new supernatural moral object, which includes and surpasses the natural moral good.

1. Cf. CCC, 374–379.
2. First Vatican Council, Dogm. Const. *De Fide Catholica*: DS 3005.
3. Benedict XII, Const. *Benedictus Deus*: DS 1000.
4. Cf. CCC, 1027.
5. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Illius Magistri*: DS 3689.

## The Supernatural Perfection of the Angels

ALL ANGELS WERE elevated to the supernatural order. Afterward, God subjected them to a test so that they could merit heaven with the use of their freedom. Some, out of pride, wanted to become like God by themselves and fell into everlasting sin. Nevertheless, many were faithful. These were confirmed in grace and rewarded with glory.

## **21. The Angels' Original State and Test**

We read in the Book of Genesis that our first parents heard a seductive voice, opposed to God, which led them to fall into sin and death (cf. Gn 3:1–5; Wis 2:24). Sacred Scripture and Tradition see this being as a fallen angel, Satan or the devil (cf. Jn 8:44; Rv 12:9).<sup>1</sup>

## 21 a) Supernatural Elevation

*God elevated all the angels to the supernatural order, that is, he proposed to them the beatific vision as last end, and he gave them the supernatural gifts (grace and virtues) necessary to achieve this end (sent. certa).*

In 1567, Pope St. Pius V defined, to correct Baius, that the angels could not merit heavenly bliss through their natural good works. Therefore, the ordination to eternal bliss is not a reward, but a grace.<sup>2</sup>

Our Lord said, referring to children, that “their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 18:10). Another passage says that the devil “has nothing to do with the truth” (Jn 8:44). These passages show that all the angels were elevated to the supernatural order and underwent a test. This test resulted in different situations according to each angel’s response.

## 21b) The Angels' Test

*All the angels had to undergo a test (sent. certa as regards the fallen angels; sent. comm. as regards the good ones).*

The Magisterium of the Church affirmed that the fallen angels “made themselves evil by their own doing,” and incurred eternal punishment.<sup>3</sup> This implies that a divine law was broken.

Revelation does not explicitly tell us the exact nature of this test. Some Fathers of the Church cited the sin of pride, some the sin of envy.

God wanted to impose a test so that a creature would do some work to achieve its supernatural end. Given the spiritual perfection of the angel, one act of charity was enough to merit glory, and one act against charity was enough to merit eternal damnation. The very nature of angelic decision makes them incapable of repentance and, therefore, of divine redemption.



## **22. The Evil Spirits and Their Fall**

### **22a) The Existence of the Demons**

*There are evil spirits who, in spite of having been created good by God, became bad by their own fault (de fide).*

The Magisterium of the Church, in the Fourth Lateran Council, defined that “The devil and the other demons were created by God good according to their nature, but they made themselves evil by their own doing.”<sup>4</sup>

In Sacred Scripture, the Book of Isaiah takes for granted that the bad angels sinned, which is why they were condemned to hell: “How you are fallen from Heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high.... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol to the depths of the Pit” (Is 14:12–15).

Satan figures prominently in the New Testament. Jesus calls him the tempter, the enemy who sows evil, and he says that the devil is the “murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (Jn 8:44).

## 22b) The Sin of the Demons

*The sin of the demons was a sin of pride (sent. comm.).*

Sacred Scripture speaks of the sin of these fallen angels (cf. 2 Pt 2:4). This “fall” was a free choice of these created spirits in which they *rejected* God and his Kingdom radically and irrevocably.<sup>5</sup>

We read in the Book of Tobit: “For in pride there is ruin and great confusion” (Tob 4:13). The Book of Sirach also affirms that “the beginning of pride is sin” (Sir 10:13).

Most of the Fathers of the Church taught that the demons, especially Satan, fell because of pride. Some Fathers, like St. Gregory of Nyssa, taught that the sin of the evil angels was one of envy. St. Gregory Nazianzen, who thought it was a sin of pride, said: “The angel who rashly rebelled and with great pride revolted against the Almighty Lord, coveting (as the Prophet says) a place above the clouds, was punished according to his madness.”<sup>6</sup>

## 22c) The Punishment of the Demons

*After their sin, the demons were immediately condemned (sent. comm.).*

Jesus Christ addressed the damned in the following terms: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41). St. Jude said that “the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains of nether gloom” (Jude 6).

The demons’ sin cannot be forgiven, not because of any defect of the infinite mercy of God, but because of the irrevocable character of their decision.<sup>7</sup>

The punishment inflicted on the demons cannot be a sensible one, as is the punishment of damned human beings, since they have no bodies. Nevertheless, they are tormented by tremendous suffering since they continue desiring supreme happiness in a natural way. Yet, they know that they cannot achieve it because their evil decision is irrevocable.

## 22d) Diabolic Action in This World

After they had sinned, God could have “thrown the rebellious angels to the infernal prison forever” as he will do at the end of time.<sup>8</sup> However, he preferred to give them some freedom of action in order to use them in his own service. God makes use of the devil’s power and malice in order to test the virtue of mankind. As the Second Vatican Council taught, the devil’s action can be felt continuously. “The whole of man’s human history has been the story of our combat with the powers of evil, stretching, so our Lord tells us, from the very dawn of history until the last day.”<sup>9</sup>

The devil can tempt people. God allows these temptations both to test the fidelity of his people and so that the power and merits of Christ may be more clearly manifested. In the end, this will result in greater humiliation for the devil, who will be defeated by the spiritual weapons that Christians possess. Among these weapons is the recourse to the angels<sup>10</sup> and the particular protection of the Most Blessed Virgin. The devil fears her in a special way because God already warned him in the beginning: “She shall crush your head” (Gn 3:15, Confraternity version).

Aside from temptations, the demons can also torment people through *obsessions* and *possessions*. In a possession, the devil takes over a person’s body and uses it, thus eliminating or diminishing the person’s control over his own body. The Gospel relates many cases of people possessed by the devil in this way (cf. Lk 11:17ff; 13:22; Mk 5:9). In cases of real diabolic possessions, the Church has the power to cast out the evil spirit from a person (exorcism).

However, these extraordinary actions of the devil (such as the obsessions and apparitions that tormented some saints) are not common. Although the devil cannot force people’s intellect or will, he has access to the external senses and inferior faculties such as the imagination, the internal senses, and the memory. He can awaken images and stimulate sensations that can affect the human intellect and incline the will toward evil.

We should always be vigilant because “Satan, God’s enemy and man’s, does not give up nor does he rest. He maintains his siege, even when the soul is ardently in love with God. The devil knows that it’s more difficult for the soul to fall then, but he also knows that, if he can manage to

get it to offend its Lord even in something small, he will be able to cast over its conscience the serious temptation of despair.”<sup>11</sup> The battle against the devil and his schemes to wring souls from God is part of the duty of the Church, and it is the ascetical struggle of every Christian. The Fathers of the Church offer advice regarding this struggle in rather abundant spiritual writings. For example, St. John Chrysostom recommended, “What should we do in such a situation? Never give credit to the devil, never listen to him, abhor his promises. And the greater the things he promises, the less you should listen to him.”<sup>12</sup>

## **23. Good Angels**

### **23a) The Reward of the Good Angels**

*The angels who passed the test were immediately brought to the state of heavenly bliss (sent. certa).*

The degree of glory reached by each angel depends on the merit acquired in the test. Once in heaven, their happiness does not change substantially. Nevertheless, it can increase accidentally, as it does when an angel comes to know about new works of God, especially those referring to the Church of Christ or about the eternal salvation of souls they are serving. Referring to his own ministry, St. Paul wrote, “That through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10). Jesus Christ said, “Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Lk 15:10).

## 23b) The Angels' Ministry

*Some angels are sent by God into the world to protect men and help them reach salvation (de fide on account of the universal and ordinary Magisterium).*

There are many passages in Sacred Scripture that talk about the ministry of the angels: “For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Ps 91:11–12). “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?” (Heb 1:14).<sup>13</sup>

## 23c) Guardian Angels

*Every person has a guardian angel (sent. certa as regards the faithful; sent. comm. as regards all mankind).*

The *Roman Catechism* teaches that “Our heavenly Father has placed over each of us an Angel under whose protection and vigilance we may be enabled to escape the snares secretly prepared by our enemy.”<sup>14</sup>

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that humans are entrusted by God to the angels’ custody (cf. Ps 34:7; 91:10–13) from childhood (cf. Mt 18:10) to death (cf. Lk 16:22) and to their intercession (cf. Jb 33:23–24; Zec 1:12; Tb 12:12).<sup>15</sup> “Each Christian has an angel beside him as a protector and shepherd to lead him to life [everlasting].”<sup>16</sup>

The testimony of the Fathers of the Church is abundant. “Great is the dignity of each soul,” wrote St. Jerome, considering that “each one of them has an angel assigned to guard it from the moment of birth.”<sup>17</sup>

Christian tradition describes the guardian angels as powerful friends, placed by God alongside each one of us, to accompany us on our way. And that is why he invites us to make friends with them and get them to help us.<sup>18</sup>

It is very appropriate for God to send us this special help of the angels. Although grace elevates our potentialities to the supernatural order, enabling us to believe and love God above all things, our reason and will are weakened by original sin. The action of the guardian angel is that of a true and faithful friend who helps our defective reason with his advice. With his intervention, he clarifies the truth in our mind, making us see the means to be applied in each occasion. Unlike a human friend, however, we ordinarily neither see nor hear him. His intervention is, thus, less evident, but his effectiveness is greater. The angel can reach our imagination more directly—without words—by awakening images, remembrances, impressions, which can clarify our supernatural knowledge about our vocation and help us to continue in our way.

1. Cf. CCC, 391–395.
2. DS 1903–1904.



3. Fourth Lateran Council: DS 800.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Cf. CCC, 392.
6. *Oratio* 6.12.
7. Cf. CCC, 393.
8. *ST*, Suppl., q. 89, a. 8, ad 2.
9. *GS*, 37; cf. CCC, 395.
10. St. Josemaría Escrivá advises: “Turn to your guardian angel at the moment of trial; he will protect you from the devil and bring you holy inspirations” (*The Way*, 567).
11. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 303.
12. St. John Chrysostom, *In Matth. hom.* 13.4.
13. Cf. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 4:1:4; CCC, 334–335.
14. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 4:1:4.
15. CCC, 336.
16. St. Basil, *Eun.* 3,1.
17. St. Jerome, *Comm. in Matth.* 18.20.
18. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 63.

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# The Supernatural Elevation of Man

## **24. The State of Original Justice**

The Church—authentically interpreting symbolic biblical language in light of the New Testament and Tradition—teaches that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were created in the “state of holiness and justice.”<sup>1</sup>

## 24a) Sanctifying Grace

*God endowed our first parents with sanctifying grace before the fall (de fide).*

The elevation of man to a supernatural end—similar to the elevation of the angels—is a central truth of our faith.

The declaration of the Magisterium of the Church against the Pelagians<sup>2</sup> and semi-Pelagians,<sup>3</sup> which clarified the doctrine on the state of fallen nature, freedom, and the necessity of grace, implicitly states that Adam was elevated to the supernatural order. The Council of Trent presupposed this elevation when it affirmed that original sin brought about an immediate loss of the sanctity and justice in which Adam was constituted: “If anyone does not profess that the first man Adam immediately lost the justice and holiness in which he was constituted when he disobeyed the command of God in the Garden of Paradise ... let him be anathema.”<sup>4</sup>

In the New Testament, the condition of Adam before original sin is explained using the doctrine of Redemption. St. Paul referred to the work of Christ as a *reconciliation* (cf. Rom 5:11), a *restoration* (cf. Eph 1:10), and a renewal of man according to the image of God, in which he was created in the beginning (cf. Eph 4:23–24ff; Col 3:9–10ff). If Christ recovered supernatural sanctity and justice for us, it follows that Adam possessed these gifts before the fall.

The Fathers of the Church underscored the state of internal and external freedom in which our first parents lived. St. John Damascene asserted, “Adam lived in a very holy and very beautiful place. But in his soul, he lived in an even more holy and beautiful place. God, who lived in him, was his temple. God was his glorious clothing. Man was clothed with divine grace.”<sup>5</sup>

## 24b) Integrity of Nature and Preternatural Gifts

*Aside from supernatural grace, the first man's nature was in a state of integrity, that is, he was endowed with the preternatural gifts: integrity (sent. fidei proxima), immortality (de fide), impassibility (sent. comm.), and infused science (sent. comm.).*

The preternatural gifts were benefits with which God endowed human nature through Adam and Eve.<sup>6</sup> These gifts were adequate to the human condition but exceeded its proper end. Therefore, humans were not due them. The preternatural gifts are the following:

### (1) *Integrity*

The gift of integrity is the perfect subjection of sensuality to reason, the body to the soul, and the human will to the Creator. The Book of Genesis states that our first parents were “both naked, and were not ashamed” (Gn 2:25). In contrast, a feeling of shame appears after the fall. The nakedness of our first parents is traditionally understood as a sign of the radical rectitude of their passions.

### (2) *Immortality*

By the gift of immortality, people were not subject to the inexorability of death. One possessing this gift would pass from this life to the happiness of heaven without going through the tough passage of death, that is, without experiencing the separation of body and soul.

The Second Synod of Milevi (A.D. 416) and the Sixteenth Synod of Carthage (A.D. 418), in the face of the Pelagian heresy, condemned “whoever said that Adam, the first man, was created mortal so that, whether he sinned or not, he would have died a bodily death.”<sup>7</sup> The Council of Trent repeated this doctrine.<sup>8</sup>

Sacred Scripture presents death as God's punishment for not fulfilling his commandment: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gn 2:17).

God promised immortality to Adam if he fulfilled his commandment, and he threatened him with death if he violated it. This possible, promised immortality was not due to the material incorruptibility of man but to the preternatural intervention of God. Therefore, it was not that Adam *could not possibly die*, but that Adam *had the possibility of not dying*.

(3) *Impassibility*

The gift of impassibility implied immunity from all suffering and misery. No material being would cause a person possessing impassability any suffering. With this gift, people could work without effort and without fatigue and would not find any cause of physical or moral sufferings.

In the Book of Genesis, it is clear that our first parents had mastery over the whole of creation. They had to work in paradise and watch over it (cf. Gn 2:15), but this work was not accompanied by tiredness (cf. Gn 3:17ff). Animals would not bother or attack them (cf. Gn 3:15).

(4) *Infused Science*

Adam and Eve possessed knowledge suitable to their state without having to strain themselves in order to acquire it. In Genesis, God directly instructs Adam. After having created all the animals and birds, God “brought them to the man to see what he would call them” (Gn 2:19). Adam immediately knew the mission of the woman with certainty and depth (cf. Gn 2:23ff). In the Book of Sirach, the condition of our first parents is thus summarized: “He made for them tongue and eyes; he gave them ears and a mind for thinking. He filled them with knowledge and understanding” (Sir 17:6–7).

## 24c) Supernatural Elevation: A Gift of Love

God's love moved him to grant the supernatural gifts to our first parents.

It was an extraordinary gift on the part of God. Our first parents would participate in the intimate divine life and would be heirs of heaven. The supernatural elevation entails the elevation of the human realities: the creature, as regards his personal relationship with God, is elevated to the divine filiation (cf. 2 Pt 1:4); nature is elevated by sanctifying grace, which is a supernatural habit; the potencies of the soul are elevated by the supernatural virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit; the human acts of the intellect are elevated by the light of actual grace; and the acts of the free will are elevated by the motion of other actual graces.

Divine filiation is the great news, the great message of divine Revelation: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 Jn 3:1). Man has been elevated, acquiring the fundamental condition of a new creature (cf. Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17). Because of that, we are no longer strangers: we are members of the family of God (cf. Eph 2:19).

Through grace, our first parents had become elevated creatures. This implies a new mode of presence for God in the soul: *the indwelling of the Most Blessed Trinity*. In the beatific vision—which is the supernatural end—they would contemplate the One and Triune God face to face (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). Meanwhile, Adam and Eve—and, later on, any human being in the state of grace—enjoyed a foretaste of it through the presence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the soul in grace, because Jesus Christ had said, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14:23)."<sup>9</sup>

## 25. Original Sin

God is infinitely good, and all his works are good. Yet, we notice the existence of suffering and of evil in this world, especially of moral evil (sin). Why is this so? Where does moral evil come from? This “mystery of lawlessness” (2 Thes 2:7) can be understood only in the light of the “mystery of our religion” (1 Tm 3:16). Christ’s revelation of God’s love has shown both the extension of evil and the extraordinary abundance of grace (cf. Rom 5:20). We should, therefore, look at the question of evil in the world by directing our eyes of faith toward the Conqueror of evil (cf. Lk 11:21–22; Jn 16:11; 1 Jn 3:8). It is necessary to know Christ as the source of grace in order to understand Adam as the source of sin. The doctrine of original sin is, in a manner of speaking, the “reverse” of the Good News that Jesus is the Savior.<sup>10</sup>

Our first parents were created by God and placed in paradise in order to work and watch over it (cf. Gn 2:15). The Creator endowed them with the preternatural and supernatural gifts. They lived happily, dealing intimately with God and having mastery over the whole of creation: the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the animals that moved over the earth (cf. Gn 1:28).

But they were seduced by the devil, and they offended God. Together with its head, Adam, the whole of humanity “preferred to be under the tyranny of the power of corruption than to be with God, exchanging his freedom, power and will for the grave and harmful servitude to sin.”<sup>11</sup> As a consequence of this transgression, “sin came into the world through one man and death through sin” (Rom 5:12). By his offense, Adam not only harmed himself, but also harmed all his descendants. He lost the sanctity and justice received from God for himself and for us, and he transmitted the death and sufferings of the body—as well as the death of the soul (sin)—to the whole human race.<sup>12</sup>



## 25a) The Sin of Adam and Eve

*God gave Adam a special precept in order to test him. Later, Adam and Eve disobeyed the divine precept, committing a grievous sin of pride and disobedience (de fide).*

Sacred Scripture explicitly narrates the test to which God submitted our first parents: “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall die’” (Gn 2:16–17).

The same biblical narrative shows the severe punishment given not only to Adam and Eve, but also to their descendants: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gn 3:19).

The sin of Adam and Eve necessarily had to be serious, since, in the state of innocence, the lower powers of human nature were perfectly subjected to the mind, which, in turn, was perfectly subordinated to God. It was, therefore, impossible for man to suffer from any disorder that would give rise to an imperfect consent to sin.

As regards its moral species, the sin of our first parents was one of *disobedience*; the precept of God was meant to test their obedience. Thus, St. Paul declared, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (Rom 5:19). The root of disobedience was pride: “For in pride there is ruin and great confusion” (Tb 4:13). Henceforth, every sin is a disobedience to God and demonstrates a lack of confidence in his goodness. With sin, man preferred himself to God; he despised God. He tried to place himself above God, thus going against his state as creature and doing damage to himself. Man was destined to be “divinized” by God in heaven. However, he wanted to “be like God” but “without God, ahead of God, and not according to God.”<sup>13</sup>

## 25b) The Punishment of Original Sin

*Because of original sin, our first parents incurred a number of penalties (de fide).*

All human beings are implicated in Adam's sin in the same manner that all are implicated in Christ's salvation.

In its *Decree on Original Sin*, the Council of Trent defined, "If anyone does not profess that the first man Adam immediately lost the justice and holiness in which he was constituted when he disobeyed the command of God in the Garden of Paradise; and that, through the offense of this sin, he incurred the wrath and indignation of God, and consequently incurred the death with which God had previously threatened him and, together with death, bondage in the power of him who from that time had the empire of death (cf. Heb 2:14), that is, of the devil; and that it was the whole Adam, both body and soul, who was changed for the worse through the offense of sin: let him be anathema."<sup>14</sup>

The consequences of original sin for our first parents were:

- the loss of sanctifying grace and the other supernatural gifts,
- enmity with God,
- the loss of the preternatural gifts, including immortality (thus death entered the world as a punishment), and
- subjection to the devil.

## 25c) Transmission of Original Sin

*The sin of Adam is transmitted by generation to all his descendants, unless they are miraculously preserved by God, as in the case of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary (de fide).*

The Magisterium of the Church has always taught this truth. As the Council of Trent's *Decree on Original Sin* affirmed, "If anyone asserts that Adam's sin was injurious only to Adam and not his descendants, and that it was for himself alone that he lost the holiness and justice that he had received from God, and not for us also; or that after his defilement by the sin of disobedience, he transmitted to the whole human race only death and punishment of the body but not sin itself, which is the death of the soul; let him be anathema."<sup>15</sup>

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that Adam received sanctity and original justice not only for himself, but for all mankind.<sup>16</sup> Yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a *personal sin*, but this sin affects the entire *human nature*, which is transmitted as it is, in a *fallen state*.

Sacred Scripture attests to this revealed truth. In the New Testament, there are key texts that have been authentically interpreted by the Magisterium of the Church, such as: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Rom 5:12).<sup>17</sup> The dogma of original sin is implicitly affirmed in the sacred books whenever Christ is said to have redeemed *everyone*, thereby including infants who could not possibly commit any personal sin. If these infants also have a sin that excludes them from salvation, it must be inherited. In this line, St. Paul affirmed that "he died for all" (2 Cor 5:15). Jesus Christ himself told Nicodemus that "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5).

The Fathers of the Church clearly delineated what the Catholic faith holds on this matter. St. Irenaeus remarked, "We offended God in the first Adam by not fulfilling the commandment,"<sup>18</sup> while Origen attested, "Each one of the souls born of the flesh is stained by the dirt of sin and of evil." In his work *Contra Julianum*, St. Augustine appealed to the authority of Sacred Tradition, saying, "Irenaeus, Cyprian, Hilary, Ambrose, Gregory,

Innocent, John [Chrysostom], Basil, the holy presbyters and eminent commentators of the Holy Books, to which I add the name of the priest Jerome—not to mention those who are still alive—have all affirmed that all men inherit sin.”<sup>19</sup>

## 25d) The Nature of Original Sin

*The essence of original sin formally consists in the privation of sanctifying grace, caused by the sin of Adam (sent. comm.).*

This statement is in agreement with all the principles established by the *Decree on Original Sin* of the Council of Trent:

- i) Original sin is the “death of the soul.”<sup>20</sup> The soul—deprived of sanctifying grace, which God willed it to have—is dead with regard to the supernatural order.
- ii) Canon 3 asserted that this sin is “communicated to all men by propagation, not by imitation.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, since sin consists in nature’s being deprived of grace, original sin is transmitted when the nature deprived of grace is inherited.
- iii) Canon 3 also stated that the inherited original sin “is in each one [of the descendants of Adam] as his own.”<sup>22</sup> If it formally consists in the deprivation of grace, it is in every descendant of Adam, since the nature deprived of grace is in everyone.
- iv) Through the Sacrament of Baptism, everything that is truly and properly sinful is destroyed.<sup>23</sup> Though original sin formally consists in the deprivation of grace, it is destroyed by the infusion of grace that Baptism brings about. The habitual disorder of concupiscence is the material element of original sin.

## **26. The Consequences of Original Sin**

Through sin, the devil acquired a certain dominion over human beings even though they remain free. We cannot ignore that human nature is wounded (not thoroughly corrupted).<sup>24</sup>

## 26a) Loss of the Supernatural Gifts

*Because of the inherited original sin, man is completely deprived of the supernatural and preternatural gifts, as well as of the happiness of heaven (de fide).*

The descendants of Adam are deprived of sanctifying grace. Actually, the culpable privation of this grace constitutes the essence of the inherited original sin. Together with grace, we also lose charity, the infused virtues, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and any right to the supernatural graces needed to achieve our supernatural last end. People could not even initiate any act directed to the supernatural end if our Lord Jesus Christ had not merited grace for them, and applied it to them.

The Magisterium of the Church teaches that Adam lost justice and sanctity for himself and for us.<sup>25</sup> “The human soul, infected by original sin, is dead and cannot be freed of sin without the grace of the Redeemer.”<sup>26</sup> Humanity was excluded from the beatific vision.<sup>27</sup>

Besides sanctifying grace, man has lost the preternatural gifts he received in the state of innocence, which proceed from original grace and were united to it.<sup>28</sup>

## 26b) Wounded Human Nature

*The nature of man, infected by original sin, deteriorated (de fide).*

This change for the worse does not completely destroy free will or the ability to know the truths of natural religion. Against Lutheran pessimism, the Council of Trent declared, “If anyone says that after Adam’s sin man’s free will was destroyed and lost, or that there is question about a term only; indeed, that the term has no real foundation; and that the fictitious notion was even introduced into the Church by Satan; let him be anathema.”<sup>29</sup> The deterioration caused by sin consists only in the weakening of the natural powers of the body and the soul.

As a consequence of original sin, there are four wounds in fallen human nature, which correspond to the four potentialities that are the subject of the four cardinal virtues:

- i) The wound of *malice* affects the *will*, which is inclined to sin and weakened in the face of temptation. This wound is opposed to the virtue of *justice*.
- ii) The wound of *ignorance* affects the *intellect*, which is darkened, making the search for truth difficult. This wound is opposed to the virtue of *prudence*.
- iii) The wound of *weakness* affects the *irascible appetite*, which, as a result, avoids exerting effort and shuns difficulties. This wound is opposed to the virtue of *fortitude*.
- iv) The wound of *concupiscence* affects the *concupiscible appetite*. The object of this appetite is the sensible good but, weakened by concupiscence, it escapes from the dominion of reason. This wound is opposed to the virtue of *temperance*.

Baptism gives the life of Christ’s grace, erases original sin, and reunites man with God. However, the consequences of original sin remain, forcing man to maintain a spiritual combat every day of his life.<sup>30</sup>

- 1. CCC, 375; cf. Council of Trent: DS 1511.
- 2. Cf. Fifteenth Council of Carthage: DS 222.
- 3. Cf. Second Council of Orange: DS 370ff.
- 4. DS 1511; cf. CCC, 375–376.



5. St. John Damascene, *De Fide Orth.* 2.11.
6. Cf. CCC, 376–377.
7. DS 222.
8. Cf. DS 1511.
9. J. Ortiz López, *Palabras de Vida Eterna: Charlas Sobre el Credo* (Madrid: Magisterio Español), p. 105.
10. Cf. CCC, 385, 389.
11. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Oratione Dominica*, 5.
12. Cf. Council of Trent, Sess. 5, can. 2: DS 1512.
13. St. Maximus, *Conf.*; cf. CCC, 398.
14. DS 1511; cf. CCC, 402–406.
15. DS 1512.
16. Cf. CCC, 404.
17. Cf. DS 1514.
18. St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 5.16.3.
19. St. Augustine, *Contra Jul.* 2.10.
20. DS 1512.
21. DS 1513.
22. DS 1513.
23. Cf. DS 1515.
24. Cf. CCC, 407–412.
25. Cf. Council of Trent, *Decree on Original Sin*: DS 1512; CCC, 405.
26. Council of Trent, *Decree on Original Sin*: DS 1512–13.
27. Cf. DS 780, 858.
28. Cf. CCC, 399–400.
29. Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, can. 5: DS 1555.
30. Cf. CCC, 405.

# God Made Man: Jesus Christ the Incarnate and Redeeming Word

by José María Pujol Bertrán

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# **JESUS CHRIST: THE INCARNATE AND REDEEMING WORD**

by José María Pujol Bertrán

## **Part I**

### **JESUS CHRIST: THE INCARNATE SON OF GOD**

HAVING STUDIED THE creation of man, his elevation to the supernatural order, and his fall (brought about by original sin), we must now explain how God freely decreed the Incarnation of his only-begotten Son, so that through his life, Passion, death, and Resurrection, he might redeem the human race.

In the first part of these lessons, we will deal with the Person of the Redeemer, true God and true man. In the second part, we will expound on the work of Redemption.<sup>1</sup>

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## **Jesus Christ's Humanity**

# 1. The Historical Existence of Jesus

*Jesus really lived (de fide).*

Our Lord Jesus Christ lived in a particular moment of history, appearing to people as a *true man*, born of the Virgin Mary.<sup>1</sup>

The historical existence of Jesus Christ is a truth of faith contained in the Symbols of Faith (or Creeds) and dogmatic definitions of the Church.

The historical fact of Jesus' existence is not subject to doubt. There are four accounts of Jesus' life, which were written by St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. Moreover, non-Christian writings of pagan and Jewish origin bear witness to him. Explicit reference is made to the historical existence of Jesus in the *Annals* of Tacitus, a Roman historian, who mentions Jesus Christ in relation to the burning of Rome and the ensuing persecution of the Christians. Likewise, he is mentioned in the *Jewish Antiquities* of Flavius Josephus, a Jew who lived during the time of Jerusalem's destruction.

## **2. The Integrity of Jesus' Human Nature**

### **2a) He is True Man**

*Jesus Christ is true man (de fide).*

The faith of the Church, expressed by the words of the Creed, “I believe in Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried,” professes that Jesus Christ is a true man, born of a woman, and capable of suffering and dying.

Divine revelation, especially in the Gospels, directly teaches that Jesus Christ was a true man, who had a real body. As a newborn, he was wrapped in swaddling clothes. During his life, he slept, became tired, and felt hunger.

The docetae, heretics of the first century, taught that Jesus Christ did not have a true body, but merely used an apparent body like angels who appeared to men. They thought that death on the cross was impossible for and unworthy of the Son of God. Gnosticism and docetism directly opposed various dogmas of the Church. If Jesus Christ did not have a real body, he could not have really died on the cross, thus the Redemption of mankind would not have been accomplished. Further, the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist—with his body, blood, soul, and divinity—would be meaningless.<sup>2</sup>

St. John the Apostle bore witness to the corporeal existence of Christ when he writes of “that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life” (1 Jn 1:1). He contradicted docetism when he wrote: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2 Jn 7). Finally, he affirmed that “every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God” (1 Jn 4:2).

## 2b) Jesus Had a Rational Soul

*Jesus Christ possessed an integral human nature, with a rational soul (de fide).*

In response to the error of Arius and Apollinaris (who denied that the Word of God assumed a human rational soul), the Church taught that Christ had a complete human nature like ours. The Council of Chalcedon, held in A.D. 451, defined that Christ is “perfect ... in his humanity ... truly man composed of body and rational soul... consubstantial with us in his humanity.”<sup>3</sup>

Sacred Scripture clearly attests to the existence of Jesus Christ’s human soul, which it calls spirit: “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit” (Lk 23:46); “And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (Jn 19:30).

The existence of the soul of Jesus Christ is also shown by its operations. For example, our Lord manifested his human will—a faculty of the soul—when, in the garden of Olives, he showed a natural repugnance toward the Passion and exclaimed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mt 26:39).

Among the many testimonies of Tradition to Jesus’ soul, we find this statement of Origen: “One cannot doubt about the nature of his [Jesus’] soul, which is that of all souls.”<sup>4</sup>

Speculative Theology proves the existence of Jesus’ rational soul with the following arguments:

- If Jesus Christ did not have a soul, the Word of God would have had to substitute for it (as Arius and Apollinaris claimed) and, therefore, would have had to carry out its functions. Now, as the soul is the substantial form of the body, the Word would have been the substantial form of the body of Jesus Christ. But this is absurd, because God cannot enter into composition with any creature.
- Moreover, if Christ did not have a soul, he would not have been a true man, and, therefore, could not be the Mediator and Redeemer of mankind.

## 2c) Jesus' Origin as Man

*Jesus Christ was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary (de fide).*

Jesus shares a common origin with us through Adam and Eve, our first parents, and the substance of his human nature is the same as ours.

The Church teaches that Jesus' human nature is the same as that of other men, and she condemns errors that claim that his body descended from heaven or was immediately created by God from the earth.<sup>5</sup>

The Second Vatican Council teaches that Jesus Christ “is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam, that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For by his incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin.”<sup>6</sup>

Divine revelation—in the Old as well as the New Testament—teaches the natural filiation of the Messiah, who proceeds from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is a descendant of Adam and the son of David “who was descended from David according to the flesh” (Rom 1:3). Christ's real filiation to the Virgin Mary is revealed with the following words: “Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:18); “Do not be afraid, Mary ... behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus” (Lk 1:30–31).

Sacred Tradition has never doubted the human origin of Jesus. Among other testimonies, St. Ignatius of Antioch writes: “Jesus is truly a member of the family of David according to the flesh ... truly born of the Virgin.”<sup>7</sup>

Jesus had our very nature and, precisely because of this, he could redeem human nature from original sin. Man, having been defeated by the devil in the tree of paradise, would, in turn, defeat the devil on the tree of the cross.

Pope John Paul II wrote that the Church “knows with all the certainty of faith that the Redemption that took place through the cross has definitively restored his dignity to man and given back meaning to his life in the world, a meaning that was lost to a considerable extent because of sin.”<sup>8</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 422–682.
1. Cf. *Ibid.*, 456–483.
2. Cf. *Ibid.*, 465.
3. DS 301; cf. CCC, 471–475.
4. Origen, *De Principiis*, 2,6,5.
5. Cf. DS 301; CCC, 484–486.
6. *GS*, 22.
7. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Smyr.*, 11; *Eph.*, 18,2.
8. John Paul II, Enc. *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.



## Jesus Christ's Divinity

JESUS CHRIST IS true man. However, the Church teaches that he is not merely a man, but truly and properly the Son of God, and God himself.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. The Doctrine of the Church on Jesus' Divinity

In all the Symbols of the Faith and doctrinal definitions of the Councils, the Church has proclaimed her faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God. To cite one example from the many definitions, the Apostles' Creed affirms: "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, his Only-Begotten Son."<sup>2</sup>

In A.D. 325, the Council of Nicaea defined against Arius, who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ, "We believe in only one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten born of the Father ... God from God; light from light; true God from true God; begotten, not created, consubstantial with the Father."<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed teaches, "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all time; light from light, true God from true God; begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father."<sup>4</sup>

The modernists deny the divinity of Jesus Christ, since, according to them (following the liberal Protestant theology), one has to distinguish between the Jesus who lived in Palestine (the "historical Jesus") and the Jesus in whom we believe ("Jesus of the faith"). Consequently, they conjecture that our faith in Jesus Christ and in his divinity is not at all related to the Jesus who appears in the historical narrations of the Sacred Scriptures, and, therefore, we cannot prove that Jesus was really the Son of God.

In 1907, Pope St. Pius X approved the decree *Lamentabili*, where various modernist propositions were condemned, among them: "The divinity of Jesus Christ is not proven from the Gospels; but it is a dogma that the Christian consciousness deduced from the notion of the Messiah"; "It may be conceded that the Christ who appears in the light of history is far inferior to the Christ who is the object of faith"; and "The Christology taught by Paul, John, and the Councils of Nicaea, Ephesus, and Chalcedon is not the doctrine that Jesus taught, but one that the Christian consciousness formed about Jesus."<sup>5</sup>

The dogmatic definitions of the Church teach that Jesus Christ possessed the divine nature with all its perfections because he has been

eternally begotten by God the Father, and is, thus, of the same substance of the Father. He is the Son of God and true God.

#### **4. Christ's Divinity in Sacred Scripture: The Testimony of the Old Testament**

The Old Testament prepares the ground for the New Testament. Thus, the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament announcing the Redeemer acquire their full meaning in the light of the New Testament, and they should be interpreted accordingly. For example, because the mystery of the Blessed Trinity had not yet been revealed in the Old Testament, the Jews understood the title "Son of God" only in a broad sense. After the revelation of the New Testament, which shows Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God, we understand it in the sense that Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity and, therefore, true God.

## **4a) Messianic Prophecies**

In the Old Testament, the Messianic prophecies tell of the different divine characteristics of the future Redeemer. He is the Son of God: “[The Lord] said to me: ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’” (Ps 2:7), generated from all eternity: “From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from old, from ancient days” (Mi 5:2); and his power is eternal and universal, like that of God: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man ... and to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away” (Dn 7:13–14).

Christ called himself “Son of Man,” an expression found, among other places, in the above quoted text of the prophet Daniel.

Isaiah called the future Redeemer “Immanuel” (“God with us”) and clearly pointed out the divinity of the Messiah with this expression (cf. Is 7:14; 8:8). He repeated the same idea in other places: “For God is with us” (Is 8:10); “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’” (Is 9:6).

## 4b) Jesus is the Divine Wisdom

Along with the messianic prophecies, other Old Testament texts deal with the *divine wisdom*; they are interpreted as referring to the Person of the Son because the Son of God—the Word—is the wisdom of God. In them, the Word appears as co-eternal with the Father: “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth ... when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him ... rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men” (Prv 8:22–31). According to this text, the divine wisdom, like God, is eternal and takes part in creation.

One should remember that St. John, in the prologue of his Gospel, applied these words to the Incarnation of Christ: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him ... In him was life, and the life was the light of men... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (Jn 1:1–4, 14).

St. Paul applied the above text to Jesus Christ when he taught that Jesus Christ is “the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ... all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:15–17).

#### **4c) The Divine Wisdom is God**

Certain parts of the Old Testament, like the Book of Wisdom, identify the divine wisdom—the Word of God—with God himself. It affirms that it “is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness” (Wis 7:25–26). The expressions “pure emanation,” “nothing defiled gains entrance into her,” and “spotless mirror” indicate that the Word is in no way inferior to God. From these texts came the expression “light from light,” which is used in the Creeds by the Magisterium of the Church.

#### **4d) Jesus Christ Applied the Messianic Prophecies to Himself**

Jesus Christ allowed himself to be called “Lamb of God” by John the Baptist (cf. Jn 1:36). To the question of the disciples of St. John, “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Jesus answered with a prophecy of Isaiah: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Mt 11:3–5). In accordance with Psalm 2, he calls himself *Son of David*. Jesus claims the power to judge at the end of time as Daniel had foretold as his own (cf. Lk 20:41–44; Mt 24:29–31; 25:31–46).<sup>6</sup>

The ancient prophecies are, thus, fulfilled in Jesus Christ: He is the Messiah and Son of God, heir to the eternal throne of David through the foundation of a kingdom not of this world in which everyone will be admitted with equal rights; this kingdom is the Holy Church.



## **5. The Divinity of Christ in the New Testament**

The New Testament reveals the divinity of Jesus. We will systematically study this topic as revealed by the synoptic Gospels, the writings of St. John, the epistles of St. Paul, and the other books of the New Testament.<sup>7</sup>

## **5a) Testimonies of God the Father**

In various moments of the life of Jesus, God the Father called him “Son.” In his narration of the moment of Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan, St. Mark says, “And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased’” (Mk 1:10–11). During the transfiguration at Mount Tabor, the voice of the Father was also heard saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mt 17:5). In these words, the Church has found a testimony to Jesus’ divine filiation.

## 5b) Jesus' Own Testimony about Himself

### (1) *Jesus showed himself superior to all creatures.*

Jesus revealed his divinity by showing himself superior to the angels, men, and all other creatures. After being tempted in the desert, “angels came and ministered to him” (Mt 4:11). Jesus’ responses to Satan in the temptation also revealed that he could ask his Father to send him legions of angels (cf. Mt 26:53).

Jesus Christ is superior to both the prophets and kings of Israel. He explicitly stated this: “And behold, something greater than Jonah is here... and behold, something greater than Solomon is here” (Mt 12:41–42). David had regarded him as his Lord, a lordship underlined further by the fact that Moses and Isaiah accompanied him on Tabor (cf. Mt 17:3; 22:43–44).

### (2) *Jesus claimed divine attributions.*

Jesus affirmed his equality to God by applying what was exclusive of God in the Old Testament to himself. As God the Father did in the Old Testament, Jesus sent “prophets and wise men and scribes” (Mt 23:34) to proclaim the good news. At the same time, he promised them his help: “I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict” (Lk 21:15).

Jesus, as God, is the Lord of the Law prescribed by the Old Testament. Upon his own authority, he brings the old precepts to their full and rightful perfection, a dominion that he particularly manifested when he declared himself the “lord of the sabbath” (Mt 12:8).

On the occasion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ confirmed that he did not come “to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Mt 5:17). He repeatedly stated, “You have heard that it was said to the me of old ... but I say to you ...” (Mt 5:21ff). Consequently, “when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Mt 7:28–29).

### (3) *Jesus imposed divine commands.*

Jesus imposed divine precepts on his disciples that only God can demand from people. Jesus asked his disciples to have faith in him and added, “blessed is he who takes no offense at me” (Mt 11:6). He demanded

from his disciples a love that is exclusive, a love that is rightful to God, who should be loved “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Dt 6:5). He declared that “if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:26), thus, pointing out that one should hold love for him above any other human love.

Jesus allowed himself to be adored in a religious manner, permitting people to prostrate themselves at his feet. Among those who prostrated themselves before him were the woman from Canaan (cf. Mt 15:25), the leper whom he touched to heal (cf. Mt 8:2), the ruler who asked for the cure of his daughter, who was later raised from the dead by Jesus (cf. Mt 9:18), his disciples after he had walked over the water and calmed the winds (cf. Mt 14:33), and the holy women and his disciples after his Resurrection (cf. Mt 28:9, 17). In Jewish as well as Christian tradition, prostration is an act of adoration rendered to God alone.

(4) *Jesus was aware of his divine power.*

Jesus said of himself, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt 28:18), and he exercises this power by performing many miracles. He also gave his disciples the power to perform miracles in his name: “And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits” (Mt 10:1). He commanded them to “[h]eal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons” (Mt 10:8). Further, the disciples, upon returning, bore witness to his divinity: “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name” (Lk 10:17).

Jesus Christ forgave sins, something that is proper to God alone. To the paralytic who was carried to him by four friends, Jesus declared, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” He was met by the scandal of the scribes, who “said to themselves, ‘This man is blaspheming.’ But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say: “Rise and walk”? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,’—he then said to the paralytic—‘Rise, take up your bed and go home.’ And he rose and went home” (Mt 9:2–7).

Furthermore, Jesus claimed the task of judging the world, a right that the Old Testament reserves for God alone: “For the Son of man is to come

with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done” (Mt 16:27).

(5) *Jesus was aware of being the Son of God.*

Jesus clearly distinguished between his divine Sonship and the divine filiation proper to his disciples. When he talked of his relation to his heavenly Father, he always referred to him as “my Father.” However, when he talked to his disciples, he said “your Father.” Note that he never used the expression “our Father,” which could imply that God is Father to Jesus and all other people in the same way. The only time he used this expression was in the Lord’s Prayer, when he taught his disciples how *they* should pray.

Jesus’ awareness of his divine filiation was made plain when he went up to the temple at the age of twelve. To Mary’s question “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously,” Jesus answered, “How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:48–49). When Mary alluded to her rights as a mother, Jesus pointed out that his being the Son of his heavenly Father imposed higher duties on him and superseded his natural filiation to her.

In expounding his relationship with his Father God, Jesus showed an awareness of his divine Sonship: “All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Mt 11:27). This passage reveals that Jesus received all the power to carry out his mission from the Father. Moreover, by affirming that no one knows the Father but the Son and the Son but the Father, he revealed his divinity, because only God the Father is capable of knowing his divine nature. For the same reason, only the Son can know the Father. The fact that the Father and Son know each other necessarily presupposes that both possess the same divine nature.

During his life, Jesus allowed himself to be called “Son of God.” When he asked his disciples “‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven’” (Mt 16:15–17).

In the climax of his trial before the Sanhedrin, the high priest compelled him, “‘I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the

Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven’” (Mt 26:63–64). Jesus Christ did not evade the question; rather, he affirmed his divinity by saying, “you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power.” The Jews understood it in that sense and condemned him to death for blasphemy, which it would not have been if Jesus had called himself only the Messiah and not the Son of God.

## 5c) Jesus' Divinity in the Gospel of St. John

The divinity of Jesus is splendidly disclosed in the fourth Gospel. It is only natural, since St. John attested that he wrote his Gospel “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (Jn 20:31). Under the inspiration of God, John emphasized the divinity of Jesus Christ in his Gospel.

### (1) *The Word of God*

In the prologue of his Gospel, St. John emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the consubstantial Son of the Father. First, he describes the preexistent Word (*Logos* in Greek) who has been from all eternity and is a Person who coexists with God, for he is God himself. All things were made through him, he is the fount of eternal life, and he enlightens all mankind through his revelation. The Word is the Son of God, called the “only-begotten of the Father” and the “only-begotten Son.” The Word, who existed from all eternity, came to the world and “was made flesh” in order to bring grace and truth to humanity. The Word made flesh is Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 1:1–18).

St. John repeats several times in his Gospel that Jesus is “the only Son of God” (Jn 3:16; cf. Jn 3:18).

### (2) *Jesus' divine filiation*

In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus calls God “his Father” or “the Father” and himself “the Son” more frequently than in the synoptics (the other three Gospels). He explicitly distinguished his divine filiation from the filiation of his disciples. Thus, he said to Mary Magdalene after his Resurrection: “Go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to *my* Father and *your* Father, to *my* God and *your* God” (Jn 20:17, author's emphasis).

### (3) *The pre-existence of Jesus as God*

Jesus Christ testified that the Father had sent him and that he had come down “from heaven” or “from above” (Jn 3:13; 6:38). So saying, he expressed his eternal existence in God.

### (4) *Jesus as equal in nature to the Father*

After the cure of the sick man who had been waiting for 38 years at the pool of Bethzatha, the Jews told him: “It is the sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your pallet.” The Gospel narrative continues: “And this is

why the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did this on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working still, and I am working.’ This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God” (Jn 5:10, 16–18).

Jesus claimed that his work was equal to the work of his Father. More explicitly, he declared that “the Son cannot do anything of himself, but what he sees the Father doing, for whatever the Father does, the Son also does in like manner” (Jn 5:19). This undoubtedly means that the work of the Son is equal to that of the Father. Jesus, therefore, being the Son of God, rightly ascribed to himself the same powers as the Father.

Jesus demanded faith in his words: “He who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life.” He called himself “Son of God” in this passage and affirmed his consubstantiality with the Father: “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (Jn 5:24, 26).

On the occasion of a dispute he had with the Jews while he was walking about Solomon’s portico in the temple, Jesus revealed his consubstantiality with the Father: “So the Jews gathered round him and said to him: ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness to me’” (Jn 10:24–25). After making them realize that they do not believe because they are not his sheep, he concluded: “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30). Then, the Jews tried to stone him, and Jesus asked them: “‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone me?’ The Jews answered him, ‘We stone you for no good work but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God’” (Jn 10:32–33).

It was plain to the Jews that Jesus had declared himself the Son of God. Because of this, they said that he blasphemed, and they wanted to stone him. Jesus answered them saying: “Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said ‘I am the Son of God’?” (Jn 10:36). He asked them to believe in the testimony of the Father, shown in the miracles that he did, “Believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn 10:38).



In the long discourse of the Last Supper, Jesus explained the intimate and mutual relation that exists between him and the Father in careful detail. When Philip begged him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied,” Jesus replied, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves” (Jn 14:8–11).

Finally, in his priestly prayer during the Last Supper, Jesus prayed for the unity of the apostles and of all the faithful, and offered them his substantial unity with the Father as a model: “Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one” (Jn 17:11). Some moments later, he added, “I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one” (Jn 17:20–22).

(5) *Jesus’ claims of divine attributes and operations*

In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus affirms his *eternal nature*: “Before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8:58); his *perfect knowledge of the Father*: “I know him. If I said, I do not know him, I should be a liar like you; but I do know him and I keep his word” (Jn 8:55); his *equal power and activity with the Father*: “My Father is working still, and I am working” (Jn 5:17); and his *power to forgive sins*: “Go, and do not sin again” (Jn 8:11). Additionally, he claimed to be judge, worthy of adoration, the light of the world, and “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6).

Jesus imposed divine precepts: “Believe in God, believe also in me” (Jn 14:1). He promised that he and the Father will dwell in the souls of those who believe in him: “And we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23).

He asked for prayers in his and his Father’s name and assured their efficacy: “If you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name” (Jn 16:23).

He accepted the solemn profession of his divinity made by St. Thomas the Apostle: “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28).

(6) *Christ’s divinity proved by his works*

The miracles were signs that confirmed the divinity of Jesus. The Lord repeatedly resorted to the testimony of his works as motives of his credibility: “The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness to me” (Jn 10:25).

## 5d) The Divinity of Jesus in the Epistles of St. Paul

### (1) *Jesus is Lord*

St. Paul testified to the divinity of Jesus by calling him Lord (*Dominus* in Latin, *Kyrios* in Greek).<sup>8</sup> The Jews never uttered God's name when reading the Scriptures. In the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, and at the time of St. Paul, the title of *Kyrios* was generally used to designate God. St. Paul, therefore, reveals that Jesus Christ is God by calling him *Kyrios*. "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord" (1 Cor 1:31). "Every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom 10:13).

According to St. Paul, the name of Jesus is above all names. It is the name of God and is, therefore, worthy of adoration: "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil 2:10).

### (2) *Jesus is God*

St. Paul also testified to the divinity of Jesus Christ by calling him God. St. Paul presented a magnificent summary of Christology in the epistle to the Philippians: "Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:5–11).

### (3) *Jesus is the Son of God*

St. Paul attributed divine filiation to Jesus<sup>9</sup> and called him *Son of God*: "[The Father] has ... transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col 1:13). Jesus Christ, as the Son of God the Father, "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature" (Heb 1:3).

(4) *Natural divine filiation*

The writings of St. Paul unmistakably profess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God *by nature* while redeemed humans are children of God *by an adoption* through grace: “When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son ... to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4–5).

## **5e) Other Testimonies about the Divinity of Jesus**

The other apostles and disciples gave witness to their faith in Jesus as the Son of God. One may recall what St. Peter declared in Caesarea Philippi: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16). Much later, in his preaching, he did not cease to ascribe the divine prerogatives to Jesus. Thus, in his first discourse after Pentecost, he told his audience, “But you denied the Holy and Righteous One ... and killed the Author of life” (Acts 3:14–15). St. Peter called Jesus God and Savior in his letters (cf. 2 Pt 1:1).

St. James the apostle proclaimed himself “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Jas 1:1), while St. Stephen exclaimed just before being martyred, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56).

## **6. The Divinity of Jesus Christ Affirmed in Tradition**

The Fathers of the Church unanimously affirmed the divinity of Jesus Christ. St. Clement of Rome, the third pope in the line of succession from St. Peter, wrote in a letter to the Corinthians around A.D. 96, “Christ is the splendor of the majesty of God, the Son of God exalted above all the angels.” St. Ignatius of Antioch, martyred about A.D. 107, bore abundant witness about the divinity of Jesus, whom he called “God our Lord,” “God humanly manifested,” and “The Only Son of the Most High Father ... our God.”<sup>10</sup>

## 7. Major Heresies Denying the Divinity of Christ

The heresies that denied the divinity of Jesus Christ tended to consider him either a simple man adorned with great virtues (the *Ebionites*, of Jewish origin), a man in whom the *Logos* dwells, which made him worthy to be the adoptive son of God (*Nestorians*), or the most perfect creature made by God *ex nihilo* (*Arianism*).<sup>11</sup>

Nowadays, *rationalists* and *modernists* deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and consider his divinity a personified projection of the desires and aspirations of individuals or of the whole of humanity.

These heresies against the divinity of Jesus Christ are opposed to revealed truth. Their claims cannot stand when confronted with the testimony of Sacred Scripture, which so clearly shows that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Somehow, they all spring from an anti-supernatural bias that refuses to accept any mystery that totally exceeds our rational capacity.

1. Cf. CCC, 456–469.
2. DS 2; cf. CCC, 422–445.
3. DS 125.
4. DS 150.
5. DS 3427, 3429, 3431.
6. Cf. CCC, 439–440.
7. Cf. *Ibid.*, 441–445.
8. Cf. *Ibid.*, 446–451.
9. Cf. *Ibid.*, 441–445.
10. *Ep. ad Cor.* 36:2–4; *Ep. ad Eph.* 18:2; 19:3; *Ep. ad Rom.*, Intr.
11. Cf. CCC, 464–469.

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## The Hypostatic Union



## **8. Jesus Christ: True God and True Man**

Up to this point, we have been dealing with the two natures of Jesus Christ: the human and the divine. Let us see now how these two natures are united in the Person of the Word. The union of the human nature and the divine nature in the Person of the Word is called *hypostatic union*, which is the same as “union in the Person” because *hypostasis* means “person” in Greek. We will see how this union comes about in the Person of the Word, and how his human nature (body and soul) is substantially assumed in the Person of the Word.<sup>1</sup>

## 8a) The Doctrine of the Church

*Christ's human and divine natures are hypostatically united in the unity of the divine Person (de fide).*

Church dogma states that in Jesus Christ, there is only one divine Person (that of the Son of God) and two natures (divine and human) subsisting in the one divine Person of the Son. The human nature is united to the divine nature in the Person of the Word.

In A.D. 431, the Council of Ephesus defined that the two natures of Christ (divine and human) are united in one divine Person: "Christ ... is both God and man"<sup>2</sup>; "The Holy Virgin is, therefore, Mother of God, for she gave birth in the flesh to the Word of God made flesh."<sup>3</sup>

In A.D. 451, the Council of Chalcedon defined, "We all with one accord teach the profession of faith in the one identical Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We declare that he is perfect both in his divinity and in his humanity, truly God and truly man.... The one selfsame Christ, only-begotten Son and Lord, must be acknowledged in two natures without any commingling or change or division or separation; that the distinction between the natures is in no way removed by their union but rather that the specific character of each nature is preserved and they are united in one person and one hypostasis ... not split or divided into two persons, but that there is one selfsame only-begotten Son, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup> The hypostatic union defined by the Council of Chalcedon is real and subsistent, not accidental. It is physical, not moral.

Paul VI reaffirms this in the *Creed of the People of God*: "We believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the eternal Word, born of the Father before all time, and consubstantial to the Father; through whom all things were made. And he took flesh of Mary the Virgin by the work of the Holy Spirit, and was made man. [He is] equal, therefore, to the Father in his divinity, less than the Father in his humanity; completely one, not by confusion of the substance (which cannot be done), but by the unity of the person."

Sacred Scripture reveals the hypostatic union, that is, the union of Jesus Christ's two natures (human and divine) in one and only one divine Person. The operations proper to human nature and the operations belonging to the divine nature are attributed to the same Person, Jesus

Christ. What is human (cf. Jn 4:6) is found next to that which is divine: “Before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8:58). When St. John says, “the Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14), he indicates that God, without ceasing to be God, was made man.

The Fathers of the Church have always attributed divine as well as human actions to the one Person of Christ and have rejected any doctrine that supposes the existence of two persons in Jesus Christ. If there were two persons in Christ, the Incarnation would not have taken place, but only an indwelling of God in a man.

Besides, if it were only a human person who had suffered and died on the cross, the Passion of Jesus would not have infinite value, and, if Christ were a mere man, his Real Presence in the Eucharist would not be a foretaste of eternal life.

The cause of many misunderstandings and disputes about the one Person of Christ was actually a matter of terminology, since some of the Greek words that the Fathers of the Church employed were interpreted in several ways.

Some early Fathers referred to “person” as *physis*, while others referred to it as *hypostasis*. “Nature,” on the other hand, was always called *physis*. In saying that there are two *physeis* in Jesus Christ, some mistakenly thought that there were two persons in Jesus instead of two natures. Use of these terms became better defined in the course of time; *hypostasis* came to refer always to person, and *physis* to nature.

## **8b) Errors Regarding the Hypostatic Union**

The Church had to fight some heresies regarding the one divine Person of Jesus Christ. In A.D. 428, Nestorius wrongly claimed that there were two persons in Jesus Christ: the divine (the Son of God) and the human (the son of Mary). If this were true, the Virgin would not have been Mother of God, but only mother of Christ as man. These two persons would have been only morally united. Consequently, the Redemption (Passion and death of Jesus) would be proper only to the human person of Christ. These teachings were condemned by the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431.

At the other extreme, Eutiches and his followers (who were named the monophysites) falsely taught that there was only one person and only one nature in Jesus Christ (*monophysis* means only one person and only one nature). They affirmed that the human nature of Christ was either transformed or absorbed by the divine nature. In the same vein, others believed in a certain fusion or confusion of the two natures that gave rise to a third nature. The monophysite error of Eutiches was condemned in the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.<sup>5</sup>

## **9. The Hypostatic Union on the Part of the Assuming Person**

### **9a) Only the Word Became Man**

*Only the Second Person of the Most Blessed Trinity was made man (de fide).*

This truth is affirmed by all the symbols and definitions of the faith of the Church.

Reason enlightened by faith can explain why it was appropriate for the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word of God, to be the only one incarnated. We know that God created the world through his Word, which is the model (exemplary cause) of the entire universe. The sin of Adam and Eve introduced disorder into the world that God had created. God, in turn, promised a Redeemer. Now, an artist, when a work of his is destroyed, will restore it according to the model he used to make it. Therefore, it was quite fitting for the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity and model of creation, to be the Redeemer who would restore the human race to the original harmony that was destroyed by the sin of Adam.

## 9b) The Whole Trinity Caused the Incarnation

*The hypostatic union was a common work of the three divine Persons (de fide).*

In the Incarnation, one has to distinguish between the *act of the Incarnation* (or *active Incarnation*, which is an action originating in the divine nature and is therefore common to the three Persons of the Trinity) and the *terminus of the Incarnation* (or *passive Incarnation*, which is exclusive to the Second Person of the Trinity). In short, all three Persons took part in the Incarnation, but only the Second Person was incarnated.

The faith of the Church, as defined in the Fourth Lateran Council, states, “The Only-Begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, [was] made incarnate by a common action of the Holy Trinity.”<sup>6</sup>

Divine revelation testifies to the fact that the act of Incarnation is proper to the three divine Persons, attributing it sometimes to the Father, at other times to the Son himself, and sometimes to the Holy Spirit (cf. Phil 2:7; Lk 1:35).

Sacred Tradition attests to the same teaching. St. Augustine wrote, “The fact that Mary conceives and gives birth is the work of the Trinity, by whose creative ability are all things made.”<sup>7</sup>

The reason behind this truth is that all operations *ad extra* (i.e., outward) of God are necessarily common to the three divine Persons.

## **10. The Hypostatic Union on the Part of the Assumed Human Nature**

*The Son of God assumed all and each of the parts that belong to the essence and integrity of human nature (sent. comm.).*

The Son of God not only entirely assumed human nature, he also directly assumed each of its components. He directly assumed a rational soul. If this were not the case, he would not have been true man, as we have established. With his soul, he also assumed a body. He assumed blood, a part of the body. Thus, its shedding brings about our Redemption. Precisely because the Son of God assumed each of the parts of human nature, the Council of Trent taught that the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Jesus Christ is contained under each of the sacramental species of the Eucharist.<sup>8</sup>

## **11. Beginning and Duration of the Hypostatic Union**

### **11a) The Beginning of the Hypostatic Union**

*The hypostatic union of the human nature of Christ with the Person of the divine Word took place at the instant of Christ's conception (de fide).*

The symbols of the faith teach us that “[Christ] was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary.”

Holy Scripture testifies, “God sent forth his Son, born of a woman” (Gal 4:4).

St. Augustine wrote, “From the moment in which he began to be a man, he is also God.”<sup>9</sup>



## 11b) The Continuity of the Hypostatic Union

*The hypostatic union was never interrupted (sent. fidei prox.).*

The definition of the Council of Chalcedon states that “Christ, only-begotten Son and Lord, must be acknowledged in two natures without any commingling or change or division or separation.”<sup>10</sup> The symbols of the faith teach that the Son of God suffered, died, was buried, descended into hell, and resurrected. That is to say, Jesus Christ is always God and man, never losing the hypostatic union.

The text, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46) should not be understood as an interruption of the hypostatic union, but as a lack of external protection against those who persecuted Jesus. The question could also have been a way of showing that, at that time, the Messianic prophecies of Psalm 22 were being fulfilled. The psalm starts with the same words and continues with a detailed description of the Passion: “They have pierced my hands and feet ... They divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots” (Ps 22:16, 18).

## 11c) The Eternity of the Hypostatic Union

*The hypostatic union will never cease (de fide).*

In A.D. 381, the Council of Constantinople taught, “His Reign will have no end.”<sup>11</sup>

Sacred Scripture attests to the same truth: “[Jesus Christ] will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:33). “He holds his priesthood permanently” (Heb 7:24).

St. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote, “If at any time you hear that the kingdom of God has an end, abhor this heresy.”<sup>12</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 470–474.
2. DS 253, 257.
3. DS 252.
4. DS 301.
5. Cf. CCC, 466–468.
6. DS 801.
7. St. Augustine, *De Trin.*, 2.5.9.
8. Cf. DS 1640–1641.
9. St. Augustine, *De Trin.*, 12.17.22.
10. DS 301.
11. DS 86.
12. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat.* 15.25.

## The Two Natures of Christ and their Relationship

DID THE TWO natures of Jesus Christ undergo any change or modification as a consequence of the hypostatic union?

They did not—each nature remained unaltered. It logically follows that they continue to perform the operations proper to them. The divine operations are performed through the divine nature and the human actions through the human nature. Both types of operations, however, belong to the divine Person of Jesus Christ, Son of God.

## 12. The Duality of Natures in Christ

*After their union, the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ are still distinct from each other, preserving intact their mode of being, that is, without being transformed or mixed (de fide).*

The Church defined this doctrine by teaching that in Jesus Christ there are “two natures, without confusion or change, without division, without separation, without their differences being lost in any way due to their union, but rather each nature conserving its properties and both coming together in a single person and in a single hypostasis.”<sup>1</sup>

Sacred Scripture, upon affirming that “the Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14), shows that Jesus Christ really has two different natures: the divine—proper to the Word—and the human—designated by the expression *flesh*, a term that, in Sacred Scripture, frequently indicates human nature, not just the body.

The Fathers of the Church upheld the diversity of the two natures of Jesus Christ and branded the doctrine of the monophysites—that Jesus’ human nature was absorbed in the divine—as heretical. If monophysism were so, there would only be one divine nature and one divine Person in Jesus Christ, or else there would be one single but mixed divine-human nature.

The Fathers of the Church rejected the monophysite heresy because it contradicted the immutability of the divine nature. Further, if it were true, then the Redemption brought about by Christ would not have had any value: Without having our human nature, Christ could not have merited the forgiveness of our sins. Tertullian summarized the doctrine of the Church, writing, “the distinction of each nature was conserved ... both natures, each one in its state, acted in distinct ways.”<sup>2</sup>

### 13.      **The Duality of Will and Operations in Christ: The Two Wills of Christ**

*Each of the natures of Christ possesses its own will and operations (de fide).*

Some heretics affirmed that, as a consequence of the union of the two natures—understood in the monophysite way—Jesus Christ had only one will, that is, he made decisions only insofar as he was God. It seemed to them that if Jesus were to make decisions with a merely human will, these could, at times, be contrary to his divine will. This heresy is called *monotheletism*: “only one will” (the divine will) in Christ.

The Church condemned monotheletism when she defined that Christ “has two volitions or wills, and two natural operations, without division or change, without partition or commingling. And the two natural wills are not opposed (by no means! ) as the godless heretics have said.”<sup>3</sup>

Revelation affirms the double will of Christ: “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mt 26:39).

Commenting on this text, St. Athanasius stated, “He shows here two wills, one human—which is of the flesh—and the other divine—which is of God.”<sup>4</sup>

Reason enlightened by faith shows that the will is an operation of the nature. Since Jesus Christ has a human and a divine nature, he has two wills: one human, the other divine.

## 14. Theandric or Divine-Human Operations of Christ

Two distinct natures exist in Christ. Therefore, there are two sets of operations in him: the divine (e.g., to create, to conserve the being of creatures) and the human (e.g., to speak, to move). However, any human operation of Christ is also divine, since it is carried out by the Person of the Word by means of his human nature. Considering it from this point of view, all the human actions of Christ can be regarded as *theandric* (divine-human).

Nevertheless, in theology, the term *theandric operations* is normally reserved for those operations that, though human, are instruments of the divine and produce effects that completely surpass human nature and that manifest the divinity of Christ. Such an operation took place when, with the clay made from his saliva, Jesus Christ cured the man who was blind from birth. There are two distinct aspects of this operation: the human action, which is to put clay in the man's eyes, and the effect produced by the divinity, which is the curing of the blindness.

## 15. The Freedom of Christ

*The human will of Jesus Christ is free (sent. fidei prox.).*

The freedom of Jesus Christ is a property of his perfect human nature. If Jesus were not free, he would not have merited anything—he would not have been the meritorious cause of our Redemption. Sacred Scripture shows this freedom of Jesus in several passages, e.g., “Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judea” (Jn 7:1).

Jesus was free to do or not to do something and to choose between different actions that were good. The freedom to choose evil, however, being an imperfection, is incompatible with the hypostatic union. Christ, therefore, did not have that freedom.

## 16. The Harmony of Christ's Two Wills

*The two wills of Jesus did not oppose each other; the free human will was completely subject to the divine will (de fide).*

In A.D. 680–681, the Third Council of Constantinople defined that in Jesus Christ, “the human will is compliant, and not opposing or contrary; as a matter of fact, it is even obedient to his divine and omnipotent will.”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus said on various occasions, “I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (Jn 5:30).

In the agony in the garden (cf. Lk 22:39–44), the Lord, moved by a natural human resistance, wished to put aside suffering, but he fully accepted the will of the Father. Moved by his free human will, Christ felt “the anguish of death” before his Passion; at the same time, his human will freely submitted to his divine will and accepted death on the cross.

Reason enlightened by faith shows us that the human will of Jesus Christ also belongs to the divine Person—the only Person existing in Jesus—and was therefore infallibly subject to its influence and, thus, always obeyed the Person of the Word.

1. DS 302.
2. Tertullian, *Adv. Praex*, 27.
3. DS 556; cf. CCC, 475.
4. St. Athanasius, *De Inc. Dei Verbi*, 21.
5. DS 556.



## Consequences of the Hypostatic Union

WE HAVE SEEN how Jesus Christ, through the hypostatic union, is one Person with two natures: divine and human. But, in what way does the divine Person of the Word influence or relate to the human nature of Jesus? Or, in what way do his human actions belong to the divine Person?

## **17. The Unity of Being in Jesus Christ**

All human natures that exist are, at the same time, human persons. Theology tries to explain why the human nature of Jesus Christ was not an independent human person. The reason that is commonly given in theology is that the human nature of Jesus Christ exists by virtue of the act of being of the divine Person. Jesus' human nature does not have an act of being of its own; it exists through the act of being of the divine Person. Only the divine Person exists in Jesus, as being is an essential property of his divine nature. There is no human person in Jesus because his human nature, as it lacks its own act of being, is not subsistent; it exists in the divine Person.

## 18. The *Communicatio Idiomatum*

*The divine as well as the human properties of Jesus Christ should be attributed to the Person of the incarnate Word (de fide).*

Revelation teaches that the divine Person of Jesus alone possesses all the divine as well as all the human properties that belong to his two natures. He was conceived and born; he suffered and died (human realities). He performed miracles, forgave sins, and resurrected from the dead (divine operations). The divine Person must solely possess them, since all properties and actions are always of the person and not of the nature. For example, it is the person who is born and dies, not a nature. This exclusive attribution of all the human and the divine properties to the Person of Jesus Christ is called *communicatio idiomatum*.

Without denying the distinction between the two natures and their respective properties, the *communicatio idiomatum* is the *mutual* attribution of the properties of each nature to the one Person. The acts of nature are not done in a direct manner, but only through the sole Person—the incarnate Word, true God and true man. Thus, it can be said that “God became man,” but not that “the divinity is the humanity.”

## 19. The Filiation of Jesus Christ

*Jesus Christ, even as man, is the natural Son of God (de fide).*

The Church defined the natural filiation of Christ, condemning the adoptionists, who proposed the adoptive filiation of Jesus Christ as a man.<sup>1</sup>

St. Augustine, along with many other Fathers of the Church, maintained, “Read the Scriptures. In no place does it say that Jesus Christ is the Son of God by adoption.”<sup>2</sup>

Reason professes that filiation is proper of persons and not of natures. Since in Jesus Christ there is only one Person (the divine one), he ought to be, for this reason, the natural Son of God. Besides, it would be contradictory to affirm that he is by his human nature the adoptive Son, while, at the same time, asserting that he is the natural Son due to his divine nature. If this were true, Jesus Christ, who is the only Son of God, would be his Son in two conflicting ways.

## 20. The Adoration of Jesus Christ

*One has to adore Jesus Christ, God and man, with only one cult: the absolute cult of latria, which corresponds exclusively to God (de fide).*

The Church teaches that Jesus Christ, God and man, deserves divine adoration.<sup>3</sup>

The apostles preached the Gospel so “that all men may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father” (Jn 5:23); “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (Phil 2:10). The writer of *The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp* (A.D. 155–157) distinguished between the adoration rendered to Jesus Christ and that rendered to the martyrs: “Him we adore because he is the Son of God; but the martyrs we love as it is fitting to the disciples and friends of the Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

Adoration is rendered to the divine Person of Jesus Christ, and his human nature, which rightly belongs to him, should not be excluded from this adoration. The cult to his Most Precious Blood, the Sacred Heart, the Five Wounds, etc., is derived from this. The adoration of these parts by the faithful means nothing other than the adoration of the whole divine Person of Christ.

Additionally, the cult of *relative latria* is owed to the true cross due to its union with the Person of Christ.

1. DS 610–611.
2. St. Augustine, *C. Manich.*, 5.
3. Cf. DS 431; CCC, 333, 448, 528, 971.
4. *The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, 17.3.

## The Supernatural Prerogatives of Jesus Christ as Man

WHAT GIFTS OR graces did the humanity of Jesus Christ receive as a result of its unity with the Person of the Word? God sanctifies virtuous people by means of grace and gives them the accompanying virtues and gifts, which form their interior life. What main gifts or graces did God give to Jesus Christ as man? The interior life of Jesus, that is, his fullness of grace, his immunity from all sin, and his knowledge and love of God depend on his union with the divinity.

To answer this question, we will study the created supernatural gifts that, by reason of the hypostatic union, enrich the interior life of Jesus as true man.

## **21. Jesus Christ's Immunity to Sin**

### **21a) Jesus Christ was Free from Sin**

*Jesus Christ did not inherit original sin and did not commit any personal sin (de fide).*

The Council of Ephesus taught that “as he was sinless, he had no need of any offering.”<sup>1</sup>

Sacred Scripture attests to the fact that Jesus was conceived without original sin: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Lk 1:35). It also affirms that he never committed any sin whatsoever in passages such as “He made him to be sin who knew no sin” (2 Cor 5:21), “one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning” (Heb 4:15), and “Which of you convict me of sin?” (Jn 8:46).

Sacred Tradition extensively confirms this doctrine. Thus, Origen taught: “He did not know sin, nor was there malice in his lips, because he did not know sin.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus Christ could not have been in the state of original sin because he was conceived by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. Neither could he commit sin, because to sin is to separate oneself from God. Separation from God was impossible for Jesus because of the permanence of the hypostatic union.

## **21b) Jesus Christ Had No Disordered Concupiscence**

*Jesus Christ was free of disordered concupiscence (de fide).*

The disorder of concupiscence is an effect of original sin. Jesus, conceived without original sin, could not experience this disorder.



## **21c) Jesus Christ Could Not Sin**

*Jesus Christ is incapable of sinning, which goes to show that not only did he not commit any sin, but he also could not possibly sin (sent. fidei prox.).*

The theological reasons that support this statement are easy to understand, since any action of Jesus Christ is proper to the divine Person. If God could not sin, neither could Jesus Christ. Besides, we have already seen that the human will of Jesus Christ was absolutely subordinated to the divine will, and the latter cannot sin. A final reason that Jesus Christ could not sin is that he already enjoyed the beatific vision.

## 22. Christ's Grace

The nature of Jesus Christ is holy in itself because, by the hypostatic union, the divinity took full possession of the humanity, which then became perfectly united to God (without undergoing any change in human nature). Sanctity consists in precisely such unity. This type of sanctity is called *substantial sanctity*.

Grace, moreover, sanctified the soul of Jesus. Scripture calls him “full of grace” (Jn 1:14). Further, since Jesus was enjoying the beatific vision, the created grace that he received was infinite and, therefore, could not increase.

In addition to grace, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:38). Pius XII, in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, asserted that “the Holy Spirit dwells in him in such fullness of grace that it is impossible to imagine any increase in it.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus Christ also received the virtues that accompany grace, excluding, of course, all aspects that might contradict his perfection. Due to the fact that he enjoyed the beatific vision, he could not receive faith or hope, inasmuch as they imply believing in God (whom one does not see) and hoping in God (whom one does not yet possess). He received them, however, as far as their secondary objects were concerned. For example, he had hope in the glorification of his body. He also enjoyed the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This type of sanctity in Jesus is called *accidental sanctity*.

The created grace of Jesus Christ is called *capital grace* (from *caput*, “head”) because it is transmitted from him to the members of his Mystical Body, the Church. Pius XII taught: “From him originates all the light with which all the faithful of the body of the Church are enlightened supernaturally, and all the graces by which they are sanctified are derived from him, as Christ was Holy.”<sup>4</sup>

Jesus Christ, head of the Church, gives grace to all her members, whether they are members actually through Baptism or only potentially through a desire to be converted.

## **23. Christ's Knowledge**

### **23a) Jesus Christ's Human Knowledge**

*Aside from divine knowledge, Jesus Christ possessed human knowledge (de fide).*

The Church teaches that Jesus Christ is “perfect man, subsistent with a rational soul,”<sup>5</sup> affirming that Jesus Christ possessed all the operations proper to all rational creatures, among them, human science.

Sacred Scripture expresses it this way: “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Lk 2:52).

If Jesus Christ possessed the capacity to know with his natural faculties (and we know it is proper to human perfection to make use of such faculties), then we have to conclude that the Lord knew things in a natural way.

Jesus Christ had all the knowledge fitting his dignity that was not contrary to the end of Redemption. Thus, we affirm that Jesus Christ had natural human knowledge (acquired knowledge), infused knowledge, and the direct vision of God.

## 23b) Beatific Vision

*Jesus Christ enjoyed the beatific vision from the very first moment of his existence (sent. certa).*

Sacred Scripture shows Jesus saying, “But you [the disciples] have not known him [the Father]; I know him. If I said, I do not know him, I should be a liar like you; but I do know him and I keep his word” (Jn 8:55).

Pius XII taught that Jesus Christ had “even that knowledge that we call Beatific Vision; ... he possessed it with such fullness that it surpassed in extension and clarity the beatific contemplation of the blessed in heaven. He had it from the very moment of his conception in the womb of the Mother of God.”<sup>6</sup> The reasons for this are, first, the hypostatic union and, second, the fullness of grace of Jesus’ human nature that makes him superior to any saint in heaven.

## **23c) Jesus' Infused Knowledge**

*Jesus Christ possessed infused knowledge (sent. comm.).*

The knowledge attained by the angels is infused by God (infused knowledge). Our first parents also acquired their knowledge in this way. Thus, Jesus Christ, the first-born of all creatures, should also have infused knowledge.

## **23d) Christ's Knowledge: Extension and Certainty**

Jesus Christ's knowledge was always free from positive ignorance and from error.

The Church, in agreement with St. Gregory the Great, teaches that "any limitation of the knowledge of the soul of Christ is inadmissible."<sup>7</sup>

Sacred Scripture asserts that he is "full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14) and "filled with wisdom" (Lk 2:40).

The intrinsic reason why it is impossible for Jesus to suffer from ignorance or error is the hypostatic union. By it, Jesus Christ enjoyed the beatific vision and knew God One and Triune with all his perfections. Moreover, he possessed infused knowledge of the natural truths and of the truths God revealed to mankind. He also knew the necessary particulars of every moment through his acquired knowledge.

## 24. The Power of Jesus Christ

We know that the human will of Christ, though always subordinated to the divine will, freely commanded the fulfillment of operations proper to a human being: wanting, sleeping, and dominating the body. We know, too, that the divine will is omnipotent, since it is the will of God.

Now, the divine omnipotence—one of the divine attributes really and intimately identified with the divine essence—is an infinite attribute and, thus, cannot be communicated to any finite creature, even the humanity of Christ.

The human will of Jesus Christ by itself, therefore, is not capable of performing miracles. United to the Person of the Word, however, it is capable of performing them as an instrument of the divinity. We may recall that the many miracles narrated in Sacred Scripture are precisely theandric (or divine-human) operations.

1. DS 261.
2. Origen, *Comm. in Ioann.* 28.18.
3. DS 2288.
4. DS 2288; cf. *CCC*, 1997.
5. DS 76; cf. *CCC*, 472–474.
6. DS 2289.
7. DS 3467.

## Were Passions Part of the Human Nature of Christ?

IT IS PROPER of human nature to have passions such as love, joy, and sorrow. Jesus Christ—being human like us—also had human passions, although, properly speaking, he did not have any defects. These are consequences of original sin, which Jesus did not have. Thus, passions were not disordered in Jesus Christ but were always subject to reason.



## 25. Christ's Sufferings

*Because of his human nature, Jesus Christ could suffer (de fide).*

The Magisterium of the Church unanimously teaches that “the Word of God suffered in his flesh and was crucified in his flesh and experienced death in the flesh.”<sup>1</sup> All the symbols of the faith also teach that Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross.

Sacred Scripture narrates that Jesus Christ felt hungry, was sleepy, and tired; he was maltreated; he suffered and died.

In answer to the erroneous doctrine of docetism, the Fathers of the Church preached that Christ really and truly suffered.

Christ freely accepted some natural defects that were derived from his human nature. They were not punishments, for Jesus had not incurred original sin. Jesus Christ freely accepted suffering in order to atone for our sins, manifest his true human nature, and set an example for us.

These defects in the human nature of Christ are not contrary to his human perfection, since he freely assumed them out of love for us and in accord with the ends of the Incarnation. He did not in any way assume defects opposed to the perfection of his knowledge and his grace (such as ignorance, inclination toward evil, and difficulty in doing the good).

## 26. Christ's Feelings

*The soul of Christ experienced human sentiments (sent. certa).*

Sacred Scripture attests that the Lord had a fully human and complete psychic life, including emotions: “Jesus looking upon him loved him” (Mk 10:21); “He began to be sorrowful and troubled” (Mt 26:37); “And he looked around at them with anger” (Mk 3:5); “For your sake I am glad” (Jn 11:15). Jesus also wept on several occasions, such as over the coming destruction of Jerusalem (cf. Lk 19:41–44), and before the tomb of Lazarus (cf. Jn 11:35).

The Fathers of the Church called the passions of Christ *protopassions*, or the beginning of passions, since the passions of Christ do not indicate disorder in him but are always directed toward the good.

Speculatively speaking, it is logical that Jesus' soul should suffer the pains of his body, since the soul is man's substantial form. But, it is also perfectly fitting that Jesus' passions be always perfectly controlled by reason and directed toward the good.

Moreover, since the sensible affections pertain to the perfection of human nature, Jesus Christ, as perfect man, ought to possess them in their most perfect form. The great value of his sufferings during the Passion was derived from this perfection.

1. DS 263; cf. CCC, 554, 555, 572, 601, 609, 618, 649.

## Part II

# THE WORK OF REDEMPTION

AFTER STUDYING THE Person of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ our Lord, we will go on to the treatise on the work of Redemption, also called *soteriology* or the science of salvation.

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## The Mystery of Redemption

GOD CREATED MAN and elevated him to the supernatural order by means of grace. Due to original sin, man lost this original state of sanctity. His nature was wounded, and he was placed under the dominion of death and the devil. God promised our first parents a Savior who would free them from the domination of sin.<sup>1</sup>

## **27. The Concept of the Redemption and the Redeeming Mediation of Jesus Christ**

Redemption is the forgiveness of humanity's sins, granted by God through Jesus Christ. The sole and perfect mediator between God and mankind is Jesus Christ, who is both God and man.<sup>2</sup>

The redeeming action of Jesus Christ is based in his divine-human condition, which makes him capable of being mediator between God and mankind. "There is only one God and mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tm 2:5–6).

Jesus Christ, as God and man, can exercise a physical mediation, since he participates in divinity as well as humanity. However, moral mediation is also proper to him, since the Word was incarnated precisely to reconcile the human race with God. The Word, as God, is equal to the Father, and therefore cannot be mediator, but he can be mediator insofar as he is man (i.e., has a human nature), for this allows him to suffer and atone for our sins.

His actions and passions, however, are endowed with redemptive value insofar as they belong to the Word, who sustains and directs the assumed human nature. Christ is, thus, mediator according to his human nature, though this is not independent of his divinity. The Redemption is the mediation of Christ in act, and this is concretely manifested in his priesthood.

## **28. Redemption: God's Free Gift, Necessary for Salvation**

A fundamental dogma of the faith of the Church declares the incapacity of the fallen human race to achieve its own salvation. Only God can restore the supernatural order that was lost through sin.

We will now study the voluntary nature of Redemption and its necessity for our salvation.

## 28a) Necessity of Redemption for Man

*Fallen man cannot redeem himself (de fide).*

The Magisterium of the Church teaches that one cannot redeem oneself from sin through one's own power. God's help is necessary for redemption. The Council of Trent condemned the heretics who affirmed the contrary, saying, "If anyone says that without divine grace through Jesus Christ man can be justified before God by his own works, whether they were done by his natural powers or by the light of the teaching of the [Mosaic] Law, let him be anathema."<sup>3</sup>

Sacred Scripture teaches that only God's grace makes one just, that is, enables one to abandon sin and enter into friendship with God. Grace is a gratuitous gift from God: "They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24). Thus, only the saving work of Jesus Christ frees men from their sins, not their own efforts. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8).

The Fathers of the Church, with respect to people's ability to save themselves, taught that God's help is needed to be justified. St. Irenaeus wrote, "It was God himself who saved them because, by themselves, they could not have been saved."<sup>4</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa affirmed, "Human nature could not evade death, if God had not imparted health to it."<sup>5</sup>

Reason enlightened by faith shows us that sin is an infinite offense committed against God. Though it may be finite considered as an act of man, it contains infinite malice insofar as it offends God by one's rejection of him and preference for creatures. Since a mere creature cannot satisfactorily atone for sin, it was necessary for God either to renounce just satisfaction or to atone himself on behalf of humanity. Further, since there was no proportion between natural human capabilities and the supernatural life, it was impossible for mankind to be saved through its own efforts, knowing that only divine mercy can restore supernatural life to fallen man.

## 28b) Freedom on God's Part

*There was neither an internal nor an external obligation on God's part to redeem man (sent. certa).*

If the original state of justice of Adam and Eve was a gratuitous gift from God, that is, due only to his love and mercy, then the restoration of this original justice is more so a free act of God.

Holy Scripture is absolutely explicit about the freedom and love that God exercised in redeeming us: "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph 2:4–5).

Commenting on this text, John Paul II said, "This truth, more than just something to be taught, is a reality that Christ has made present to us. *To make the Father present in his love and mercy* is, in the conscience of Christ himself, the proof of his mission as Messiah.... Christ, in revealing the merciful love of God, *demanding from men* at the same time to allow themselves to be guided by love and mercy in their lives. In a fuller way, Christ makes present and reveals the Father, the God rich in mercy, upon being converted in the incarnation of love, which is manifested with a peculiar strength to those who suffer, to the unhappy, and to the sinners."<sup>6</sup>

The Fathers of the Church taught that God could have excluded the entire human race from the Kingdom of heaven without committing any injustice whatsoever.<sup>7</sup>

Gods' freedom to redeem humanity is based on his not being in any way indebted to humanity. Mankind did not have any right to receive grace; God gave it gratuitously in the original state of justice. He again showed his freedom, afterwards, in restoring his people to the state of grace, which they lost through original sin. Further, God did not owe himself anything: his glory cannot possibly be increased. God, therefore, redeemed humanity with absolute freedom on his part in order to show his goodness and love.

1. Cf. CCC, 410, 430.

2. Cf. *Ibid.*, 618.

3. DS 1551; cf. CCC, 457.
4. St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.21.2.
5. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Adv. Apoll.* 51.
6. John Paul II, Enc. *Dives in Misericordia*, 3; cf. CCC, 456–460.
7. Cf. St. Augustine, *De Nat. et Grat.* 5.5.



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## God's Plan of Salvation

## 29. The Eternal Decree of God

*God decreed to redeem all men from eternity, and this decree was promulgated in time (de fide).*

God freely decreed the Redemption of the human race from all eternity. He carried it out in history through our Lord Jesus Christ.

God, in his infinite wisdom, knew about original sin before Creation and from all eternity decreed the redemption of mankind. After the fall of Adam and Eve, he promised them a Redeemer.

In the history of salvation, which started with God's promise to Adam and Eve, one can distinguish two different stages. The first corresponds to the time before the coming of Christ during which God prepared the people of Israel. The second is the period during which he carried out the Redemption of the fallen human race through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The existence of God's eternal plan to redeem mankind is revealed, among other places, in these words of St. Paul: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph 1:4).

With the following arguments, human reason can grasp why it is appropriate for God to decide to save people:

- God, who is just, is also merciful, and the Redemption splendidly manifests this divine attribute of mercy.
- Fallen man, as long as he is a wayfarer, can change and be purified, and it is fitting for the perfection of the universe that man, spiritual and material creature that he is, may not totally perish.

## 30. Incarnation and Redemption

*According to the divine decree, the human race has been redeemed by the incarnate Son of God (de fide).*

The symbols of the faith, innumerable testimonies of Sacred Scripture, and Tradition profess this truth. The Nicene Creed of A.D. 325 teaches that Jesus Christ, “for us men and for our salvation ... came down, was made flesh, and became man.”<sup>1</sup> The Council of Trent affirmed, “When the glorious fullness of time had come, the heavenly Father ... sent Jesus Christ his Son to men. Christ had been announced and promised to many holy Fathers before the Law and during the time of the Law. He was sent that the Jews ... might be redeemed, and the Gentiles ... might secure justice, and that all might receive the adoption of sons.”<sup>2</sup>

Holy Scripture teaches that the Son of God was incarnated for the remission of the sins of all mankind. “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10); “For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (Jn 3:17); “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tm 1:15). Still, one might wonder if this decreed Redemption could have been performed by means other than the Incarnation.

God could have redeemed mankind another way. To say the contrary would limit the omnipotence, wisdom, and justice of God; he would be limited to one possibility—the Incarnation of his only-begotten Son. This is clearly not the case. For example, he could save people without receiving any satisfaction whatsoever from sinful mankind.

But, *if God wanted adequate satisfaction, the Incarnation of a divine Person was necessary (sent. certa)*, since the infinite offense against God demanded an infinite satisfaction that could be offered only by God himself.

We might also ask if the Incarnation would have taken place if Adam had not sinned. The most probable opinion, based on Scripture, states that God decreed the Incarnation only for the salvation of mankind. Therefore, according to the divine decree, if Adam had not sinned, the Son of God would not have been incarnated. Thus, St. Irenaeus taught, “If there had not been flesh to be saved, in no way would the Word of God have been made

flesh.”<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine, in like manner, wrote, “If man had not perished, the Son of Man would not have come.”<sup>4</sup>

## **31. Preparation for the Redemption in the Old Testament**

God prepared mankind for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, Redeemer of mankind, by choosing the people of Israel and revealing himself to them through the patriarchs and prophets. In fact, the entire content of the Old Testament is a preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

Among the very first teachings of Scripture is found the promise of a Redeemer, made to our first parents by God after their fall. A descendant of Eve, he asserted, would vanquish the devil: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gn 3:15).

God established a covenant with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Later, he renewed and established it through Moses.

Throughout the history of the Jewish people, God gradually revealed the traits of the promised Messiah: He would be king, priest, suffering servant, son of David; he would be born of a Virgin and will be “God with us.”

Sacred Scripture also carefully points out that “he did not leave himself without witness” (Acts 14:17) to other nations. For this reason, the other peoples of the earth also received a remote preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

## 32. Fittingness of the Time of the Incarnation

The time of the Incarnation was determined by a supremely free divine decree. Thus, there was no human reason by which one may have determined the time it would be fulfilled.

The requirement of divine justice makes it appropriate that the Incarnation did not occur immediately after the fall, but only after a long period of preparation and anticipation. On the other hand, it did not seem proper for the Redemption to be postponed until the end of time, since the ignorance and concupiscence engendered by original sin would have caused such great harm by then that only very few would have been able to know Jesus Christ.

1. DS 125.
2. DS 1522; cf. CCC, 456–457, 607.
3. St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 5.14.1.
4. St. Augustine, *Serm.* 174.2.2.

# The Triple Ministry of Jesus Christ and the Work of Redemption

HOW DID JESUS Christ carry out the Redemption of all people?

Jesus Christ carried out his saving mission through his triple ministry, or function, as teacher, pastor, and priest. As he himself taught, “I am the way [pastoral ministry], and the truth [doctrinal ministry], and the life [priestly ministry]” (Jn 14:6).

Jesus Christ, as teacher, exercised his doctrinal ministry by aiming at people’s understanding and teaching them the truth.

Through his pastoral ministry, he aims at the will, demanding obedience to the commandments of God. This pastoral ministry includes legislative, judicial, and governing powers.

Each moment of Jesus’ life may be considered an act of redemption, but Jesus Christ accomplishes the objective reconciliation of man with God most fully through his priestly ministry. The supreme redeeming act of Christ’s priesthood is his sacrificial death on the cross.

## **33. Jesus Christ's Doctrinal or Prophetic Ministry**

### **33a) Jesus as Teacher**

Jesus is the teacher of humanity.<sup>1</sup> His teaching is necessary for salvation, since it makes the fight against ignorance and error possible. He came “to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8), and ignorance and error are consequences of sin, which was instigated by the devil—“the father of lies” (Jn 8:44). Jesus tells us, “the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:32).



### 33b) Jesus as Prophet

*Jesus is the new prophet promised in the Old Testament, and the absolute master of mankind (sent. certa).*

Moses prophesied the coming of a new teacher of Israel in the Old Testament: “God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him shall you heed” (Dt 18:15). Jesus is this prophet who teaches the truth. He allows himself to be called “Teacher and Lord” (Jn 13:13). Indeed, he is the only teacher: “Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ” (Mt 23:10). His teaching power encompasses all people at all times (cf. Mt 28:19). His contemporaries, amazed at his doctrine and authority, affirmed, “No man ever spoke like this man” (Jn 7:46).

St. Paul summarized Jesus’ magisterial and prophetic vocation with these words: “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb 1:1–2).

The Fathers of the Church regarded Christ as the master of the truth. St. Ignatius of Antioch called him “the infallible mouth by which the Father has spoken the truth.”<sup>2</sup>

The Church in her solemn Magisterium—in the Second Vatican Council, for example—teaches that Jesus Christ, insofar as he is the Word of God, is the sole source of revelation.<sup>3</sup> Reason enlightened by faith makes us realize why Jesus is necessarily the master and prophet who teaches the truth to mankind: he is the divine Word Incarnate, i.e., the wisdom of God made man.

## 34. Jesus Christ's Pastoral or Royal Ministry

Jesus is pastor, king, legislator, and judge.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, leads people to salvation. He exercises his pastoral ministry by issuing laws, judging, and governing mankind. The mission of issuing laws, judging, and ruling as king of the universe belongs exclusively to Jesus Christ.

*Jesus governs as king (de fide).*

The Fathers of the Church applied the title of king to Jesus Christ. St. Justin, to cite one example, taught that the Lord reigns from the wood of the cross.<sup>5</sup>

Pius XI, in the encyclical *Quam Primas*, taught that the royalty of Jesus Christ is based on the hypostatic union and that he exercises direct dominion over the entire universe.<sup>6</sup>

*Jesus is legislator (de fide).*

The Church teaches that Jesus Christ is legislator. This is contrary to Luther's doctrine, which states that Jesus Christ made promises but did not impose precepts.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus Christ exercises his legislative power mainly through his preaching. The Sermon on the Mount serves as a particularly notable display of his authority, since it is precisely a summary of the New Law (cf. Mt 5:6). On other occasions, Jesus also promulgated the new commandment of love (cf. Jn 13:34).

*Jesus is judge (de fide).*

The symbols of the faith teach us that he will come "to judge the living and the dead."<sup>8</sup> Sacred Scripture says, "the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son" (Jn 5:22). The sentence pronounced by Jesus as judge is inexorably fulfilled: "And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Mt 25:46).

## **35. Jesus Christ's Priestly Ministry**

### **35a) The Priestly Ministry of Jesus Christ**

Jesus Christ is priest. He carried out the Redemption of the human race by means of his priestly office, a task consummated by his death on the cross. The death of Christ on the cross, by right and in truth, is the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which reconciles humanity with God.

## 35b) Jesus is High Priest

*Jesus Christ, God and man, is high priest (de fide).*

The Magisterium has defined the priesthood of Christ as a matter of faith. The Council of Ephesus states that “the Word of God himself ... was born to be our High Priest ... when he was made flesh and a man like us.”<sup>9</sup> Also, the Council of Trent dwelt extensively on the priesthood of Christ.<sup>10</sup>

In Sacred Scripture, the priesthood of Christ is thus announced: “You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps 110:4). The New Testament applies these prophetic words to Jesus Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews is a treatise on the excellence of the eternal priesthood of Christ as superior to the priesthood of the Old Law (cf. Heb 3–7).

Among the Fathers of the Church, St. Clement of Rome called Christ “the Pontiff of our offerings”<sup>11</sup> and St. Polycarp named him “Eternal and High Priest.”<sup>12</sup> His priesthood begins with the hypostatic union, since the capacity to mediate between God and man is proper to the human nature assumed by the Word.

Moreover, since the priesthood of Christ shares the eternity of its eternal cause—through the hypostatic union—the effects of the priestly mediation of Jesus are also perpetual and eternal. Thus, the sentiments that led Jesus to his immolation on the cross (adoration, praise, petition, propitiation, and thanksgiving) are eternally present and continually exert their influence on humans.

## **36. Exercise of Christ's Priesthood: His Sacrifice**

In search of a deeper understanding of the faith of the Church, which asserts that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is a true sacrifice, we will first study what constitutes a sacrifice. Afterwards, we will see that the death of Jesus on the cross fulfills all the requirements of a sacrifice. Finally, we will consider how the Redemption of the human race was carried out through Jesus' sacrifice.

### **36a) Notion of Sacrifice**

A sacrifice is the *offering* (oblation) and *destruction* (immolation) of a *sensible thing* carried out by a *legitimate minister* in order to *profess the supreme dominion of God* above all things. These five conditions are necessary for a true sacrifice to take place.

## 36b) The Death of Jesus Christ is a True Sacrifice

*Jesus Christ, by dying on the cross, offered a true and proper sacrifice (de fide).*

The Magisterium of the Church is quite explicit in its teaching about the sacrificial character of Christ's death on the cross. The Council of Trent stated, "Our Lord and God was once and for all to offer himself by his death on the altar of the Cross to God the Father to accomplish for them [men] an everlasting redemption."<sup>13</sup>

Many passages of Sacred Scripture show the sacrificial character of the death of Christ. Hebrews 9 and 10, for example, describe the superiority of Christ's sacrifice with respect to sacrifices of the Old Testament.

Reason enlightened by faith proves that the death of Christ on the cross was a true sacrifice because it contained all the essential elements of a sacrifice:

- *Oblation of a sensible thing*: Christ, the man, offered himself to God.
- *Immolation or destruction*: Jesus died on the cross, shedding his blood.
- *Legitimate minister*: Jesus in his humanity was a qualified minister, since he is the mediator between God and humans.
- *Dominion of God*: Jesus gave himself up to die out of obedience to the will of the Father, to whom he "became obedient unto death" (Phil 2:8).

Jesus died on the cross in order to placate the divine justice and wash away the sins of all mankind. All the prerequisites of a true sacrifice were, therefore, fulfilled.

### **36c) The Death of Christ Redeemed Us**

*Jesus Christ rescued us and reconciled us with God by means of the sacrifice of his death (de fide).*

The Church believes that, although the entire life of Christ has salvific value,<sup>14</sup> his death on the cross sums up and culminates his work of redemption. Through it, the forgiveness of sins was accomplished. The Council of Trent stated that Jesus Christ “reconciled us to God in his blood,”<sup>15</sup> and that the purpose of the sacrifice of his death on the cross is “to accomplish for them [all who were to be sanctified] an everlasting redemption.”<sup>16</sup>

Sacred Scripture declares that the Lord gave up his life as “a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). When he instituted the Holy Eucharist, Jesus Christ himself pointed out the redeeming power of his death: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). St. Paul attributes the reconciliation of sinful humanity to the death of Christ: “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10).



## 37. Jesus Christ's Vicarious Satisfaction

In order to forgive sins, God willed that an adequate satisfaction be offered by humanity.<sup>17</sup> Only a satisfaction of infinite value could make up for the infinite offense committed against God in sin. Only Jesus Christ—a divine Person, true God and true man—could provide this satisfaction.

Jesus Christ, however, is innocent of our sins. How could he satisfy for the sins of which he was not guilty?

Satisfaction is the reparation of an offense. The reparation may be offered by either the offender or his representative. In the latter case, it is called vicarious satisfaction.

Jesus Christ himself did not have anything to atone for, since he had not committed any sin. He, indeed, offered vicarious satisfaction for the sins of humanity.

Two aspects can be distinguished in the satisfaction of people's sins carried out by Jesus Christ: the *objective redemption* (the way in which the death of Christ redeemed sin) and the *subjective redemption* (the manner in which each individual benefits from that redemption). We will study now these two aspects of the vicarious satisfaction by Jesus Christ.

## 37a) Objective Redemption

### (1) *Adequacy and Superabundance*

*The vicarious satisfaction of Christ is adequate or de condigno (sent. comm.).*

The sacrifice of the death of Jesus adequately (*de condigno*) and superabundantly provided satisfaction for the sins of mankind. It is a vicarious satisfaction, as he himself says, “I lay down my life for the sheep” (Jn 10:15).

Satisfaction is adequate, equivalent, or *de condigno* when it perfectly makes up for the seriousness of an offense according to strict justice. It is called inadequate satisfaction or *de congruo* when it does not totally make up for the injustice, but is nevertheless accepted benevolently by the offended party. The vicarious satisfaction of Christ is adequate since the sacrifice of his death has infinite value. Being the death of the Son of God, it totally made up for the guilt of all the sins of mankind. Jesus “gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tm 2:6).

*The vicarious satisfaction merited by Christ is superabundant. Its merits and effects infinitely exceed all the injustices caused by sins (sent. comm.).*

Sacred Scripture explicitly reveals that “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom 5:20), and St. Cyril of Jerusalem wrote: “The injustice of sinners was not as great as the justice of him who died for us.”<sup>18</sup>

### (2) *Universality*

*Jesus Christ satisfied for the sins of all without exception and not only for the predestined (de fide).*

The Council of Trent taught that Jesus died for the sins of everyone.<sup>19</sup> In 1653, Pope Innocent X condemned as heretical a proposition stating that Jesus Christ died only for the predestined. Alexander VIII, in 1690, rejected the proposition that Jesus died only for the faithful.

The universality of the Redemption is clearly taught in Sacred Scripture. Jesus is the “expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also

for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn 2:2). God “desires all men to be saved” (1 Tm 2:4).

## **37b) Subjective Redemption**

Only the objective redemption of Jesus is universally effective. For the sufficient and superabundant vicarious satisfaction of Christ to take effect in the individual, it is necessary for each person to make those merits his or her own. That is to say, the objective redemption (death of Christ) is universally effective, but the subjective redemption (the salvation of each person) is particular and might not be attained by all.

The salvation of each person also depends on faith and good works. Each person must strive to attain personal salvation. The Council of Trent taught that “though Christ did die for all, still all do not receive the benefit of his death, but only those with whom the merit of his Passion is shared... They would never have been justified except through rebirth in Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

The same council taught that the justification of infidels is not possible without Baptism: “After the promulgation of the Gospel, this passing [from sin to justification] cannot take place without the water of regeneration or the desire for it.”<sup>21</sup>

Sacred Scripture links justification to faith in Jesus Christ and to the fulfillment of the commandments and counsels given by the Lord. The apostle St. James clearly says, “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (Jas 2:24).

### **38. The Different Ways in which the Passion of Jesus Christ Effected our Salvation**

The Council of Trent taught that Jesus Christ “merited justification for us by his own most holy Passion on the wood of the Cross and made satisfaction for us to God the Father.”<sup>22</sup>

Knowing that the human race was subject to the devil and separated from God through its fall due to sin, we may say that Jesus Christ brought about our salvation through his death, for the following reasons:

- He ransomed us from the dominion of the devil and sin. Thus, Jesus Christ accomplished the satisfaction for our sins by way of redemption, or ransom paid to satisfy the divine justice.
- He merited eternal salvation for us. Jesus Christ’s satisfaction, therefore, gives us the grace that sanctifies, a grace that is Christ’s in every right.

In short, the justification of mankind is carried out through the forgiveness of sins and, at the same time, through the elevation of humans to the supernatural order through grace: Grace erases sin and sanctifies.

## 39. The Merit of Jesus Christ

*Christ merited for himself a state of exaltation, manifested in his Resurrection, the glorification of his body, and his Ascension into heaven (sent. certa).*

Jesus Christ possesses all the conditions to gain merit, since he is both *viator* and *comprehensor* at the same time. He is free and enjoys the fullness of grace from the moment of his conception.

Sacred Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ “humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name” (Phil 2:8–9). St. Augustine comments: “By his humiliation he merited his glorification; glorification is the reward of humiliation.”<sup>23</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 459, 520, 581–582, 888.
2. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*, 8.2.
3. Cf. *DV*, 1.
4. Cf. CCC, 553, 764, 894–896.
5. Cf. *Apol.* 1.14.
6. Cf. DS 3679.
7. Cf. DS 1571.
8. DS 11–36.
9. DS 261.
10. Cf. DS 1740; CCC, 662, 1137, 1545.
11. St. Clement of Rome, *Cor.* 36.1.
12. St. Polycarp, *Phil.* 12.2.
13. DS 1740; cf. CCC, 613–614, 1330, 1366, 2100.
14. Cf. CCC, 606ff.
15. DS 1513.
16. DS 1740; cf. CCC, 613, 617.
17. Cf. CCC, 478, 519, 616–617.
18. St. Cyril, *Cat.* 15.33.
19. Cf. DS 1522; CCC, 616.
20. DS 1523; cf. CCC, 618.
21. DS 1524.
22. DS 1529; cf. CCC, 615.
23. St. Augustine, *In Ioann. Tract.* 104.3.

## The Conclusion of the Redemption: Jesus Christ's Glorification

WE SHOULD RECALL that, although the sacrifice of Christ's death is the culminating moment of the work of salvation, his entire life is redemptive. Thus, the events that follow the death of Christ on the cross also have a redemptive value.

## 40. Jesus Christ's Descent into Hell

*After his death, Jesus Christ descended into the limbo of the just in his soul, that is, without his body (de fide).*

Sacred Scripture tells us: “In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens” (Eph 4:9–10). The Scripture calls this place *hades* or *sheol*.

The symbols of the faith teach this truth: “he [Jesus Christ] descended into hell,”<sup>1</sup> and the Fourth Lateran Council clarifies, “He descended into hell... but he descended with his soul.”<sup>2</sup>

The Fathers of the Church offer unanimous testimony to the descent of Christ's soul into the limbo of the just as well. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote that Jesus Christ went down to *sheol* and “resurrected from the dead all those prophets who had been his disciples in spirit and who had waited for him as their master.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus did not go down to liberate the damned from hell or to destroy hell.<sup>4</sup> The Church teaches that Jesus Christ went down to hell to free the souls of the just who were waiting in limbo (or the bosom of Abraham). Jesus did this by applying the fruits of the Redemption to them and making them share in the beatific vision of God in heaven.<sup>5</sup>



## 41. Jesus Christ's Resurrection

*On the third day after his death, Jesus Christ gloriously rose from the dead (de fide).*

Sacred Scripture proclaims, “And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus” (Acts 13:32–33). The Resurrection of Christ is the fundamental truth on which our faith is based since, as St. Paul says, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:14, 19). The truth of *the divinity of Jesus* is confirmed by his Resurrection: “When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he” (Jn 8:28).

The Church affirms the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus in all the symbols of the faith and in her most solemn Magisterium.<sup>6</sup> The Resurrection of the Messiah is foretold in the Old Testament: “For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit” (Ps 16:10). Christ's Resurrection was the *fulfillment of the promises* of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, Jesus announces categorically that he will rise from the dead three days after his death (cf. Mt 12:40, Jn 2:19).

The empty sepulcher, the apparition to Mary Magdalene and the holy women (they were the first to announce Christ's Resurrection to the apostles), the numerous apparitions to his disciples, the conversations he had with them, and the encounters in which he even ate or allowed them to touch him (cf. Mt 28; Mk 16; Lk 24; Jn 20–21) all prove the historical reality of Jesus Christ's Resurrection. Jesus appeared first to Peter, then to the twelve apostles (cf. 1 Cor 15:5). Peter, who would be called to confirm his brethren in the faith, saw the risen Christ before the rest of the apostles. Upon Peter's testimony, the community exclaimed: “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” (Lk 24:34). The Resurrection of Jesus is the central theme of the apostles' preaching, who “gave their testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).

St. Paul speaks of Jesus Christ appearing once to more than five hundred people (cf. 1 Cor 15:4–8). Considering the weight of all this testimony, it is impossible to interpret the Resurrection of Christ outside the

physical and historical realm. Further, the apostles' testimony was not the result of a mystical exaltation. Scripture presents them "looking sad" (Lk 24:17).

Jesus Christ rose in a glorious state and, from then on, his glorious body was not subject to the limitations of time and space, yet it was not merely "a spirit." The glorious body of Jesus retained the wounds and the signs of the Passion as a manifestation of his triumph over death and as effective signs of his perpetual priestly mediation in heaven: "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing" (Jn 20:27). The Resurrection of Jesus and the glorification of his humanity are the rewards for the humiliation of his Passion and death on the cross. Jesus' Resurrection was not like the resurrection of Jairus' daughter, Lazarus, or the young man at Naim, for the latter people returned to their ordinary, earthly lives. The risen body of Christ is full of the Holy Spirit and shares the glorious divine life, never to die again.

Through his death, Christ liberates us from sin. Through his Resurrection, he gives us access to new life. The Resurrection of Jesus brings the Redemption of the human race to its fulfillment, because it is the figure of our own spiritual resurrection from the death of sin, and because it is the foretaste of our physical resurrection at the end of the world. It accomplishes our *adoption as children of God*, as Jesus said, "Go and tell my brethren" (Mt 28:10).

Christ's Resurrection is also the source and beginning of *our future resurrection*: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.... For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:20, 22).

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest of his miracles, and, since it is the fulfillment of his prophecies, it is the most decisive apologetic argument of the truth of his teaching.

## 42. Jesus Christ's Ascension into Heaven

*Jesus Christ went up to heaven in body and soul and sits at the right hand of God the Father (de fide).*

The symbols of the faith teach us that Jesus Christ “ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father.”<sup>7</sup>

Apart from presenting the words of Jesus by which he announces his Ascension into heaven (cf. Jn 6:63), Sacred Scripture describes the historic fact of his Ascension, a scene witnessed by many: “The Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God” (Mk 16:19; cf. Lk 24:51; Acts 1:9ff; Eph 4:8; Heb 4:14).

Jesus Christ went up to heaven by his own power. As God, he did so by his divine power. As man, he accomplished it through the power of his glorified soul, which is able to bring the body wherever it wills.

The Ascension into heaven is the definitive glorification of the human nature of Jesus Christ. With respect to our salvation, it is the definitive consummation of his work of Redemption.

Jesus Christ, God and man, entered into glory with the souls of the just who had died before the Redemption. From heaven, he prepares a place for us, effectively intercedes for us (cf. Jn 14:2ff; Heb 7:25), is the only mediator of grace—a position that he merited through the Redemption—and sends the Holy Spirit to us. Christ is *seated at the right hand of the Father*. He who existed as the Son of God before all centuries—true God consubstantial with the Father—is now seated with his body, after it was incarnated and glorified.<sup>8</sup>

## 43. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ, or *Parousia*

*Jesus Christ will come with glory and majesty at the end of time to judge the world (de fide).*

Sacred Scripture affirms this truth on several occasions. For this reason, the Magisterium of the Church holds, “From thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.”<sup>9</sup>

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that Christ, the Lord, reigns *through the Church*, but the things of this world are not yet subjected to him. The forces of evil continue to attack mankind.<sup>10</sup>

On the Day of Judgment at the end of the world, Christ will come in glory to accomplish the definitive triumph of good over evil. He will reveal the secret dispositions of people’s hearts and reward each one according to his or her deeds and acceptance or rejection of God’s grace.

1. DS 11–36.

2. DS 801; cf. CCC, 631–637.

3. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Magn.* 9.2.

4. Cf. DS 587, 1011, 1077.

5. *Roman Catechism*, 1.6.6.

6. Cf. CCC, 638–658.

7. DS 11–36; cf. CCC, 659–667.

8. Cf. St. John Damascene, *De Fide Orth.*, 4.2; CCC, 663.

9. DS 11–36; cf. CCC, 668–682.

10. Cf. CCC, 671.

# God's Mother

by José María Pujol

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# **The Most Blessed Virgin, God's Mother**

by José María Pujol

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### Mary's Divine Motherhood

THE DIVINE MOTHERHOOD of Mary is the principal and central mystery of her life. All of the other mysteries, privileges, and perfections of the Virgin Mary are based on her divine motherhood.

Something similar occurs with the person of Jesus Christ. The hypostatic union—the union of Jesus' human and divine natures in the divine Person of the Word—is the principal mystery of his life. All of the other mysteries depend on and originate from the hypostatic union.

We will, then, first study the divine motherhood of Mary, which is the greatest privilege and the greatest gift granted by God to any created being.

# 1. Mary, the Mother of God

*The Holy Virgin Mary is, truly and rightfully, the Mother of God (de fide).*

In the Creed, we confess our faith in Jesus Christ “who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, and became man.” The divine motherhood of Mary is professed by these words of the Creed. So that no one may doubt it, the Church, in the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431), defined: “The Holy Virgin is ... Mother of God, for she gave birth in the flesh to the Word of God made flesh.”<sup>1</sup> In the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), the Church taught that “in his humanity, [Christ] was begotten in this last age of Mary the Virgin, the Mother of God.”<sup>2</sup> Further, the Church insists “that in the proper sense and in all truth she is Mother of God.”<sup>3</sup>

The doctrine of Mary’s divine motherhood is taught *implicitly* by Sacred Scripture, especially in passages wherein Mary is called “Mother of Jesus” or “Mother of Christ.” The word *mother*, applied to Mary in passages that relate the conception and birth of Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 1; Lk 2) as well as in other passages of the New Testament, does not have any meaning other than the most common one. The announcement of the archangel Gabriel alludes to this very sense: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus” (Lk 1:31).

Sacred Scripture also *explicitly* states in several passages that Mary is truly the Mother of God. Such are the words of the archangel Gabriel when he tells Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Lk 1:35). Likewise, one discerns it when St. Elizabeth greets Mary with the following words: “And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Lk 1:43). St. Paul also tells us that Mary is the Mother of God: “God sent forth his Son, born of a woman” (Gal 4:4).

Sacred Tradition also teaches this doctrine. The Fathers of the Church firmly held that Mary is the Mother of God. Thus, St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote, “The Son of God was truly born of a Virgin,”<sup>4</sup> and St. Irenaeus

declared, “This Christ, who as the Word [*Logos*] of the Father was with the Father ... was born of a Virgin.”<sup>5</sup>

The Greek word *Theotokos* (“Mother of God”) was already used to refer to the Virgin Mary by Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, as early as the year 318.<sup>6</sup> Later, its use spread throughout the Christian world.

Heretics have held teachings opposed to this doctrine. In the first century, the docetae claimed that the body of Jesus was not real and compared it to the “bodies” that angels assume during their apparitions to men. Consequently, they denied that Mary was really the Mother of Jesus and, therefore, the Mother of God. In the fifth century, Nestorius began to teach that Mary was the Mother of Christ only in his humanity. Because of this, he claimed that she should not be called the Mother of God, but only the bearer of God.

Speculative theology can prove that Mary is the Mother of God. Mothers give birth to persons, not just natures, even though they only engender the bodies of their children while God creates each human soul. Similarly, even if it is true that Mary only engendered the body of Jesus, she nevertheless gave birth to a Person, a divine Person: the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity made man.

It is, therefore, understandable why many Christological errors directly oppose Mary’s divine motherhood. In recent years, the Magisterium of the Church has confronted these errors. The declaration *Mysterium Fidei Dei*, for example, recalled the doctrine affirmed by the first ecumenical councils and admonished those who deny the unity of natures in the one divine Person of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

The intimate relationship that exists between the mystery of Christ’s being and the Most Blessed Virgin’s divine motherhood is revealed in this very doctrine.<sup>8</sup>

When the Blessed Virgin said “Yes,” freely, to the plans revealed to her by the Creator, the divine Word assumed a human nature: a rational soul and a body, which was formed in the most pure womb of Mary. The divine nature and the human were united in a single Person: Jesus Christ, true God and, thenceforth, true man; the only-begotten and eternal Son of the Father and, from that moment on, as Man, the true Son of Mary. This is why our Lady is the Mother of the Incarnate Word, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity who has united our human nature to himself forever, without any confusion of the two natures. The greatest praise we can give to the Blessed Virgin is to address her loud and clear by the name that expresses her very highest dignity: Mother of God.<sup>9</sup>



## 2. Mary, Temple of the Holy Spirit

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that, when the fullness of time came, the Holy Spirit accomplished in Mary the preparations for the coming of Christ to the people of God.<sup>10</sup> Through the Holy Spirit's action in her, the Father gave the Immanuel—"God with us"—to the world.

- In Mary, the Holy Spirit *accomplished* the compassionate design of God: The Virgin conceived by the Holy Spirit and gave birth to the Son of God.
- In Mary, the Holy Spirit *manifested* the Son of the Father made Son of the Virgin. She is the burning bush. Full of the Holy Spirit, Mary presents the Word to mankind.
- Through Mary, the Holy Spirit began to *place humans in communion* with Christ. The shepherds, the Magi, Simeon and Anna, the spouses at Cana, and the disciples were the first to receive Jesus through Mary.
- Mary, Mother of the "total Christ," was present with the twelve apostles at the dawn of the "last times" when the Holy Spirit manifested the Church.

### **3. Mary's Divine Motherhood is a Gift**

“God sent forth his Son” (Gal 4:4), but to form his Son's body, he wanted the free cooperation of a creature. Thus, God chose a daughter of Israel to be the Mother of his Son and sent his angel “to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary” (Lk 1:27). God chose one who was thought to be weak to show his fidelity to his promises. “After a long period of waiting the times are fulfilled in her, the exalted Daughter of Sion, and the new plan of salvation is established.”<sup>11</sup>

Mary's divine motherhood is a free supernatural gift granted to her by God. This gift is intimately connected with the Incarnation of the Son of God. Consequently, in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854), Pope Pius IX taught, “By one and the same eternal decree, God has predestined Jesus to a natural divine filiation and Mary to be the Mother of God... By one and the same eternal decree, Jesus was predetermined to be the Son of the Most High and Mary the Mother of God.”<sup>12</sup>

## 4. Mary's Dignity

*Due to her divine Motherhood, Mary's dignity surpasses that of all created persons (common teaching).*

The eminent dignity of the Virgin Mary is explicitly revealed in Sacred Scripture. St. Elizabeth did not hesitate to tell Our Lady, “Blessed are you among women” (Lk 1:42). The Blessed Virgin herself, full of gratitude to God, sang in the canticle of the *Magnificat*, “he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Lk 1:48).

The Fathers of the Church taught the doctrine of the Virgin Mary's excellence with words like the following ones of Origen: “‘Hail, full of grace.’ This greeting is addressed only to Mary.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, St. John Damascene remarked, “She has power over all creatures, because she is the handmaid and Mother of the Creator.”<sup>14</sup>

Reason enlightened by faith can prove that the dignity of Mary, as Mother of God, is superior to that of any other creature. In conceiving the body of Christ and giving birth to the divine Person of the Lord, Mary established a direct relationship with the Person of the Incarnate Word. Aside from Christ's, no union between humanity and divinity is more perfect than Mary's union. For the same reason, her dignity and beatitude—derived from her perfect sanctity: *full of grace*—are superior to the bliss of all saints, which consists only in knowing and loving God.

1. DS 252.
2. DS 301.
3. DS 427; cf. CCC, 466–470, 484–486, 495.
4. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 7.2.
5. St. Irenaeus, *Ep.* 53.
6. Cf. *Ep.* 1.12.
7. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decl. *Mysterium Filii*, Feb. 21, 1972.
8. Cf. CCC, 470.
9. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 274.
10. Cf. CCC, 721–726.
11. LG, 55; cf. CCC, 488–489.
12. Pius IX, Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, Dec. 8, 1854: DS 2803.

13. Origen, *In Luc. Hom.*, 6.
14. St. John Damascene, *De Fide Orth.*, 4.14.

## The Privileges of the Virgin Mary

WITH AN EYE toward her divine motherhood, God granted the Virgin Mary the privilege of being full of grace so that she would be able to perfectly fulfill her unique mission as the Mother of God. We can distinguish two aspects of this privilege:

- i) A negative aspect, since her fullness of grace excludes original sin and all actual sins
- ii) A positive aspect, since her fullness of grace consists in her eminent holiness: She had been adorned by God with an abundance of graces and supernatural gifts.

Thus, we will study the following privileges of the Blessed Virgin Mary:

- Her Immaculate Conception
- Her immunity from all actual sins and from the very inclination to sin
- Her holiness

## 5. The Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary

*Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin (de fide).*

On December 8, 1854, Pius IX, in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, declared the Immaculate Conception of Mary a dogma of faith:

We declare, pronounce and define the doctrine that maintains that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary in the first instant of her conception, by a unique grace and privilege of the omnipotent God and in consideration of the merits of Christ Jesus the Savior of the Human Race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore must be firmly and constantly held by all the faithful.<sup>1</sup>

This dogmatic definition contains the following three important points, which we will consider in detail:

- i) It affirms that the Blessed Virgin Mary had been *preserved from all stain of original sin* at the moment of her conception, that is, from the moment her soul was created and united to her body.
- ii) It also declares this preservation to be *a special privilege* and a totally singular grace, a fruit of God's omnipotence.
- iii) Finally, it affirms that Mary was preserved from original sin *by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ*, the Savior of all mankind.

It was fitting for the Virgin Mary, who had been chosen from all eternity to be the Mother of God, to be the most perfect creature. Consequently, God freed her from all contact with sin and decreed that she should be conceived without original sin. As the theologians explain, "It was *fitting* for God to free her from sin; he *could* do so, therefore, he *did* it."

Mary was preserved free from original sin by the merits of her Son in view of her future divine motherhood. She was redeemed in the most perfect manner possible, that is, through a preserving redemption that freed her from acquiring the stain of original sin. The Virgin was never subject to this sin.

The redemption that preserved the Virgin from sin is superior to the Redemption that frees from a previously acquired sin, as is the case with the rest of mankind. Obviously, it is better to have been always free from sin than to have been subject to it for a time.

Sacred Scripture shows the privilege of the Immaculate Conception in the words that God addressed to the serpent after Adam's fall into original sin: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed

and her seed; she shall crush your head, and you shall lie in wait for her heel” (Gn 3:15).<sup>2</sup> The Redemption of mankind is announced in this passage of the Old Testament. The passage is called the *proto-evangelium*, the first announcement of the good news of our Redemption. The Church teaches that Mary and Jesus are prefigured by the woman and her seed, respectively. This statement reveals that Jesus and Mary have “*the very same enmity*” toward the devil, as Pius IX affirmed in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus*. If their enmities are exactly the same, then Mary’s enmity should be equally absolute to Christ’s, exclusive of any degree of original friendship with the devil, that is, excluding any state of original sin.

Divine revelation also teaches the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary through the greeting of the archangel Gabriel: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you” (Lk 1:28). The fullness of grace that the archangel attributes to Mary is incompatible with any sin.

Sacred Tradition is explicit in expressing this privilege of our Lady, particularly after the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431. Thus, St. Proclus taught that Mary was “formed from the purest clay,”<sup>3</sup> and St. John Damascene wrote that Mary “escaped the infected darts of the devil.”<sup>4</sup>

## 5a) Immunity from Sin

*Mary, by a special privilege of God, was free from all sin, even venial sin, during her entire life (de fide, implicitly defined).*

Whenever the Church has stated that all have sinned, she has always been careful not only to exclude the Virgin Mary from this affirmation, but also to define her immunity from sin as a special privilege of God. The Council of Trent defined, “man, once justified, cannot avoid all sins, even venial sins, throughout his entire life without a special privilege of God, as the Church holds in regard to the Blessed Virgin.”<sup>5</sup>

Sacred Scripture indirectly teaches this truth when it calls Mary “full of grace” (Lk 1:28) because such fullness of grace is incompatible with even the slightest sin.

The Fathers of the Church also taught the total absence of sin in Mary. For example, St. Augustine wrote, “Due to the glory of her Son, who is to redeem the sins of the world, we cannot include Mary when we deal with the topic of sin.”<sup>6</sup> The Fathers of the Church even rejected the existence of any voluntary imperfections in Mary and taught that there was no imperfect act of charity or omission whatsoever in her life, for she was always ready to respond promptly to any inspiration from God.

Speculative reason clearly understands how “God prepares and disposes those persons whom he chooses for a particular goal, in such manner that they may find themselves capable of fulfilling the goal for which they were chosen.”<sup>7</sup> Mary, one can see, would not have been worthy of being the Mother of God if she had sinned at some time in her life, because, in one way or another, the honor or dishonor of parents always falls upon their children. Consequently, Mary, by a special privilege because she was the Mother of God, was endowed with the gift of moral impeccability, that is, of being confirmed in grace. Thus, she never committed a sin in her life.

The privilege of immunity from sin has, therefore, the following consequences:

- An extremely high degree of habitual grace and charity, which inclines Mary’s soul toward acts of love for God and keeps her away from sin



- The confirmation in grace, which preserved all her faculties from a possible deviation towards evil

Preservation from sin meant that Mary's will had no inclination at all toward evil. However, this does not mean that she was not free. She kept her full freedom to do good.

## 5b) Freedom from Concupiscence

*Mary was preserved from all inclination to sin (fomes peccati), from the first moment of her conception (sent. certa).*

It is logical that the Virgin Mary—conceived without the stain of original sin—could never be subject to concupiscence, understood as disorder of the passions (*fomes peccati*), which, as the Council of Trent defined, “is from sin and inclines to sin.”<sup>8</sup>

Like our first parents in the state of original justice before original sin, the Virgin Mary never experienced any disorderly movement in her sensible appetites. They were always subordinated to her intellect and will, which perfectly fulfilled the will of God at every moment of her life.

Mary was not subject to error either, since, by her fullness of grace and total aversion to sin, she was always in the presence of God. In addition to having acquired the knowledge of the Creator through his creatures, she also possessed a profound and simple knowledge of everything that Sacred Scripture taught about the Messiah. All of this knowledge moved her to always adore God and remain with him.

## 5c) Subjection to Suffering and Pain

*The Virgin Mary was subject to pain, and it is uncertain whether or not she was preserved from death (sent. certa).*

As in the case of Jesus (but unlike in our case), the sorrows of Mary were certainly not the consequence of original sin. Since she was preserved from all sin, her sufferings were, rather, a consequence of human nature, truly subject in itself to pain and bodily death. Immortality was a special privilege granted to our first parents, and not a quality of human nature itself. Nevertheless, as we will later discuss in the chapter on the Assumption, we are not really certain whether or not Mary died.

There is a great deal of similarity between the pain and death of Jesus and the pain and death of Mary. Jesus was virginally conceived in mortal flesh and voluntarily accepted suffering and death on the cross in order to redeem us. Mary, following Christ's example, accepted pain voluntarily to unite herself to the suffering and death of her Son. In union with Christ, she atoned for our sins, thus becoming our co-redemptrix.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, the privilege of the Immaculate Conception, far from removing her suffering, increased Mary's capacity to suffer. It also led her to offer every occasion of pain and suffering for our salvation in union with the sufferings of her Son.

## **6. The Sanctity of the Mother of God**

### **6a) The Virgin Mary's Initial Fullness of Grace**

Before conceiving our Lord, Mary received the fullness of grace necessary to adequately prepare her for the dignity of divine motherhood.

Divine revelation expresses this truth in the angelic salutation: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you” (Lk 1:28).

The Magisterium of the Church teaches that Mary “was loved by God above all creatures. God was pleased entirely with her and admirably crowned her with all graces, much more grace than that of all the angelic spirits and all the saints.”<sup>10</sup>

Reason, enlightened by faith, helps us understand that the closer we are to the source of all graces, the more graces we will receive. Since Mary was the closest to the principle of grace—Christ himself—she received from him the fullness of grace from the first instant of her conception. This plenitude of grace surpasses that of all creatures combined.

The initial grace of Mary is even greater than the final state of grace of all mankind and angels put together. Theological reasoning concludes that Mary's initial fullness of grace is superior to that of all the angels and saints because Mary received it as a preparation for her divine motherhood.

Finally, because of Mary's initial fullness of grace, she received the supreme fullness of infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Church teaches that the theological virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit are infused, together with sanctifying grace, in the soul of the just person. Mary, full of grace, received an equal plenitude of infused virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

## **6b) Increase in Grace at the Incarnation and During her Life**

*Through her complete submission to the will of God, the Blessed Virgin, at the moment of conceiving Jesus Christ in her womb, received an increase of grace (sent. comm.).*

The Blessed Virgin Mary continuously grew in holiness in the course of her life by freely corresponding to God's grace at every moment.<sup>11</sup> The initial grace of Mary, though full and perfect, was not infinite. It is only logical for her to grow in grace and merit throughout her life.

There is a moment in her life that highlights her loving fulfillment of the will of God: the Incarnation of the Word, which took place as a consequence of her unconditional *fiat*. It is merely logical for an increase of grace to follow that moment. There are three reasons for such an increase:

- i) By the mystery of the Incarnation itself, it was fitting for the Blessed Virgin to receive an increase in grace to directly prepare her for the reception of the Word Incarnate in her womb.
- ii) Besides, it is but logical for the Son of God himself, upon being made man in Mary through the Incarnation, to enrich her with more grace because Jesus Christ is the cause of grace.
- iii) Lastly, the mutual love between the Son of God and his mother is a motive for an increase of grace. In fact, grace is the fruit of love for God. Since the Word Incarnate loves his mother more than any other creature, he grants her superabundant graces. Further, our Lady's most perfect correspondence to this grace made her more worthy of it.

## **6c) Mary's Final Fullness of Grace**

The Virgin Mary enjoys the most perfect bliss in heaven, greater than what any other created person is capable of attaining. Her bodily Assumption into heaven and her universal mediation are manifestations of her eternal and supreme happiness.

## **7. The Perpetual Virginity of Mary**

The term *virginity* has two aspects: a bodily aspect and a moral aspect. The bodily aspect refers to the physical integrity of the Blessed Virgin before, during, and after giving birth to Jesus Christ. The moral aspect, which Mary equally possessed, refers to the deliberate and virtuous habit of perpetually preserving her virginity.<sup>12</sup>

## 7a) The Virginal Conception

*Holy Mary conceived her son, Jesus Christ, by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, all the while maintaining her virginity (de fide).*

Mary's virginity before Christ's birth—the virginal conception of Jesus Christ—is one of the great truths of our faith. The Creed affirms that Jesus “was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus' virginal conception is a truth firmly maintained and constantly taught by the Church.<sup>14</sup>

Sacred Scripture reveals that “a young woman [virgin] shall conceive and bear a son” (Is 7:14). The virginal conception is also made manifest in the scene of the annunciation when Mary asks, “‘How can this be, since I have no husband?’ And the angel said to her: ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God’” (Lk 1:34–35). God also revealed it to St. Joseph in a dream: “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 1:20). The Gospels again highlight the virginity of Mary when they refer to Jesus as “being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph” (Lk 3:23).

The Fathers of the Church unanimously taught the virginal conception of Jesus as an essential truth of our faith.

Reason, enlightened by faith, can discover that it was fitting for the only-begotten Son of the Father not to have another father on earth according to the flesh.



## 7b) The Virgin Birth

*Mary's virginity was preserved while she gave birth to her Son (de fide).*

Mary's virginity during childbirth was defined by the Lateran Council of A.D. 649 when it declared that she gave birth to the divine Word "without any detriment to her virginity, which remained inviolable even after his birth."<sup>15</sup>

St. Ambrose, echoing the unanimous teachings of the Fathers of the Church, wrote: "She shall be a Virgin in conception and at childbirth."<sup>16</sup>

To better understand this truth, some writers have piously compared the preservation of Mary's virginity during Christ's birth to a sunbeam going through glass without modifying it in any way.

## 7c) Virginité after the Birth of Jesus

*Holy Mary remained a virgin after having given birth to Christ (de fide).*

The Lateran Council of A.D. 649 taught the doctrine of Mary's virginity after childbirth, that is, her perpetual virginity after the birth of our Savior.<sup>17</sup> Pope Paul IV proclaimed this doctrine anew when he condemned whoever dared to claim that "the Blessed Virgin Mary ... did not remain a perfect virgin before, while, and forever after she gave birth."<sup>18</sup>

In Sacred Scripture, the words "I have no husband" (Lk 1:34) are understood as meaning that Mary made a firm resolution to maintain her virginity through a deliberate act of her will. This transforms the physical fact of virginity into a virtuous act. When one reads Jesus Christ's declaration from the cross "Behold, your mother" (Jn 19:27), one can reasonably conclude that Mary was entrusted to John's care because she had no other children.

Some expressions in Sacred Scripture about Mary seem confusing at first sight. Once the right interpretation is given, however, they are perfectly consistent with the truth of the perpetual virginity of Mary. When we read that Mary "gave birth to her first-born son" (Lk 2:7), this does not mean that Mary had other children, but simply that Jesus was her first child. In a tombstone found in Alexandria from the same period as Mary and Jesus, one reads the following epitaph: "She died when she brought forth her first-born child." It is obvious that this woman could not have had more children. Her only child was called her first-born child.

Another passage, "but [Joseph] knew her not until she had borne a son" (Mt 1:25), does not imply anything about what happened afterwards, but simply tells us that Joseph did not have sexual relations with her before the moment of childbirth. The same applies to the following passage: "Before they came together she was found to be with child" (Mt 1:18). Likewise, the brothers and sisters of Jesus mentioned in Scriptures (cf. Jn 7:3) were simply his cousins or relatives. Hebrew does not have a separate word for each degree of relationship but groups all of them as "relatives." It was the way people used to speak. One clear example of this linguistic practice is found in the Old Testament; Abraham sometimes calls Lot his *nephew* and sometimes his *brother* (cf. Gn 11–13).

From the fourth century on, the Fathers of the Church very frequently give Mary the title of “ever Virgin.” They wrote extensively about the perpetual virginity of Holy Mary.

Reason, enlightened by faith, explains why the existence of some brothers of Jesus would not quite reconcile with his great dignity. Since he is the only-begotten Son of the Father from all eternity, it was fitting for him to be the only Son of Mary in time. Besides, the loss of her virginity would be an offense to the Holy Spirit, who sanctified her virginal womb forever.

## 8. Mary's Assumption into Heaven

Because of her divine motherhood, Mary was intimately related to Jesus Christ. This relationship, which began here on earth, continues in heaven in its fullest degree. Thus, in the same way as the Ascension is the crowning of Jesus' life on earth, the Assumption into heaven is the culmination of Mary's earthly life.

We will, thus, study the *fact* of the Virgin's Assumption into heaven, leaving aside the *manner* in which it was done, that is, whether or not she actually died. We will not discuss this second issue because the very papal bull that defined the dogma of the Assumption left the question unanswered. We have already seen that if the Virgin Mary actually died, it would not have been as punishment for original sin (she was born immaculate) or for actual sins (she never committed any), but rather to imitate her Son, who—being sinless—took death upon himself.

*The Virgin Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven (de fide).*

Since the sixth century, the Church—in the East as well as in the West—has celebrated the feast of the Assumption of Mary on August 15. The Assumption of Mary into heaven, believed and taught by the Church, was defined as dogma by Pope Pius XII through the constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* as follows: “By our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.”<sup>19</sup>

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary is implicitly revealed in Sacred Scripture: “And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (Rv 12:1). The Church interprets this passage as a reference to the Virgin Mary, who appears in heaven full of glory.

Reason enlightened by faith helps us understand the dogma of the Virgin's Assumption into heaven:

- We have already pointed out that the Assumption of Mary is the summit of her life on earth. Being the mother of the Savior, she, like Jesus Christ, finds the fullness of her life in heaven.
- Furthermore, Mary received the fullness of grace and, consequently, was particularly “blessed ... among women” (Lk 1:42).

This exceptional blessing excludes the divine malediction (cf. Gn 3:16–19). Therefore, we can conclude that the Virgin Mary ought to be preserved from the corruption of the tomb and that her body should not return to the ground. She should be either preserved from death or subject to death but rise again through an anticipated resurrection and be assumed into heaven.

- The Virgin Mary was also closely associated to the full victory of Christ over the devil on Calvary. This victory includes the triumph over sin and death. It is, therefore, fitting for Mary to be associated with the complete victory over death through the Assumption of her body and soul into heaven.

## 9. Mary's Glorification: The Queenship of Mary

*God crowned the Virgin Mary Queen of heaven and earth. He exalted her above all the angels and saints. She intercedes effectively for all of us through her prayer (de fide eccl.).*

“The Mother of Christ is glorified as ‘Queen of the Universe.’”<sup>20</sup> “In the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven she is the image and beginning of the Church.”<sup>21</sup> The queenship of Mary belongs to the spiritual kingdom, which is eternal and universal; its essence is service to her Son’s mission. Her power of mediation is so great that she is called the *omnipotent suppliant*.

The Church, through her Tradition, liturgy, and the teachings of theologians, attests to the queenship of Mary. In 1954, Pius XII instituted the feast of Mary the Queen, which is celebrated on August 22, for the entire Church: “We do not intend to add a new truth to the faith of the Christian people, because the title itself and the arguments on which the queenly dignity of Mary is based have been actually magnificently explained throughout the ages and are found in the ancient documents of the Church and in the books of Sacred Liturgy.” He collected these documents in his encyclical *Ad Coeli Reginam*, of October 11, 1954, as authentic and solemn proof of Mary’s queenship.

The Fathers of the Church call Mary “Lady” and “Queen.” The Magisterium of the Church, in using the same expressions, teaches the truth of the queenship of Mary as well. For example, the Second Vatican Council declared that Mary was “exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and the conqueror of sin and death.”<sup>22</sup>

The theological reasons used to demonstrate the fittingness of the Virgin Mary’s privilege of being called “queen” are based on her status as Mother of Christ the King:

- Mary engendered the body of Jesus Christ and is, therefore, the Mother of God. Jesus Christ as man is king because his human nature is hypostatically united to the divine Person. Therefore, Mary, as

mother of the Lord, participates in the kingship and universal kingdom of Christ.

- Further, Jesus Christ is king of the universe by his fullness of grace and his victory over the devil, sin, and death. Mary, therefore, who takes part in the victorious Redemption of Christ, is also associated with his universal kingship.
- Finally, the Virgin Mary is closely united to God. She is the daughter of God the Father, the mother of God the Son, and the spouse of God the Holy Spirit. Consequently, she is also the queen of the universe.

Some aspects of the queenship of Mary are mentioned in the Litany of Loreto: “Queen of angels,” “Queen of patriarchs,” “Queen of prophets,” “Queen of apostles,” “Queen of martyrs,” “Queen of confessors,” “Queen of virgins,” “Queen of all saints,” and “Queen of peace.”

## 10. The Spiritual Motherhood of the Virgin Mary

In our study of our Lady's divine motherhood and privileges, so far we have only considered her relationship with God. We will now discuss her relationship with all people through her spiritual motherhood (a consequence of her divine motherhood) and through her mediation and co-redemption (aspects of that spiritual motherhood).

The spiritual motherhood of Mary complements the divine motherhood on which it depends. Mary is the mother of the *total Christ*: the physical mother of Christ, the head of the Church, and the spiritual mother of the members of his Mystical Body.

The Second Vatican Council explained the doctrine of the Church concerning Mary's spiritual motherhood of all people.<sup>23</sup>

In what sense is Mary our mother? The Virgin Mary is not our mother in a natural, physical sense. She is, rather, our spiritual mother since, through her union with Christ the Redeemer, she has transmitted to us the supernatural life of grace. If St. Paul could say of himself, "I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:15), or "My little children, with whom I am again in travail" (Gal 4:19), with greater reason could we speak of the spiritual motherhood of Mary, who gave us her Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, source of eternal life. Even more, Mary, "in a wholly singular way cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope, and burning charity in the work of the Savior in restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is our Mother in the order of grace."<sup>24</sup>

When did Mary become our Mother? The Motherhood of Mary to all mankind began with her fiat and reached its fullness on the cross, when our Lord explicitly presented her to us as our mother: "Woman, behold your son! ... Behold, your mother!" (Jn 19:26–27). Since St. John represented all of us, as the Church teaches, we can very well say that our Lord has given Holy Mary to each one of us as mother. Thus, Mary became our mother because of her total adherence to the will of God the Father, to the redeeming work of her Son, and to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Who has the right to enjoy the benefits of her Motherhood? The Virgin Mary is the mother of all the faithful, of all those who believe in her Son and receive the life of grace through him. Through grace, the Christian



is mystically identified with Christ and, consequently, becomes a child of Holy Mary. Therefore, Sacred Scripture says that “those whom he foreknew he has also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren” (Rom 8:29).

## 10a) The Virgin Mary is the Mother of Mercy

Pope John Paul II talks specifically about this topic in his encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*: “Nobody but Mary has ever experienced divine mercy in such a singular and exceptional manner. In an equally exceptional way, she has been able to show forth her own participation of the divine mercy through the sacrifice of her heart.”<sup>25</sup>

Mercy is a virtue proper to good and powerful persons who are actually capable of giving help. It is principally a virtue of God. The Virgin Mary participates in God’s mercy and intercedes for all of us to God, who often gives us more than we need, more than we justly deserve, so that mercy may triumph over justice.

She who at the Annunciation called herself the “handmaid of the Lord” remained throughout her earthly life faithful to what this name expresses. In this she confirmed that she was a true “disciple” of Christ, who strongly emphasized that his mission was one of service....

Christ entered into the glory of his kingdom. Mary, the handmaid of the Lord, has a share in this Kingdom of the Son. The *glory of serving* does not cease to be her royal exaltation; assumed into heaven, she does not cease her saving service, which expresses her maternal mediation.

Mary’s maternal mediation does not cease to be subordinate to him who is the one Mediator, until the final realization of “the fullness of time,” that is to say until “all things are united in Christ” (cf. Eph 1:10).<sup>26</sup>

## 10b) The Virgin Mary is the Mother of the Church

One specific aspect of Mary's spiritual motherhood is her title "Mother of the Church." The Second Vatican Council highlights the elements that determine Mary's motherhood towards the Church:

- The Virgin Mary, as the most excellent and unique member of the Mystical Body, is the type of the Church. The Church reaches her fullness and perfection in Mary. "In the mystery of the Church, which is herself rightly called mother and virgin, the Blessed Virgin stands out in eminent and singular fashion as exemplar both of virgin and mother."<sup>27</sup>
- Mary is the spiritual mother of the Church: "For the glory of the Virgin and our consolation, we proclaim most Holy Mary as Mother of the Church. She is the Mother of all the people of God, of both the faithful and the pastors, who call her most loving Mother. From now on we want her to be honored and invoked with this most pleasing title. We are dealing with a title ... that is not new to the piety of Christians. In fact, the faithful and the entire Church are used to calling Mary with this name, with preference over any other, justified by her dignity as the Mother of the Word Incarnate."<sup>28</sup>
- Mary is the Mother of the Church because she is the Mother of God: "Mary's divine motherhood ... constitutes the fundamental principle of her relationship with the Church ... since she is the mother of him who from the very first instant of his Incarnation in her virginal womb, was made head of his Mystical Body, the Church. Mary, therefore, as the mother of Christ, is also mother of the faithful and all the pastors. She is therefore the Mother of the Church."<sup>29</sup>

## 10c) The Virgin Mary is the Mediatrix of All Graces

The Virgin Mary is the mediatrix between God and humanity because she is the Mother of God and the mother of all mankind. This privilege allows her to intercede effectively. In fact, Mary, by her divine motherhood, intercedes before God for all people. By her spiritual motherhood, she brings God's grace and help to us. The Magisterium of the Church thus honors Mary with titles such as "Mediatrix of all graces,"<sup>30</sup> "Mediatrix before her Only-Begotten Son,"<sup>31</sup> and "Mediatrix before the Mediator."<sup>32</sup>

### (1) *The universal mediation of Mary*

Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces for three reasons:

- i) She gave the Redeemer to the world (*de fide*).
- ii) She intercedes before God and presents all prayers and good works to him.
- iii) God decreed, after Mary's Assumption into heaven, that no one would receive graces from him except through the special intercession of Mary (*de fide eccl.*).

The Gospel narrative tells us that the Redemption of Christ, with the participation of Mary, will continue until the end of time. According to the common doctrine of the Church, when the Virgin Mary answered the archangel Gabriel "Let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38), she spoke as the representative of all mankind. This includes those who lived in the past, those who live in the present, and those who are to come. This is why we believe that the Virgin Mary collaborates not only as co-redeemer in the Redemption of Christ, but also as mediatrix in the application of the Redemption to every person through all ages.

The Fathers of the Church also preached Mary's universal mediation. St. Augustine wrote that Mary "collaborated through her charity in the spiritual birth of all the faithful, who are members of Christ."<sup>33</sup>

### (2) *Mary's maternal mediation*

Sacred Scripture teaches us that Mary interceded for people while she was here on earth. In the wedding feast at Cana, for example, she told Jesus that "they have no wine" (Jn 2:3) and she moved Jesus to perform the

miracle of the conversion of water into wine. She also prayed steadfastly with the apostles in the upper room (cf. Acts 1:14ff). Consequently, we should believe even more firmly that Mary intercedes for us from heaven after the Ascension.<sup>34</sup> “Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation.”<sup>35</sup>

Reason enlightened by faith helps us understand Holy Mary’s power of intercession. The Virgin, mother of all, knows our needs, and, logically, moved by her great love for us, intercedes efficaciously for all mankind before her Son Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of all mankind. The efficacy of Mary’s prayers is based on their unity with the prayer of Christ, her Son, whose petitions are always granted.

The Church prays repeatedly in the litany of the Holy Rosary, “Holy Mary, pray for us,” and *lex orandi, lex credendi*.

(3) *Can Mary’s universal mediation be defined?*

The Church teaches the doctrine of the universal mediation of the Virgin Mary: “Of the vast treasure of all grace that the Lord has won ... nothing at all is given to us, in accordance with God’s will, except through Mary.”<sup>36</sup> In the Holy Rosary, we ask the intercession of Mary for our many needs: “Health of the sick,” “Refuge of sinners,” “Consoler of the afflicted,” “Help of Christians.” Thus, through her, a multitude of graces are granted to man.

The Church could officially define the universal mediation of Mary easily, since the Magisterium of the Church in recent years has been unanimous in this point. Leo XIII says, “She is the Mediatrix with the Mediator.”<sup>37</sup> St. Pius X calls her “the dispenser of all gifts that Jesus has won for us through his blood.”<sup>38</sup> The Second Vatican Council tells us that “the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.”<sup>39</sup>

## 10d) The Virgin Mary is Co-Redemptrix

The Virgin Mary is co-redemptrix because she united herself to the work of the Redeemer when she accepted God's will and became the Mother of God. She freely consented through the initial fiat, by which she accepted the Incarnation of the Word. Her acceptance implicitly includes the Redemption.<sup>40</sup>

Our Lady was not ignorant of the Messianic prophecies. Furthermore, she repeatedly meditated on the prophecies about her Son, such as that of Simeon: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also)" (Lk 2:34–35).

As time passed, Mary came to better understand how the Redemption must take place through the expiatory death of her Son (cf. Is 53:3–6). Through her fiat, the Virgin Mary, the new Eve, united herself to Jesus Christ (the principal and instrumental cause of the redemption of mankind) as a subordinate cause in the work of salvation in a manner analogous to Eve's participation with Adam in the work of perdition.

Still, the fundamental reason for Mary's co-redemption is that she engendered our Lord in the body with which he suffered and died for our Redemption. Furthermore, being the mother of the Redeemer, the Virgin Mary united herself to him in perfect conformity with his will, just as the Magisterium of the Church teaches us:

The glory of Mary is not only due to her consent to be Mother of the Only-Begotten Son of God, in order to make the sacrifice destined for the salvation of all men possible; it also consists in her acceptance of the mission to protect and nourish the sacrificial Lamb and to lead him to the altar of immolation, when the precise moment arrived. In this way, the union of the lives and sufferings of Mary and her Son was never interrupted.<sup>41</sup>

As a result of this union of suffering and willing between Mary and Christ, she "most deservedly merited to be the restorer of the lost world" and therefore the dispenser of all gifts that Jesus has won for us with his death and blood... Seeing that she is holier than all and more closely united with Christ, and as he has chosen her as his associate for the work of human salvation, she merits for us *congruously* (*de congruo*), as they say, what Christ merited *in strict justice* (*de condigno*), and she is the principal agent in distributing graces.<sup>42</sup>

Because of this, the participation of the Virgin Mary in the Redemption is not only more intimate than the participation that the

disciples of Jesus could achieve through grace, but is also different from it.

## 11. The Veneration of the Virgin Mary

### 11a) The Cult of Hyperdulia

“All generations will call me blessed” (Lk 1:48). The piety of the Church toward the Blessed Virgin is an intrinsic element of the Christian cult.<sup>43</sup>

Cult, in general, is honor attributed to someone superior to us. The cult given to the servants of God is honor rendered to God himself, who manifests himself and attracts us to himself through them. The Council of Trent defined this to defend the faith against Protestant reformers, who held that the cult of the saints was a mode of superstition.<sup>44</sup>

The Church teaches us that the cult of *hyperdulia* or *supreme dulia* (veneration) should be rendered to the Blessed Virgin Mary because of her eminent dignity as the Mother of God. This kind of veneration is different from the cult of *latria* (adoration)—proper to God alone—and the simple cult of *dulia*, which is proper to the other saints.

St. Epiphanius, St. Gregory Nazianzen, and St. Ambrose, to name a few, explicitly talked about the cult that is due to Mary.<sup>45</sup> We have received some prayers dedicated to the Virgin from St. Ephrem, who died in A.D. 378. This cult is based on the divine motherhood of Mary and her fullness of grace, which is far superior to the grace attained by the saints.

The history of the Church shows that, since the earliest times, the first Christians rendered the cult of *hyperdulia* to the Virgin Mary. The first representations of the Most Holy Virgin with the Child Jesus in her arms, for example, are found in Roman catacombs dating from the second to the fourth centuries. The Second Vatican Council teaches:

Mary is rightly honored by a special cult in the Church. From the earliest times the Blessed Virgin is honored under the title of Mother of God, whose protection the faithful take refuge together in prayer in all their perils and needs.... This cult ... differs essentially from the cult of *adoration*, which is offered equally to the Incarnate Word, and to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, and it is most favorable to it.<sup>46</sup>



## **11b) The Fruits of Devotion to the Virgin Mary**

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, which leads us to imitate her virtues, is the surest way to salvation. Mary obtains final perseverance for those who faithfully ask for it, since she is the universal mediatrix of all graces. She looks with special benevolence toward her devout children. “To Jesus we always go, and to him we always return, through Mary.”<sup>47</sup> Devotion to Mary is, thus, often counted as one of the signs of predestination.

In a more general way, the veneration rendered to the Virgin Mary reaffirms the foundations of the faith of the Church, since it is based on the faith in the redeeming Incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is, thus, a safeguard against heresies. At the same time, it is a path to holiness, and it glorifies our Lord.

## 11c) Some Marian Devotions

To honor the Virgin Mary, the Church celebrates different Marian feasts throughout the liturgical year.<sup>48</sup> Some are specially important and solemn, for example, the feast of Holy Mary Mother of God, the Annunciation, the Assumption of Our Lady, Mary the Queen, the Sorrows of Our Lady, the Nativity of Our Lady, Our Lady of the Rosary, and the Immaculate Conception. More recently, (in the year 2002) the pope has restored the feast of the Most Sweet Name of Mary to be celebrated on September 12. In this way, the Christian faithful are encouraged to filially venerate the mysteries of the life of Mary, seek her powerful intercession, and imitate her virtues.

The Christian faithful, as good children of Mary, render filial veneration to the Virgin through other devotions, both public and private. Some that have taken stronger roots in Christian tradition are the following:

- *Prayers*: The Hail Mary,<sup>49</sup> the Holy Rosary, the litanies, and the Angelus
- *Practices*: Marian confraternities and sodalities, May (the month of Mary), pilgrimages, medals,<sup>50</sup> Saturdays dedicated to the Virgin, and the scapular—“Wear on your breast the holy scapular of Carmel. There are many excellent Marian devotions, but few are as deep-rooted among the faithful and so richly blessed by the popes. Besides, how motherly is the sabbatine privilege!”<sup>51</sup>
- *Sanctuaries and shrines*: those erected specifically to honor the Mother of God<sup>52</sup>

Among all the Marian devotions, the Holy Rosary is the most important: “The Holy Rosary is a powerful weapon. Use it with confidence and you’ll be amazed at the results.”<sup>53</sup> The popes have strongly recommended the praying of the Holy Rosary. Pope Paul VI wrote, “Do not fail to inculcate with all care the recital of the Holy Rosary, the prayer so well-loved by the Virgin and so often recommended by the Supreme Pontiffs, by means of which the faithful could fulfill, in a simple and efficacious manner, the command of the Lord: ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you.”<sup>54</sup> The

excellence of the Rosary proceeds from its very nature,<sup>55</sup> an excellence further emphasized by the praise it has received from the Roman pontiffs.

## 12. St. Joseph's Predestination and Eminent Sanctity

After Mary, St. Joseph is the greatest of all saints.

Christ wanted to be born and grow in the bosom of the Holy Family of Joseph and Mary. The Church, the family of God, has special veneration for St. Joseph.<sup>56</sup> No one is greater than him, save the Virgin Mary. The reason for Joseph's preeminence is the proportionate fullness of grace he received so as to carry out his mission as the foster father of Jesus. He was directly and immediately chosen by God for this unique task in the world.

St. Joseph's mission surpassed the order of grace itself and approached the hypostatic order, which consists in the very same mystery of the Incarnation.

The whole Church recognizes St. Joseph as a patron and guardian. For centuries many different features of his life have caught the attention of believers. He was a man ever faithful to the mission God gave him. That is why, for many years now, I have liked to address him affectionately as "our father and lord."<sup>57</sup>

The virtues of St. Joseph are a splendid model for us. "St. Joseph, our father and lord, is a teacher of the interior life. Put yourself under his patronage and you'll feel the effect of his power."<sup>58</sup> The Church encourages us, so as to be prepared for the hour of our death, to ask the intercession of the Mother of God and of St. Joseph, who died surrounded by Jesus and Mary.<sup>59</sup>

1. Pius IX, Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, Dec. 8, 1854: DS 2803; cf. CCC, 490–493.
2. In the *Vulgate* version. Other versions read "He," referring to her seed, Christ.
3. St. Proclus, *Orat.*, 4.2.
4. St. John Damascene, *Hom.*, 1.7.
5. DS 1573; cf. CCC, 493.
6. St. Augustine, *De Nat. et Gratia*, 36.
7. *ST*, III, q. 27, a. 4.
8. DS 1515.
9. Cf. CCC, 618, 964.
10. Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*: DS 2800; cf. CCC, 721–726.
11. Cf. CCC, 494.

12. Cf. CCC, 496–507.
13. DS 30.
14. Cf. DS 30, 503, 555; CCC, 437, 496–507, 723.
15. DS 503; cf. CCC, 499.
16. St. Ambrose, *Ep.* 42.
17. Cf. DS 503.
18. DS 1880; cf. CCC, 500–501, 510.
19. Pius XII, Const. *Munificentissimus Deus*, 44; cf. CCC, 966.
20. John Paul II, Enc. *Redemptoris Mater*, 41.
21. *LG*, 68; cf. CCC, 972.
22. *LG*, 59; cf. CCC, 966–968, 970.
23. Cf. *LG*, 60–63; CCC, 501, 721, 724–726, 967–970.
24. *LG*, 61.
25. John Paul II, Enc. *Dives in Misericordia*, 9; cf. CCC, 966, 2677.
26. John Paul II, Enc. *Redemptoris Mater*, 41.
27. *LG*, 63; cf. CCC, 507, 963–970, 972.
28. Paul VI, Speech at the closing of the Second Vatican Council, Nov. 21, 1964.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Pius IX, Enc. *Caritate Christi Compulsi*; cf. CCC, 967–970, 975.
31. Pius IX, Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*.
32. Leo XIII, Enc. *Fidentem Piumque*: DS 3321.
33. St. Augustine, *Sancta Virg.*, 6.6.
34. Cf. CCC, 965–966, 1014, 2673–2679.
35. *LG*, 62.
36. Leo XIII, Enc. *Octobri Mensi*: DS 3274.
37. Leo XIII, Enc. *Fidentem Piumque*: DS 3321.
38. St. Pius X, Enc. *Ad Diem Illum*: DS 3370.
39. *LG*, 62; cf. CCC, 969.
40. Cf. CCC, 964, 968–969, 973, 1370.
41. Leo XIII, Enc. *Iucunda Semper*.
42. St. Pius X, Enc. *Ad Diem Illum*: DS 3370.
43. Cf. CCC, 971.
44. Cf. DS 1744, 1755, 1821.
45. Cf. St. Epiphanius, *Haer.*, 79; St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Orat.*, 24.11; St. Ambrose, *De Inst. Virg.*, 13.83.
46. *LG*, 66.
47. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 495.
48. Cf. CCC, 971.
49. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2676–2677.
50. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1674.
51. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 500.
52. Cf. CCC, 1674.
53. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 558; cf. CCC, 2678.
54. Paul VI, Enc. *Mense Maio*, Apr. 29, 1965.
55. Cf. Paul VI, Ap. Ex. *Marialis Cultus*, Feb. 4, 1974.
56. Cf. CCC, 437, 534, 1655, 2177.
57. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 39.
58. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 560.
59. Cf. CCC, 1014.

# God's Grace

by Jorge Salinas

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**Redemption and Grace**

# 1. Introduction

Our salvation is a grace from God.<sup>1</sup> Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we share in the Passion of Christ, dying to sin. Through the same power, we share in Christ's Resurrection and are born to a new life: the life of grace. We become members of Christ's body, the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12), living branches united to the vine, which is Christ (cf. Jn 15:1–4).

The first effect of the grace of the Holy Spirit is *conversion*, which justifies us. As Jesus announced, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17). Moved by grace, a person turns to God, departs from sin, and places himself under God's justice and mercy. “Thus, justification entails the forgiveness of sin, sanctification, and renewal of the inner man.”<sup>2</sup>

Grace is a *favor*, the free help that God gives us so that we can respond to his calling. It makes us children of God (cf. Jn 1:12–18), adopted children (cf. Rom 8:14–17), sharers of the divine nature (cf. 2 Pt 1:3–4), and sharers of eternal life (cf. Jn 17:3). Grace is a *participation in God's life*. It introduces us to the intimacy of the Blessed Trinity.

The grace of God's children is a consequence of the Redemption that was accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ. Before examining the nature of grace and its place in the study of theology, let us recall a number of basic truths that are intimately connected with the lessons contained in this work.

The word *grace* appears in every page of this treatise. More often than not, it is qualified by some adjective. Thus, we will speak of actual grace, habitual grace, and special graces. In the language of faith, the term *grace* refers to a mysterious reality that lies beyond what human intelligence or the senses alone can apprehend. It refers to a supernatural reality in the strictest sense, something that involves the Divinity itself, the intimate life of the Trinity, and the action of the Trinity on humanity. Whatever we know about grace comes from divine revelation. Divine revelation in itself is a form of grace; as the Apostle says, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God [the Father] and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14).

To designate this living and supernatural reality, Sacred Scripture uses different words, especially the Greek word *kharis*. From *kharis* come words



like *charisma* and *Eucharist*. The Greek *khara* (“cheerfulness”) is also related to it.

The Greek terms employed in Sacred Scripture expressed the contents of our faith, and were constantly used by the apostolic Fathers. When they were translated into Latin, the word *gratia* was used. *Gratia* means “gift,” “present,” or “spiritual beauty.” Words like *gratuitous* and *gracious* are derived from it.

St. Thomas says that the word *grace* is commonly used to mean one of the following:

- The benevolent affection of a superior for his subordinate. For example, we say that a person enjoys the good graces (or favor) of the king.
- A gift given to someone without any merit on the part of the receiver, something gratuitously given. We say, therefore, that kings give the grace of the nobility to their subjects (or that they graciously confer on them the rank of the nobility).
- The gratitude of someone who has received a benefit without meriting it in any way, a benefit conferred out of the graciousness of the donor. In this sense, we say, “Thank you, God!”—“*Gratias tibi, Deus, gratias tibi!*”

As St. Thomas himself points out, the second usage of the word *grace* depends on the first, and the third depends on the second.<sup>3</sup> In this work, we will use the word *grace* principally in the second sense, meaning an unmerited gift, a gift given through love, and a calling for gratitude to the Father of all graces on our part.

The Christian meaning of the word *grace* is much richer, however, and it must be further qualified if the reader is to understand its usage in the pages that follow.

Everything that creatures receive from God is unmerited. Who can rightfully demand from God the gift of life or the gift of intelligence? Therefore, we can properly call *natural gifts* all the benefits that God has bestowed on us, as well as our human nature. These include all that God gives us to preserve our nature and bring it to perfection in the natural order. In this sense, life, health, and all that perfect a person in the order of nature (i.e., beauty, personal charm, talent) are natural gifts.

In addition to those mentioned above, there are other gifts from God that, although not necessary for the integrity of human nature, nevertheless

perfect man *within the created order*. One example is the gift of immortality, which Adam and Eve enjoyed before committing original sin. These gifts are called *preternatural gifts*.

Strictly speaking, however, the term *grace* refers to all those divine gifts given to humans (and angels) that elevate them to the *supernatural* or divine order. They transcend the demands of human nature and cannot be either acquired or merited by natural efforts alone. We call these gifts *supernatural graces*. Grace, therefore, is any supernatural gift that God gratuitously bestows on us for our eternal salvation.

Every supernatural grace is a divine gift to people in which God himself is the gift. It is bestowed on us so that we may have a share in the intimate life of the Godhead.

## 2. Humanity's Elevation to the Supernatural Order

*Humanity was elevated by God to the supernatural order (de fide).*

The *natural order* is that whereby all creatures—taken individually and as a whole—operating according to their own nature, rendering to God the glory that is due him. In the natural order, man is ordained to God as his natural final end through natural knowledge and love (i.e., the knowledge and love of which he is capable, using all the faculties of his intellect and will).

The direct contemplation of God completely surpasses the natural order: “No one knows the Father except the Son” (Mt 11:27).

The elevation to the *supernatural order* means that God has gratuitously elevated mankind to a knowledge and love of the Godhead that transcends the capacity of ordinary human nature and, therefore, entails a new divine operation emerging from the depths of his soul. When one is raised to this order, he does not cease to be human, but is enabled to perform operations that surpass human nature.

In the Magisterium of the Church, this dogma appears as early as in the Sixteenth Provincial Council of Carthage (A.D. 418)<sup>4</sup> and the Second Council of Orange.<sup>5</sup> The fifth session of the Council of Trent<sup>6</sup> presents a more elaborated treatment of this dogma. In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, there is hardly a page that fails to mention the supernatural order, grace, or heavenly glory. In this respect, too, there is perfect continuity between this and the previous ecumenical councils. “The eternal Father, in accordance with the utterly gratuitous and mysterious design of his wisdom and goodness, created the whole universe, and chose to raise up men to share in his own divine life.”<sup>7</sup>

In Sacred Scripture, this supernatural reality is revealed in the first chapters of Genesis (cf. Gn 5:1–2). The relationship of Adam and Eve with God is described simply, yet profoundly, as that of children to their father. Humanity has been elevated to relate *intimately* with God. The Creator does not leave Adam to simply develop according to *nature* (the word *nature* comes from the Latin *nascor*, *nascere*, “to be born”—nature is what is acquired by birth), but deals with him with paternal affection; he gives him

a companion. To both Adam and Eve, he entrusts the propagation of the human race, gives them dominion over the earth, and places them in the garden of paradise. God gives man the names (and knowledge) of each plant and animal. The nakedness of Adam and Eve signifies the transparency of their souls as well as the absence of malice in the use of their body, the dominion of their souls over their bodies, and their close union with God. These gifts, along with the promise of immortality if they obeyed God, show that our first parents were in a state that was totally different from the one in which we are born.

In the New Testament, certain texts from St. Paul show how the entire redemptive work of Christ—the new Adam—is, in fact, a *restoration* of the sanctity and justice that Adam lost. If Christ came to make up for a loss, there must have been a loss to atone for in the first place (cf. Rom 5:10ff; 8:14ff; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 1:7; 4:23ff).

The Fathers of the Church bear witness to this belief of the Church. St. Augustine comments that our renewal (cf. Eph 4:23) consists in “receiving the justice that man had lost through sin.”<sup>8</sup> St. John Damascene affirms, “The Creator gave man his divine grace, and through it made him share in his own life.”<sup>9</sup>

Condemning the errors of Baius and Jansenius, the Magisterium of the Church affirmed the supernatural character of the gifts that man received from God before original sin.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, Pius XII, discussing several modern erroneous theological views said, “Others destroy the *gratuitous* character of the supernatural order by suggesting that it would be impossible for God to create rational beings without equipping them for the beatific vision and calling them to it.”<sup>11</sup>

If one does not properly distinguish the natural and supernatural orders, one necessarily falls into one of the following extreme heretical positions:

- Only the natural order exists (*naturalism*); or,
- Only the order of grace exists (*supernaturalism*).

The error of supernaturalism is the most dangerous one, for it is usually expressed in emotionally charged religious language (like that of some Protestant groups) and espouses superficially logical theological views (logical, that is, to anyone who accepts its erroneous principles). An

example of this is Rahner's teaching about the so-called anonymous Christians: Every person, by the mere fact of being human, would be within the mainstream of salvation, even if he is unaware of it, or is a professed atheist due to the bad example of some Christians, or even if he chooses to ignore God.

In such confusion between nature and grace, the true significance of the Redemption, the Church, and the apostolate is lost. If everyone is good, then why speak to people about God? Why "complicate" their lives? The end result of such flawed reasoning will be utter religious indifference under the guise of theology.

### 3. Consequences of Original Sin

*Through original sin, our first parents lost grace for themselves and for their descendants (de fide).*

The Pelagians directly denied the dogma of original sin and its transmission to all humanity, together with all its effects. They claimed that the fall of our first parents only acted as a bad example. It had no ill effects on our nature, which we inherit from them unimpaired and, according to Pelagius, endowed with the ability to merit heavenly glory without the help of grace.

Against these heretical views, the Councils of Carthage and Orange defined the dogma of original sin. Later on, the Council of Trent was to articulate this dogma in its most complete form in its *Decree on Original Sin*.<sup>12</sup> This was in response to the errors of Luther, seen as the extreme opposite of Pelagius with respect to the consequences of original sin. Some Lutherans see man as essentially corrupted by original sin, and, thus, rendered incapable of good works even with the help of grace. For them, grace cannot transform the very essence of human nature.

In the long run, Lutheranism often leads to skepticism regarding the natural capacity of reason to know God (*agnosticism*) and the denial of personal freedom. For the greater part of modern philosophy, the *person* is a *state of consciousness*, the product of a historical process (Hegel), of social conditioning (Marx), or of cultural conditioning.

Catholic doctrine teaches that Adam and Eve were elevated to the supernatural order not only in their *personal* capacities, but also in their *specific* capacity, i.e., as the first man and woman, from whom the entire human race was to proceed, and from whom mankind was to inherit grace.<sup>13</sup>

This grace (also called original grace) was not the beatific vision of glory because otherwise, Adam and Eve could not have sinned. What God gave them was supernatural grace (*gratia elevans*) that did not do away with nature, but elevated it so that people might be rendered capable of knowing and loving their supernatural end, tending toward it, and obtaining it. God wanted mankind to merit what he had promised to give as a reward.<sup>14</sup>

Adam and Eve were put to a test. If they obeyed God, they would be confirmed in grace and would merit eternal life; if not, they would be punished. Through faith, we know that our first parents sinned by transgressing the divine command. Their sin is called *original* because it was committed at the origin of the human race and brought the following consequences in its wake for Adam and Eve and their descendants:

- The loss of supernatural grace and, as a consequence, the enmity of the soul with God
- The loss of the preternatural gifts (infused knowledge, freedom from concupiscence, impassibility and immortality)
- The wounding—not corruption—of human nature: “It was the whole Adam, both body and soul, who was changed for the worse.”<sup>15</sup>

Because of original sin, the divine plan to make human beings share in the intimate life of God was upset by man himself, and from that time onward, people are born “unclean” (Is 64:6–7), “by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3), “slaves of sin” (Rom 6:20), and are destined to die. As the Apostle says, “Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned” (Rom 5:12).

## 4. The Divine Plan of Redemption

*The Son of God became man to redeem all mankind (de fide).*

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (the one used at Mass) affirms this article of faith as regards Jesus Christ: “Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven ... and became man.”<sup>16</sup>

Moved by mercy, God decided to give man an efficacious means to recover the possibility of attaining glory. He was in no way obliged to do so; it was mankind as a whole who had confronted God in the person of Adam and had offended him. The offense was an infinite one when we consider the infinite dignity of God who was offended. Hence, it was out of mercy that God decreed the remittance of the infinite debt incurred by mankind. A Savior would come to pay the price of our redemption (cf. Gn 3:15).<sup>17</sup>

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish” (Jn 3:16). The payment of the infinite debt that mankind owed to God was made by way of the Incarnation, Passion, and death of Christ.

“In Christ and through Christ, God is made specially visible in his mercy.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, in the mystery of Christ, the divine attribute of mercy is highlighted in a special way. God could have left the world in its state of perpetual estrangement from its supernatural end, but instead chose to save it by making the God-Man pay the redeeming price of his blood on behalf of mankind.

Christ came to save the entire human race because God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tm 2:4–6). These words of St. Paul show that no one is excluded from the salvific will of God, and that salvation is possible only to the extent that people work to accept the merits that Christ has earned for us. Only through Christ is salvation possible.

The death of Christ—the God-Man—has more than sufficiently paid the debt that mankind owed its Creator. Christ’s Passion and death are an expression of “absolute justice, because Christ suffers the passion and death on the cross on account of the sins of humanity. It is even a *superabundance*



of justice, since the sins of man are *compensated for* by the sacrifice of the Man-God.”<sup>19</sup>

The Person of Christ is divine. Because of his infinite dignity, the merits that he gained for us through his human nature (which suffered for our sake) are also infinite. The plenitude of grace that Christ merited on our behalf gives us all the necessary means for our salvation. Only Christ is capable of “re-establishing justice, understood as the order of salvation desired by God since the beginning for man and, through man, in the world.”<sup>20</sup>

## 5. Redemption is Objectively Complete

*Christ has redeemed us and reconciled us with God by means of the sacrifice of the cross (de fide).*

The Magisterium of the Church has defined this truth as follows: “He, then, our Lord and our God, was once and for all to offer himself by his death on the altar of the Cross to God the Father, to accomplish for them [there] an everlasting redemption.”<sup>21</sup> The Council of Trent proclaimed that Jesus Christ is the only mediator: he alone “reconciled us to God in his blood, having become for us justice, and sanctification, and redemption” (cf. 1 Cor 1:30).<sup>22</sup>

*The Resurrection of Christ and his Ascension into heaven form part of the Redemption taken as a whole (de fide eccl.).*

Although the Resurrection of the Lord and his Ascension into heaven are not directly the meritorious cause of our Redemption (it is Jesus’ death on the cross), they do form part of the Redemption as a whole.

The Ordinary Magisterium of the Church, particularly since the Second Vatican Council, has been teaching this truth even though no dogmatic definition on it has been issued. Through her ordinary teaching, the Church has, thus, sanctioned a doctrine that many Fathers and Doctors of the Church, including St. Thomas Aquinas, have taught as based on Sacred Scripture. Vatican II says: “The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ, our Lord, in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He achieved his task principally by the paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension, whereby dying, he destroyed our death, and rising, restored our life (Easter Preface of the Roman Missal).”<sup>23</sup>

In Scripture, the glorious mysteries of the Lord appear intimately connected to his death on the cross. They comprise the fitting recompense of Christ’s humiliation and obedience. St. Paul says that Christ “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God *has highly exalted him* and bestowed on him the name which is above every name” (Phil 2:7–9).

The role in our Redemption played by Jesus' Resurrection is described in other Pauline texts as being the figure of our spiritual resurrection from sin (cf. Rom 6:3–5) and the guarantee and pattern of our bodily resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:20ff; Phil 3:21). Jesus, as St. Paul says, “was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom 4:25).

The Ascension and glorification of Christ in heaven is the crown of the entire work of Redemption. In heaven, Jesus prepares a place for his disciples (cf. Jn 14:2–3) and intercedes on our behalf (cf. Heb 7:25; 9:24; Rom 8:34; 1 Jn 2:1). Our Lord's Ascension is also a figure and guarantee of our own future glorification.

*The fullness of the new order decreed by God has been embodied in the sacred humanity of Christ and in his Blessed Mother (sent. certa).*

As St. Paul says, “God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4–6).

## 6. Redemption Takes Place in Time

Everything that has been fulfilled through Christ and his mother will be fulfilled in the elect—not to the same degree, of course, nor all at once, but in the manner decreed by God in the course of the centuries. The work of the Redemption is still taking place. The following points should be borne in mind:

- i) *The salvific will of God is universal.* Membership in the supernatural family of the children of God, however, is not automatic after the Redemption wrought by Christ. *Each person* has to be reborn in grace through Baptism.

Sacred Scripture teaches that God wants to save all people (cf. 1 Tm 2:4). We can be completely sure that God wants every human being to be saved because Christ died for all<sup>24</sup> and because everyone is given the means necessary to be saved.<sup>25</sup>

We also know through revelation, however, that hell exists and that souls that die in mortal sin go there. Regarding the souls of the damned, we can no longer speak of God's will of salvation for them, but instead of his decree to manifest divine justice through their eternal punishment.

- ii) *Concerning human nature*, we know through faith that one of the consequences of original sin was that “the whole man—both body and soul—was changed for the worse.”<sup>26</sup> Certainly, one of the effects of grace is that it heals the wounds of original sin in human nature, but it does not completely restore it to health until the end of the world.

Our intelligence, though still capable of knowing God as he is reflected in creatures,<sup>27</sup> is somewhat obscured. It very easily falls into error and manages to free itself from ignorance only with effort. As regards the will, it still retains its freedom but finds it difficult to use this freedom to choose what is good. Although capable of overcoming its difficulties and disordered tendencies, the will remains weak and prone to evil. In short, even after Baptism, all of us retain disorder in the intelligence, the will, and the passions. This disorder, though not a sin in itself, “derives from sin and inclines to sin.”<sup>28</sup>

Experience of sin, then, should not make us doubt our mission. True, our sins can make it difficult to recognize Christ. That is why we must face up to our personal miseries and seek to purify ourselves. But in doing this, we must realize that God has not promised us a complete victory over evil in this life. Instead he asks us to fight. “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor 12:9), our Lord replied to St. Paul, when he wanted to be freed of the “thorn in his flesh” which humiliated him.

The power of God is made manifest in our weakness and it spurs us on to fight, to battle against our defects, although we know that we will never achieve total victory during our pilgrimage on earth. The Christian life is a continuous beginning again each day. It renews itself over and over.<sup>29</sup>

- iii) *With respect to our bodily conditions*, although the supernatural reality of grace does affect our bodies in some mysterious way, death comes inexorably to each person redeemed by Christ. The immortal soul may well be saved, but the body will undergo corruption and will have to wait until the end of the world before becoming a glorified body.

The Church, taught by divine revelation, declares that God has created man in view of a blessed destiny that lies beyond the limits of his sad state on earth. Moreover, the Christian faith teaches that bodily death, from which man would have been immune had he not sinned, will be overcome when that wholeness that he lost through his own fault will be given once again to him by the almighty and merciful Savior. For God has called man and still calls him to cleave with all his being to him in sharing forever a life that is divine and free from all decay. Christ won this victory when he rose to life, for by his death, he freed man from death.<sup>30</sup>

Conformed to the image of the Son who is the first-born of many brothers, the Christian man receives the “first fruits of the Spirit” (Rom 8:23) by which he is able to fulfill the new law of love. By this Spirit, who is the “pledge of our inheritance” (Eph 1:14), the whole man is inwardly renewed, right up to the “redemption of the body” (Rom 8:23). As one who has been made a partner in the paschal mystery, and as one who has been configured to the death of Christ, he will go forward, strengthened by hope, to the resurrection.<sup>31</sup>

- iv) *With regard to human society and the fruit of human activity*, it is God’s desire to definitively establish the heavenly family composed of his children, all conformed to the image of the glorified Christ. The divine work of re-creation also extends to material creatures and the historical and terrestrial realities of humanity, but, here, too, the fulfillment of this aspect of the universal reign of God through Christ will take place only at the end of time.

We know neither the moment of the consummation of the earth and of man, nor the way the universe will be transformed. The form of this world, distorted by sin, is passing away, and we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, whose happiness will fill and surpass all the

desires of peace arising in human hearts. Then, with death conquered, the sons of God will be raised in Christ, and what was sown in weakness and dishonor will put on the imperishable: charity and its works will remain and all of creation, which God made for man, will be set free from its bondage to decay.<sup>32</sup>

## 7. Habitual Grace and Actual Grace

A distinction must be made between habitual and actual grace.<sup>33</sup>

*Grace, in general, is any supernatural gift that God gratuitously bestows on us out of pure benevolence, with a view to our eternal salvation (de fide as regards the existence of grace).*

We are not going to expound this proposition, just recall the definition of the term *grace* given in the introduction.

*Actual grace is an interior enlightenment of the intellect along with an inner prompting of the will (de fide).*

*It is distinct from God and from both human faculties of mind and will; it is supernatural in nature (sent. prob.).*

The Second Council of Orange (A.D. 529) rejected as heretical the teaching that man, using his own resources without the special help of the Holy Spirit, can think or will something that is profitable for eternal salvation, choose a supernatural good, or accept the Holy Gospel.<sup>34</sup> The First Vatican Council reiterated this need for an “illumination and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, who gives all men the facility to accept and believe in the truth.”<sup>35</sup>

Sacred Scripture is replete with prayers addressed to God asking him for help to live according to his will: “Restore us to thyself, O Lord, that we may be restored” (Lam 5:21); “Lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death” (Ps 13:3).

In the Gospels, Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (Jn 6:44). St. Paul affirms, “God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13).

This is the theological explanation of this mystery: If God must move the intellect and will in the natural order before these faculties can achieve their end (for God is the cause of the being and operation of creatures), he must, likewise, move the soul in a special (supernatural) way before it can carry out salutary acts directed to its supernatural end.

*Habitual grace is a supernatural reality infused by God in the soul (de fide) that inheres in the soul in a stable manner (sent. fidei prox.).*

In contrast to actual grace, which is a transient reality and is ordained to eliciting a good supernatural action in the will or intellect, *habitual grace*

is a *state*. Hence, we say that one is or is not in the state of grace. Habitual grace is also called *sanctifying grace*.

In the Council of Trent, the Magisterium of the Church employs terms like *poured forth*, *infused*, or *inheres* to express how this grace is given to the soul.<sup>36</sup> The *Roman Catechism*, which was written in compliance with a decree of the same council, describes habitual grace as “a divine quality that inheres in the soul.”<sup>37</sup>

This grace is what transforms one into a new creature. It is something really in us, and, by its virtue, we shed the old sinful person. It is a reality that can and ought to grow with the help of ever-new actual graces to which one freely corresponds. With this grace, a person begins to advance toward *sanctity* in spite of the many defects that he may still possess and must uproot in order to strengthen this initial degree of sanctity within himself.

Luther separated himself from the Catholic faith, above all, by denying that grace was something *real in us*, a reality created by God and infused into our souls. According to Protestants in general, grace consists merely of a benevolent attitude on the part of God, who turns his eyes away from our sins and regards us as already justified because he sees us in Jesus Christ, whose merits are like a mantle covering the misery of our corrupted human nature, which *undergoes no change*. This is why it makes no sense in Protestantism to speak of the sanctity of the saints. Hence, they reject the veneration of saints, and they are unable to judge the sanctity of a deceased Christian.

Protestants usually have difficulty grasping the importance of the *ascetical struggle*, or the effort to achieve sanctity with the help of God, who calls us to be saints. In its place, there is a sentimental *pietism* and an *ethics of good works*, focusing merely on man’s temporal welfare: civil honesty, decency, or puritanism. Alternatively, Catholics who strive to live in accordance with the faith exert effort to do good, which also means obeying the just and legitimate laws of civil society.

Sacred Scripture is full of passages about grace. “No one born of God commits sin; for God’s nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God” (1 Jn 3:9). Grace is also described as an anointing, a seal, and a pledge of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 1:21ff); a participation in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pt 1:4); eternal life (cf. Jn 3:15–16); a new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15); and a regeneration (cf. Jn 3:5; Ti 3:5). This grace,



which is a stable reality, should not be confused with the lights and extra helps (actual graces) that God gives to pagans for their conversion, to sinners for them to repent, or to those already in the state of grace that they may respond to the new demands he makes of them.

St. Thomas classifies sanctifying grace among the entitative habits, which belong to the accidental category of quality.<sup>38</sup>

## 8. Grace Heals and Elevates Fallen Nature

*Habitual or sanctifying grace heals and elevates fallen nature (de fide eccl.).*

The above means that the nature we have inherited from Adam has been wounded by original sin. Grace, which is infused into the soul for the first time by Baptism, *heals* this wounded nature. It does not completely remove the effects of original sin, however, because an inclination to sin still remains (*fomes peccati*), which God, through his mercy, permits. He does so both to forestall our falling into presumption and because it is his will that we reach heaven after winning in the ascetical struggle. Grace also *elevates* human nature (this is the principal effect) since it raises our being and our soul to a new, *supernatural* order.<sup>39</sup>

## 9. Absolute Need for Grace

*Grace is absolutely necessary to carry out every supernatural action (de fide).*

This has been the constant teaching of the Magisterium of the Church. The Second Council of Orange says, “When we do something good, God acts in us and with us that we may perform this good;”<sup>40</sup> and “man cannot perform any good work unless God first help him to perform it.”<sup>41</sup> The Church made these declarations against the Pelagian and semi-Pelagian heresies. They clearly refer, therefore, to good actions in the supernatural order, not to God’s presence in the being and operation of creatures in the natural order. The Council of Trent confirms this doctrine in its *Decree on Justification*.<sup>42</sup>

This dogma was opposed by Pelagius, who denied the need for grace in order to attain heaven, and the semi-Pelagians, who said that man could take the first step toward conversion without the help of grace.

Some Protestants hold that human nature has been totally corrupted by original sin. Thus, man is incapable of performing any good supernatural action. For this reason, they are also led to deny the existence of an internal and supernatural grace that enables man to act supernaturally.

Baius did not distinguish between the natural and the supernatural orders. Hence, he denied that grace is not proper to human nature. For him, supernaturally good and meritorious acts belong intrinsically to human nature.

Jansenius was more imbued with Lutheranism thought. He thought that all the good acts that a person performs in the supernatural order are the exclusive work of grace, which, he said, is irresistible. Consequently, the least attempt to perform a supernaturally good act was, for him, a sin of pride. Because of the influence of Jansenism, from the seventeenth century until the extraordinary pastoral work carried out by St. Pius X in the beginning of the twentieth century, popular piety in some quarters of Christian society was characterized by a mood of pessimism and sadness.

Sacred Scripture is explicit about this revealed truth: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit; for *apart from me you can do nothing*” (Jn 15:5, author’s emphasis). Using other analogies, like that of the body and the head, St.

Paul teaches the same doctrine (cf. Eph 4:15ff; Col 2:19). He says, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God” (2 Cor 3:5). We would not be able to say a single aspiration without the help of grace: “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3).

Among the Church Fathers (who are witnesses to Tradition), St. Augustine stands out as the defender of the truth against the heresy of Pelagius: “The Lord did not say, ‘Without me you can do little,’ so as to lead one to think the branch could of itself bring forth some fruit. Rather, he categorically stated, ‘Without me you can do nothing.’ Regardless of whether the task is big or small, therefore, nothing can be accomplished without him whose help is necessary if anything at all is to be accomplished.”<sup>43</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 355–421.
2. DS 1528; cf. CCC, 1989.
3. Cf. ST, I-II, q. 110, a. 1.
4. Cf. DS 222.
5. Cf. DS 371ff.
6. Cf. DS 1510ff.
7. LG, 2; cf. CCC, 375.
8. St. Augustine, *De Gen. ad Litt.*, 6.24.35.
9. St. John Damascene, *De Fide Orth.*, 2.30.
10. Cf. DS 1921–1926, 2616.
11. Pius XII, Enc. *Humani Generis*: DS 3891.
12. Cf. DS 1512, 1513, 1523; CCC, 400.
13. Cf. CCC, 402–404.
14. Cf. ST, I, q. 94, a. 1, ad 2.
15. DS 1511.
16. DS 150; cf. CCC, 422, 456–460.
17. Cf. DS 3514.
18. John Paul II, Enc. *Dives in Misericordia*, 2.
19. *Ibid.*, 7.
20. *Ibid.*
21. DS 1740.
22. DS 1513; cf. CCC, 618.
23. SC, 5.
24. Cf. Innocent X, Const. *Cum Occasione* (condemnation of Jansenist errors): DS 2005.
25. Cf. DS 1567.
26. Cf. DS 371, 1511.
27. Cf. DS 3004, 3026.

28. DS 1515; cf. CCC, 405.
29. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 114.
30. GS, 18.
31. *Ibid.*, 22.
32. GS, 39.
33. Cf. CCC, 2000.
34. Cf. DS 376, 1525.
35. DS 3010.
36. Cf. DS 1530, 1561; CCC, 1996–2005.
37. *Roman Catechism*, 2.2.49.
38. Cf. ST, I-II, q. 110, aa. 3–4.
39. Cf. DS 1515.
40. DS 379.
41. DS 390; cf. DS 377.
42. Cf. DS 1551–1553.
43. St. Augustine, *In Ioh. Tr.*, 81.3.

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## The Life of Grace

## 10. Man's Divinization

The intimate life of God consists, above all, in the intra-Trinitarian processions: The Father begets the Son (the eternal generation of the Word) and from the Father and the Son proceeds the Holy Spirit (the eternal spiration of the divine gift).

It has been beautifully and profoundly said that our God, in his most intimate mystery, is not someone locked up in his own solitude, but constitutes a family; for the divinity shares within itself the relations of paternity, filiation, and love, which are of the essence of a family. This love in the divine family is the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

The above quotation contains three key notions: *paternity*, *filiation*, and *love*. In the human family, paternity is proper to the parents, who—even before becoming parents—were already constituted as persons. In them, paternity is a *relation to their children*. This relation qualifies or adds a new dimension to the personal being they possess independent of their parenthood.

*Filiation* is proper to the children. Just like the parents, they have their own personal being, to which this *relation (of filiation) to their parents* is added. The *love* or affection that unites the members of the family to one another is found in all the members, but does not constitute one more person—it is simply the bond that keeps the whole family united.

On the other hand, God, in his intimate life, is a Trinity of distinct Persons who share the greatest unity possible among themselves—the unity of the divine substance, which is unity by essence. Hence, the distinction of the three divine Persons should not be conceived of as the distinction between three different individuals of the same species. In the one and the same divine nature, we have the Father who is subsistent paternity, the Son who is subsistent filiation, and the Holy Spirit who is the subsistent passive spiration of the Father and the Son.

By an eternal and gratuitous decree of his will, God calls humanity to share in the ineffable life of the Blessed Trinity. This participation in the divine life is different from the participation in Being that the Creator gives each human being through his creative and conserving action. It involves a new divine action on a creature in the state of grace whereby God communicates with the person as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit. By virtue of this re-creation, the individual possesses, along with the being proper to creatures, the being that makes him or her a *God-by-participation*.

Hence, grace makes humans godlike. It brings about a divinization of a person, gives one a new mode of being and living (*according to God's image and likeness*), and brings one into the intra-Trinitarian life of God.



## 11. Divine Filiation

*Through grace, we are made children of God (de fide).*

The Council of Trent defined justification as the process whereby we are constituted in the state of grace and of adoption as God's children.<sup>2</sup>

The new quality that God puts into humans in order to conform them to his only-begotten Son, adopt them as children, and bring them into the intra-Trinitarian life is sanctifying grace.

Man is configured to Christ in Baptism. Through Christ, he is made to share in the intimacy of the life of the Trinity; and being born of the Spirit, he becomes spiritualized; being made unto the image of the Son, he becomes a son; and with the Father of the Only-Begotten, he is united in most intimate bonds: the Father indeed becomes a father to him.<sup>3</sup>

This truth of faith appears constantly in Sacred Scripture. After Baptism, our relationship with the Father becomes filial: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:15–16).

The life of grace, or supernatural life, is not of itself a reality that can be felt, because it exceeds the bounds of human nature. It is a truth of divine and Catholic faith that no one can be absolutely certain of being in God's grace unless he receives a special revelation from heaven.<sup>4</sup> However, if we are in God's grace, we are really his children, although nothing unusual is felt. Ordinarily, however, joy and peace are consequences of a genuine spiritual life. The more intense and profound one's spiritual life, the more apparent and deeply felt is one's sense of divine filiation—a gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the above-cited text of the epistle to the Romans, St. Paul wishes to impress upon us the awareness of our condition as God's children. This awareness necessarily increases in those who strive to behave as children of God, imitating the example of Jesus Christ. "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit"; from the depth of our soul, the Paraclete makes us aware of what we are—children of God; certain of this truth, we cry out, "Abba! Father!" with filial piety.

This mystery is strictly a supernatural one, and human language is incapable of adequately expressing it. However, since our filiation to God is

different from that of the Son to the Father, we need adjectives to distinguish them. The filiation of the only-begotten is *natural*, since it is proper to God's nature that the Father beget the Son and that both share one and the same substance. We refer to our filiation as *divine adoptive filiation* in order to distinguish it from the Son's filiation, which is the cause and model of our own.

The word *adoptive*, however, scarcely reflects the reality of our condition as children of God in Christ. When a man adopts a child as a son, he gives him his affection, his family name, his solicitude, and his property. However, the child was already constituted as a person prior to the adoption and cannot be born again. The human nature he has is the same that he received from his biological parents.

When God adopts us as his children, however, he gives us a share of his own nature, and we undergo a new supernatural rebirth as a consequence of this adoption. St. John writes, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 Jn 3:1). In earthly adoption, a father cannot truly say that an adopted child is his own flesh and blood. It is not so with divine adoption, for God himself accomplishes this wonder: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19).

## 12. Grace is a Participation in Divine Nature

*Sanctifying grace is a participation in divine nature within the soul (de fide eccl.).*

It is in this sense that the Magisterium of the Church understands the following words of St. Peter: “He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may ... become *partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Pt 1:4).

The Church teaches that habitual grace is “a divine quality infused into the soul, a kind of splendor and light that cleanses the soul of all blemish, making it very beautiful and resplendent.”<sup>5</sup>

Among the errors of Baius condemned by Pope St. Pius V (1567), one states, “the justice whereby the sinner is justified consists formally in one’s obedience to the Commandments.” This error contradicts Catholic doctrine as reaffirmed by this pope, namely, that justification consists in the grace infused into the soul, “whereby man is adopted as a son of God and renewed according to the inner man and made to share in the divine nature, in such a way that, renewed as he is by the Holy Spirit, he may henceforth live rightly and obey the commandments of God.”<sup>6</sup>

The Second Vatican Council teaches, “The followers of Christ, called by God not in virtue of their works but by his design and grace, and justified in the Lord Jesus, have been made sons of God in the Baptism of faith and *partakers of the divine nature*, and so are truly sanctified.”<sup>7</sup>

In Sacred Scripture, sanctifying grace is described as a seal that God stamps on the hearts of the faithful (cf. 2 Cor 1:22), a “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:14), and a seed that germinates and buries its roots in the inner depths of man—“No one born of God commits sin; for God’s nature abides in him” (1 Jn 3:9).

The notion of *participation* connotes *multiplicity*. There is only one divine nature common to the three divine Persons, but this divine nature can be participated in by a multitude of human beings, who thereby become “gods by participation.”<sup>8</sup> There is only one subsistent filiation (the only-begotten Son of the eternal Father), but there can be a multitude of people who *participate* in this filiation: a multitude of children of God in Christ in

such a way that Christ becomes “the first-born among many brethren” (Rom 8:29).

Divine adoptive filiation is the reality that affects the entire *person* of the Christian, and *sanctifying* or *habitual grace* is the supernatural quality received by the human *nature* of that person. Sanctifying grace and divine filiation, though two different realities, are therefore inseparably linked.

This is how the Fathers of the Church understood one’s participation in the divine nature, which is made possible by sanctifying grace. Among the Greek Fathers, the expressions “becoming godlike” or “divinization of man” by grace are rather common. St. Athanasius, for instance, writes, “The *Logos* became man so that we might become God [or godlike].”<sup>9</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, a witness of Tradition, comments that divinization is “becoming similar to God and achieving the greatest possible union with him.”<sup>10</sup>

Among the modern writers, the expression *endiosamiento*, “divinization,” or “becoming godlike” occurs frequently in the writings of the Founder of Opus Dei:

God only wants us to be humble and to empty ourselves, so that he can fill us. He wants us not to put obstacles in his way so that—humanly speaking—there will be more room for his grace in our poor hearts. For the God who inspires us to be humble is the same God who “will refashion the body of our lowliness, conforming it to the body of his glory, by exerting the power by which he is able to subject all things to himself” (Phil 3:21). Our Lord makes us his own, he makes us divine with a “true godliness” [*endiosamiento bueno*].<sup>11</sup>

### 13. Grace Presupposes Nature

The entire supernatural order that we find in man is an *accidental reality*. This expression does not mean that it is of inconsequential importance, but that it requires a substance in which to inhere. In the case of grace, this necessary substance or subject is the substance of humanity itself.

The Church teaches that the “supernatural order ... not only does not in the least destroy the natural order ... but elevates that order and perfects it, each affording mutual aid to the other, and completing it in a manner proportioned to its respective nature and dignity. This is because both come from God, who cannot contradict himself: ‘The works of God are perfect and all his ways are judgments’ (Dt 32:4).”<sup>12</sup> Hence, the true Christian, far from avoiding the undertakings of temporal life or the use of one’s natural abilities, strives to cultivate them and bring them to perfection in harmony with one’s supernatural life. The Christian thereby ennobles the natural order by enriching it, not only with spiritual and eternal goods, but also with material and temporal ones.<sup>13</sup>

Since original sin did not completely *corrupt* human nature, God’s designs for *creation* still hold. His plans for the redemption of mankind do not supplant those of creation, but are an ensuing path intended for humanity to follow. Grace does not replace nature but heals and elevates it. This mysterious union and continuity between the creative and redemptive designs of God for humanity is alluded to in the Second Vatican Council when it describes the Christian as “living by faith in the divine mystery of the creation and redemption.”<sup>14</sup>

This truth has important consequences for the ascetical struggle (one needs to cultivate human virtues in order to acquire the supernatural ones) and for the apostolate (need for unity of life, Christian naturalness). It also sheds light on the supernatural value of human work and the Christian’s role in society:

If we enter into the theology of it instead of limiting ourselves to functional categories, we cannot say that there are things—good, noble or indifferent—which are exclusively worldly. This cannot be after the Word of God has lived among the children of men, felt hunger and thirst, worked with his hands, experienced friendship and obedience and suffering and death.<sup>15</sup>

## 14. Inhabitation of the Blessed Trinity in the Soul

*The Blessed Trinity inhabits the soul of the just through grace (de fide).*

The Council of Trent declared that imperfect contrition or attrition “is a gift of God and an inspiration of the Holy Spirit; not, indeed, as already dwelling in the soul, but as merely giving an impulse that helps the penitent make his way towards justice.”<sup>16</sup>

The doctrine about the inhabitation of the Blessed Trinity in the soul of the just is contained in the Gospels and has been developed by the Magisterium of the Church.

Pope Leo XIII taught, “by means of grace, God inhabits in the soul of the just as in a temple, in an intimate and singular way.”<sup>17</sup> It is a supernatural presence in the soul of a person. This presence is different from the natural presence of God whereby he preserves all things in existence, and is infinitely superior to the presence of God in creatures endowed with intelligence and will (which is likewise natural).

The presence of the Trinity in the soul of the just is a prelude of heaven in the same way that grace is the beginning of eternal glory while one is still on earth. Thus, the Church teaches, “It is only because of its [temporal] condition and nature that this admirable union [of the Trinity and the soul in grace] differs from that [eternal union with himself] which God bestows on the blessed in heaven.”<sup>18</sup>

Pius XII says that it is a “hidden mystery, which in this earthly exile can never be fully disclosed, and grasped, and expressed in human language.”<sup>19</sup> However, some light can be shed on this mystery if we see it in the context of the other supernatural mysteries of our faith and of the final end to which all of us are called. Hence, “the Divine Persons are said to inhabit [the soul in grace] inasmuch as they are present to intellectual creatures in a way that transcends human comprehension, and are known and loved by them, yet in a way that is unique, purely supernatural, and in the deepest sanctuary of the soul.”<sup>20</sup>

As was said earlier, heaven is the total fulfillment of this inhabitation, and, with the beatific vision, “it will be granted to the eyes of the human

mind strengthened by the light of glory, to contemplate the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in an utterly ineffable manner, to be immediately present throughout eternity at the processions of the Divine Persons, and to rejoice with a happiness very much like that with which the holy and undivided Trinity is happy.”<sup>21</sup>

Christ himself has revealed this sublime mystery to us; “The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive ... dwells with you, and will be in you” (Jn 14:17). And, he told his apostles, “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23).

## 15. The Holy Spirit's Action in the Soul

*The work of our transformation in Christ by grace is attributed to the Holy Spirit (de fide eccl.).*

Every divine operation *ad extra* (operations that refer to creatures) is common to the three divine Persons. Hence, the infusion of grace into the soul and the process of divine adoption is the work of the Trinity. Nevertheless, all divine operations that convey a special outpouring of God's love are attributed to the Holy Spirit, who is the substantial love between the Father and the Son. This is why the transformation of souls into Christ by grace is attributed to the Holy Spirit.

The Magisterium of the Church uses expressions based on the doctrine of appropriation, which in turn is rooted in Sacred Scripture. The Council of Trent, for example, teaches that the justice whereby we are made just (or the habitual grace received in Baptism) and charity, along with the other virtues, are “poured out” and “distributed” to the hearts of the faithful “by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>22</sup> The doctrine of appropriation with regard to works attributed to the Holy Spirit is further elaborated upon in the encyclical *Divinum Illud Munus* of Leo XIII. It is also found in liturgy, especially in the rituals of Baptism and Confirmation, and in the prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours.

“The Holy Spirit is the Spirit sent by Christ to carry out in us the work of holiness that our Lord merited for us on earth.”<sup>23</sup> The final objective of this gradual transformation effected by the Spirit of the Lord is our full identification and union with Jesus Christ, which will take place in heaven. Until then, God carries out his work within us through the grace that he abundantly lavishes upon us through the sacraments.<sup>24</sup>

The moral life of a Christian must be directed toward collaborating with the Lord in the task of his or her own sanctification, which means removing the obstacles to the action of the Holy Spirit and carrying out works pleasing to God. “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (Jn 4:34).

What is the surest path leading to personal intimacy with the Holy Spirit? The Founder of Opus Dei writes: “The Holy Spirit comes to us as a result of the cross—as a result of our total abandonment to the will of God,



of seeking only his glory and renouncing ourselves completely.”<sup>25</sup> “It is he who leads us to receive Christ’s teaching and to assimilate it in a profound way. It is he who gives us the light by which we perceive our personal calling and the strength to carry out all that God expects of us. If we are docile to the Holy Spirit, the image of Christ will be formed more and more fully in us, and we will be brought closer every day to God the Father. ‘For whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God’ (Rom 8:14).”<sup>26</sup>

## 16. Divine Grace and Free Human Correspondence

*Divine grace calls for man's cooperation (de fide in the case of an adult).*

The Council of Trent condemned as heretical the Protestant thesis that “the free will of man, moved and awakened by God, in no way cooperates with the awakening call of God by an assent by which man could dispose and prepare himself to get the grace of justification.”<sup>27</sup> Also condemned was the notion that “man cannot dissent, if he wishes, but, like a lifeless object, he does nothing at all and is merely passive.”<sup>28</sup> A century later, Innocent X condemned the Jansenist view that “in the state of fallen nature, interior grace is never resisted.”<sup>29</sup>

In truth, divine grace never suppresses human freedom. Hence, “far removed from the truth are those who say that voluntary actions are less free because of the intervention of God (through grace). The power of divine grace is interior to man and in keeping with his natural inclinations, for it proceeds from the same author of our understanding and our will, who moves all things in accordance with their specific natures.”<sup>30</sup> Rather, grace enlightens the intellect and strengthens the will to do good so that the use of one's freedom is actually facilitated and rendered more secure.<sup>31</sup>

Sacred Scripture stresses human responsibility in some passages and divine action in others. Its constant exhortations to penance and holiness show that grace does not do away with freedom: “How often would I have gathered your children together ... and you would not!” (Mt 23:37). “You always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51; cf. Dt 30:19; Sir 15:14–17; 31:10).

The Fathers of the Church are unanimous on this point, for all their earnest incitements to the ascetical life and to exerting effort to achieve sanctity presuppose the conviction that man must make use of his freedom. St. Augustine's testimonies are of special significance, for even though he had to emphasize the need of grace for salvation in order to refute the Pelagians, he still did not hesitate to write, “He who created you without your help, will not save you without your help.”<sup>32</sup> Hence, the Christian's

transformation into Christ is the work of God, but it is also the work of the person insofar as the person does not place obstacles to inner divine action.

People, therefore, are endowed with the mysterious ability to decide their own destiny:

It is only we men (I am not referring now to the angels) who can unite ourselves to the Creator by using our freedom. We are in a position to give him, or deny him, the glory that is his due as the Author of everything that exists.

This possibility makes up the light and shade of human freedom. Our Lord invites us, urges us to choose the good, so tenderly does he love us!...

Ask yourself now (I too am examining my conscience) whether you are holding firmly and unshakably to your choice of Life? When you hear the most lovable voice of God urging you on to holiness, do you freely answer 'Yes'? Let us turn our gaze once more to Jesus, as he speaks to the people in the towns and countryside of Palestine. He doesn't want to force himself upon us. "If you have a mind to be perfect..." (Mt 19:21), he says to the rich young man. The young man refused to take the hint, and the Gospel goes on to say: *abiit tristis* (Mt 19:22) ("he went away forlorn"). That is why I have sometimes called him the "sad lad." He lost his happiness because he refused to hand over his freedom to God.

Consider now the sublime moment when the Archangel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary the plans of the Most High. Our Mother listens, and asks a question to understand better what the Lord is asking of her. Then she gives her firm reply: *Fiat!* (Lk 1:38) ("Be it done unto me according to thy word")! This is the fruit of the best freedom of all, the freedom of deciding in favor of God.<sup>33</sup>

## 17. Radical Primacy of Grace

*Divine grace requires man's cooperation, but, at the same time, always precedes it (de fide).*

The entire work of salvation has God as its beginning. It can truly be said that God's action always precedes that of the human being. When a person takes a step closer to God, it is because the Lord had first drawn that person to himself. Nevertheless, God does nothing supernatural in us without eliciting our free cooperation. In this way, God—the Author of our sanctification and the one who brings this work to its completion—associates us with himself in carrying out this task.

The Magisterium of the Church, in the Council of Trent, has spoken with great precision on this subject. The teaching regarding the radical primacy of grace can be summarized as follows:

- Without previous actual grace, no one can take the first steps that lead to conversion and Baptism.<sup>34</sup>
- A special help from God is needed in order to carry out any supernaturally meritorious act.<sup>35</sup>
- The very desire for grace requires the help of grace itself.<sup>36</sup>
- Actual grace is required in order to believe,<sup>37</sup> and in order to:
  - desire to believe,<sup>38</sup>
  - pray,<sup>39</sup>
  - fulfill the commandments,<sup>40</sup>
  - overcome temptation,<sup>41</sup>
  - avoid falling into mortal sin,<sup>42</sup>
  - repent and make acts of penance,<sup>43</sup>
  - dispose oneself to receive habitual grace and merit eternal life,<sup>44</sup> and
  - persevere in grace until death.<sup>45</sup>

1. John Paul II, Homily in Puebla, Jan. 28, 1979.
2. Cf. DS 1524; CCC, 1987–2005.
3. John Paul II, Ap. Letter *Patres Ecclesiae*, Jan. 2, 1980.
4. Cf. DS 1534.
5. *Roman Catechism*, 2.2.50.
6. DS 1942.
7. LG, 40; cf. CCC, 1996–1997.
8. St. Thomas Aquinas, *In III Sent.*, d. 34, q. 1, a. 3.
9. St. Athanasius, *Or. de Incarn. Verbi*, 54.
10. Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Eccl. Hier.*, 1.3.
11. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 98.
12. Pius XI, Enc. *Divini Illius Magistri*: DS 3689.
13. Cf. LG, 40–41.
14. AA, 29.
15. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 112.
16. DS 1678; cf. CCC, 1453.
17. Leo XIII, Enc. *Divinum Illud Munus*, May 9, 1897: DS 3330.
18. DS 3331.
19. Pius XII, Enc. *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943: DS 3814.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. DS 1528–1530, 1561; cf. CCC, 1987–1989.
23. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 130.
24. Cf. LG, 7: “All the members must be formed in his likeness, until Christ be formed in them (cf. Gal 4:19). For this reason we, who have been made like to him, who have died with him and risen with him, are taken up into the mysteries of his life, until we reign together with him.”
25. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 137; cf. CCC, 1992, 2015.
26. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 135.
27. DS 1554.
28. DS 1554.
29. DS 2002.
30. Leo XIII, Enc. *Libertas Praestantissimum*, June 20, 1888.
31. Cf. CCC, 1993, 2001–2002.
32. St. Augustine, *Sermon* 169: PL 38.923.
33. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 24–25.
34. Cf. DS 1525, 1526, 1551, 1553.
35. Cf. DS 242, 246, 248.
36. Cf. DS 373.
37. Cf. DS 1526, 1553.
38. Cf. DS 373.
39. Cf. DS 373, 376.
40. Cf. DS 1536, 1552, 1568.
41. Cf. DS 1520.
42. Cf. DS 1544.
43. Cf. DS 1553.
44. Cf. DS 1545.
45. Cf. DS 1541, 1566, 1572.

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Supernatural Virtues  
and the Gifts  
of the Holy Spirit

## 18. Basic Concepts

Natural life has God as its end insofar as he can be known and loved using our natural faculties. This means that it returns to its origin after a process of perfection or fulfillment of its being, since natural life—like all degrees of being—proceeds from God. This process basically takes place through the spiritual operations of knowing and loving. Each person has a unique being that he has received from God and is conserved by him. One also has a capacity to perfect oneself through the exercise of one's superior faculties, which are also received from God, conserved by him, and moved by him to operate in conjunction with human freedom.

Under the direction of reason and will, our natural faculties are brought to perfection through the repetition of good acts. They are endowed with habits called *natural* or *human virtues*, which lead to the natural moral good. The individual *grows in being* to the extent that the natural faculties are perfected by doing good. The individual draws closer to God and lives in better accord with the right order of personal and social life founded in God. Such a person grows in being and becomes more perfect by *doing* what one ought to do well.

In the elevation of human nature to the supernatural order, God infuses into it a principle of new life, which is called *grace*. He also infuses new operative habits (called *supernatural* or *infused virtues*) and the *gifts* of the Holy Spirit into its natural faculties. We will deal with them later on. Habitual grace (which elevates nature) and the supernatural operative habits (which elevate the operative potencies to the supernatural order) form what is frequently called the *supernatural organism*. This term must be understood by analogy—it is both similar to and different from a natural organism.

The similarity lies in that, through grace, virtues, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, the soul is capable of carrying out supernatural works and operations that perfect it and bring it closer to sanctity, which is the goal of Christian life. Similarly, through human nature and all its operative potencies, a person acts and is able to reach biological, intellectual, and moral maturity.

The dissimilarity lies in the fact that the natural organism (body, soul, and their faculties) constitutes a substance that enjoys a relative autonomy with respect to other creatures. On the other hand, the supernatural organism is an element of the natural organism (the entire order of grace

belongs to the accidental order). Hence, the *subject* that acts through the supernatural organism is the human person. It must use its natural intelligence and will to accomplish supernatural acts.

There are other important differences between operations of a strictly natural variety and those of a supernatural kind, and between the process of perfection as it takes place in the merely natural order or the supernatural order.

Because of the condition as a creature, the human person needs an action of God (God's conserving act) in order to continue existing. The person, likewise, needs divine prompting for his faculties (like intelligence and will) to act. The Magisterium of the Church refers to this presence of God in the being and operations of every creature when it speaks of the threefold manner of God's natural presence in all things: "By power, insofar as all things are subject to him; by presence, insofar as all things are present to his eyes; by essence, insofar as he is present in all things as cause of their being."<sup>1</sup>

This constant divine action in the being and operation of mankind does not suppress human freedom, since God conserves each creature in the being that is proper to it and moves it in conformity with the nature that it possesses. Hence, there is no compulsion that may impair one's natural way of acting. Humans are the authors of their naturally good acts and are responsible for them, even though such acts depend entirely on God as well. This is a truth of the natural order, which philosophy can discover with certitude.

In the supernatural order, God is also the cause of the supernatural being and operations of the person. He acts through the person's *supernatural organism*—a term that must be understood in an analogical way, as was said earlier. God, the first cause, moves the natural potentialities to act. If these potentialities have good moral habits, they respond with more skill in the performance of good acts. In the same way, God also moves the infused or supernatural habits (virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit) to perform concrete acts of virtue that are supernaturally meritorious. For example, a person has the virtue of faith (an operative habit) even while sleeping. In order to perform a concrete act of faith (i.e., "My Lord and my God!"), this habit needs the help of an actual grace that enlightens the intellect and moves the will. The will must freely respond to this grace.



In the following pages, we will distinguish between supernatural virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

## 19. Supernatural Virtues

### 19a) Supernatural Virtues as Infused Operative Habits

*Along with sanctifying grace, supernatural operative habits are simultaneously infused into the soul (de fide with respect to the theological virtues; de fide eccl. with respect to the moral virtues).*

The *Roman Catechism* taught that “sanctity is inaccessible to nature. This sublime goal can only be attained by the Christian through the grace that God infuses into the soul with charity and the most *noble array of all the virtues*.”<sup>2</sup>

An *operative habit* is a stable quality that is found in an operative potency, enabling it to perform certain acts. In the case of *good natural operative habits* (or virtues), the potentiality is endowed with the facility to carry out corresponding good acts. If the human virtue is deep-rooted, one also experiences joy in doing good. In the case of *supernatural virtues*, they alone do not bring about the capacity to perform their corresponding acts, but only the possibility to do so. This is why the supernatural moral virtues must be joined to their corresponding human virtues.

## 19b) The Theological Virtues

*Along with sanctifying grace, the three theological (or divine) virtues of faith, hope, and charity are infused into the soul (de fide).*

The Magisterium of the Church states, “In the very act of being justified, at the same time that his sins are remitted, a man receives through Jesus Christ, to whom he is joined, the infused gifts of faith, hope and charity.”<sup>3</sup> The word *infused* means that these virtues are not the fruit of natural effort but are a gift of God. They are bestowed not as acts but as habits that abide in the soul. A baptized infant possesses these three virtues even though the infant is incapable of performing their corresponding acts.

Sacred Scripture contains this truth of faith: “God’s charity has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). The Apostle also says, “Charity never ends” (1 Cor 13:8). In the verses that follow, St. Paul explains that faith—which is conserved in this life—will give way to *vision* in the life to come; and hope—also conserved in this life—will disappear in heaven, for it will be replaced by the possession of God: “So faith, hope, charity, abide these three” (1 Cor 13:13).

Tradition unanimously emphasizes the importance of these three virtues, which have God himself as their immediate object. Regarding Baptism and its effects, St. John Chrysostom comments, “You have faith, hope, and charity, which abide. Foster them. They are more precious than miracles. But nothing can compare with charity.”<sup>4</sup>

## 20. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

### 20a) The Gifts as Infused Operative Habits

Christian life is rendered possible by habitual grace, which is a stable supernatural quality in the soul (although it can be lost through mortal sin), and by the infused, or supernatural, virtues. The *fullness* of Christian life, however, can be attained only by means of the *gifts of the Holy Spirit*: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

The just man who already lives the life of grace and, like the soul utilizing its potencies, acts according to corresponding virtues, stands in need of those seven gifts we call proper to the Holy Spirit. By virtue of these gifts, the soul is disposed and strengthened to follow the divine inspirations more easily and readily. Such is the efficacy of these gifts that they lead to the summit of holiness; and such is their excellence that they are preserved intact—although more perfect—in the kingdom of heaven. Thanks to these gifts, the Holy Spirit moves us and inspires us to achieve the beatitudes of the Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernatural habits (permanent dispositions) that are infused into the soul along with habitual grace and the virtues. They differ from the infused virtues in their manner of operation. The gifts of the Holy Spirit enable a person to receive and readily obey the promptings that the Holy Spirit himself sends to the soul in grace. Two further points in this vein must be clarified:

(1) *The gifts are bestowed on all*

*The gifts of the Holy Spirit are bestowed on all the baptized together with habitual grace (de fide eccl.).*

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not the privileged possession of select souls. They are operative habits in any soul in the state of grace. However, their actual exercise depends upon the degree of spiritual life of the subject, just as is the case of the human intelligence (intellective potential of the soul). Its actual exercise begins only after the person has reached a certain age, even though it was already present in the soul from the very moment of conception. Further, just as a more perfect physical constitution and a good education facilitate the use of the intelligence, the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is more productive if there is more holiness in the soul.

(2) *The gifts do not violate man's freedom*

Although the divine action upon the soul in the case of the gifts is so immediate that the proper response of the will is more passive than active (thus, the person obeys the Holy Spirit's promptings, reinforces his interior motions, and allows himself to be led along), nevertheless, the will must cooperate. The action of grace always depends on the consent of the will. For this reason, docility to the action of the gifts merits an increase of the life of grace in the soul.

## 20b) The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Some gifts of the Holy Spirit pertain to the intellect. These perfect the virtue of faith (the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding) and prudence (the gift of counsel). Others pertain to the will and perfect the virtue of fortitude (the parallel gift of fortitude), piety (the gift of piety), and humility (the gift of fear of God). “Among the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I would say that there is one which we all need in a special way: the gift of wisdom. It makes us know God and rejoice in his presence, thereby placing us in a perspective from which we can judge accurately the situations and events of this life.”<sup>6</sup>

1. Cf. *ST*, I, q. 8, a. 3, quoted in DS 3330; *CCC*, 301–308.
2. *Roman Catechism*, 2.2.51; cf. *CCC*, 1998, 2013, 2028.
3. DS 1530; cf. *CCC*, 1991.
4. St. John Chrysostom, *In Actus Apost.*, 40.2.
5. Leo XIII, Enc. *Divinum Illud Munus*, May 9, 1897; cf. *CCC*, 1830–1831.
6. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 133.

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The Beginning, Growth,  
and Fullness of the  
Life of Grace

## 21. The First Justification, or the Beginning of the Supernatural Life

### 21a) Justification: The Birth of the Supernatural Life

*Justification is the birth of the supernatural life. It involves a passage from nothingness and sin to grace (de fide).*

The Council of Trent defined justification as “passing from the state in which man is born a son of the first Adam, to the state of grace and adoption as sons of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ our Savior.”<sup>1</sup> This is not something that we merit, but is freely bestowed by God.

Sacred Scripture employs expressions that highlight the abyss from which a person is saved by divine mercy in becoming a child of God. Justification involves a new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). It is the generation of new supernatural life in one who was previously a sinner (cf. 1 Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5ff). It is an interior renewal (cf. Eph 4:23ff) and a sanctification (cf. 1 Cor 6:11). It is the passage from the state of death to that of life (cf. 1 Jn 3:14), from the state of darkness to that of light (cf. Col 1:13; Eph 5:8), from the ways of the flesh to those of the spirit (cf. Jn 3:5–6), from injustice to justice (cf. Rom 5:18–19), from slavery to freedom (cf. Rom 6:17–18), from uncleanness to purity (cf. 1 Cor 6:9ff; Eph 5:26), from the old man to the new man (cf. Eph 4:21ff), and from eternal damnation to salvation (cf. Ti 3:4–7).

Justification involves two simultaneously occurring things: the remission of sin and the infusion of grace and charity. These are not two changes that occur sequentially. They are two aspects of the same reality: The grace and charity infused into the soul wipe away and destroy sin, much in the same way that fire melts candle wax.

Justification is, at the same time, the reception of God’s justice through faith in Jesus Christ. By *justice*, we mean the righteousness of God’s love.

The Church teaches that only God’s infinite mercy is capable of bridging the abyss that lies between sin and grace. “The same Christ, the Son of God, at the end—and, in a sense, reaching further beyond the end—



of his messianic mission, reveals himself to be the inexhaustible font of mercy, of that same love that, in the ulterior perspective of the history of salvation in the Church, perennially shows itself stronger than sin.”<sup>2</sup> Each time God lifts a soul from the abyss of sin and places it in his paternal arms, he shows us that “love is always greater than weakness and sin.”<sup>3</sup>

Justification is granted to us through the merits of Christ’s Passion. He offered himself on the cross as a propitiatory victim for the sins of all.

Justification is the most excellent deed of God’s love. It is manifested in Jesus Christ and granted by the Holy Spirit according to the will of the Father.<sup>4</sup>

## 21b) Justification: A Participation in God's Justice

*Justification is a participation in the very justice of God (de fide).*

The last end of every divine operation *ad extra* is the glory of God, who manifests and communicates his infinite goodness to the creature. The Redemption, for example, glorifies the Incarnate Word and Redeemer, who leads all those he redeems to eternal life. Justification also has for its *final cause* the “glory of God and of Christ, and eternal life.”<sup>5</sup>

God's infinite mercy, as *principal efficient cause*, carries out the work of justification. The lesson we learn in the parable of the prodigal son is that love is transformed into mercy when the strict norm of justice has to be surpassed. The inexhaustible paternal love of God that leads him to be always faithful to his fatherhood and turns that lost sinner into a son once more: “The parable of the prodigal son expresses in a simple yet profound way the reality of conversion. It is the most concrete expression of the fruit of love and of the presence of mercy in the world of man.”<sup>6</sup>

Christ merited justification for us through his passion and death on the cross. He is the *meritorious cause* of our justification. “In the center (of the messianic mission of Christ) is the cross because it is on the cross that the revelation of merciful love achieves its summit.”<sup>7</sup>

Justification does not consist merely in the vicarious reparation that Christ offers on our behalf by virtue of which sin is not imputed to us. Rather, it essentially involves an inner renewal whereby we are rendered just or holy, with a holiness or justice that God himself imparts. This holiness—*formal cause of justification*—is not “the justice by which he himself is just, but the justice by which he makes us just, namely, the justice that we have as a gift from him and by which we are renewed in the spirit of our mind. And not only are we considered just, but we are truly said to be just, and we are just.”<sup>8</sup>

This supernatural life is first bestowed through the Sacrament of Baptism. If it is lost through mortal sin, it can be recovered in the Sacrament of Penance. These two sacraments are, therefore, the *instrumental cause* of justification. Through them, the infinite merits of Christ are applied to us.

## 21c) Man Cooperates in his Justification

Justification establishes cooperation between God's grace and man's freedom. On man's part it is expressed by the assent of faith to the Word of God, which invites him to conversion, and in the cooperation of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent.<sup>9</sup>

*With the help of actual grace, a sinner can and ought to dispose himself to receive the grace of justification (de fide).*

The Magisterium of the Church affirms that God calls sinners so that they may, "awakened and assisted by his grace, be disposed to turn to their own justification by freely assenting to and cooperating with that grace. The result is that, when God touches the heart of man with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the man who accepts that inspiration certainly does something, since he could reject it; on the other hand, by his own free will, without God's grace he could not take one step towards justice in God's sight."<sup>10</sup> Justification is a free gift of God that one cannot merit.

These truths are reflected in Sacred Scripture. On one hand, we read, "Restore us to thyself, O Lord, that we may be restored" (Lam 5:21); on the other, the word of God says, "Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you" (Zec 1:3).

*Without faith, an adult cannot be justified (de fide).*

This was defined by the Council of Trent: Faith "is the beginning, the foundation, and the root of all justification"<sup>11</sup>; "without it, no one has ever been justified."<sup>12</sup>

The Church teaches us that we must believe that Christ has redeemed us. "To believe in the Crucified Son means to see the Father; it means to believe that love is present in the world and that this love is stronger than all the evils that plague man, humanity, and the world. To believe in this love means to believe in mercy."<sup>13</sup> Along With this revealed truth, we must believe *all* the other divinely revealed truths and promises. The faith that is necessary for salvation is the faith professed by the Church.

Faith is a personal act; one's free response to God who reveals. That is why we say, "I believe." Still, faith is not an isolated act. No one can be the origin of his own life or live "all by himself." Likewise, no one can be the origin of his own faith, or believe isolated, "all by himself." The Church is the first to believe. She leads, nourishes, and sustains each Christian in

the faith. Thus, we also say, “We believe.” Every believer has received his faith from another. Thus, he should transmit it to someone else. Our love for Jesus Christ and all mankind compels us to talk to others about our faith.<sup>14</sup>

Our faith is an objective faith; it has real content. Thus, it is different from what is called “fiducial faith,” or the simple confidence in divine mercy. Faith must act “through charity” (Gal 5:6; cf. Jas 2:14–26), be sustained by hope (cf. Rom 15:13), and be rooted in the faith of the Church.<sup>15</sup>

No doubt, filial confidence in divine mercy is the fruit of objective faith. It disposes one to know divine revelation better in order to adhere to it. But, of itself, “fiducial faith” does not suffice for justification. Hence, the Church condemned the thesis that “the faith that justifies is none other than the fiducial faith in divine mercy.”<sup>16</sup>

*Other predisposing acts must go hand in hand with faith (de fide).*

The Council of Trent declared that, in addition to faith, other predisposing acts are required.<sup>17</sup> It mentions the following: fear of divine justice, confidence in divine mercy through the merits of Christ, the initial movements of charity, hatred of and abhorrence for sin, the resolve to do penance, the reception of Baptism, and to amend one’s life. All these internal acts should translate into deeds—the study of the *Catechism*, consulting a priest, or changing one’s habitual environment if necessary. These deeds go hand in hand with faith and pave the way for the justification that is received in Baptism.

After Baptism, the Christian has to fight to fulfill the divine precepts and be docile to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit if he wishes to sustain and deepen his spiritual life. Faith must be preserved: “Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith” (1 Tm 1:18–19).

## 22. The Growth, Loss, or Stagnation of the Spiritual Life

### 22a) Grace is Lost through Mortal Sin

*The grace of justification can be lost through mortal sin (de fide).*

This dogma contradicts the heresy of Calvin, who said that grace can never be lost, and that of some Lutherans, who say that justice is lost only through the sin of disbelief or the loss of fiducial faith. The Council of Trent defined, “the grace of justification ... is lost not only by unbelief, which causes the loss of faith, but also by any other mortal sin, even though faith is not lost.”<sup>18</sup>

The habitual grace received in Baptism is like a seed that virtually contains the full-grown plant. Theologians refer to grace as *semen gloriae*, “the seed of glory,” because the state of heavenly bliss is the full flowering of the life of grace that can no longer be lost. Heavenly glory is to grace what the full-grown plant is to the seed. Hence, grace is also called “the principle or beginning of glory” (*inchoatio gloriae*).

As long as we journey along our earthly pilgrimage, there is always a real possibility of losing the life of grace, just as any incipient life can be forfeited due to unwholesome environments. “We Christians carry the great treasures of grace in vessels of clay (cf. 2 Cor 4:7). God has entrusted his gifts to the weakness and fragility of human freedom. We can be certain of the help of God’s power, but our lust, our love of comfort, and our pride sometimes cause us to reject his grace and to fall into sin.”<sup>19</sup>

Because of this inclination to sin, which is a consequence of original sin, one cannot be absolutely assured of being in God’s grace (although there are signs that may warrant a moral certainty),<sup>20</sup> nor of one’s final perseverance unless by an extraordinary revelation of God.<sup>21</sup>

Given the pilgrim state of a creature who still must reach his destination, deep humility—which grows with self-knowledge—is needed. “Together with humility, the realization of the greatness of man’s dignity—and of the overwhelming fact that, by grace, we are made children of God—forms a single attitude. It is not our own forces that save us and give us life; it is the grace of God. This is a truth which can never be forgotten. If it

were, the *divinization* of our life would be perverted and would become presumption, pride. And this would lead, sooner or later, to a breakdown of spiritual life, when the soul came face to face with its own weakness and wretchedness.”<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, if we are humble and fight with determination, we will never lack divine help to fulfill God’s commandments.

Experience of sin, then, should not make us doubt our mission. True, our sins can make it difficult to recognize Christ. That is why we must face up to our personal miseries and seek to purify ourselves. But in doing this, we must realize that God has not promised us a complete victory over evil in this life. Instead he asks us to fight. “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor 12:9), our Lord replied to St. Paul, when he wanted to be freed of the “thorn in his flesh” that humiliated him.

The power of God is made manifest in our weakness and it spurs us on to fight, to battle against our defects, although we know that we will never achieve total victory during our pilgrimage on earth. The Christian life is a continuous beginning-again each day. It renews itself over and over.<sup>23</sup>

If a Christian loses the life of grace through mortal sin, God will not deny that person the actual graces—provided he cooperates—that will lead to repentance and to the Sacrament of Confession, just as he gives actual graces to the person who is preparing to receive Baptism.

## 22b) Effects of Venial Sin

*Venial sin does not destroy or diminish habitual grace, but it does weaken the ardor of charity and paves the way for mortal sin (de fide eccl.).*

The Council of Trent implicitly alludes to this doctrine when it exhorts the faithful to exert effort in fulfilling the commandments more conscientiously.<sup>24</sup>

Traditionally, theologians have distinguished between venial sins that are brought about more by inadvertence than bad will, and those venial sins that are committed deliberately. Venial sins of the latter sort pose the greater threat to the spiritual life because they clearly reveal that the will is ill disposed toward the duty of striving for sanctity.

I already know that you avoid mortal sins. You want to be saved! But you are not worried about that constant and deliberate falling into venial sins, even though in each case you feel God's call to conquer yourself.

It is your lukewarmness that makes you so badly disposed.<sup>25</sup>

In that state, the exercise of the supernatural virtues is half-hearted and the acts proper to the gifts of the Holy Spirit are paralyzed. Such a supernatural life is weak and never gets beyond the stage of beginners.

There is one case that we should be especially sorry about: that of Christians who could do more and don't. Christians who could live all the consequences of their vocation as children of God, but refuse to do so through lack of generosity. We are partly to blame, for the grace of faith has not been given to us to hide but to share with other men (cf. Mt 5:15–16). We cannot forget that the happiness of these people, in this life and in the next, is at stake. The Christian life is a divine wonder with immediate promises of satisfaction and serenity—but on condition that we know how to recognize the gift of God (cf. Jn 4:10) and be generous, not counting the cost.<sup>26</sup>

## 22c) The Merit of Good Works

Merit, in general, is the *due retribution* given by the community for the good actions of one of its members. Strictly speaking, mankind cannot claim any merit before God. People have received everything from him, their Creator; even their good works are God's gifts. The merit of a Christian before God results from *God's decision to freely associate humanity to the works of his grace*. The paternal action of God comes first, then the person acts freely—influenced by God—cooperating with grace. The merit should be attributed first to God, then to the Christian faithful. Our divine filiation, which makes us sharers of the divine nature, gives us a right to *true merit* according to the gratuitous justice of God.<sup>27</sup>

*The just man, by means of good works, acquires a genuine right to a reward from God (de fide).*

The Church has defined, "If good works are carried out, they merit a reward; but in order to be carried out, they must be preceded by grace, and grace is not owed to anyone."<sup>28</sup> The Council of Trent clearly expresses the nature of this merit: "God's goodness towards all men is such that he wants his gifts to be their merits."<sup>29</sup> The Council emphasizes that one "truly merits" (*vere mereri*), and that the merit is *de condigno* (based on justice).<sup>30</sup>

In Sacred Scripture, eternal bliss is described as a reward, a wage, a remuneration, and a trophy. Jesus promises a heavenly reward to those who suffer persecution for his name's sake: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Mt 5:12). The judge of the last judgment will base his verdict on the good works of the just: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food" (Mt 25:34–35). The theme of reward is frequent in the words of the Lord (cf. Mt 19:29; 25:21; Lk 6:38). St. Paul, who places great stress on the value of grace, also emphasizes the merits that are earned by good works: "He will render to every man according to his works" (Rom 2:6); "Each shall receive his wages according to his labor" (1 Cor 3:8). He refers to heaven as the "crown of justice" (2 Tm 4:8) that is to be conferred by the just judge.

The basis of *supernatural merit* is the divine promise, the fidelity of God to his word, and his love. St. Augustine, meditating on this truth, was



led to exclaim, “In the context of grace, what wonder to behold the nature of man’s merit! Indeed, it is through merit that man can obtain grace; and yet, it is but the working of grace that obtains for us all the merits that we receive, so that when God crowns our merits he does nothing else but crown his own gifts.”<sup>31</sup>

## 22d) The Merit of Man in State of Grace

*By means of good works, a person in the state of grace merits an increase of sanctifying grace, eternal life, and the increase of heavenly glory (de fide).*

This is the definition of the Council of Trent.<sup>32</sup> “Hence, the just themselves should feel a greater obligation to walk in the way of justice because, now set free from sin and became slaves of God (cf. Rom 6:22), living temperately and justly and piously (cf. Ti 2:12), they can advance [in holiness] through Christ Jesus.”<sup>33</sup>

Growth in sanctifying grace also involves the growth of the supernatural virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for the virtues and gifts inhere more deeply in the soul and its potentialities, and are rendered more operative.

The growth of the supernatural virtues is governed by laws that differ from those applicable to the growth of human virtues. The latter grow by repetition of acts, so each new virtuous act *perfects* the corresponding habit. On the other hand, in the supernatural order, acts of virtue carried out under the impulse of grace and with the full cooperation of the subject *merit* growth—which is bestowed by God—not only for the virtue involved, but also for the entire supernatural organism.

## 23. Toward Holiness

### 23a) Holiness of Christian Life

*Christian life bears fruits of sanctity (de fide).*

Belief in the holiness of the Church is contained in the Creed: “I believe in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” (*Credo ... in Ecclesiam, unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam*).

In the religious sphere man is still man and God is still God. In this sphere the peak of progress has already been reached. And that peak is Christ, alpha and omega, the beginning of all things and their end (cf. Rv 21:6).

In the spiritual life, there is no new era to come. Everything is already there, in Christ who died and rose again, who lives and stays with us always. But we have to join him through faith, letting his life show forth in ours to such an extent that each Christian is not simply *alter Christus*: another Christ, but *ipse Christus*: Christ himself<sup>34</sup>

All the saints have attained this objective. In heaven, they form a firmament of varying degrees of splendor, and constitute a reflection of Christ, who is the only Sun. The Church continues to confer the title of “blessed” or “saint” on some Christians who have finished their earthly course. However, the number of the blessed in heaven is so numerous that it is impossible to know them all. This is the reason for the celebration of the feast of All Saints. At present, the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints devotes itself to studying—as thoroughly as is humanly possible—the lives of those servants of God whose processes of beatification and canonization are underway. The final verdict, which falls within the scope of the prerogative of infallibility, is reserved to the Roman pontiff.

Material for this formal declaration exists when it is possible to prove the heroic degree of the supernatural virtues (theological and moral) of a servant of God with certainty, and the eminent degree of the action of the Holy Spirit (through his gifts) upon the “good and faithful” servant. Whatever one had preached or written in doctrinal matters must also be in accord with the objective faith upheld by the Magisterium and with the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and especially counsel. The miracles that have been recognized as such by the Church are manifestations of the divine *placet* toward the Church’s sanctioning public cult to a new blessed or saint.

The vast majority of souls who enter heaven, however, do not become the object of such a judgment by the Church on earth.

## 23b) The Universal Call to Sanctity

*The vocation to sanctity is universal (de fide eccl.).*

The Second Vatican Council has solemnly reminded us that “all Christians, in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.”<sup>35</sup>

We are deeply moved, and our hearts profoundly shaken, when we listen attentively to that cry of St. Paul: “This is God’s will for you, your sanctification” (1 Thes 4:3). Today, once again, I set myself this goal, and I also remind you and all mankind: this is God’s Will for us, that we be saints.<sup>36</sup>

The Second Vatican Council has officially sanctioned the teaching that inspired the preaching and life of the Founder of Opus Dei, as well as the lives of thousands of men and women belonging to the ranks of the ordinary Christian faithful. This teaching now forms part of the frequent exhortations of the Magisterium:

The Pope exhorts all lay people to live up to their dignity and responsibility with integrity and vigor. The Pope counts on the lay people and expects a great many things from them for the glory of God and the service of men. Yes, as I have already said, the Christian vocation is essentially apostolic. It is only in this dimension of service to the Gospel that the Christian will find the *fullness of his dignity and responsibility*.

Indeed, the laity incorporated into Christ by Baptism, and who form part of the People of God, and who in their own way share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ, are called to sanctity and are sent to announce and spread the kingdom of Christ until he comes.<sup>37</sup>

The path of sanctity leads to the cross. There is no sanctity without self-denial or without spiritual combat (cf. 2 Tm 4). “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24).

Grace also includes the gifts that the Holy Spirit grants us to associate us to his work and be able to cooperate in the salvation of the others. These are the *sacramental graces*, proper to every sacrament.

The Holy Spirit can also distribute *special graces* and *charisms* (graces *gratis datae*) for the good of the entire Church. Among the special graces there are the *graces of state*, which accompany the exercise of the responsibilities of Christian life and ministries within the Church. Lastly, it must be noted that the Holy Spirit can inspire—and has in fact inspired—extraordinary paths of sanctity, and bestow exceptional gifts. All these

special graces (charisms, miraculous powers, and gift of tongues) are ordained to sanctifying grace and are at the service of charity, which builds the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12).<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the fullness of Christian life wanted by God for the vast majority of the faithful is to be found along the paths of ordinary life.

I am not talking about extraordinary situations. These are, they may very well be, ordinary happenings within our soul: a loving craziness which, without any fuss or extravagance, teaches us how to suffer and how to live, because God grants us his wisdom. What calm, what peace is ours once we have embarked upon “the narrow road that leads on to life” (Mt 7:14)!

Asceticism, mysticism? I don’t mind what you call it. Whichever it is, asceticism or mysticism, does not matter. Either way, it is a gift of God’s mercy. If you try to meditate, our Lord will not deny you his assistance. Faith and deeds of faith are what matter: deeds, because, as you have known from the beginning and as I told you clearly at the time, the Lord demands more from us each day. This is already contemplation and union. This is the way many Christians should live, each one forging ahead along his own spiritual path (there are countless paths) in the midst of the cares of the world, even though he may not even realize what is happening to him.<sup>39</sup>

1. DS 1524; cf. CCC, 1987–1995.
2. John Paul II, Enc. *Dives in Misericordia*, 8.
3. John Paul II, Homily at the ordination of priests in Valencia, Spain, Nov. 8, 1982.
4. Cf. CCC, 1989–1995.
5. DS 1429; cf. CCC, 1992.
6. John Paul II, Enc. *Dives in Misericordia*, 5; cf. CCC, 1994.
7. John Paul II, Enc. *Dives in Misericordia*, 8; cf. CCC, 1992.
8. DS 1529; cf. CCC, 1990.
9. CCC, 1993.
10. DS 1525; cf. CCC, 160, 1993, 2002.
11. DS 1532; cf. CCC, 1987, 1991.
12. DS 1529; cf. CCC, 161.
13. John Paul II, Enc. *Dives in Misericordia*, 7.
14. Cf. CCC, 166.
15. Cf. CCC, 162.
16. DS 1562, 1533ff.
17. Cf. DS 1559.
18. DS 1544.
19. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 131.
20. Cf. DS 1534; CCC, 2005.
21. Cf. DS 1540.

- 22. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 133.
- 23. *Ibid.*, 114.
- 24. Cf. DS 1536–1538.
- 25. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way*, 327.
- 26. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 147.
- 27. Cf. CCC, 2006–2011.
- 28. DS 388.
- 29. DS 1548.
- 30. Cf. DS 1582.
- 31. St. Augustine, *Ep.*, 194.5.19.
- 32. Cf. DS 1545–1548, 1582.
- 33. DS 1537.
- 34. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 104; cf. CCC, 2012–2016.
- 35. *LG*, 40.
- 36. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 294.
- 37. John Paul II, Homily in the Mass at Toledo, Spain, Nov. 4, 1982; cf. *LG*, 31.
- 38. Cf. CCC, 2003.
- 39. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 307–308.

# God's Church

by Charles Belmonte

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**God's Church**  
by Charles Belmonte

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The Origin of the Church

# 1. The Church: A Mystery of Faith

The Church is a complex reality. She is not merely a human society, but a supernatural one. She is a supernatural mystery. Thus, mankind needs faith to understand the nature of the Church.

The Church is present in the world and transcending it at the same time. She is a mystery of God's love that only divine revelation can clarify. "Proceeding from the love of the eternal Father, the Church was founded by Christ in time and gathered into one by the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

On the day of Pentecost, Christ the Lord sent the Holy Spirit. The missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit comprise one joint, inseparable mission. It is accomplished in the Church, which is the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Through this joint mission, Christ associates the faithful in his communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit *prepares* people to receive Christ, *manifests* to them the risen Christ, and makes the mystery of Christ *present*—especially in the Eucharist—to lead them to communion with God, so that they may bear "much fruit" (Jn 15:5). Thus, the Holy Spirit builds, gives life, and sanctifies the Church. The mission of the Church is not added to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit—it is its sacrament. The Church is the sacrament of the communion of the Blessed Trinity with mankind.<sup>2</sup>

These statements sum up the explanation of the Church's nature offered by the sources of revelation (Sacred Scripture and Tradition):

- The Church is the new people of God.
- The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ enlivened by the Holy Spirit.
- The Church is the temple of the Holy Spirit.
- Primarily and fundamentally, the Church is a living community, a mystery of communion "in Christ," between God and mankind. Christ is brought to humanity through the Holy Spirit. Traditionally, this *mystery of the union of mankind and God in Jesus Christ* has been expressed not by one, but by several terms.
- The Church on earth is also the instrument, or sacrament, of the union between mankind and God. She is the means of salvation established by God.

Depending on which aspect we want to emphasize, we say that the Church is at the same time visible and invisible, interior and exterior, or mystical and institutional.

When we emphasize the institutional aspect, we say that the Church is an organic and hierarchical society, structured and governed by the pope and the bishops under the supreme authority of the Roman pontiff, who is head of the episcopal college. All her members, without exception, have an active role to play.

When we refer to the mystical aspect, we say that the Church is a Trinitarian mystery. Being the mystery of Christ, she enables us to share in his divine life as God's Son, "for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18). In the Church, we can see (though in a veiled way) the mystery of the divine life of the Blessed Trinity, a mystery that one must accept on faith.

So that we never forget, we need to meditate frequently on the fact that the Church is a deep, great mystery. We cannot fully understand the Church on this earth. If men, using only their reason, were to analyze her, they would see only a group of people who abide by certain precepts and think in a similar way; but that would not be the Church.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Preparation of the Church in the History of Salvation

God did not reveal the Church as an abstract notion; he revealed the Church concretely by progressively building her and bringing her to completion.

The most important document of the Second Vatican Council on the Church describes the history of salvation thus:

The eternal Father, in accordance with the utterly gratuitous and mysterious design of his wisdom and goodness, created the whole universe.<sup>4</sup>

In the first chapters of Genesis, mankind appears to have a certain community of life with God; thus, creation is a *preparation* for the Church.<sup>5</sup>

... And [God] chose to raise up men to share in his own divine life ...<sup>6</sup>

Grace, which makes us children of God, is the “sharing of divine life.” Mankind was created in the state of original justice, a likeness of the salvation brought by the Church. Thus, this period is also a prophetic *anticipation* of the Church.

... And when all men had fallen in Adam, God did not abandon them, but at all times held out to them the means of salvation, bestowed in consideration of Christ, the Redeemer ...<sup>7</sup>

Adam’s sin severed his special connection with God. The consequences of sin were as follows:

- Mankind was cut off from *God* (cf. Gn 3:8).
- Mankind was cut off from *itself* (cf. Gn 3:19).
- Mankind was cut off from *his fellowman* (cf. Gn 2:18; 3:16).
- Mankind was cut off from *the material universe* (cf. Gn 3:18).
- Mankind would suffer *death* (cf. Gn 3:19).

God’s compassion for his people—the first promise of salvation—appears immediately after the narration of the first sin. From then on, there is a new relationship between mankind and God. After Adam’s sin, the mystery of the Church—the instrument of the salvation of mankind—is present in the expectation of the Redeemer.

The Latin word *ecclesia* (*ekklesia* in Greek, from *ek-kalein*—"to call out") means "assembly." This term is frequently used in the Greek text of the Old Testament to designate the assembly of the chosen people (cf. Ex 19). The first community of those who believed in Christ called itself "ecclesia," recognizing itself as the heir of that assembly. In this "Ecclesia," God "calls" his people from the entire world. The English term *Church* is derived from the Greek *Kiriaké* (a word related to *Kyrios*); it means "those who belong to the Lord."

### 3. The Covenants of God with Humanity

#### 3a) The Old Covenant

In history, God prepared for the coming of the Messiah and the foundation of the Church by singling out the people of Israel as his chosen people.

The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God's plan of salvation, the beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets.<sup>8</sup>

In the time of the patriarchs, God established a special covenant with the Hebrews. Beginning with Abraham, God entered into the history of mankind, progressively and gratuitously forging an alliance or *covenant*. This alliance was the seed of a new and deeper relationship between the whole of humanity and God. All generations of people on earth would be blessed through Abraham.

During the time of Moses, the Messianic orientation of the covenant is clear in the formal and solemn agreement on Sinai. God underlined the religious nature of his kingdom and its fulfillment in the Messiah through the prophets—especially Isaiah.

God demanded absolute faith from the Israelites, the people of the promise. Thus, Israel also became a people of believers (cf. Gn 12:1), the people of God—*Qahal Yahweh*. This first covenant of God with his people was an anticipation of the Church. The holy city (Jerusalem) and the dwelling of Yahweh (the temple) also prefigured the Church.

The Israelites broke the first covenant (cf. Jer 31:31ff; Ez 36:25ff). Thus, there was suffering, yet also hope among them. God announced that he would create a *new alliance* with the few who would remain faithful, the *remnant of Israel* (cf. Is 4:2–3). The New Covenant would be different from the Old Covenant in that:

- it would be more *interior* (cf. Ez 36:27);
- it would be *definitive and eternal* (cf. Jer 31:31);
- it would have a more *personal* character (cf. Ez 14:11);
- there would be *forgiveness of sins* (cf. Ez 36:25; Jer 31:34).

Thus, the Jews were waiting for the New Covenant to be established through the Messiah.

### **3b) The New Covenant in the Church**

In fulfillment of the Father's eternal decree and with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). He reconciled heaven and earth by carrying out the work of humanity's redemption and sanctification. He forgave sins, taught the doctrine of life, and gave himself up out of love for us. Still, since he had to return to his Father after the glorification of his humanity, he founded the Church so that the fruits of the Redemption would be applied in every time and place.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council summarize the origin of the Church by saying:

The eternal Father ... determined to call together in a holy Church those who should believe in Christ. Already present in figure at the beginning of the world; this Church was prepared in marvelous fashion in the history of the people of Israel and in the old Alliance.<sup>9</sup>

The Church founded by Christ is a historical reality. She is continuous with the former people of God in the Old Testament. However, what was a promise, a prefiguration, or a preparation in the people of Israel became a reality, a fulfillment, and a completion in the Church of Christ.

To redeem us, Christ used his human nature, acquired through the Most Blessed Virgin. To sanctify us, he uses the Church, which he has endowed with the necessary means for all souls to reach holiness.

The Church was established in this last age of the world, and made manifest in the outpouring of the Spirit. She will be brought to glorious completion at the end of time.<sup>10</sup>

## 4. Christ Founded the Church

### 4a) The Kingdom of God in the Gospel

We read in the Gospel that Jesus began his preaching by announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God. He said that he came to proclaim the inauguration of the Kingdom: “I was sent for this purpose” (Lk 4:43). The images that he used point to a certain *imminence*, a *presence* of that Kingdom.

Christ himself unfolds the Kingdom before humanity in his words, deeds, and very presence. To embrace Jesus’ word is to embrace the Kingdom. The humanity of Christ makes the Kingdom of God present, and the Kingdom of God is mysteriously present in the Church.

The Church receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God; she is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that Kingdom. While she slowly grows to maturity, the Church longs for the completed kingdom. With all her strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with her king.<sup>11</sup>

There are three distinct stages in the foundation of the Kingdom:

- i) The first stage encompasses the whole of Christ’s public life, during which he began the Kingdom by proclaiming the good news given by God (cf. Mk 1:14–15). At the same time, he organized this Kingdom into a visible Church, *his* Church (cf. Mt 16:18).
- ii) The second stage, in which the foundation becomes active, began when Christ sealed the New Covenant between God and mankind with his sacrifice.
- iii) The third and last stage—the public manifestation and mission of the Church, “the era of the Church”—was inaugurated by the *visible coming of the Holy Spirit* on Pentecost. The Acts of the Apostles describes the beginning of this stage.

It is a dogma of faith that Christ founded the Church.

Sacred Scripture gives an eloquent description of Christ’s intention to found the Church. Our Lord spoke in parables to the crowds, explaining the new order of things: “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field” (Mt 13:31). On other occasions, he spoke of the church as a net, yeast fermenting the mass of dough, a hidden treasure, or a valuable pearl.



Both the Church's living Tradition and her Magisterium have continuously professed the divine origin of the Church as a truth of faith. The two most recent ecumenical councils have offered summaries of this teaching. The Second Vatican Council stated:

To carry out the will of the Father, Christ inaugurated the kingdom of heaven on earth and revealed to us his mystery; by his obedience he brought about our redemption. The Church—that is, the kingdom of Christ—already present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world.<sup>12</sup>

The First Vatican Council taught:

To render the saving work of redemption lasting, the eternal Shepherd and Guardian of souls decided to establish his holy Church. In her, as in the house of the living God, all the faithful will be held together by the bond of one faith and one love.<sup>13</sup>

## 4b)           **Announcement of the Features of the Church**

The manner of the preaching of the Kingdom of God announced the features of the Church. Jesus did not merely preach the coming of a Kingdom of faith and love; he also made it clear that this Kingdom was to be a visible institution with a hierarchical structure. Thus, he prayed to the Father, “and called to him those whom he desired.... And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach” (Mk 3:13–14; cf. Mt 10:1; Lk 6:13). There were twelve apostles just as there were twelve tribes of Israel. They were the faithful *remnant* of the old Israel and the nucleus of the new Israel, the future people of God (cf. Mt 19:28).

The following texts reveal that Christ had decided to build his Church on the apostles, especially Peter.

- Mt 16:16–20. Peter will be the stone to found the Church and he will receive a certain power, the “keys of the kingdom.” This power is also a service, the Petrine ministry.
- Lk 22:32. This passage relates the first application of this ecclesial power: Peter should sustain the faith of his brethren.
- Mt 18:18. Our Lord promised that the apostles should share the power to govern the Church: “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

These texts show that Jesus wanted to entrust his Kingdom to the apostles and perpetuate his presence through them. Thus, future generations will find Christ’s salvation within the Church.

Every aspect of Christ’s life is connected to founding his Church. Still, Jesus announced that his mission could not be accomplished without the cross (cf. Mt 16:21; Mk 8:31). Thus, Tradition and Magisterium have understood that the Church was born in a special way on the cross:

The Word of God to achieve the salvation of all, not only desired to be nailed to the Cross and die on it, but to suffer the perforation of his side by a lance, after giving up his soul. On issuing from his side water and blood, the one and only Holy Mother Church was formed, immaculate and virginal, the spouse of Christ, just as the first woman Eve was formed from the side of the first man while he slept.<sup>14</sup>

The new alliance is accomplished by the blood of Christ with his death on the cross. In the Last Supper, he instituted the means to make that

alliance effective, namely, the Eucharist (which makes the Church) and Holy Orders (which allows the Church to make the Eucharist).

With the Resurrection, the sacrifice of the cross appeared in proper perspective, not as a failure but as the accomplishment of God's plans for the world. The Resurrection is the birth of the Church.

After the Resurrection, Jesus conferred the power he had promised on the apostles: “‘As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’” (Jn 20:21–23).

Shortly before his ascent to heaven, Jesus gave the apostles a mission: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15). “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19–20).

Our Lord's promise began to reach fulfillment at Pentecost, when “the Holy Spirit was sent ... in order that he might continually sanctify the Church.”<sup>15</sup> Pentecost is the manifestation and promulgation of the Church: She will reach her perfection in heaven as the assembly of all the redeemed (cf. Rv 14:4).<sup>16</sup>

## **5. The Immutability, Indefectibility, and Perennial Nature of the Church**

As a result of her divine origin, the Church is immutably constituted, indefectible (that is, she will not perish or go wayward), and perennial. “We believe that the Church which Christ founded and for which he prayed is indefectibly one in faith and in worship, and one in the communion of a single hierarchy.”<sup>17</sup>

The Church’s indefectibility is founded on her union with Christ, the head of her body, and the Holy Spirit, her source of life.

The Church’s indefectibility means the following:

- The Church will never perish.
- The Church will never fail in her mission.
- The Church will not undergo any substantial change in her constitution, doctrine, or worship.

Since she has a divine origin, no human being can alter her essential aspects. Moreover, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, guarantees the immutability of the Church’s constitution.

The Church can be persecuted, but she cannot perish or be destroyed. She will be present on earth until the end of time—she will attain her fullness in heaven—because Jesus Christ will be with her always, as he promised.

The prophecies of the Old Testament spoke of an eternal covenant between God and man, an eternal and indestructible kingdom. When God became man, the archangel Gabriel declared to Mary: “He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Lk 1:33). Christ built his Church on a living rock and promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against her (cf. Mt 16:18). These words express the Church’s indefectibility and perennial character.

## 6. The Blessed Trinity and the Church

Several passages in the Gospel of St. John (cf. Jn 7:29; 15:26; 17:22–23) show that the origin of the Church is the work of the Blessed Trinity.

One should not forget the complex character of the nature of the Church: The Church is concurrently visible and invisible, interior and exterior, mystical and institutional.

When we refer to her mystical aspect, we say that the Church is a Trinitarian mystery. As we have seen, the Church originates from God the Father's will to save all mankind in Christ.

Being the mystery of Christ, the Church enables us to share in his divine life as God's Son, "for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18). The Church also shares Christ's mission: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21). Thus, the Church appears as the *fruit of the divine missions, namely, the mission of God the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit*. On several occasions, the Second Vatican Council refers to this Trinitarian nature of the Church.

The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). In them he prays and bears witness to their adoptive sonship (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15–16, 26). Guiding the Church in the way of all truth (cf. Jn 16:13) and unifying her in communion and in the work of ministry, he bestows upon her varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs her and adorns her with his fruits (cf. Eph 4:11–12; 1 Cor 12:4; Gal 5:22). Thus, the universal Church is seen to be 'a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.'<sup>18</sup>

The role (*munus*) of the Church in the eternal decree of salvation is to bring people to unity, both among themselves and with God. The pattern of unity is the very unity of the Blessed Trinity: "That they may be one, even as we are one" (Jn 17:11).

There is a radical difference between the Church and all other human institutions because of the supernatural character of the Church. The Church is truly *God's family*.

1. GS, 40; cf. CCC, 770–771.
2. Cf. CCC, 731–741.
3. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Supernatural Aim of the Church*, p. 2.

4. *LG*, 2; cf. *CCC*, 758–769.
5. Cf. *CCC*, 760.
6. *LG*, 2.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *NA*, 4; cf. *CCC*, 761–762.
9. *LG*, 2.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 5.
12. *Ibid.*, 3.
13. DS 3050; cf. *CCC*, 763–766.
14. DS 901.
15. *LG*, 4.
16. Cf. *CCC*, 767–769.
17. Paul VI, *Creed of the People of God*, 21.
18. *LG*, 4. St Cyprian, *De Orat. Dom.* 23.

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## The Nature of the Church

## 7. Concepts that Describe the Church

The Church is revealed in Sacred Scripture as the mystery of the communion between God and humanity, and among humans, through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

The mystery of the Church is very rich in content. Different names are used in Holy Scripture to shed light on this mystery, thus making it easy for us to understand its nature and aim. These names and figures have something in common. They all refer to a *visible* (or human) element and an *invisible* (or divine) element. The following concepts are used to explain the Church's nature:

- People of God
- Body of Christ
- Temple of the Holy Spirit
- Communion
- Sacrament of salvation

These concepts refer to the one and only Church, and they complement each other.



## 8. The People of God

The Church, the congregation of all those who believe in Christ, is the People of God, which he bought with his blood. She was prefigured in the ancient nation of Israel. Hence, the Magisterium states, “As Israel according to the flesh, which wandered in the desert, was already called the Church of God (2 Ezr 13:1; cf. Nm 20:4; Dt 23:1ff.), so too, the new Israel, which advances in this present era in search of a future and permanent city, is called also the Church of Christ (cf. Mt 16:18).”<sup>1</sup>

- The People of God is born of the New Covenant that God established with mankind. God gathered a people, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pt 2:9) from those who were not a people.
- One becomes a *member* of this people by being “born anew ... of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:3–5).
- The new People of God has Christ as its *head*. He is the Messiah (“the Anointed One”); the chrism of his anointing flows from the head to the members. The People of God is a “Messianic people.”
- The *identity* of the People of God is the dignity and freedom of the children of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in a temple. All its members have the same dignity, since all have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and called to holiness. This dignity is compatible with a diversity of roles among different members.
- The *law* of this new people is the New Commandment.
- Its *mission* is spreading God’s Kingdom by being the “salt of the earth” and the “light to the world” (cf. Mt 5:13–16).<sup>2</sup>
- Its *destiny* is the Kingdom of God.

In this regard, the Second Vatican Council has taught:

Christ instituted this new covenant, namely the new covenant in his blood; he called a race made up of Jews and Gentiles, which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and this race would be the new People of God... That messianic people has as its head Christ, “who was delivered up for our sins and rose again for our justification” (Rom 4:25), and now, having acquired the name which is above all names, reigns gloriously in heaven. The state of this people is that of the dignity and freedom of the sons of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in a temple. Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ loved us. Its destiny is the kingdom of God, which has been begun by God himself on earth and which must be further extended until it is brought to perfection by him at the end of time when Christ our

life, will appear and “creation itself will also be delivered from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the sons of God” (Rom 8:21).<sup>3</sup>

## 8a) The Kingdom of God

We have seen that Jesus began his preaching by announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God, present in his words and deeds. His Kingdom has a mysterious presence in the Church.<sup>4</sup>

Henceforward, the Church, endowed with the gifts of her founder and faithfully observing his precepts of charity, humility, and self-denial, receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is, on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

This Kingdom of God will attain its culmination in heaven, when everything will be subject to God's rule.

In order to understand the meaning of the expression *Kingdom of God*, we must first look at the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. Although a number of the Psalms describe Yahweh as king of the people of Israel, the root of this tradition is likely found in the visions of the prophet Daniel describing the Son of Man invested with a kingdom, power, and glory (cf. Dn 7:14). From that time on, Messianic references seem to imply a theocratic society in which Yahweh will impose his will over all nations, liberating Israel from the political oppression of its enemies.

When Jesus announced God's Kingdom, he changed the temporal meaning of this expression. His words had no political implications. Jesus' explanation of the Kingdom is that of a leaven slowly and silently transforming hearts and the whole of society just like leaven in dough (cf. Mt 13:33).

Moreover, Jesus' preaching alludes to a *Kingdom to come*. This future Kingdom will be established after the Son of Man's second coming and will be accompanied by the judgment of the good and the wicked. Hence, it is called the eschatological kingdom. The completion of God's Kingdom will occur at some more or less remote stage in the future, at the end of time, which is not precisely known (cf. Mt 24:31). Meanwhile, we must be watchful, since we do not know when the Son of Man will come to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus announced the Kingdom of God *to all mankind*, beginning with the children of Israel. This Kingdom belongs to all those who receive it with a humble heart, *to the poor and the little ones*. Even *sinners* are invited to come in by means of a genuine conversion, without which one cannot enter heaven. Jesus reveals God's compassion to them. All are invited to

come into the Kingdom through Jesus' parables. But words are not enough; deeds are needed (cf. Mt 21:28–32). To reach the Kingdom, a radical decision to give up everything is necessary (cf. Mt 13:44–46).

As signs of the approaching Kingdom, Jesus liberated some people from material evils, such as hunger (cf. Jn 6:5–15), injustice (cf. Lk 19:8), sickness, and death (cf. Mt 11:5). Nevertheless, he did not come to abolish material evils (cf. Lk 12:13–14; Jn 18:36) but to liberate mankind from the most grievous slavery: the bondage of sin (cf. Jn 8:34–36). Sin is the real obstacle to one's vocation as a child of God, and is the root of unhappiness.<sup>6</sup>

The Kingdom of God is the New Covenant between God and mankind, granting the forgiveness of sins and leading us into the mystery of common life with the One and Triune God. This Kingdom is universal and has two stages: a heavenly and definitive one, and an earthly one, which is the Church militant.

## 9. The Mystical Body of Christ

The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. Identified with his glorious body, she is the extension in time of his work of salvation.<sup>7</sup>

If we should define and describe this true Church of Jesus Christ—which is the holy, Catholic, apostolic Roman Church—we shall find no expression more noble, more sublime or more divine than ... “the mystical body of Jesus Christ.” Sacred Scripture frequently asserts that the Church is a body. “Christ,” says the Apostle [Paul], “is the head of his body, the Church” (Col 1:18). If the Church is a body, it must be an unbroken unity according to those words of Paul: “We, though many, are one body in Christ” (Rom 12:5).<sup>8</sup>

The union between the glorified Christ and the Church is not metaphorical but real, although mystical in nature. Christ sent the disciples to preach in his name saying, “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me” (Lk 10:16). Of St. Paul, who had been vigorously persecuting the Church before his own conversion, Christ asked, “Why do you persecute me? ... I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:4–5).

The Church is called the Mystical Body of Christ because God “has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:22–23).

The faithful play diverse roles in the Church, just as the eyes, ears, and feet have diverse functions in a natural body. “As all the members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also are the faithful in Christ. Also, in the building up of Christ’s Body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to his own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives his different gifts for the welfare of the Church.”<sup>9</sup> The diversity of roles does not harm but rather serves the unity of the body (cf. 1 Cor 12:18–20).

The Church receives her life and growth from Christ, who is the head of the body (cf. Col 1:18). “Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love” (Eph 4:15–16).

The Holy Spirit acts in the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. By giving us grace, he gives life to, unifies, and moves the whole body. His

work could be compared to the function that the soul—the principle of life—performs in the human body. The Holy Spirit is also the source of unity in the body of Christ both between the faithful and Christ and among the faithful themselves.<sup>10</sup>

The life of Christ is communicated to the faithful by means of the sacraments.<sup>11</sup> Through the sacraments, the faithful are united to the dead and risen Christ. Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist are the three sacraments that initiate and complete the incorporation of the faithful into the body of Christ. Christ and the Church are, therefore, “the total Christ” (*Christus totus*).

The Virgin Mary, who, at the message of the angel, received the Word of God in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world, is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and of the Redeemer... Being of the race of Adam, she at the same time is also united to all those in need of salvation; indeed, ‘she is truly the mother of the members of Christ ... since she has—by her charity—cooperated in the birth of believers into the Church, the faithful who are members of its Head.’ ... The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with filial affection and devotion as a most beloved mother.<sup>12</sup>

## **9a) The Church, Bride of Christ**

The unity of Christ and the Church—the head and members of the body—entails a mutual distinction within a personal relationship. This aspect is frequently expressed by the image of the bride and spouse. One of the most beautiful images used by St. Paul to portray the nature of the Church and her relation to Christ is that of a bride whom Christ, the spouse, deeply loves. So much does he love the Church that he “gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25). Christ purified his bride with his blood. The Savior gives life—through the sacraments—to his bride, the Church. She is the new Eve, the faithful spouse of the new Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:45); she was formed from the side of Christ as he slept in death on the cross. By virtue of Christ’s never-failing love, she is a faithful bride, ever teaching the truth, ever calling people to holiness.<sup>13</sup> The Church is now the fruitful mother of all the children of God.

## 10. The Temple of the Holy Spirit

The Church is the temple of the Holy Spirit. What the soul is to the body, the Holy Spirit is to the body of Christ, the Church.<sup>14</sup> The Holy Spirit is like the soul of the Mystical Body of Christ. He is the origin and source of the body's *life*, the *unity* in the diversity of the faithful and of the wealth of *gifts and charisms* that contribute to the renewal and building of the Church.<sup>15</sup>



## 11. The Church as Communion

The Church is fundamentally a community of life resulting from the participation of humanity in Christ's fullness of grace as head of his Mystical Body.

The notion of communion (*koinonia* in Greek) is quite adequate to express the essential core of the Church's mystery. The notion entails both the *vertical dimension* (communion with God) and the *horizontal dimension* (communion among people). This *communion* is, above all, a gift from God, a new relationship between mankind and God that has been established in Christ and is communicated through the sacraments. It also develops a new relationship of people among themselves.

The concept of communion should be understood to express both the sacramental nature of the Church while "we are away from the Lord" (2 Cor 5:6),<sup>16</sup> and the particular unity that makes the faithful into members of one and the same body. This body, the Mystical Body of Christ,<sup>17</sup> is an organically structured community,<sup>18</sup> a people brought into one by the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit<sup>19</sup> and endowed with suitable means for its visible and social union.

The ecclesial communion includes, at the same time, both the *invisible dimension* (intimate communion with the Holy Trinity and other human beings) and the *visible dimension* (communion in the teaching of the apostles, the sacraments, and in the hierarchical order). This communion, then, is not simply moral or psychological in nature, but ontological and supernatural, and it implies a spiritual solidarity among the members of the Church inasmuch as they are members of one body, i.e., the body of Christ.

"The link between the invisible and visible elements of ecclesial communion constitutes the Church as the sacrament of salvation."<sup>20</sup>

In the Church, there is a real *participation* in Christ's grace: "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:29). But it is a free and gratuitous participation. The Church is a *community of life* in Christ and the fullness of Christ (*pleroma*).

## 11a) The Communion of Spiritual Goods

In the primitive Church in Jerusalem, the disciples “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). The spiritual goods shared by the faithful are the following:

- *Faith*: The faith of the faithful is the faith of the Church.
- *Sacraments*: The Church shares all of them, but especially the Eucharist.
- *Charisms*: Each one receives charisms for the benefit of all (cf. 1 Cor 12:7).
- *Wealth*: “They had everything in common” (Acts 4:32).
- *Charity*: “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself” (Rom 14:7). “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor 12:26–27). This solidarity among all Christians is founded on the communion of the saints. Every sin damages this communion.<sup>21</sup>

## 11b) The Communion of the Church in Heaven and the Church on Earth

### (1) *The three states of the Church*

The mystery of the Church is accomplished in different stages. The Church, to which we are all called in Christ, will not actually be complete until heavenly glory is reached. Then, all things will be renewed.

Until that day when our Lord will come in majesty, some disciples continue their pilgrimage on earth—the *Church militant*. Others, having ended their life in this world, are still being purified—the *Church suffering*. Still other members are already in glory—the *Church triumphant* or in *Patria*.

The Second Vatican Council highlighted the idea of a pilgrim Church: God's Kingdom has begun in us because we share in the divine life through the sacraments. However, it is not complete as yet:

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which by the grace of God we acquire holiness, will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven, when will come the time of renewal of all things. At that time, together with the human race, the universe itself, which is so closely related to man and which attains its destiny through him, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ.<sup>22</sup>

While awaiting the fullness of glory, the Church is a pilgrim on earth, suffers in purgatory, and triumphs in God's glory through those who have reached heaven:

When the Lord will come in glory, and all his angels with him, death will be no more and all things will be subject to him. But at the present time some of his disciples are pilgrims on earth. Others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory, contemplating "in full light, God himself triune and one, exactly as he is." All of us, however, in varying degrees and in different ways share in the same charity towards God and our neighbors, and we all sing the one hymn of glory to our God.<sup>23</sup>

The *Roman Catechism* states, "These different parts of the Church form one and the same Church and one single body, because they have the same head, Jesus Christ; the same spirit, which gives them life and unity; and the same aim—eternal happiness—which some already enjoy and others await."<sup>24</sup> The Church Triumphant, Militant, and Suffering are not three churches, but *only one* Church.

### (2) *The communion of saints*

There exists a communion—a communication, or sharing, of spiritual benefits—between the different parts of the Church that is called the *communion of saints*.<sup>25</sup> This communion exists not only among the members of the Church on earth, but also between these and all who, having passed from this world in the grace of the Lord, belong to the heavenly Church or will be incorporated into her after having been fully purified.<sup>26</sup> This means, among other things, that there is a *mutual relationship* between the pilgrim Church on earth and the heavenly Church in the common mission.

Only members of the Church in the state of grace share fully in this communion. The damned in hell are excluded from the communion of saints. Those not in the state of grace are only in imperfect communication, insofar as the good deeds of others aid in their conversion.

(3) *Intercession of the saints*

Members of the Church triumphant can intercede before God for the members of the Church suffering. Further, they present the sufferings and prayers of the pilgrim members to God so that he may have mercy on them. Hence, not only is Christ's intercession on behalf of his members (cf. Heb 7:25) important, but so is that of the saints and, in an eminent fashion, of the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>27</sup> Devotion to the saints corresponds in its very essence to the profound reality of the Church as a mystery of communion.

The Church has always believed that the apostles and Christ's martyrs, who gave the supreme witness of faith and charity by the shedding of their blood, are closely united with us in Christ; she has always venerated them, together with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the holy angels, with a special love, and has asked piously for the help of their intercession.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to the apostles and martyrs, there are all those who have heroically practiced the Christian virtues and those whose divine charisma commend them to the devotion of Christians.

It is most fitting, therefore, that we love those friends and co-heirs of Jesus Christ who are also our brothers and outstanding benefactors, and that we give due thanks to God for them, "humbly invoking them, and having recourse to their prayers, their aid and help in obtaining from God through his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, our only Redeemer and Savior, the benefits we need."<sup>29</sup>

(4) *Praying for the dead*

The militant or pilgrim Church is in communion with the suffering Church. The Second Vatican Council recalled that most ancient tradition whereby the deceased are piously remembered and sufferings offered for them goes back to the dawn of Christianity.<sup>30</sup>

(5) *God's family*

All the children of God, united in praise of the Blessed Trinity and by mutual love, form the Church—God's family.

Following in Christ's steps, those who believe in him have always tried to help one another along the path that leads to the heavenly Father, through prayer, the exchange of spiritual goods, and penitential expiation.... This is the very ancient dogma called the Communion of Saints. It means that the life of each individual son of God is joined in Christ and through Christ by a wonderful link to the life of all his other Christian brethren. Together they form the supernatural unity of Christ's Mystical Body so that, as it were, a single mystical person is formed.<sup>31</sup>

## 12. Sheepfold, Flock, Field, Building

The Church is compared to a *sheepfold* with Christ as the door, and to a *flock* whose shepherds are God the Father and Jesus Christ, who gave his life for his sheep. She is also a *field* cultivated by God, a divine *building* whose cornerstone is Christ, with the apostles as its foundation and the faithful as living stones. “This edifice has many names to describe it: the *house of God* in which his family dwells; the *household of God* in the Holy Spirit; the *dwelling place of God* among men; and especially the *holy temple*. This temple, symbolized in places of worship built out of stone, is praised by the Fathers and, not without reason, it is compared in the liturgy to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem” (cf. Eph 2:19, 22; Rv 21:3).<sup>32</sup>

The Church is also called “the celestial Jerusalem,” and *our mother* (Gal 4:26; cf. Heb 12:22).<sup>33</sup>

1. LG, 9.
2. Cf. CCC, 782.
3. LG, 9.
4. Cf. CCC, 541–560, 763–766.
5. LG, 5.
6. Cf. CCC, 541–560.
7. Cf. CCC, 787–795.
8. Pius XII, Enc. *Mystici Corporis*, 199.
9. LG, 7.
10. Cf. LG, 7.
11. Cf. *Ibid.*
12. LG, 53; cf. St. Augustine, *De S. Virginitate*, 6.
13. Cf. CCC, 796.
14. Cf. St. Augustine, *Serum.*, 267.4.
15. Cf. CCC, 797–801.
16. Cf. LG, 1.
17. Cf. *Ibid.*, 7; Pius XII, Enc. *Mystici Corporis*.
18. Cf. LG, 11.
19. Cf. St. Cyprian, *De Orat. Dom.*, 23; cf. LG, 4.
20. J. Card. Ratzinger, *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 15, 1992.
21. Cf. CCC, 949–953.
22. LG, 48.
23. *Ibid.*, 49; cf. DS 1305.
24. *Roman Catechism*, 149; cf. CCC, 954–955.
25. Cf. CCC, 957.
26. Cf. LG, 49.

- 27. Cf. *Ibid.*, 50, 66; CCC, 956.
- 28. *LG*, 50.
- 29. DS 1821; cf. *LG*, 50.
- 30. Cf. *LG*, 50; CCC, 958.
- 31. Paul VI, *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, 4–5; cf. CCC, 959.
- 32. *LG*, 6.
- 33. Cf. CCC, 753–757.

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## The Church as Sacrament



### 13. The Church, Sacrament of Salvation

The Church's universal mission is born from the command of Jesus Christ, and is fulfilled in the course of the centuries in the proclamation of the mystery of God and the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son, as saving event for all humanity. The Church is what God wanted her to be: the people of God the Father, the Mystical Body of God the Son, and the temple of God the Holy Spirit. In this chapter, we will examine the concept of "sacrament of salvation," which explains some aspects of the nature of the Church. She is the visible sign of the invisible reality of God's salvation.

The Greek word *mysterion* is translated into Latin by two terms: *mysterium* and *sacramentum*. The term *sacramentum* better outlines the Church as the visible sign; the term *mysterium* better outlines the occult reality of salvation. In this sense, Christ is himself the "mystery" of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

St Paul calls the union of Christ with the Church "a great mystery" (Eph 5:32). The Church joins Christ, her spouse, as the bride. Thus, she becomes a mystery (cf. Eph 3:9–11). Christ, our salvation, acts through the seven sacraments of his Church. These are the signs and instruments of the Holy Spirit to distribute the grace of Christ (the head) onto the Church (his Mystical Body). Thus, the Church contains and distributes the grace that she signifies. In this analogical sense, the Church is called "a sacrament."<sup>2</sup> Christ instituted his Church as the *universal sacrament of salvation*. Through her, he joins all people closer to himself. Nourishing them with his own body and blood, he makes them partakers of his glorious life.<sup>3</sup>

## 13a) The Church is an Invisible and Visible Communion

The Church is both invisible and visible at the same time. As an *invisible* reality, the Church is the communion of each human being with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit, and with the others, who equally share in the:

- divine nature (cf. 2 Pt 1:4),
- Passion of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 1:7),
- same faith (cf. Eph 4:13; Phlm 6), and
- same spirit (cf. Phil 2:1).

The Church on earth is also a *visible* reality, a visible communion of faithful who converge in the:

- teaching of the apostles,
- sacraments, and
- hierarchical order.<sup>4</sup>

The Church is a communion of divine life and, at the same time, the visible means or institution of salvation.

Just as Christ is one in two natures, the Church is also one single reality with a dual composition. She is “essentially both human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities ... present in the world, but as a pilgrim, so constituted that in her the human is directed toward and subordinated to the divine, the visible to the invisible ... and this present world to that city yet to come, the object of our quest.”<sup>5</sup>

The visible and social organization of the Church is due to a *free disposition* of Christ. Its context is the *continuation of the Incarnation of the Word*, an Incarnation that is the culmination of the covenant between God and man. This social organization of the Church is in line with man’s nature and deepest needs as a social being that is essentially dependent on others.

This is the perspective in which we must understand the sacraments and the formation of the hierarchy—a structural feature of the institutional Church that enables mankind to hear God when listening to people, and to speak to God in speaking to a person.<sup>6</sup> Thus, by analogy with the Incarnate Word—God and Man—the Church is said to be a general sacrament of salvation.

## 13b) The Church and the Sacraments

All in the Church concur in the same visible realities: the teaching of the apostles, the sacraments, and the hierarchy. By means of these divine gifts, Christ carries out (in different ways in history) his prophetic, priestly, and kingly *functions* for the salvation of mankind.<sup>7</sup> This link between the invisible and visible elements of ecclesial communion constitutes the Church as the *sacrament* of salvation. The sacraments are visible realities made effective signs of his gifts of salvation by the will of Christ. The Church is, as it were, a more universal and comprehensive sacrament.

Each individual is introduced into the ecclesial communion by faith and Baptism (cf. Eph 4:4–5; Mk 16:16). Baptism is the incorporation into a body—the Church—that the risen Lord builds up and keeps alive through the Eucharist. Thus, this body can truly be called the body of Christ.

The Eucharist—the root and center of the community—is the creative force and source of *communion* among the members of the Church. It unites each one of them with Christ himself: “Really sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another. ‘Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread’ (1 Cor 10:17).”<sup>8</sup> The Eucharist is the sacrament “through which in the present age the Church is made.”<sup>9</sup> “When we share in the body and blood of Christ we become what we receive.”<sup>10</sup>

By giving us his body, the Lord transforms us into one body: the Church.<sup>11</sup> Hence, St. Paul’s expression “the Church is the body of Christ” means that the Church expresses herself principally in the Eucharist. While present everywhere, the Church is one, just as Christ is *one*.<sup>12</sup>

By the Sacrament of Confirmation, the Holy Spirit sends the gift of the Holy Spirit to each person in the Church. By the Sacrament of Penance, priests reconcile sinners with God and the Church. By the Anointing of the Sick, the Church continues Christ’s healing mission for those who are seriously ill, and accompanies them in the last battle. Holy Orders configures the priests to Christ the priest, thus they act within the Church as Christ, administer the sacraments, and build up the community of faith. Marriage symbolizes the union of Christ and his Church, which is the fruit

of the Eucharist. New members are added to the Church through this sacrament.

## 14. Necessity of the Church for Salvation

It must be firmly believed as a truth of Catholic faith that the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God.<sup>13</sup>

This unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude a manifold cooperation (which is but a participation) in this one source, but rather gives rise to it. Just as Christ is the one and only mediator between God and humans, so also is the Church the one and universal means—sacrament—of salvation. As we will see in the next chapter, this Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, *subsists* in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him. No man can be saved without belonging to her, either completely (as a full member) or at least in spirit (by his heartfelt attitude, that is, by a desire implying perfect charity and, therefore, at least an implicit supernatural faith).

The ordinary and universal Magisterium of the Church teaches as a truth of faith that membership in the Church is necessary for salvation. Several solemn declarations confirm this truth.<sup>14</sup>

There are many religious traditions in the world. “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”<sup>15</sup>

The need to belong to the Church for salvation is thus a truth of faith: “Outside the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church none can be saved, just as none were saved from the flood outside the Ark of Noah, which was a figure of this Church.”<sup>16</sup> “No one remaining outside the Catholic Church ... can become partakers of eternal life; but they will go to the ‘everlasting fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels,’ unless before the end of life they are joined to the Church.”<sup>17</sup> This is the very same teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which, on the basis of Scripture and Tradition stated that “the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation.”<sup>18</sup>

Our Lord had already said in Holy Scripture that, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5). In sending the apostles around Galilee, he said to them: “And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town” (Mt 10:14–15).

The fervor of the early Christians in living Christ’s command to preach and baptize is shown in the Acts of the Apostles. They were encouraged by the awareness of being harbingers of the message of salvation. Apart from Christ, St. Peter tells the elders and scribes of Jerusalem that “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

We cannot forget that the Church is not merely a way of salvation; she is the only way. This is not a human opinion, but the express will of Christ. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” That is why we affirm that the Church is a necessary means of salvation... “There is no salvation outside the Church”—*Extra Ecclesiam, nulla salus*. That is the continual warning of the Fathers.<sup>19</sup>

“Outside the Catholic Church,” St. Augustine says, “you can find everything except salvation. You can have honor and sacraments; you can sing *alleluia* and respond *amen*. You can uphold the Gospel, have faith in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, and preach that faith. But never, except in the Catholic Church, can you find salvation.”<sup>20</sup>

Salvation always passes through Christ and his Church. The Church, being a mystery, goes beyond her visible structure and organization. Thus, those who are outside the visible boundaries of the Church can also attain salvation if they fulfill the natural law and obey God; still, this is always by means of the Church. For, together with the above-mentioned teaching, the Church has always taught that God doesn’t deny anyone the means to obtain supernatural and eternal happiness: “Those who are afflicted with invincible ignorance with regard to our holy religion, if they carefully keep the precepts of the natural law that have been written by God in the hearts of all men, if they are prepared to obey God, and if they lead a virtuous and dutiful life, can attain eternal life by the power of divine light and grace.”<sup>21</sup>

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or the Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace,

try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—these too may achieve eternal salvation.<sup>22</sup>

God alone knows what goes on in the heart of each man, and he does not deal with souls *en masse*, but one by one. No one on this earth can judge about the eternal salvation or condemnation of any individual.<sup>23</sup>

It is good to remember that, in spite of the shades of indifferentism, “all men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and his Church, and to embrace it and hold on to it as they come to know it.”<sup>24</sup> This means that it is not enough to have a general good will. There must also be a sincere and constant effort to seek the truth with the help and light of grace.

Membership in the Church necessarily requires Baptism, belief in and profession of Christ’s teaching, reception of the same sacraments, and recognition of the pope and the other legitimate pastors of the Church. Baptism of desire is an act of perfect love of God or perfect contrition accompanied by an at least implicit desire for Baptism. The Church’s Magisterium specifies that not “any desire whatsoever of entering the Church is sufficient for a man to be saved. It is necessary that the desire by which a man is related to the Church be informed with perfect charity. And an implicit desire cannot have its effect unless a man has supernatural faith.”<sup>25</sup>

It is a matter of faith that anyone who does not belong to the Church will not be saved, and that anyone who is not baptized does not enter the Church. Justification “cannot take place after the promulgation of the Gospel, without the water of regeneration or its desire,” the Council of Trent established. This is an ongoing demand of the Church that on the one hand stimulates us to greater apostolic zeal and on the other manifests clearly the infinite mercy of God with his creatures.<sup>26</sup>

In the light of the documents already examined, the Church’s tradition can be summed up as follows:

- It is a dogma of faith that “the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation.”<sup>27</sup>
- “They could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter her, or to remain in her.”<sup>28</sup>
- In applying this principle to individuals, their circumstances and capabilities should be borne in mind.

- It is always required to have a desire or aspiration, not necessarily explicit, but in any event, it must be motivated by perfect charity, which implies an act of supernatural faith.<sup>29</sup>  
The texts of the Magisterium are insistent on two points:
  - i) They refer to the overall direction of one's life: "there must be an effort to fulfill God's will in deeds"; "there must be an effort to live an upright life."
  - ii) But this cannot be achieved and have a saving effect except under the *influence of grace*.



## 15. The Church's Universal Mediation

We will see now the *specific ways* in which salvation is achieved through the Church. Thus, we will understand that nobody is saved without the Church (the Church's universal mediation), nor outside the Church (there are different degrees of membership in the Church).

Since the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation in the world, all graces come through her and all graces are directed toward her.<sup>30</sup> However, we should clarify that in Christ, the qualities of Mediator and of head or principle of grace are exactly identical. The Church, on the other hand, is only a *channel*, but not a principle of grace: She only administers the grace.

The Church's mediation is carried out through:

- the power of the sacraments and especially the Eucharist, and
- the power of other prayers and sacrifices offered by the Church in relation to the dogma of the communion of saints.

At the same time, all graces are directed toward the Church. That is, they necessarily draw the recipient to a closer and deeper membership in the Church.

## 16. Degrees of Membership

Each person is admitted into the Church through faith and Baptism. With regard to membership, the following broad principles should be taken into account:

Full incorporation in the Church is for those who:

- are united to the Church by the triple bond of sacraments, teaching, and government; and
- possess the invisible reality of sanctifying grace.

Those who have this triple bond but who have lost charity—that is, those bereft of sanctifying grace as a consequence of mortal sin—belong to the Church “in their bodies,” but not “in their hearts.”

Those catechumens who, moved by the Holy Spirit, expressly request full admittance to the Church are linked to her by this very desire, and our Mother the Church embraces them with love and care.

## **16a) Ecumenism**

There is only one true, universal (i.e., Catholic) Church. The Church is ecumenical because she incorporates in her community all people, whatever their nationality, race, or condition. The faithful enjoy full membership, but there are some who—without being united to the Church—are somehow related to her, with different degrees of closeness.<sup>31</sup> We can distinguish among the following groups:

- The faithful
- Non-Catholic Christians
- Non-Christians

## **16b) The Christian Faithful**

The Christian faithful enjoys a full incorporation or membership in the strict sense, which implies profession of the same faith, acceptance of all the sacraments, and communion with the ecclesial hierarchy.<sup>32</sup>

## 16c) Non-Catholic Christians

Non-Catholic Christians are “these who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.”<sup>33</sup>

The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but who do not, however, profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter... The Spirit stirs up desires and actions in all of Christ’s disciples in order that all may be peaceably united, as Christ ordained, in one flock under one shepherd. Mother Church never ceases to pray, hope, and work that this may be achieved, and she exhorts her children to purification and renewal so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face of the Church.<sup>34</sup>

Among these communities, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, though separated from the See of Peter, retain apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist. These Churches, which (while not existing in perfect communion with the Catholic Church) remain united to her by means of the closest bonds—that is, by apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist—are true *particular Churches*.<sup>35</sup>

However, communion with the universal Church, represented by Peter’s successor, is not an external requirement, but one of the internal constituents of a particular church. Thus, the existence of these communities as particular churches is *wounded*. They are not part of the Catholic Church.

The rift is even deeper in those *ecclesial communities* that have not retained the apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist (the Protestants). They are not churches in the proper sense.

This situation calls for an ecumenical commitment on the part of everyone to achieve full communion in the unity of the Church, that unity “which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning. We believe that this unity subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time.”<sup>36</sup> In this ecumenical commitment, prayer, penance, study, dialogue, and collaboration are important priorities. Thus, through a new conversion to the Lord, all may be able to recognize the continuity of the primacy of Peter in his successors, the Bishops of Rome, and to see the Petrine ministry fulfilled in the manner intended by our Lord.<sup>37</sup>

## 16d) Non-Christians

Non-Christians are those who, not having yet received the Gospel, are somehow “related to the People of God.... Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel, and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life.”<sup>38</sup>

Among these, the Church—the people of God in the New Covenant—acknowledges her spiritual ties with the *Jewish people*, the first to hear the word of God.

The Church also has a high regard for the *Muslims*. They worship God, who is One, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men.<sup>39</sup>

1. Cf. St. Augustine, *Ep.*, 187.34.
2. Cf. CCC, 772–776.
3. Cf. LG, 48.
4. Cf. J. Card. Ratzinger, *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 15, 1992.
5. SC, 2; cf. LG, 8; CCC, 771.
6. Cf. P. Faynel, *L'Eglise*, 1, p. 288ff.
7. Cf. LG, 25–27; CCC, 774, 2014.
8. LG, 7.
9. St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, 12.20.
10. St. Leo the Great, *Sermo* 63.7.
11. Cf. St. John Chrysostom, *In I Cor. Hom.*, 24.2; cf. LG, 3, 11.
12. Cf. J. Card. Ratzinger, *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 15, 1992.
13. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decl. *Dominus Iesus*, 14, Aug. 6, 2000.
14. Cf. DS 702, 802, 870, 1051, 1351, 2540, 2865, 3304, 3802–08, 3866–72; LG, 14; CCC, 846–848; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decl. *Dominus Iesus*, Aug. 6, 2000.
15. NA, 2; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decl. *Dominus Iesus*, 2, Aug. 6, 2000.
16. *Roman Catechism*, 170.
17. DS 1351.
18. LG, 14.
19. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Supernatural Aim of the Church*, pp. 9–10.
20. St. Augustine, *Sermo ad Caesariensis Ecclesiae Plebem*, 6: PL 43, 456.
21. DS 2866.
22. LG, 16; cf. DS 3869–72.
23. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Supernatural Aim of the Church*, p. 12.
24. DH, 1.

- 25. DS 3872.
- 26. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Supernatural Aim of the Church*, p. 11; cf. DS 1524.
- 27. *LG*, 14.
- 28. *Ibid.*
- 29. Cf. DS 3872.
- 30. Cf. *CCC*, 824, 830.
- 31. Cf. *LG*, 15–16; *UR*, 3–4; *CCC*, 817–822, 836.
- 32. Cf. *CCC*, 837.
- 33. *UR*, 3.
- 34. *LG*, 15.
- 35. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decl. *Dominus Iesus*, 17, Aug. 6, 2000.
- 36. *UR*, 4.
- 37. Cf. *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, 17, May 28, 1992; cf. *CCC*, 838.
- 38. *LG*, 16.
- 39. Cf. *CCC*, 839–845.

The Church is One, Holy,  
Catholic, and Apostolic



## 17. Properties and Marks of the Church

The *properties* of the Church are all the essential characteristics conferred on her by Christ, her founder. Therefore, even though the Church is an ineffable reality—a mystery of faith—she can be described through her essential properties: a supernatural perfect society, at once visible and invisible, perennial, eschatological, necessary for salvation, hierarchical, sacramental, one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

The *marks* of the Church, besides being essential properties of the Church, imply some visible sign that enables the true Church to be distinguished from the others. These marks are unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. They are exclusive to the Roman Catholic Church, the only true Church founded by Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

## 18. Properties of the Church

“The Church is essentially both *human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities*, zealous in action and dedicated to contemplation, present in the world, but as a pilgrim.”<sup>1</sup> By analogy with her Founder, the Church is a divine and human reality: “The Church ... is a society divine in her origin, supernatural in her end and in the means immediately leading to her end. However, she is a human association in that she is made up of men.”<sup>2</sup>

The Church is at once *charismatic and hierarchical* because Christ himself “filled her with his Spirit; he has provided means adapted to her visible and social union.”<sup>3</sup> This is the power of jurisdiction. For this reason, the Church is a *perfect society* in her order—independent of civil society—and endowed with the necessary means to lead her members to their end.

Although the Church is *present in time* and forms the beginning of the heavenly kingdom while on earth, “She has a saving and *eschatological purpose* which can be fully attained only in the next life. But she is now present here on earth and is composed of men; they, the members of the earthly city, are called to form the family of the children of God even in this present history of mankind and to increase it continually until the Lord comes.”<sup>4</sup>

However, the Church will attain her full measure only in heavenly glory, when the time comes for all things to be renewed. Then, the whole of creation—which is closely related with the human race—will also attain its end through him, and together, they will be perfectly restored in Christ. “However, until there be realized new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, the pilgrim Church, in her sacraments and institutions, which belong to the present age, carries the ark of this world, which will pass, and she herself takes her place among the creatures, which groan and travail yet and await the revelation of the sons of God.”<sup>5</sup>

The Church is at once *hierarchical and fraternal*. She is hierarchical because “in order to shepherd the People of God and to increase her numbers without cease, Christ the Lord set up in his Church a variety of offices, which aim at the good of the whole body.”<sup>6</sup> Catholic doctrine holds that this specific power of hierarchical jurisdiction does not stem from the

community of the faithful but comes directly from God. However, the Church is a fraternal society, since there is true equality of dignity among all the faithful for the building up of the Mystical Body of Christ.

There is no impairment of the Church's unity in her being human and supernatural, visible and invisible, juridical and charismatic, temporal and eschatological, local and universal, fraternal and hierarchical. Rather, these properties confirm and protect her unity. "The society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complex reality, which comes together from a human and a divine element."<sup>7</sup>

According to St Augustine, "Two levels of life exist in the Church, both announced and recommended by our Lord; in one of them faith is operative, in the other, there is celestial vision; one exists on our pilgrim way, the other in the heavenly mansions; in one there is tribulation, in the other rest; one is like a journey, the other the homeland; one exists in active effort, the other in the reward of contemplation."<sup>8</sup>

## 19. Marks of the Church

The marks are essential and visible signs that allow the true Church founded by Christ to be distinguished from others. The Second Vatican Council stated:

This is the sole Church of Christ, which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Savior, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, commissioning him and the other Apostles to extend and rule it, and which he raised up for all ages as "the pillar and mainstay of the truth"(1 Tm 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him.<sup>9</sup>

All the Creeds confess the existence of these characteristic signs of Christ's Church by which she can be recognized by all as the true Church.

The true Church of Jesus Christ is constituted by divine authority and is known by four notes. We lay down here these notes as matters of faith in the Creed. And any one of these notes is so joined to the others that it cannot be separated from them. Hence, the Church, that really is catholic, and is called Catholic, must, at the same time, shine with the prerogatives of unity, sanctity, and apostolic succession.<sup>10</sup>

Only faith can recognize that the Church possesses these marks because of her divine origin. But the historical manifestations of these marks are signs that speak clearly to human reason. The First Vatican Council reminds us: "The Church herself, by her marvelous propagation, eminent holiness, and inexhaustible fruitfulness in everything that is good, with her catholic unity and invincible stability, is a great and perpetual motive of credibility and an irrefutable testimony of her divine mission."<sup>11</sup>

## 19a) Unity

We believe that the Church that Christ founded and for which he prayed is indefectibly one in faith and in worship, and one in communion of a single hierarchy.<sup>12</sup>

The Church—*founded by Christ*—is *one* and *unique* because of her origin. The unicity or uniqueness of the Church means that there is only one true Church of Christ, whose make up is in exact agreement with her divine Founder's will. It is evident from the Gospel that Christ desired "one flock, one shepherd" (Jn 10:16; cf. Mt 12:25).

The Church's Magisterium has always held, in faithfulness to Christ's teachings, that the Church is one and unique. The Second Vatican Council strongly reaffirmed this perennial teaching of the Magisterium: "The sacred Council begins by professing that God himself has made known to the human race how men by serving him can be saved and reach happiness in Christ. We believe that this one true religion continues to exist in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus entrusted the task of spreading it among all men."<sup>13</sup>

The Church is one because of *her "soul," the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit governs the Church and is the foundation of her unity. This one and only Church of Christ is kept in unity—undivided—"by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion."<sup>14</sup> Thus, the roots of the internal unity of the universal Church are:

- the same faith,
- the same Baptism, the one Eucharistic sacrifice, the same sacraments, and
- the unity of the episcopate, based on the apostolic succession through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

The Eucharistic sacrifice, while always offered in a particular community, is never a celebration of that community alone. The community is the image and true presence of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Where the Eucharist is celebrated, the totality of the mystery of the Church becomes present.

The Catholic Church is the only Church with unity of doctrine, of sacraments, and of government under one single head. Protestants, for

example, due to the principle of personal interpretation, lack unity in faith, as well as unity of government. The schismatic Orthodox Greeks, even while maintaining unity of doctrine, lack unity of government. Schismatics break the social bonds by denying obedience to the legitimate pastors. Schism and heresy are formally distinct, but the former also implies a heresy by denying the authority and infallibility of the Church and the Roman pontiff.

To defend the unity of the Church is to live very united to Jesus Christ, who is our vine. How? By growing in fidelity to the perennial Magisterium of the Church... By venerating this mother of ours without stain and loving the Roman Pontiff, we will preserve unity.<sup>15</sup>

Heresy, apostasy, and schism are wounds on the unity of the Church that are produced by people's sins. Nevertheless, one cannot charge those who are born into these communities (and in them are instructed in the faith of Christ) with the sin of separation. These separated communities possess some elements of sanctification and truth: the written word of God, the life of grace, faith, hope, and charity. However, all these elements, which come from Christ and lead back to him, belong by right to the one Church of Christ. The Holy Spirit makes use of these elements to bring people to salvation.

From the beginning, Christ granted the mark of unity to the one and only Church. This unity subsists in the Catholic Church as something that she can never lose.<sup>16</sup>

## 19b) Holiness

The Church is holy, even though she embraces sinners in her bosom, for she enjoys no other life but the life of grace. If, then, they live her life her members are sanctified.<sup>17</sup>

The Second Vatican Council taught: “The Church ... is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy. This is because Christ, the Son of God ... loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her; he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.”<sup>18</sup>

The Church is holy in her *origin*: Christ is her holy Founder and head. The Church is also holy in her *internal principle of life*, the Holy Spirit. Her *aim* is holy—namely, God’s glory and man’s sanctification. The *means* that she uses are holy: Christ’s teaching, his moral precepts and counsels, the forms of worship, the sacraments, and the gifts of grace. The Church is holy in *many of her members*, as there are and always have been saints whose holiness has been proven and proclaimed by the Church.

Holy, holy, holy, we dare to sing to the Church, evoking a hymn in honor of the Blessed Trinity. You are holy, O Church, my mother, because the Son of God, who is holy, founded you; you are holy, because the Father, source of all holiness, so ordained it; you are holy, because the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the souls of the faithful, assists you, in order to gather together the children of the Father, who will dwell in the Church of heaven, the eternal Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup>

“One must not imagine that the body of the Church ... is made up during the days of her earthly pilgrimage only of members conspicuous for their holiness, or consists only of those whom God has predestined to eternal happiness.”<sup>20</sup> “The men who make up the Church are made of the clay of Adam, and can be, and often are, sinners. The Church is holy in her structures, and can be sinful in the human members giving her shape; she is holy yet seeks holiness; she is at once holy and penitent; she is holy in herself and infirm in the men who make her up.”<sup>21</sup> The Church is without sin, but harbors sinners whom she restores to life by the forgiveness of sins.

## 19c) Catholicity

*Catholic* means universal.<sup>22</sup> The Church is universal because Christ is present in her. “Where Christ Jesus is, there the Catholic Church is.”<sup>23</sup> The fullness of the body of Christ, united to her head, subsists in the Church (cf. Eph 1:22–23). This implies that she possesses the totality of the means of salvation<sup>24</sup>: right and complete faith, integral sacramental life, and ministry ordained in the apostolic succession.

Another clear sign of the universality of the Church: the faithful preservation and administration of the sacraments as they were instituted by Jesus Christ, without human deformations or evil attempts to interpret them psychologically or sociologically.<sup>25</sup>

For many centuries now the Church has been spread throughout the world; and she numbers persons of all races and walks of life. But the universality of the Church does not depend on her geographical distribution, even though this is a visible sign and a motive of credibility. The Church was catholic already at Pentecost: she was born catholic from the wounded heart of Jesus, as a fire that the Holy Spirit kindled.<sup>26</sup>

From a qualitative point of view, the universality of the Church is manifested in:

- her awareness of a common destiny for all,
- the constant effort to carry out that mission, which is at the same time a right,
- the universality of her doctrine, applying to all people, all races and cultures, and
- the strong unity of all Catholics who practice their faith.

The Church is catholic also because Christ has sent her in mission to the totality of mankind. Christ wanted the Church to be universal and to reach—without losing her unity—all peoples throughout the centuries. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

All men are called to belong to the new People of God. This People therefore, whilst remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God’s will may be fulfilled: he made human nature one in the beginning and has decreed that all his children who were scattered should be finally gathered together as one.<sup>27</sup>



The Catholic Church's extension throughout the world—unequalled by any Christian community or by all of them together—is an evident fact.

## 19d) Apostolicity

The fourth mark that we profess in the Creed is the apostolicity of the Church, which—spread throughout the earth—gives continuity to the mission entrusted by Jesus Christ to the Apostles.<sup>28</sup>

The Greek word *apostoloi* means “those who are sent.” The Church is called “apostolic” because she is founded on the apostles in a threefold sense:

- i) *Apostolic foundation*: The Church was built and remains on the “foundation of the apostles” (Eph 2:20), chosen by Christ as witnesses and sent by him in mission (cf. Mt 28:16–20).
- ii) *Apostolic truth*: She guards and transmits—with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells within her—the teachings and words taught by the apostles (cf. Acts 2:42).
- iii) *Apostolic government*: She continues being taught, sanctified, and directed by the apostles, in the persons of their successors in the pastoral ministry: the college of bishops—presided by Peter’s successor—and helped by the presbyters (priests).<sup>29</sup>

The Church can be traced back—in a living, uninterrupted continuity—to the twelve apostles, whom Christ established as shepherds of his flock. Thus, if there is a body of shepherds that received her mission and powers from the apostles through an uninterrupted chain of lawful succession, then the true Church of Jesus Christ must be found there.

The Magisterium states that “the bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the Apostles as pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ.”<sup>30</sup>

The entire Church is apostolic (“sent”) to the entire world. All her members, in different manners, take part in this task.

## 19e) Only the Roman Catholic Church Shows these Marks

This Church constituted and organized as a society in the present world, *subsists in* the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside her visible confines. Since these are gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards Catholic unity.<sup>31</sup>

With the expression *subsistit in*, the Second Vatican Council sought to harmonize two doctrinal statements: on the one hand, that the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church, and on the other hand, that ‘outside of her structure, many elements can be found of sanctification and truth’, that is, in those Churches and ecclesial communities which are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church. But with respect to these, it needs to be stated that ‘they derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.’<sup>32</sup>

The Catholic Church is the one and only true Church. The complete means of salvation are to be found only within the Catholic Church. Every single distinctive mark of the true Church is found in the Roman Church in their fullest degree:

This Catholic Church is Roman.... St. Ambrose wrote a few words that comprise, as it were, a song of joy: “Where Peter is, there is the Church; and where the Church is, not death but eternal life reigns.” For where Peter and the Church are, there Christ is; and he is salvation, the only way.<sup>33</sup>

1. SC, 2; cf. CCC, 771.
2. Leo XIII, Enc. *Satis Cognitum*, June 29, 1896: DS 2888.
3. LG, 9.
4. GS, 40.
5. LG, 48.
6. *Ibid.*, 18.
7. *Ibid.*, 8.
8. St. Augustine, *Treatise Against Heresies*, 3.24.
9. LG, 8; cf. CCC, 811–871.
10. DS 1868.
11. DS 3013; cf. CCC, 812.
12. Paul VI, *Creed of the People of God*, 21; cf. CCC, 813–822.
13. DH, 1.
14. LG, 14.

15. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Loyalty to the Church*, p. 7.
16. Cf. CCC, 817–822.
17. Paul VI, *Creed of the People of God*, 19; cf. CCC, 823–829.
18. *LG*, 39.
19. Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*: DS 3803.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Paul VI, Address, Oct. 20, 1965.
22. Cf. CCC, 830–856.
23. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyr.*, 8.
24. Cf. *AG*, 6.
25. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Loyalty to the Church*, p. 16.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
27. *LG*, 13.
28. Cf. CCC, 857–865.
29. Cf. *AG*, 5.
30. *LG*, 20.
31. *LG*, 8.
32. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Decl. *Dominus Iesus*, 16, Aug. 6, 2000. The interpretation of those who would derive from the formula *subsistit in* the thesis that the one Church of Christ could subsist also in non-Catholic Churches and ecclesial communities is therefore contrary to the authentic meaning of *Lumen Gentium*. “The Council instead chose the word *subsistit* precisely to clarify that there exists only one *subsistence* of the true Church, while outside her visible structure there only exist *elementa Ecclesiae*, which—being elements of that same Church—tend and lead toward the Catholic Church” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Notification on the Book *Church: Charism and Power* by Father Leonardo Boff, 756–762).
33. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Loyalty to the Church*, pp. 6–17; cf. St. Ambrose, *In Ps. 12 Enarratio*, 40.30.

55

## The Structure of the Church on Earth

## 20. The Church as Congregation of the Faithful

Christ's faithful are those who, since they are incorporated into Christ through Baptism, are constituted the people of God. For this reason they participate in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ. They are called, each according to his or her particular condition, to exercise the mission which God entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world.<sup>1</sup>

In the Church, there is both a *radical equality of dignity* and a *diversity of function* among the faithful: a unity of mission and a diversity of ministries. These differences in the faithful, established by the Lord, accomplish the unity and mission of his body. The Church of God has the following foundation:

- Christ is her head.
- Each member of the faithful enjoys the dignity and freedom of children of God.
- The commandment of love binds all.
- All members share the common purpose of spreading the Kingdom of God.

This fourfold foundation derives from the common baptismal incorporation into the Church. Hence, all the faithful of the Church share in the same mission.

The Church is “the congregation of the faithful,” who share the same faith—enlivened with charity—and welcome the gifts of God: the sacraments, the hierarchy, and other gifts. This welcome implies a vital commitment—a personal surrender—to God.

## 21. The Particular Churches and the Universal Church

The Church is the “congregation of the faithful,” but she is also a “body of churches”—of *particular churches*. Each particular church is a community of Christian faithful in communion of faith and sacrament with its bishop ordained in the apostolic succession.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a particular church is a portion of the universal Church gathered around the Eucharist, and is presided over by the bishop, who is united to the pope. The chief example of a particular church is a *diocese*.

The universal Church—the chosen people of God—manifests herself in each corner of the world in and through a particular church; the latter is an image of the universal Church. Yet, the universal Church is the reason for the being of the particular churches, not vice versa.

The universal Church is not the sum or a federation of particular churches<sup>3</sup>; she is prior to every particular church.

Each one of the Church’s faithful in any part of the world, particularly in the Eucharistic celebration, is in *his* Church, the Church of Christ, regardless of whether he belongs to that particular community or not. Yet, the Church’s universality does not nullify legitimate variety among the particular churches.

Guiding her in the way of truth, the Holy Spirit bestows his charismatic gifts on the Church, thus, constantly leading her to perfect union with God.<sup>4</sup>

The mission that Christ entrusted to the Church is universal: to unite human beings with God and among themselves. The particular churches participate in that mission. Thus, they share in the gifts of the universal Church—the spouse of Christ—insofar as they are united to her. Communion with the universal Church, which is represented by Peter’s successor, is not an external complement of the particular church, but one of its internal constituents. The particular churches are fully “catholic” through the communion with the Church of Rome, “which presides in the charity.”<sup>5</sup>

## 22. Unity and Variety among the Faithful

The Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation on one hand, and Holy Orders on the other, reveal the fundamental structure of the Church: All the members of the people of God are at the same time *radically and fundamentally equal* and *functionally diverse*.<sup>6</sup>

All baptized persons (the faithful) are equally called to the fullness of sanctity; they all enjoy equal dignity in the Church as God's children born of Christ. All of them are equal in dignity and duties. All are equally called to seek sanctity and apostolate—this call is their unity or principle of equality.

Because of this radical unity of God's people, all the faithful share in the mission that Christ passed on to his Church. They all share in Christ's priesthood: *the common (or royal) priesthood* of all the faithful.<sup>7</sup>

Christ the Lord, high priest taken from among men, made the new people "a kingdom of priests to God, his Father." The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to a spiritual house and a holy priesthood.... Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God, should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God. They should everywhere bear witness to Christ and give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, "to shepherd the People of God and to increase its members without cease, Christ the Lord set up in his Church a *variety of offices*, which aim at the good of the whole body."<sup>9</sup> In the Church, there is a diversity of ministries sharing in the same mission.



## 22a) The Hierarchy

It is Christ's will for the Church to have a hierarchy—to teach, rule, and sanctify. Christ endowed the hierarchy with the power and mission to teach doctrine, guard the deposit of the faith, govern the life of the Church, and administer the sacraments. This embodies *the ministerial* or *hierarchical priesthood* of those who have received the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

The ministerial priest, by the sacred power that he has, forms and rules the priestly people; in the person of Christ he effects the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people. The faithful indeed, by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist. They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, self denial, and active charity.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the principle of variety takes shape in the different ways in which Christ's priesthood is shared—namely, the common priesthood of the baptized and the ministerial priesthood of those in Holy Orders. The common priesthood of the baptized is accomplished in the growth of baptismal grace. The ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood to develop the baptismal grace of all Christians; it is one of the *means* by which Christ builds and guides his Church.

The difference between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial (or hierarchical) priesthood is an essential difference, not just one of degree.<sup>11</sup>

## 22b) The Laity

“Everything that has been said of the People of God applies equally to the laity, the religious, and the clergy. Because of their situation and mission, however, certain things pertain specifically to the laity.”<sup>12</sup> The Second Vatican Council described the laity and their mission as follows:

The laity are ... the faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they are part of the People of God; and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ; and in their personal manner carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world...

By reason of their special vocation *it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will*. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life, which, as it were, constitute their very existence.<sup>13</sup>

“Lay people, moved by the Holy Spirit, are becoming ever more conscious of the fact that they *are* the Church, that they have a specific and sublime mission to which they feel committed because they have been called to it by God himself. And they know that this mission derives from the very fact of their being Christians.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, as does every member of the faithful, lay people have the duty to spread the divine message of salvation. They may do so individually or by forming associations.

The laity, therefore, are those members of the Church who belong fundamentally to the *civitas terrena* and take part in its development. Hence, for the layman to be a good Christian it is essential that he or she be a good member of the *civitas terrena*; the catholic doctor has a serious duty to be a good doctor, the farmer must be a good farmer, etc. Further, since a man is good because of his virtues, the layman must attain and practice the human, natural, virtues—which are the basis of the supernatural virtues—and know as much as possible, within his capabilities, about his secular function, that is to say his occupation.<sup>15</sup>

## **22c) The Religious**

The religious are Christians consecrated to God by vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The religious make a total consecration to God and abandon the world for love of him. They consecrate their lives to the good of the Church and souls, helping others with their prayer, mortification, and apostolate. The religious life is a wonderful witness before the whole people of God to the supremacy of heavenly values.

The Church exhorts all religious to be faithful to the spirit and rules established by their founders.<sup>16</sup>

## **23. Hierarchical Constitution of the Church**

### **23a) The Hierarchical Order**

Jesus Christ passed on to the apostles the power to save all, which he himself had received. Shortly before ascending into heaven, he declared, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:18–20).

The apostles understood this command well. From the very beginning, they acted as a distinct group (cf. 1 Cor 9:5ff; Rom 16:7; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 4:11), exercising the powers that they received as ministers of the Lord (cf. Acts 1:15–26; 2:42; 6:1–7; 8:14–17; 1 Cor 14:26ff). Jesus willed that his Church should not end with the death of the apostles; he willed that their successors—the bishops—should continue being the shepherds in his Church until the end of the world.

The Second Vatican Council has taught:

In order to shepherd the People of God and to increase its number without cease, Christ the Lord set up in his Church a variety of offices which aim at the good of the whole body...

This sacred synod, following in the steps of the First Vatican Council, teaches and declares that Jesus Christ, the eternal pastor, set up the holy Church by sending apostles and entrusting them with their mission as he himself had been sent by the Father. He willed that their successors, the bishops namely, should be the shepherds in his Church until the end of the world. In order that the episcopate itself, however, might be one and undivided, he put Peter at the head of the other apostles, and in him he set up a lasting and visible source and foundation of the unity both of faith and communion.<sup>17</sup>

By the will of Christ, the Church is a living and hierarchical society, enlivened by the Holy Spirit and governed by the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter. The successor of Peter is the Vicar of Christ and the visible head of the whole Church. He is also the head of the bishops and the visible source and foundation of the unity of faith and communion within the Church.

The apostles and their successors speak and act not in their own name, but by virtue of Christ’s authority, not as members of the community, but speaking to it in the name of Christ. Thus, the ministers of Christ’s

grace receive the mission and sacred power of acting *in persona Christi Capitis*. They produce and give “God’s gift,” which the Tradition of the Church calls *sacrament*. No one can confer the grace of ministry to himself—it must be offered and given. It is conferred by the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

In the following sections, we will examine the following features of the ecclesial ministry:

- It comes from and acts in the person of Christ, the head of the Church.
- It is conferred by the Sacrament of Holy Orders.
- It is a real service.
- It has a collegial character: The bishops act within the college of bishops, the priests within the presbytery of the diocese.
- It has a personal character. This is proper to the sacramental nature of the office.<sup>18</sup>

## 23b) Errors on the Hierarchical Nature of the Church.

- Luther and the *Protestants* denied the existence of a hierarchy in the Church. They admit only the common priesthood of the faithful.
- The *conciliarists* ascribed the supreme power to the General Council, and declared the primacy of the pope to be merely honorary.
- The *Gallicans* taught that the totality of the faithful directly received the powers from Christ, and they later transferred the powers to the pastors.
- The *modernists* claimed that the Church hierarchy was the result of a general historical development.
- More recently, some teach that the Church founded by Christ was “merely kept together by the bond of charity” without hierarchy (the “charismatic Church”). Only gradually did she develop into a legally organized society (the “juridical Church”).

## 23c) The Roman Pontiff, Successor of St. Peter

Among the apostles, Peter received a very special mission and authority (it is also a service, the Petrine ministry) that was directly passed on to his successors.<sup>19</sup> This is a truth solemnly defined by the Church in a number of councils. The Council of Florence declared:

We define that the holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff have the primacy over the whole world; that the same Roman Pontiff is the successor of St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, and the true vicar of Christ, the head of the whole Church, the father and teacher of all Christians; that to him, in the person of St. Peter, was given by our Lord Jesus Christ the full power of feeding, ruling, and governing the whole Church; as is also contained in the proceedings of the ecumenical councils and in the sacred canons.<sup>20</sup>

Jesus Christ *promised* a specific authority over the Church to St. Peter. Christ, the “living stone” (1 Pt 2:4), assured his Church (built upon Peter) victory over the powers of death. Peter, Jesus said, will be the unbreakable cornerstone of the Church. He will have the mission of guarding the faith and confirming his brothers in the same faith:

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Mt 16:18–19)

These three images—the rock, the keys, and binding and loosing—convey the idea of supreme authority.

Later, Jesus Christ himself *conferred* the primacy on Peter. The Lord made a threefold reference to the mission of feeding God’s people:

Jesus said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep” (Jn 21:17).

After the Ascension, Peter immediately *exercised* the primacy, acting as head of the apostles. Peter passed on this power received from Jesus Christ to his successors, the bishops of Rome.

The unanimous Tradition of the Church holds that this succession is found only in “the bishops of the holy Roman See, which he established and consecrated with his blood. Therefore, whoever succeeds Peter in this Chair holds Peter’s primacy over the whole Church according to the plan of

Christ himself.”<sup>21</sup> This has always been the Catholic faith, manifested in the Church’s history.

Thus, the pope is the visible head of the Church and her universal government; he is the Vicar of Christ on earth. He is also the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity of the Church, both among the bishops and among the whole company of the faithful.<sup>22</sup>

The Pope’s primacy and infallibility, so clearly stated in Holy Scripture, has been ardently defended by the Church for twenty centuries. It was solemnly defined as dogma by the First Vatican Council and was restated by the Second Vatican Council: “This teaching concerning the institution, the permanence, the nature and import of the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff and his infallible teaching office, the sacred synod proposes anew to be firmly believed by all the faithful.”<sup>23</sup> The edifice of the entire Church rests on this teaching, against which the powers of the devil or death cannot prevail.

By virtue of his primacy, the Roman pontiff has several proper and exclusive prerogatives:

- He feeds, rules, and governs the entire universal Church; his authority is also *direct* over each of the faithful. He is the visible source of unity.
- He is the visible head of the Church of Rome as a particular church.
- He is the head of the college of bishops. He calls, transfers, and dissolves councils, appoints bishops, and possesses jurisdiction over them all.
- He has absolute authority over all spiritual matters and has the Church’s spiritual treasury at his disposal for granting all types of indulgences.
- He is the Church’s supreme lawmaker, establishing her laws, promulgating decrees, and enacting canons.
- He is not subject to civil powers.



## 23d) The Bishops, Successors of the Apostles

The mission that Jesus Christ entrusted to the apostles, with Peter as their head, is not a temporal one. It was meant to last until the end of time. That is why the apostles chose disciples to take their place when they would be gone. These successors of the apostles are the bishops who preside over the flock as pastors in God's name. They form the episcopate, or *college of bishops*.<sup>24</sup> The college of bishops succeeds the apostolic college. "The sacred synod consequently teaches that the bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the Apostles as pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them listens to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ."<sup>25</sup>

The pope is the head of the college of bishops as well as of the universal Church. He has supreme and full power over the entire Church, as described above. The college of bishops, together with the pope—never apart from him—also has supreme and full authority over the universal Church.<sup>26</sup> Thus, there is a double subject of the supreme authority in the Church:

- i) The pope
- ii) The college of bishops, with its head the pope, never apart from him

To exercise their collegial power, the bishops need to be summoned either by the pope when they are scattered in different parts of the world, or convoked in a solemn way in an *ecumenical council*.<sup>27</sup>

One becomes a member of the college of bishops by episcopal consecration—the fullness of the *Sacrament of Holy Orders*—and by the communion with the head and members of the college of bishops. The sacrament brings with it a *consecration* (a special presence of the Holy Spirit) and a *mission* (the duties of sanctifying, teaching, and ruling as a bishop).

Each bishop also receives a *canonical mission* from the pope to exercise these duties over a specific portion of the Church, usually a particular church, or diocese.

The bishop is the head of the particular church assigned to him; he is the source and visible foundation of its unity. This power is personal,

proper, ordinary, and immediate, although its exercise is ultimately controlled by the supreme authority of the Church.<sup>28</sup>

The main duties of bishops are:

- to participate in a collegial manner in the government of the universal Church, united to the pope and the other bishops,
- to have a certain solicitude for the universal Church,<sup>29</sup>
- to govern the particular Church entrusted to each individual,
- to preach the Gospel and teach all that refers to faith and morals in their dioceses,
- to preside over the Eucharist and administer the other sacraments, especially Confirmation and Holy Orders, and
- to give a good Christian example in everything, imitating Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd, who came not to be served but to serve.

Neighboring particular churches with similar culture form “ecclesiastical provinces,” “patriarchates,” or “regions.” The bishops of these territories may gather together in provincial synods or councils. “In like fashion the *conferences of bishops* may contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegiate spirit.”<sup>30</sup>

## 23e) Priests and Deacons

The teaching of the Second Vatican Council on priesthood and diaconate can be summarized as follows:

The *presbyters* or *priests* are the bishop's closest collaborators, and with him, they form one priestly body. They sanctify and govern the portion of the Lord's flock entrusted to them under the bishop's authority. While not attaining the highest level of priesthood, they are, by virtue of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, true priests in the image of Jesus Christ, the eternal high priest. As such, they must preach the Gospel, nourish the faithful, celebrate the divine worship—especially the holy sacrifice of the Mass, reconcile people with God through the Sacrament of Penance, and lead all to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup>

The *deacons* form the lowest level of the hierarchy. They help the priests in the administration of the sacraments and are assigned to tasks of charity and welfare.<sup>32</sup>

The Church is a living society in which all the members have, without exception, an active role to play.

1. CIC, 204; cf. CCC, 871–873.
2. Cf. CCC, 832–835.
3. Cf. LG, 23.
4. Cf. *Ibid.*, 4.
5. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Rom.*, 1.1.
6. Cf. Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo, *Faithful and Laity in the Church*, pp. 25–26; cf. CCC, 871–873.
7. Cf. CCC, 784, 1268, 1546.
8. LG, 10.
9. *Ibid.*, 18.
10. *Ibid.*, 10.
11. Cf. *Ibid.*; CCC, 1545, 1547ff.
12. LG, 30.
13. *Ibid.*, 31; cf. LG, 30–38.
14. *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, 59.
15. Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo, *Faithful and Laity in the Church*, p. 105; cf. CCC, 897–900.
16. Cf. CCC, 914–933.
17. LG, 18.

18. Cf. *CCC*, 874–879.
19. Cf. *CCC*, 551–553, 880–883.
20. *DS* 1307.
21. *DS* 3056–57.
22. Cf. *LG*, 23.
23. *Ibid.*, 18.
24. Cf. *CCC*, 883–887.
25. *LG*, 20.
26. Cf. *Ibid.*, 22; *CCC*, 883.
27. Cf. *LG*, 22; *CCC*, 884.
28. Cf. *LG*, 23, 27.
29. Cf. *CD*, 3.
30. *LG*, 23; *CCC*, 887.
31. Cf. *LG*, 18.
32. *Ibid.*, 29.

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## The Mission of the Church

## 24. The Supernatural Aim of the Church

The pilgrim Church has her origin in the mission of God the Son and the Holy Spirit, according to the plan of God the Father. The mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is accomplished *in the Church*, the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Church is not added to the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit; it is its sacrament.<sup>1</sup> The Church has a supernatural aim: to make people participate in the communion existing in the Father with the Son in his Spirit of love.

The Church is the effect and the fruit of the Blessed Trinity's saving action, born of God the Father's decree, founded by God the Son, and vivified by God the Holy Spirit. The Church is the sacrament and instrument of God's saving action in history.

Therefore, God entrusted this mission to the Church in order to accomplish his divine plan, whereby he decreed that all things should be restored in Christ. "The Church was founded to spread the kingdom of Christ over all the earth for the glory of God the Father, to make all men partakers in redemption and salvation, and through them to establish the right relationship of the entire world to Christ."<sup>2</sup>

The proper perspective for understanding the Church's existence and mission is none other than God's call to mankind, elevating it to share in his intimate life. The Church's role in this call is that of a universal and necessary means for the life of grace, for salvation, and for the communication of God's life to humanity.

The First Vatican Council declared, "The eternal Shepherd and Guardian of souls, in order to render the saving work of redemption lasting, decided to establish his holy Church."<sup>3</sup> The Second Vatican Council stated:

Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic, or social order: the purpose he assigned to her was a religious one.

By her nature and mission the Church is universal in that she is not committed to any one culture or to any political, economic or social system.<sup>4</sup>

The same council also underlined the analogy between Christ's mission and the Church's, which "continues and, in the course of history, unfolds the mission of Christ, who was sent to evangelize the poor."<sup>5</sup> All these texts directly echo Holy Scripture.

The missionary mandate of the Lord has its ultimate source in the eternal *love* of the Blessed Trinity for mankind.

God desires the salvation of all through knowledge of the *truth*. As the depository of revelation, the Church has received the mission to “preach the gospel to the whole creation” (Mk 16:15). Throughout twenty centuries and until the end of time, Christ’s voice is still heard through the Church. She has revelation in deposit and cannot change divine teaching.

Thus, she has always defended the integrity of revealed truth and has never accommodated error or biased and wayward views. She has always guarded the purity of the faith and has taught the Gospel throughout the world because “it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith” (Rom 1:16).

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded (Mt 28:18–20).

In those simple but sublime words that conclude St. Matthew’s gospel, we find the obligation to preach the truths of faith, the need for sacramental life, the promise of Christ’s continual assistance to his Church. You cannot be faithful to Our Lord if you neglect these supernatural demands: the instruction in Christian faith and morality and to make the sacraments our supernatural sustenance. It is with this mandate that Christ founded his Church. Everything else is secondary.<sup>6</sup>

The Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life.<sup>7</sup>

The Church is not a political party, nor a social ideology, nor a worldwide organization for harmony or material progress, even though we recognize the nobility of these and other activities. The Church has always undertaken and undertakes today an immense work on behalf of the needy, of those who suffer, of all those who suffer in any way the consequences of the only true evil, which is sin. And to all—to those in any way needy and to those who claim to enjoy the fullness of earthly goods—the Church comes to confirm only one, essential, definitive truth: that our destiny is eternal and supernatural, that only in Jesus Christ are we saved for all time, and that only in him will we achieve in some way already in this life true peace and happiness.<sup>8</sup>

The Church, then, has an exclusively supernatural aim: the glory of Christ and the eternal salvation of souls. “The Church’s mission is concerned with the salvation of men; and men win salvation through the grace of Christ and faith in him. The apostolate of the Church therefore, and of each of her members, aims primarily at announcing to the world by word and action the message of Christ and communicating to it the grace of

Christ,”<sup>9</sup> as well as attaining the means and activities to achieve her end. These means are:

- announcing the message of salvation,
- administering the sacraments as means for communicating grace,
- being a living testimony of holiness,
- prayer.

The Church is now present here on earth and is composed of human beings. She is the Kingdom of God present as a mystery, and, at the same time, she has received the mission of announcing and installing that Kingdom. However, she has a *saving and eschatological purpose* that can be fully attained only in the next life.<sup>10</sup>



## 25. The Church and the Temporal Order

Most societies base their institutions on a certain preeminence of mankind over all other things. The Church clearly recognizes mankind's origin in God. Because of her mission and competence, she is not confused with political communities; she is the sign and safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person.<sup>11</sup>

The mission of the Church is supernatural and *eternal*; the task of a state is *temporal*. Each of these realms—the eternal and the temporal—has spiritual and material aspects. The Church does not have any power (in the juridical sense) over temporal issues. Earthly affairs enjoy their own autonomy, their own order, and laws.

However, one cannot decide on these affairs as if they had no relation to their Creator. Christ's sovereignty reaches all human issues because these issues imply not only technical problems, but also problems of conscience. "All human actions have a necessary relation to man's last end; thus, all actions are subject to God's law. And the Church is the guardian, interpreter, and infallible teacher of God's law."<sup>12</sup> Through the members of the Church, Christ illuminates the entire human society with his saving light.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it belongs to the Church "to pass moral judgments even in matters related to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of souls requires it. The means, the only means, she may use are those that are in accord with the Gospel and the welfare of all men according to the diversity of times and circumstances."<sup>14</sup>

## 26. The Participation of All the Faithful in the Mission of the Church

Christians constitute “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ... once you were no people but now you are God’s people” (1 Pt 2:9–10).

This people of God has been “established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth, it is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all; as the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt 5:13–16). It is sent forth into the whole world.”<sup>15</sup>

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:18–20). This command of Christ applies to all the members of his Mystical Body:

In the Church there is a diversity of ministries, but there is only one aim: the sanctification of men. And all Christians participate in some way in this task, through the character imprinted by the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. We must all feel responsible for the mission of the Church, which is the mission of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

The fulfillment of the mission of the Church is called *apostolate*; its object is to spread the kingdom of Christ all over the world for the glory of God the Father.

The hierarchy renders service to the mission of the whole Church. The mission of the hierarchy is to be the instrument of Christ, the head of the Church. Thus, the task proper to the hierarchy is to organize and watch over the fulfillment of the mission of the entire Church.

All members of the Church must share in the apostolate—guided by the bishops and the pope—according to their status in the Church. The Second Vatican Council asserted the participation of each Christian—specifically of the laity—in the common mission of the Church:

The apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the Church. Through Baptism and Confirmation all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself.<sup>17</sup>

The pastors, indeed, know well how much the laity contribute to the welfare of the entire Church. They know that they themselves were not established by Christ to undertake alone the whole salvific mission of the Church to the world, but that it is their exalted office so to be shepherds of the faithful and also to recognize the latter’s contribution and charisms that everyone in his own way will, with one mind, cooperate in the common task.<sup>18</sup>

Hence:

- The mission of the entire Church and that of the hierarchy are not identical, just as the words *Church* and *hierarchy* are not synonymous.
- The Church's mission falls squarely on the shoulders of all her members, while the mission of the hierarchy—a particular aspect of the mission of the Church—is carried out only by the members of the hierarchy and those members of the people of God who are authorized and qualified to help them.
- The mission of the laity is not merely a participation in the mission of the hierarchy, but it is a participation in the mission of the Church.

## **27. The Exercise of the Mission of the Church**

### **27a) The Tasks of Teaching, Sanctifying, and Ruling**

The apostolic mission is the concern of all the faithful of the Church: “Each disciple of Christ has the obligation of spreading the faith to the best of his ability.”<sup>19</sup>

Catholic doctrine teaches that Christ passed on to the apostles a triple office, or authority (in Latin *munus*; plural *munera*): the office of *sanctifying*, the office of *teaching*, and the office of *ruling*. This triple office, or power, is to build up Christ’s Mystical Body. All Christians must make the faith known, spread Christ’s teaching, and bring all people under the mantle of the Church.

However, there are specific tasks for each segment of the faithful within the common apostolic mission.

## 27b) The Task of Sanctifying People

The mission of the Church, like that of Christ, is the sanctification of mankind for the glory of God the Father. Although the entire life of Christ has redemptive value, the redemption “was achieved principally by the Paschal mystery of his blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension, whereby ‘dying he destroyed our death, and rising, restored our life.’”<sup>20</sup> To perpetuate that saving death and Resurrection throughout history and make the effects of his sacrifice reach all, our Lord entrusted to his Church precise means of sanctification: the *sacraments*. “The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, *are consecrated* to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood.”<sup>21</sup>

The sacraments make the redeeming sacrifice of Christ present, unite us to his sacrifice, and apply the grace flowing from that sacrifice to us.

The Church carries out her office of sanctifying in a special way in the sacred liturgy, which is indeed seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy, by the use of signs perceptible to the senses, our sanctification is symbolized and, in a manner appropriate to each sign, is brought about. Through the liturgy a complete public worship is offered to God by the head and members of the mystical body of Christ.<sup>22</sup>

This worship and sanctification reaches its height in the celebration of the Mass—the center and root of Christian life—and through the sacraments, around which the whole liturgical life revolves.<sup>23</sup> The Eucharist is the apex of all activities of the Church, and the wellspring of all apostolate.

The Church participates in Christ’s priesthood; the sacraments are the consequence of this participation. Through their ministerial priesthood, the members of *the hierarchy* act in the person of Christ and administer the sacraments to the faithful. The bishops and priests sanctify the Church with their prayer and work by means of their ministry of the word and the sacraments.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, the lay people, by virtue of the common priesthood (also called baptismal priesthood) of all the faithful, actively participate in the sacraments in their own way. “The laity—no matter who they are—are called, as living members, to contribute with all their strength to the building up of the Church and to her continual sanctification ... All

the lay people, then, have the exalted duty of working for the ever greater spread of the divine plan of salvation to all men, of every epoch and all over the earth.”<sup>25</sup> “All their works, prayers and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of body and mind, if they are accomplished in the Spirit—indeed even the hardships of life if patiently borne—all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist, these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord. In so doing ... the laity consecrate the world itself to God.”<sup>26</sup>

## 27c) The Teaching Office: the Church's Magisterium

The Church is a *prophetic* community that preaches the word of God. As Christ was sent by the Father to be a witness to the truth, so also has the Church been sent by Christ to preach the Gospel to the entire human race, enabling all to believe and be saved. This prophetic nature is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people of God, whereby his children unfailingly adhere to the faith. To guide the faithful in this growth and to teach the truth, Christ endowed his Church with a living Magisterium.<sup>27</sup>

This was the reason why Jesus Christ instituted in the Church a *living, authentic, and never failing teaching authority*. This teaching authority he endowed with his own power; he endowed it with the Spirit of Truth; he authenticated it by miracles; and it was his will and solemn command that the doctrinal precepts of this Church be accepted as his own.<sup>28</sup>

The mission of the Magisterium is not to reveal new truths (revelation ended with the death of the last apostle). Rather, it is to defend, guard, and interpret the received deposit of faith. The Church's Magisterium, even though carried out through human instruments, is not a human magisterium: "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26).

The mission of the Magisterium is linked to the definitive character of the Covenant between God and his people. To fulfill this service, God made the universal Church infallible. This means that she cannot err in her teachings. The exercise of this charisma has the following characteristics:

- The Roman pontiff is infallible when he *solemnly* teaches matters of faith or customs, or in his *ordinary* Magisterium, when he teaches truths—concerning faith or morals—that have to be held *definitively* by all Christians.
- The college of bishops, under its head, the pope, is subject of the same infallibility when—gathered together in an ecumenical council and exercising its *Magisterium* as teacher and judge of faith and morals—it *definitively* declares for the universal Church a doctrine to be held concerning faith or morals. Likewise, the college is infallible

when the bishops—dispersed throughout the world but maintaining the bond of union among themselves and with the successor of Peter—together with the same Roman pontiff, authentically teach matters of faith or morals and are agreed that a particular teaching is to be *definitively* held.<sup>29</sup>

- The totality of the faithful possesses a supernatural sense of faith. They are infallible when they unanimously believe that a truth has been revealed by God.

Thus, *the holy People of God* shares also in Christ's prophetic office. The whole body of the faithful ... cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when, "from the bishops to the last of the faithful" they manifest a universal consensus in matters of faith and morals.<sup>30</sup>

The *ordinary Magisterium* of the pope and the bishops—in communion with the pope—dispersed throughout the world also enjoys Christ's assistance, and is always authentic because it is exercised in the name and with the authority of Christ: "He who hears you hears me" (Lk 10:16). It proposes infallible definitions when it sets forth truths contained in the word of God, whether written or handed down in Tradition, or when it pronounces itself in a "definitive manner" (i.e., a conclusive manner) on some truth.

The scope of the Church's Magisterium covers everything that refers in any way to faith and morals. This has the following consequences:

- i) The Church has the right and duty to condemn all errors concerning faith and the salvation of souls.
- ii) The Church has the right and duty to make judgments, with maximum authority, on social questions. As the *Code of Canon Law* states: "The Church has the right always and everywhere to proclaim moral principles, even in respect of the social order, and to make judgments about any human matter in so far as this is required by fundamental human rights or the salvation of souls."<sup>31</sup>
- iii) By divine right, she has the duty to interpret the natural moral law, whose faithful fulfillment is necessary for salvation.
- iv) Regarding the interpretation of Holy Scripture, "no one should dare to rely on his own judgment ... and to distort Sacred Scripture to fit meanings of his own that are contrary to the meaning that holy



Mother Church has held and now holds; for it is her office to judge about the true sense and interpretation of Sacred Scripture.”<sup>32</sup>

The assent due to the different magisterial declarations differs, depending on the type of documents involved or whether or not it is proposed in a definitive manner.

By divine and Catholic faith everything that is contained in the written word of God or in tradition, and that is proposed by the Church must be believed as a divinely revealed object of belief, be it in a solemn decree or in her ordinary, universal teaching.<sup>33</sup>

Regarding the doctrinal and moral decisions of the ordinary Magisterium of the Roman pontiff and of the bishops in the exercise of their authentic Magisterium, external silence is not sufficient. One has “to adhere to it with a ready and respectful allegiance of mind.”<sup>34</sup>

The laity—part of the Church—also teaches, announcing Christ with their words, the testimony of their lives, and their speech. Thus, they teach their children, relatives, and friends “so that the power of the Gospel may shine out in daily family and social life.”<sup>35</sup> Lay people with sufficient knowledge may impart catechetical formation, teach the sacred sciences, and collaborate in the means of social communication. In keeping with their knowledge, they also have the right and the duty to manifest to the pastors (and to the other faithful) their views on matters that concern the good of the Church, always respecting the integrity of faith and morals.<sup>36</sup>

It is their task to cultivate a properly informed conscience, and to impress the divine law on the affairs of the earthly city... The laity are called to participate actively in the entire life of the Church; not only are they to animate the world with the spirit of Christianity, but they are to be witnesses to Christ in all circumstances and at the very heart of the community of mankind.<sup>37</sup>

This evangelization [by the lay people] ... acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world.

[Married and family life have] a special importance in this prophetic office [of the Church]... In it the married partners have their own proper vocation: they must be witnesses of faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children...

Therefore, even when occupied by temporal affairs, the laity can, and must, do valuable work for the evangelization of the world.<sup>38</sup>

## 27d) The Pastoral Task

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt 28:18). But Christ exercises this authority over the entire world through humans. As Christ made himself the servant of all, for a Christian, to reign is to serve.<sup>39</sup>

The Church possesses an internal power of government—embodied in the hierarchy—that is aimed at safeguarding the purity of doctrine and regulating the exercise of her mission.<sup>40</sup> Her juridical makeup shows this. The office of government of the faithful (the hierarchy) is of divine origin: “This authority, moreover, although given to man and exercised by man, is not human but divine.... Whoever, therefore, resists this authority thus ordered by God, resists the Command of God” (cf. Rom 13:2).<sup>41</sup> The Church has received this power of government from God, not from the community of the faithful.<sup>42</sup>

The sacred power of the Roman pontiff and the bishops is the threefold, namely, issuing laws, judging, and governing.

The Roman pontiff enjoys full and supreme power over the universal Church: “It has always been the common and firm understanding of Catholics and a dogma of faith that the Roman Pontiff, the successor of St. Peter, has a Primacy over the whole Church, not only of honor but also of authority and jurisdiction, and that therefore the bishops themselves are subject to him.”<sup>43</sup>

The pope’s authority extends immediately to each and every diocese, to each and every Christian. This in no way opposes the authority of each bishop in his own diocese, which, exercised “personally in the name of Christ, is proper, ordinary and immediate, although its exercise is ultimately controlled by the supreme authority of the Church and can be confined within certain limits if the usefulness of the Church and the faithful require that.”<sup>44</sup>

The college of bishops, united with the pope and under his full authority, also holds the universal power of government:

Just as, in accordance with the Lord’s decree, St. Peter and the rest of the apostles constitute a unique apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are related with and united to one another.... The college or body of bishops has no authority unless united with

the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, at its head, whose primatial authority, let it be added, over all, whether pastors or faithful, remains in its integrity.... This power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff.<sup>45</sup>

"The bishops, as vicars and legates of Christ, govern the particular churches assigned to them by their counsels, exhortations, and example, but over and above that also by the authority and sacred power.... This power, which they exercise personally in the name of Christ, is proper, ordinary, and immediate, although its exercise is ultimately controlled by the supreme authority of the Church."<sup>46</sup> The bishops are not delegates of the pope. The pope's ordinary and immediate authority over the entire Church does not annul the bishop's authority over his diocese but confirms and safeguards it. The bishop's authority must be exercised in communion with the entire Church under the guidance of the pope.

The ordinary faithful also participate in Christ's task of ruling the world<sup>47</sup> in a manner appropriate to their vocation:

By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will.

It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer.<sup>48</sup>

The laity are given this special vocation: to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth.<sup>49</sup>

By their competence in secular disciplines and by their activity, interiorly raised up by grace, let them work earnestly in order that created goods through human labor, technical skill, and culture may serve the utility of all men ... Thus, through the members of the Church will Christ increasingly illuminate the whole of human society with his saving light.... By so doing they impregnate culture and human works with a moral value. In this way the field of the world is better prepared for the seed of the divine word, and the doors of the Church are opened more widely through which the message of peace may enter the world.<sup>50</sup>

The laity can also collaborate in the mission proper of the hierarchy if appointed to certain ecclesiastical offices.<sup>51</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 737–738, 767, 849–856, 863.
2. AA, 2.
3. DS 3050.

4. GS, 42.
5. AG, 5; cf. DS 3050.
6. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Supernatural Aim of the Church*, p. 9.
7. John Paul II, Enc. *Redemptor Hominis*, 13.
8. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Loyalty to the Church*, p. 15.
9. AA, 6; cf. CCC, 2105.
10. Cf. GS, 40.
11. Cf. CCC, 2244–2246.
12. Pius IX, Enc. *Divini Illius Magistri*.
13. Cf. GS, 36; LG, 36.
14. GS, 76.
15. LG, 9.
16. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Loyalty to the Church*, pp. 21–22.
17. LG, 33.
18. *Ibid.*, 30.
19. LG, 17; cf. CCC, 783–786.
20. SC, 5; cf. Easter Preface of the Roman Missal.
21. LG, 10; cf. CCC, 784.
22. CIC, 834.
23. Cf. SC, 6.
24. Cf. CCC, 893.
25. LG, 33.
26. *Ibid.*, 34; cf. CCC, 901–903.
27. Cf. LG, 12; CCC, 785, 888–892.
28. Leo XIII, *Satis Cognitum*.
29. Cf. CIC, 749.
30. LG, 12.
31. CIC, 747.
32. DS 1507.
33. DS 3011.
34. LG, 25.
35. *Ibid.*, 35; cf. CCC, 904–907.
36. Cf. CIC, 212, 229, 774, 776, 780, 823.
37. GS, 43.
38. LG, 35.
39. Cf. CCC, 786.
40. Cf. *Ibid.*, 894–896.
41. Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam*, Nov. 18, 1302: DS 874.
42. Cf. Pius VI, *Auctorem Fidei*, Aug. 28, 1794: DS 2603.
43. Gregory XVI, *Commissum Divinitus*, June 15, 1835.
44. LG, 27.
45. *Ibid.*, 22.
46. *Ibid.*, 27.
47. Cf. CCC, 908–913.
48. LG, 31.
49. *Ibid.*, 33.
50. *Ibid.*, 36.
51. Cf. *Ibid.*, 33.

# Sacred Liturgy

by Charles Belmonte

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Sacred Liturgy  
in God's Plan of Salvation

# 1. Introduction

The term *liturgy* comes from the Greek *ergos* (work), and *leiton* (adjective derived from *leos-laos*, “the people”). In Hellenistic culture, it meant “public work”—any work performed for the common good.<sup>1</sup>

In the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, *leitourgia* designates the duties that were to be carried out in the tabernacle of God by the tribe of Levi, of the ancient nation of Israel. They became the Levitical priesthood, and performed sacrifices on behalf of the people (cf. Nm 3:5–10). Lay people’s performance of acts of worship was referred to as *latreia* and *douleia*.

The term *liturgy* was used rather infrequently in the writings of the early Christians. Perhaps they found it too poor a word to designate the “mysteries,” the “sacraments,” the worship “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23) of the Church. Later, Christian tradition used the term to denote that the people of God took part in the mission or “work of God” (cf. Jn 17:4).<sup>2</sup>

## **2. What is the Liturgy?**

Liturgy is the priestly action of Jesus Christ, continued in and by the Church under the direction of the Holy Spirit. In the liturgy, the Holy Spirit himself brings about his work of salvation through effective signs, thus giving both a most perfect reverence to God and salvation to mankind. The concept of liturgy includes:

- the worship of God, blessing him for all his gifts,
- the presence of Christ the priest in the liturgical action,
- the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church's liturgy,
- the history of salvation continued and brought about through effective signs in the liturgy,
- the sanctification of mankind through the liturgical action.



### **3. The Liturgy: A Work of the Blessed Trinity**

- God the Father is the origin and end of the liturgy.
- The glorified Christ is present in the earthly liturgy of the Church of the apostles, which participates in the heavenly liturgy.
- God the Holy Spirit brings about the mystery of Christ in the Church's liturgy.<sup>3</sup>

## **4. The Liturgy: A Work of God the Father**

God the Father has blessed us in his Son and given us, as his children, the Spirit of adoption.

The act of blessing is a divine action that gives life; its origin is God the Father. From the beginning, God blessed all created beings, especially man and woman. Divine blessings manifested marvelous events for the salvation of mankind: the birth of Isaac, the deliverance from Egypt, the gift of the Promised Land, and the return of the “little remnant.” God’s blessing always produces its effect. In the liturgy of the Church, the blessing of God the Father is revealed and communicated.

In a reciprocal manner, in the liturgy of the Church, God the Father is blessed and adored as the source of all the blessings of creation and salvation. Therefore, the Christian liturgy is the response of faith and love to the “spiritual blessings” with which the Father constantly enriches us. It has a dual dimension:

- i) The Church, united to the Lord and “under the action of the Holy Spirit,” blesses God the Father for his ineffable gift (cf. 2 Cor 9:15).
- ii) The Church unceasingly offers her own gifts to the Father “to the praise of his glorious grace” (Eph 1:6).

## 5. The Liturgy: An Action of Christ the Priest

Before the fall, Adam ordered his acts according to the will of God; he was the priest of his own existence. Through the fall, humanity's relationship to God was severed. Mankind needed a mediator.

The Incarnation of God the Son was God's design. Thus, Jesus (without leaving off his being God the Son) assumed human nature in his divine Person. Jesus—true God and true man—was to be the sole Mediator and priest. All the events of his life—his years in Nazareth, his public ministry, the paschal mystery of his Passion, death, and Resurrection—are an uninterrupted priestly action. This action is not merely something that happened in the past without affecting our present life; it continues in the liturgy of the Church, where Christ brings about the force of the salvation caused by his death and Resurrection and accomplishes the perfect worship of God.<sup>4</sup>

Pope Paul VI points out that Christ is present in the Church in several ways<sup>5</sup>:

- Christ is present in his Church when she prays, since he is the one who “prays for us and prays in us and the one to whom we pray: He prays for us as our priest, he prays in us as our Head, he is prayed to by us as our God.”<sup>6</sup> He promised, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).
- Christ is present in the Church as she performs works of mercy, not just because whatever good we do to one of his least brethren we do to Christ himself (cf. Mt 25:40), but also because he is the one who performs these works through the Church and who continually helps mankind through his divine love.
- Christ is present in the Church as she travels on her pilgrimage, longing to reach the portals of eternal life, for he is the one who dwells in our hearts through faith (cf. Eph 3:17) and who instills charity in them through the Holy Spirit, whom he gives to us (cf. Rom 5:5).
- In another genuine way, Christ is present in the Church as she preaches, since the Gospel that she proclaims is the word of God, and

it is only in the name of Christ, the Incarnate Word of God—by his authority, and with his help—that it is preached.

- Christ is present in the Church as she rules and governs the people of God, since her sacred power comes from him and since he, the “Shepherd of Shepherds,”<sup>7</sup> is present in the bishops who exercise that power in keeping with the promise he made to the apostles.
- Christ is present in the liturgy of the Church as she administers the sacraments.
- Moreover, Christ is present in his Church in a still more sublime manner as she offers the sacrifice of the Mass. The divine Founder of the Church is present in the Mass in the person of his minister and, above all, he is really and sacramentally present under the Eucharistic species.

Through the liturgy, Christ carries out his priestly function (*munus*). Thus, the liturgy both signifies and produces sanctification.

The liturgy, then, is rightly seen as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In it, signs perceptible to the senses signify and accomplish man’s sanctification in ways appropriate to each of these signs. Thus, the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, the Head and its members, performs full public worship.

It follows that every liturgical celebration, because it is an action of Christ the Priest and his Body, which is the Church, is a sacred action surpassing all others.<sup>8</sup>

The liturgy is the work of the whole Christ, head and body. Our high priest celebrates it unceasingly in the heavenly liturgy, with the holy Mother of God, the apostles, all the saints, and the multitude of those who have already entered the kingdom.<sup>9</sup>

## **5a) The Paschal Mystery of Christ Becomes Present in the Liturgy**

From the very beginning, God decided to save humanity. His mysterious plan unfolded in stages.

- i) The Old Testament is the first stage of the history of salvation. It is the time of the prophecy, or announcement, of God's mystery (cf. Col 1:26).
- ii) With Jesus, the announcement became reality. This was the fullness of time in which Christ reconciled humanity with God and performed a perfect act of worship with his sacrifice. The salvation that Christ accomplished for us took place, above all, in the paschal mystery of his Passion, death, and Resurrection.
- iii) The third stage is the time of the Church, in which the Church—Christ's body—communicates God's salvation to humanity. In this third stage, the paschal mystery is made present and brought about in the liturgy through the sacramental system. Thus, these three realities (paschal mystery, salvation, and liturgy) are inseparable.

## 6. The Liturgy: An Action of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit's mission in the liturgy of the Church is to prepare the people of God for their meeting with Christ, manifest Christ, bring about Christ's work of salvation, and carry out the gift of communion in the Church.

(1) *The Holy Spirit prepares the Church to receive the life of the risen Christ.*

The Holy Spirit brings about the figures of the Old Covenant in the sacraments; what was a symbol is now a reality. Thus, Noah's ark—saved from the Deluge—and the crossing of the Red Sea prefigured salvation through Baptism (cf. 1 Pt 3:20–21). The water gushing out of the rock was the figure of the spiritual gifts of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10:1–6). The manna of the desert prefigured the Eucharist, “the true bread from heaven” (Jn 6:32). All these events were preparation for the mystery of Christ. In the liturgy of the Church, through the readings of the Old Testament and the singing of the Psalms, the old events are remembered and revived. This preparation of the hearts is a work of the Holy Spirit.

(2) *The Holy Spirit manifests the mystery of Christ, eliciting the faith of the believers.*

In the liturgy, the Holy Spirit and the Church cooperate to manifest Christ and his work of salvation.

The Eucharist (and the other sacraments analogously) is a memorial of the mystery of salvation.

The announcement of the word is not merely “information”; it demands a “response of faith,” which implies a personal commitment. The Holy Spirit gives the right dispositions to the listeners to understand the word of God and make it part of their lives.

The liturgical celebrations often remind the faithful of God's interventions throughout the history of salvation; the Anamnesis of the liturgy is this “bringing to our memories” of these events. Thus, the Holy Spirit gives the grace of faith to the faithful, and the liturgical assembly becomes a community of faith that praises God—Doxology.

(3) *Through his own transforming power, the Holy Spirit makes present and brings about the work of Christ's salvation.*

The Christian liturgy is not merely a remembrance of the events of our salvation; it actualizes them and brings them about.

The Epiclesis (“invocation over”) is the intercession by which the priest asks God the Father to send the sanctifying Spirit so that he may transform the offerings into the body and blood of Christ. He also asks that the faithful, upon receiving these, transform themselves into a living gift to God.

(4) *The Holy Spirit unites the Church to the life and mission of Christ.*

Through the liturgy, the Holy Spirit implants in the Church the spirit of communion of people among themselves and with the Blessed Trinity. Thus, the liturgy can produce its fruits in the life of the faithful: the new life according to the Spirit, commitment to the mission of the Church, and service to her unity.

In the liturgy, the Holy Spirit unites the Church to Christ’s life and mission of salvation. Thus, the liturgy, a work of Christ, is also an action of the Holy Spirit and his Church.

## **7. The Liturgy: A Sanctifying Reality**

On the day of Pentecost, the Church was manifested to the world. The Holy Spirit inaugurated a new era—the time of the Church. During this time, Christ manifests, brings about, and communicates his work of salvation through the liturgy of the Church—the sacramental system —“until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26).

In obedience to her Founder’s behest, the Church prolongs the priestly mission of Jesus Christ mainly by means of the sacred liturgy. It does this, most of all, at the altar, where the sacrifice of the cross is constantly reenacted. Along with the Church, her divine Founder is present at every liturgical function giving fitting worship to God.

The concept of liturgy in the New Testament is singular. The major element of the Christian liturgy is not what man does, but what God accomplishes in Jesus Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

It is an error to think that the liturgy is only the outward or visible part of divine worship, or that it is just an ornamental ceremony with a list of laws and prescriptions according to which the ecclesiastical authority orders the sacred rites to be performed.

God cannot be honored worthily unless the mind and the heart turn to him in quest of the perfect life, which unites work and adoration. The liturgy—the adoration rendered to God by the Church in union with Christ —is the most efficacious means of achieving sanctity.<sup>10</sup>



## **8. The Liturgy: A Sacramental Reality**

Christ sent the apostles not only to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, but also to accomplish the very work of salvation that they announced. “This work of salvation which they preached should be accomplished through the sacrifice and the sacraments, around which the entire liturgical life revolves.”<sup>11</sup>

Theoretically, human salvation could have been accomplished through subjective relations of God and mankind. In reality, God wanted to dispense his salvation through objective and symbolic (i.e., sacramental) realities. Through these realities—the sacraments—God communicates his life and salvation to mankind, and mankind has access to God.

In the liturgy, Christ’s mystery of salvation becomes present through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ’s body (the Church) is a kind of sacrament (i.e., sign and instrument) in which and through which the Holy Spirit bestows the mystery of salvation.

“Seated at the right hand of the Father” and pouring the Holy Spirit over his body, the Church, Christ acts now through the sacraments. Instituted by Christ, the sacraments are sensible signs (words and actions) that actually confer the grace that they signify. With the sacraments of the liturgy, the history of salvation is continued and brought about through effective signs.

## 9. The Liturgy: A Didactic Reality

The liturgy has always been an ecclesial school to nourish faith and foster the formation of the Christian people. The religious formation of a significant part of the faithful takes place through their participation in Sunday Mass, baptismal, funeral, and matrimonial liturgy.

A sacramental celebration is intertwined with signs and symbols. The significance of the sacraments is rooted in the work of creation and in human culture, outlined in the events of the Old Covenant and fully revealed in the Person and work of Christ. Such is the divine pedagogy of salvation.<sup>12</sup>

The pedagogical aspect of the liturgy is conveyed through:

- its content: the great themes of the history of salvation and revelation are offered,
- its structure: the Liturgy of the Word (readings and homily) prepares the faithful to understand the essence of the sacrament,
- its language, which is addressed to the entire person (intelligence, will, emotions, and intuition) through various elements (words, songs, meditation, postures, gestures, movements, vestments, and colors),
- its “climate” of prayer and active participation, which helps to elicit, transmit, and strengthen the faith.<sup>13</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 1066–1209.

2. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1069.

3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1077–1112.

4. Cf. SC, 5–7.

5. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Mysterium Fidei*, 35–38.

6. St. Augustine, *On Psalm 85.1*, PL 37.1081.

7. St. Augustine, *On Psalm 86.3*, PL 37.1102.

8. SC, 7.

9. CCC, 1187.

10. Cf. Pius XII, Enc. *Mediator Dei*, 25–26.

11. SC, 6.

12. Cf. CCC, 1145–1152, 1189.

13. Cf. J.A. Abad Ibañez, M. Garrido Bolaño, O.S.B., *Iniciación a la Liturgia de la Iglesia*; SC, 33.

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## The Sacramental Celebration

# WHO CELEBRATES?

## 10. The Heavenly Liturgy

The Apocalypse of St. John reveals the celebration of the heavenly liturgy with the words: “A throne stood in heaven with one seated on the throne” (Rv 4:2). Then, it reveals the presence of “a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (Rv 5:6; cf. Jn 1:29). *Christ* crucified and resurrected is the only high priest of the true temple (cf. Heb 4:14–15; 10:19–21). Later, it reveals “the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rv 22:1), one of the most beautiful symbols of the *Holy Spirit* (cf. Jn 4:10–14; Rv 22:6).

Finally, it describes *the whole of creation*, represented by the angels, the martyrs, and “a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and people and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rv 7:9).

We participate in this everlasting liturgy through the Spirit and the Church when we celebrate the mystery of salvation in the sacraments.<sup>1</sup> Through liturgical actions, *the pilgrim Church participates in the heavenly liturgy*. Those who celebrate this “action” on earth already participate in the liturgy of heaven. In heaven, the celebration is wholly communion and feast.<sup>2</sup>

## 11. The Celebrants of the Sacramental Liturgy

Liturgy is a cultic action of Christ and the Church in communion with him. It is the “action” of the “total Christ”—*Christus totus*. Through liturgy, the entire Mystical Body of Christ, body and head, performs a public worship.<sup>3</sup>

The celebrant of the sacramental liturgy is the entire *community, the body of Christ united to its head*.<sup>4</sup>

Liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church, which is “the sacrament of unity,” namely, the holy people united and arranged under their bishops. Therefore, liturgical services pertain to the whole body of the Church. They manifest it, and have effects upon it. But they also touch individual members of the Church in different ways, depending on their order, role in the liturgical services, and actual participation in them.<sup>5</sup>

It must be emphasized that rites which are meant to be celebrated in common, with the faithful present and actively participating, should as far as possible be celebrated in that way rather than by an individual and quasi-privately.<sup>6</sup>

(1) *The community of the baptized people—the Church—is a priestly community (qahal Yahweh) that takes part in the liturgy.*

She is constituted of those who “by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christian men they may offer spiritual sacrifices.”<sup>7</sup> This consecration is the “common priesthood” in which all Christians participate.

The Mother Church desires earnestly that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in the liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy and to which the Christian people—“a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people” (1 Pt 2:9; cf. 2:4–5)—have a right and obligation by reason of their Baptism.<sup>8</sup>

(2) *The liturgy is an action of the Church that is hierarchically structured.*

“All the members do not have the same function” (Rom 12:4). God calls some to render a special service for the community. These servants are chosen and consecrated through the Sacrament of Holy Orders; this consecration is the *ministerial priesthood* (another way of sharing in Christ’s priesthood). By this particular consecration, the Holy Spirit makes

them suitable representatives of Christ the Head in order to serve all the members of the Church.<sup>9</sup> This is not merely to give order in the liturgical celebration, but because Christ wanted his Church to be hierarchical. In her, there exists a diversity of functions and a radical equality among all baptized.

The ordained minister (bishop, priest, or deacon) is an “icon” or image of Christ the priest. He occupies a position of presidential ministry, not in the sociological sense, but in the theological sense (in the person, name, and authority of Christ the head). The laity occupies an essentially different level. They receive the sacraments, listen to the word of God, and offer the sacrifice that unites themselves to the actions (words and gestures) of the priest.

Concelebrations of the Eucharist are held in Masses of priestly ordinations and on other occasions. Concelebrations clearly manifest the unity of the priesthood and the Church, foster the piety of the priests, and answer some practical difficulties (e.g., the difficulty of scheduling and preparing individual Masses when there are many priests gathered together in a place).<sup>10</sup>

There are also other particular ministries—not consecrated by the Sacrament of Holy Orders—that execute some pastoral and liturgical tasks (i.e., acolytes, readers, commentators, singers). “Each person, minister, or layman who has an office to perform, should carry out all and only those parts that pertain to his office by the nature of the rite and the norms of the liturgy.”<sup>11</sup>

(3) *The liturgy occupies a central position in the life of the Church.*

The Second Vatican Council teaches:

The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows. For the goal of apostolic works is that all, who are made sons of God by faith and baptism, should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the sacrifice, and to eat the Lord’s Supper.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the liturgy does not constitute the entire activity of the Church. Before people can participate in the liturgy, they need to be called to the faith and to conversion. “But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they

have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:14–15).

## 12. Sacred Liturgy and the Laws of the Church

Every impulse of the human heart naturally expresses itself through the senses. The true worship of God, as it is the concern not merely of individuals but of the whole Church, must, therefore, be social as well. Hence, the liturgy always has a *social* and external dimension.

However, the chief element of the liturgy should be *interior*, for each one of us must always live in Christ and give ourselves to him completely, so that, through him, with him, and in him, the heavenly Father may be duly worshiped and glorified. The sacred liturgy requires, however, that its exterior and interior elements be intimately linked with each other.<sup>13</sup>

In order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions.... Pastors of souls must, therefore, realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the laws governing valid and lawful celebration. It is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by it.<sup>14</sup>

Christ has given the hierarchy—through the ministerial priesthood—the mission to lead the people of God toward the fullness of divine life. It does so by means of the ministry of the word, the sacraments, and the task of governing the Church. Thus, the regulation of the liturgical rites is exclusive domain of the hierarchy of the Church.

The hierarchy is responsible for issuing juridical norms to assure the sacred and communal character of the liturgical celebrations, procuring the orderly execution of the rites, and precluding any subjective or arbitrary initiative. Thus, the liturgical regulations enable Christ's salvation to objectively and efficiently reach each member of the Mystical Body of Christ.

*Liturgy* and *liturgical norms* are not synonymous. Further, liturgical norms are not the most important part of liturgy. Still, the liturgy cannot exist without some liturgical laws. In fact, the hierarchy of the Church has always regulated the exercise of Christian cult according to the historical situation and customs.<sup>15</sup>



## 13. History of the Liturgy

### 13a) Formation of the Liturgy in Apostolic Times

Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist—the center of liturgy—within the ritual Jewish supper of Passover on Holy Thursday. The oldest account of the Last Supper is given by St. Paul (cf. 1 Cor 11:23–29) and was written at Ephesus in either A.D. 55 or 56. In the narrative, the command is given to the apostles (and implicitly to their successors) to celebrate the Eucharist until the day when Christ returns in the full glory of his second coming. St. Luke's account (cf. Lk 22:14–20) is very similar, as might be expected from the disciple and companion of St. Paul.

St. Matthew and St. Mark (cf. Mt 26:26–29; Mk 14:22–25) give a similar narrative of the events but report a slightly different formula for the chalice: “This is my blood of the new covenant.”

The Acts of the Apostles and the epistles of St. Paul describe the primitive community as already “devoted ... to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). “Prayers” and the “breaking of bread” constituted the liturgy of the earliest Mass. It employed the Jewish ritual of religious gatherings. To the prayers and readings inherited from the synagogue, it added the Eucharist—the work of salvation realized by Christ.

The *Didache*, or *Doctrine of the Apostles* (a valuable short treatise from the first half of the second century), gives evidence of a real meal (a love feast, or *agape*) connected with the celebration of the Eucharist. The connection between the Eucharistic celebration and the *agape* did not continue for long. It still existed at Corinth in the time of St. Paul. There, the faithful brought provisions to the supper but did not always share them in common, to the Apostle's great chagrin. The *agape* was soon relegated to a position of secondary importance before it disappeared altogether. At that time, the term “Eucharist” had replaced the terms “the Lord's supper” and “breaking of bread.”

The term *Eucharist* means “thanksgiving” and takes its name from the prayer of consecration pronounced by the main celebrant. The early Christians did not merely attend the Mass; they offered it with their bishop and priests. They took an active part, answered the response, said their part aloud in chorus, contributed gifts, answered the celebrant's invitation, gave

the kiss of peace, and, when the celebrant ended the consecration, they all responded in a solemn “Amen” of assent. All Christians, even the absent ones (thanks to the deacons), received the Eucharist.

## **13b) A Second Century Mass**

St. Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 150) is among the first to furnish us with a complete description of the celebration of the Eucharist:

On the day called Sunday all who live in the cities or country assemble in one place. The Acts of the Apostles are read, or the writings of the prophets, as long as time permits. When the reading has ended the president instructs by word and exhorts us to imitate these good teachings. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we have said already, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought in. The president also offers prayers and thanksgivings according to his ability and all the people respond by exclaiming "Amen." Then the Eucharist is distributed to each and a portion is sent to those absent through the deacons.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the main elements of the Roman liturgy are present in this description.

### 13c) The Third Century: The *Anaphora* of St. Hippolytus

Up to the third century, the celebrant improvised some prayers while the most solemn prayers were carefully prepared in advance, not left to chance or the inspiration of the moment.

St. Hippolytus was a Roman priest who was martyred in 235. His tract, *The Apostolic Tradition*, throws considerable light on the primitive character of the *Anaphora*—what we call the Eucharistic Prayer or Canon of the Mass.

Except for the *Sanctus* and the Intercessions, one does not find difficulty in recognizing in St. Hippolytus's *Anaphora* the elements of the present Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass. Besides, the faithful offered different gifts, e.g., oil, cheese, and olives. Milk and honey were presented to the newly baptized, symbols of the Promised Land, which they reached through the Eucharist. In receiving the Eucharist, Christians answered "Amen" to express their assent to the mystery in which they were participating. They then returned to their everyday life to put into practice the works they had presented as a service of God.

## 13d) The Fourth Century: Two Liturgical Traditions

During the fourth century, the liturgies of the east and west sides of the Roman Empire began to vary, the western liturgy having a greater variety of formulations. The patriarchal sees of Antioch and Alexandria had their own liturgies. All other eastern liturgies are derived from these two primitive roots. In the western liturgy, Latin replaced Greek.

The prayers said by the celebrant were recorded in small books called *sacramentaries*. Three of these documents—the *Leonine*, the *Gelasian*, and the *Gregorian*—particularly stand out.

The celebration is divided in two parts: the Liturgy of the Word (or of the Catechumens), and the Liturgy of the Bread. The celebration began with a processional entry and continued with the greeting of the congregation, the readings, and the homily. In the East, the homily was longer (one hour at times) and the preachers tended to be more rhetorical, more given to the use of imagery, and more theological. In the West, the homily was shorter, simpler, more direct, and practical. Before the Liturgy of the Bread, the catechumens were blessed and dismissed.

### **13e) Development of the Roman Liturgy**

The Roman liturgy of the Mass continued unchanged during the Middle Ages (save small additions). In the West, Pope St. Gregory the Great (590–604) reformed the Roman liturgy of the Mass and gave it its definitive form. There was a new set of reforms in the time of Charlemagne (ninth century). In the eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII, with the help of the abbey of Cluny, made the Roman liturgy uniform.

According to the express wishes of the Council of Trent, the liturgical formularies were revised, and Pope St. Pius V published and made the Missal obligatory in 1570. There was the so-called “liturgical movement” at the end of the fourteenth century, which influenced Pope Pius X’s small revisions at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Missal of St. Pius V was utilized until the publication of the new Roman Missal, following the Second Vatican Council, in 1970.

## 14. The Rites or Liturgical Traditions

The different liturgical traditions were a consequence of the universal mission of the Church. Churches of a cultural and geographical area began to celebrate the mystery of Christ through particular expressions that were suited to their culture.

There are several liturgical traditions or rites:

- The *Latin* rite, mainly the Roman rite, but also the Ambrosian rite (in Milan), the Visigothic—also called Mozarabic or Hispanic—rite (in Spain), and the private rites of some religious orders are in use in their areas
- *Eastern* rites: Byzantine, Alexandrian, or Coptic, Syrian (including the Syro-Malabar rite of India), Armenian, Maronite, and Chaldean<sup>17</sup>

# WHEN TO CELEBRATE

## 15. Liturgical Time

Since the time of the Mosaic Law, the people of God had fixed feasts (beginning with the Passover), to commemorate the marvelous actions of God, thank him for those acts, perpetuate his memory, and instruct the new generations. In the Church's time, the liturgy, celebrated according to a fixed calendar, is impregnated by the newness of the mystery of Christ.

The holy Mother Church believes that it is for her to celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse in a sacred commemoration, on certain days throughout the course of the year. Once each week, on the day which she has called the *Lord's Day*, she keeps the memory of the Lord's resurrection. She also celebrates it once every year, together with his blessed passion, at *Easter*; that most solemn of all feasts. In the course of the year, moreover, she unfolds the Mystery of Christ... Thus recalling the mysteries of the redemption, she opens up to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time; the faithful lay hold of them and are filled with saving grace.<sup>18</sup>

The liturgical time is a reality related to salvation (it has a certain timelessness, *kairos*) that is divided into chronological units (it is within time, *chronos*): day, week, and year.<sup>19</sup>



## 16. The Lord's Day

The third commandment of the Decalogue states, “Remember to keep holy the Lord’s day.” It commands us to honor God with acts of worship on prescribed days.

In the Old Testament, God commanded the chosen people to keep holy the Sabbath day (Saturday). This precept reminded them that God rested on the seventh day when his work of creation was complete, and that he blessed and sanctified that day (cf. Gn 2:2–3).

Testimonies from the very beginning of the life of the Church prove that the Christians celebrated the Holy Mass on Sunday, the day that the Lord triumphed by rising from the dead.

We read in the Acts of the Apostles: “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread ...” (Acts 20:7). The verb used for “gathered together” has *synaxis* for its noun, which is Greek for Eucharist.

The Second Vatican Council offers us a deep theological explanation of the Sunday precept:

By a tradition handed down from the apostles, which took its origin from the very day of Christ’s resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every seventh day; which day is appropriately called the Lord’s day or Sunday. For on this day Christ’s faithful are bound to come together into one place. They should listen to the word of God and take part in the Eucharist, thus calling to mind the passion, the resurrection, and glory of the Lord Jesus, and giving thanks God who “has begotten them again, through the resurrection of Christ from the dead, unto a living hope” (1 Pt 1:3).<sup>20</sup>

Since the days of the New Testament, then, Sunday is the Lord’s day (*dies dominica*). On that day, we celebrate the new creation—the re-creation—of humanity as children of God by grace. The beginning of man’s birth into the life of grace, the Lord’s Resurrection, was on such a day. This supernatural new creation is far superior to the material creation of the world.

To assure and facilitate the proper sanctification of Sundays and other chief feasts, the Church prescribes attendance at Holy Mass on these days. This is prescribed in the Church’s first commandment.

The precept to attend Holy Mass obliges us to hear a complete Mass either on Sunday (or holiday) or in the last hours of the previous day.

Attending a complete Mass entails following at least its essential parts with bodily presence and pious attention.

The correct and pious observance of the first precept of the Church guarantees the fulfillment of God's third commandment. The Church requires us to attend Sunday Mass under the pain of mortal sin.<sup>21</sup>

## 17. The Liturgical Year

Salvation was accomplished with Jesus' paschal mystery and the effusion of the Holy Spirit. Thereafter, the economy of salvation becomes effective for each person as history proceeds according to God's plan. Nevertheless, the liturgical year anticipates, as a foretaste, the objective of history.

The liturgical year is the development of the various aspects of the paschal mystery.<sup>22</sup> By means of the *yearly cycle*, the Church celebrates the whole mystery of Christ, from his Incarnation to the day of Pentecost and the expectation of his coming again. The yearly cycle includes the Sundays, solemnities, and weekdays (ferial days).

The liturgical year begins with the cycle of feasts centered on the mystery of the Incarnation (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany), which commemorates the beginning of our salvation.

## 17a) Advent

Advent has a twofold character:

- i) A season of preparation for Christmas when *Christ's first coming* to us is remembered
- ii) A season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await *Christ's second coming* at the end of time

Advent is, thus, a period of devout and joyful expectation.

Advent begins on the Sunday falling on or closest to November 30 and ends before Christmas. There are four Sundays in this season.

The last part of Advent, the weekdays from December 17 to December 24 inclusive, serve as more direct preparation for the Lord's birth.<sup>23</sup>

## 17b) Christmas Season

Next to the yearly celebration of the paschal mystery, the Church holds the memorial of Christ's birth and his early manifestations as most sacred. This is the purpose of the Christmas season.

The Christmas season begins with the vigil of the Lord's birth. In addition to *Christmas Day*, the Church celebrates the feast of the *Holy Family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph*. In this feast, the Church offers the virtues of the family of Nazareth as a model for the Christian family. It is celebrated on the Sunday within the octave of Christmas. On January 1, the Church celebrates the solemnity of *Mary, Mother of God*. On January 3 the conferral of the Holy Name of Jesus is celebrated. *Epiphany* is celebrated on January 6 unless it is assigned to the Sunday between January 2 and 8. Its celebration focuses on the universality of the salvation accomplished by Christ. The Christmas season ends with the feast of the *Baptism of our Lord*.

## 17c) Lent

The Lenten season is a time of preparation for Easter. The faithful prepare themselves for the celebration of the paschal mystery by means of an inner *conversion*, recalling their Baptism, and participating in the Sacrament of Penance, or Reconciliation.<sup>24</sup> To facilitate these objectives, a series of practices are common during this season: listening to and meditating on the word of God, prayer, abstinence, fasting, and almsgiving.

Lent begins with *Ash Wednesday*. The imposition of ashes reminds the faithful of their sinful and weak condition, invites them to pray, and announces that Christ's Resurrection will follow the mystery of the cross. There are 40 days of Lent. The sixth Sunday, which marks the beginning of Holy Week, is called Passion Sunday (*Palm Sunday*). This day's procession highlights the praise due to Christ, the king, while the Mass underscores Christ's Passion.

The purpose of *Holy Week* is to remember Christ's passion, beginning with his Messianic entrance into Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup>

## 17d) The Easter Triduum

The mystery of the Resurrection, through which Christ overcame death, penetrates our time with its powerful energy, until everything is subjected to him. *Easter*, its apex, “is not simply one feast among others, but the ‘Feast of feasts,’ the ‘Solemnity of solemnities,’ just as the Eucharist is the ‘Sacrament of sacraments’ (the Great Sacrament). St. Athanasius calls Easter ‘the Great Sunday’ and the Eastern Churches call Holy Week ‘the Great Week.’”<sup>26</sup>

Christ redeemed us all and gave perfect glory to God, primarily through his paschal mystery: Dying, he destroyed our death, and rising, he restored our life. Therefore, the entire liturgical year culminates in the *Easter Triduum of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ*. Further, the solemnity of Easter has the same preeminence in the liturgical year that Sunday has in the week.

The Easter Triduum begins with the evening Mass of the *Lord’s Supper*, whose theme centers on the institution of the Holy Eucharist. After the Mass, the Blessed Sacrament is carried through the church in procession and transferred to a place of reposition, which has been prepared in a chapel that is suitably decorated for the occasion. Then, the altar is stripped and, if possible, the crosses in the church are either removed or covered. The faithful are encouraged to spend time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament.

The *Good Friday* liturgy is comprised of three parts:

- i) The readings, Psalms, and prayers of intercession
- ii) The adoration of the cross
- iii) Communion with the hosts reserved on Holy Thursday

On Good Friday and, if possible, also on Holy Saturday until the Easter Vigil, the Easter fast is observed.

The Easter Triduum reaches its zenith in the *Easter Vigil*. The Easter Vigil, commemorating the holy night when Christ rose from the dead, ranks as the “vigil of all vigils.” Keeping watch, the Church awaits Christ’s Resurrection and celebrates it in the sacraments. Accordingly, the entire celebration of this vigil should take place at night; it should either begin after nightfall or end before dawn on Sunday.<sup>27</sup> The liturgy of this solemn vigil is comprised of four parts:

- i) The service of light with the blessing of the fire and lighting of the candle, preparation of the candle, procession, and the Easter proclamation (*Exsultet*)
  - ii) The Liturgy of the Word
  - iii) The Liturgy of Baptism including the blessing of the water and the renewal of the baptismal promises
  - iv) The Liturgy of the Eucharist
- The Easter Triduum closes with the evening prayer of *Easter Sunday*.



## 17e) Easter Season

The 50 days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost are celebrated in joyful exultation. These, above all others, are days for singing the *Alleluia*.

On the 40th day after Easter, the *Ascension* is celebrated. The weekdays from the Ascension until the Saturday before Pentecost are preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit.<sup>28</sup>

Easter season ends with the great feast of *Pentecost*, in which the faithful celebrate the visible descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles.

## 17f) Ordinary Time

Apart from those seasons with a distinctive character, 33 or 34 weeks remain in the yearly cycle that do not celebrate a specific aspect of the mystery of Christ. Rather, particularly on Sunday, these weeks are devoted to the mystery of Christ as a whole. This period is known as Ordinary Time.

Ordinary Time begins after the Christmas season and continues until the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. It is resumed on the Monday after Pentecost and ends with the beginning of Advent.<sup>29</sup>

There are three important feasts in this period: *the Most Holy Trinity*, *the Body and Blood of Christ*, and the *Sacred Heart of Jesus*.

## 18. Celebrations of the Saints

The Church also includes memorial days of our Blessed Mother, the martyrs, and other saints in the yearly cycle. These celebrations constitute the yearly *cycle of the saints* (or Proper of the Saints).

In celebrating this annual cycle of the mysteries of Christ, Holy Church honors the blessed Mary, Mother of God, with a special love. She is inseparably linked with her Son's saving work. In her the Church admires and exalts the most excellent fruit of redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be.<sup>30</sup>

Thus:

- Mary is venerated on certain feast days, and she is mentioned in the liturgy throughout the year;
- liturgical texts highlight Mary's role in the history of salvation, which is united to her Son's work;
- Mary is the model of the Church. The faithful are encouraged to imitate her virtues in order to be united to Christ on earth (Christological aspect) and achieve complete union with him in heaven (eschatological aspect).

When the Church, in the annual cycle, brings to memory the martyrs and all the other saints "she proclaims achievement of the paschal mystery in the saints who have suffered and have been glorified with Christ. She proposes them to the faithful as examples, who draw all men to the Father through Christ, and through their merits she begs for God's favors."<sup>31</sup> Thus, the devotion that is due to the saints is:

- an expression of the communion of the saints,
- a channel of petitions through which their intercession is entreated,
- a means of providing the faithful with examples to emulate.

The celebrations of saints of universal significance are obligatory throughout the entire Church. Other saints are either listed in the general calendar for optional celebration or left to the veneration of some particular Church, region, or religious family.

According to their importance, celebrations are distinguished from each other and named as follows: solemnities, feasts, and memorials.

- *Solemnities* are the principal days in the calendar. Some have their own vigil Mass for use when Mass is celebrated on the evening of the

preceding day.

- *Feasts* are less important than the solemnities.
- *Memorials* can be either obligatory or optional. Their observance is integrated into the celebration of the occurring weekday in accord with the norms set forth in the *General Instructions of the Roman Missal*.

Obligatory memorials falling on Lenten weekdays may be celebrated only as optional memorials.

Should more than one optional memorial fall on the same day, only one may be celebrated; the others are omitted.

On Saturdays in Ordinary Time when there is no obligatory memorial, an optional memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary is allowed.<sup>32</sup>

## 19. The Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours)

The mystery of Christ, his Incarnation, and his Resurrection, which we celebrate in the Eucharist (especially in the Sunday assembly), permeates each day of the year through the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, or Divine Office. This celebration, faithful to the apostolic recommendation to “pray constantly” (1 Thes 5:17; cf. Eph 6:18), “is so devised that the whole course of the day and of the night is made holy by the praise of God.”<sup>33</sup> It is the public prayer of the Church; in it, the faithful (clergy, religious, and laity) exercise the royal priesthood of the baptized. Celebrated in the approved form, the Liturgy of the Hours “is truly the voice of the Bride herself addressed to her Bridegroom. It is the very prayer that Christ himself, together with his Body, addresses to the Father.”<sup>34</sup>

The Liturgy of the Hours is called the prayer of the people of God. In it, Christ “continues his priestly work through his Church.”<sup>35</sup> Each individual participates in the Liturgy of the Hours according to one’s place in the Church and the circumstances of one’s life. “Pastors of souls should see to it that the principal hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and solemn feasts. The laity, too, are encouraged to recite the Divine Office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually.”<sup>36</sup>

Celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours demands not only harmony of the voice with the heart that prays, but also “To achieve this more fully, they should take steps to improve their understanding of the liturgy and of the Bible, especially of the psalms.”<sup>37</sup>

The reading of the word of God at each hour (with the responses, or *troparia*, that follow) and reading from the Fathers and spiritual teachers at certain hours reveals the meaning of the mystery celebrated on that day, helps one to understand the Psalms, and prepares for silent prayer. The *lectio divina*, in which the word of God is read and meditated, becomes prayer rooted in the liturgical celebration.

The Liturgy of the Hours is a sort of extension of the Eucharistic celebration. It does not exclude; rather, it gathers the diverse devotions of the people of God, particularly the adoration and the cult of the Most Holy Sacrament.<sup>38</sup>

The whole office begins with an *invitatory*, with its Psalm. The *Office of Readings* seeks to provide God's people—in particular those consecrated to God in a special way—with an ample selection of passages from Sacred Scripture for meditation, together with the finest extracts from spiritual writers.

“By the venerable tradition of the universal Church, Lauds as morning prayer, and Vespers as evening prayer, are the two hinges on which the daily office turns. They must be considered the chief hours and celebrated as such.”<sup>39</sup> *Morning Prayer*, celebrated as the light of a new day is dawning, recalls the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the true light illuminating all mankind (cf. Jn 1:9) and the “sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2) “dawn[ing] upon us from on high” (Lk 1:78).

When evening approaches and the day is already far spent, *Evening Prayer* is celebrated so that “we may give thanks for what has been given us, or what we have done well during the day.”<sup>40</sup> We also recall the redemption in the prayer that we send up “like incense in the Lord's sight,” and in which “the raising up of our hands” becomes “an evening sacrifice” (cf. Ps 140:2).

The Daytime Hours are *Midmorning*, *Midday*, and *Midafternoon Prayer*. These hours are linked to the commemoration of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the crucifixion of our Lord, and the first preaching of the Gospel.

*Night Prayer* is the last prayer of the day. An examination of conscience may suitably follow. In a celebration in a group, this may take place either in silence or as part of a penitential rite. Finally, one of the antiphons in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary is recited.<sup>41</sup>

# WHERE TO CELEBRATE

## 20. The Place of the Celebration

The worship “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24) of the New Covenant is not limited exclusively to a place. All the earth is holy and has been entrusted to humanity. Wherever the faithful gather, they are “living stones ... built into a spiritual house” (1 Pt 2:5). The body of the risen Christ is the spiritual temple from which the spring of living water flows. Incorporated to Christ through the Holy Spirit, “we are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor 6:16).<sup>42</sup>

When the exercise of religious freedom is not impeded, Christians should build edifices designated for divine worship. These visible churches are not simply places of gathering but signify and manifest the Church in that place.

The *church* is the house of prayer in which the Holy Eucharist is celebrated and reserved, where the faithful gather, and where our Savior is worshiped. This house of prayer should be beautiful and appropriate for prayer and sacred celebrations.<sup>43</sup> The truth and harmony of the elements that constitute this house of prayer should manifest Christ, who is present and acts in this place.<sup>44</sup>

The *altar* of the New Covenant is the cross of the Lord (cf. Heb 13:10), from which the sacraments of the paschal mystery flow. Under sacramental signs, the sacrifice of the cross is made present over the altar—the center of the Church. The altar is also the table of the Lord to which the people of God is invited.<sup>45</sup> It must be covered with an altar cloth. There should be candles and a cross either on the altar or somewhere near it.

There may be a *reredos* or *altarpiece* (a richly painted or ornamented screen), usually figural, at the back of the altar.

The *tabernacle* is a boxlike receptacle where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved. It should be solid, inviolable, and always located within the church in a prominent, most dignified place that is conducive to prayer. The name is derived from the word “tent.” It is covered with a tabernacle veil. The nobility, disposition, and security of the Eucharistic tabernacle<sup>46</sup>

should facilitate the adoration of the Lord, who is really present in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar.

The *sanctuary lamp* must be kept burning before the tabernacle.

The *holy chrism* (*myron*), whose anointing is the sacramental sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit, is traditionally reserved and venerated in a safe place in the sanctuary. It may be kept with the oil of the catechumens and that of the sick.

The *chair* of the bishop or the priest “should signify his office as president of the assembly and director of prayer.”<sup>47</sup>

The dignity of the word of God demands that a place in the church is reserved for its proclamation: the *lectern* (or *ambo*).

The gathering of the people of God starts with Baptism. Therefore, the church should have an appropriate place for the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism (*baptistry*). Also, there should be a *holy water font* to remind the faithful of the baptismal promises.

The renewal of the baptismal life demands *penance*. Thus, the church should have a place for the faithful to express repentance and receive the Sacrament of Penance (*confessional*).

The church should also be a space that invites recollection and silent prayer, which prolongs and internalizes the Eucharist.

Finally, the church has an eschatological significance. When entering the house of God, one ordinarily crosses a threshold, symbolizing the passing from a world wounded by sin to the world of new life to which all people are called. The visible Church symbolizes the paternal home toward which God’s people are going and where the Father “will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rv 21:4). Thus, the Church is also the house of all the children of God, open wide and welcoming.



# HOW TO CELEBRATE

## 21. Signs and Symbols

The liturgical celebration includes signs and symbols that refer to creation (light, water, fire), human life (to wash, to anoint, to break bread), and the history of salvation (the rites of Easter). These human rites, gestures, or elements are inserted in the world of faith and assumed by the power of the Holy Spirit; thus, they become instruments of Christ's salvific and sanctifying action.<sup>48</sup>

*These are signs of the covenant.* The chosen people received from God specific signs and symbols that marked their liturgical life. They were not mere celebrations of the cosmic cycles or social events, but signs of the covenant with God. The liturgical signs of the Old Covenant are circumcision, the anointing, and consecration of kings and priests, the laying on of hands, sacrifices, and, above all, the Passover. The Church sees these signs as a prefiguration of the sacraments of the New Covenant.

*These are signs assumed by Christ.* The Lord Jesus frequently made use of the signs of creation in his preaching to make known the mysteries of the Kingdom of God (cf. Lk 8:10). He performed cures and emphasized his preaching through material signs or symbolic gestures (cf. Jn 9:6; Mk 7:33–35; 8:22–25). He gave new meaning to the events and signs of the Old Testament, particularly to the Exodus and the Passover (cf. Lk 9:31; 22:7–20) because he himself is the meaning of all these signs.

*These are sacramental signs.* Since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit accomplishes the sanctification of the faithful through the sacramental signs of his Church. The sacraments of the Church do not nullify, but purify and integrate all the richness of the signs and symbols of social life. Moreover, the sacramental signs fulfill the types and figures of the Old Covenant, signify and accomplish the salvation wrought by Christ, and foreshadow and anticipate the glory of heaven.

## 22. Words, Actions, and Elements

The sacramental celebration is a meeting of God's children with their Father in Christ and the Holy Spirit. This meeting is expressed as a dialogue through actions and words. The symbolic actions are already a language, but the word of God and the response of faith should accompany and enliven these actions. The liturgical actions signify what God's word expresses: the gratuitous initiative of God and the faith response of his people.<sup>49</sup>

The *Liturgy of the Word* is an integral part of the sacramental celebrations. To nourish the faithful, the signs of the word of God should be taken care of well: the book of the word (*Lectionary* or *Book of the Gospels*), the ceremony of its veneration (procession, incense, candles), the place of the proclamation (lectern or ambo), its audible and intelligible reading, the homily that prolongs the proclamation, and the responses of the assembly (acclamations, meditation psalms, litanies, confession of faith).

As signs and instruction, the words and liturgical action are inseparable, and they bring about what they signify. The Holy Spirit, in infusing the faith, not only provides understanding of the word of God, but also, through the sacraments, realizes the "marvels" of God, which are announced by the same word. It makes present and communicates the Father's work accomplished by his beloved Son.

The *liturgical gestures* may be a useful ceremony (like washing the hands after the imposition of ashes or anointing), a sign of veneration toward persons (bowing) or things (kissing the altar), an accompaniment to the words (like making the sign of the cross on the Book of the Gospels or extending the hands during the Eucharistic Prayer), a specifically Christian symbol (the sign of the cross), or a gesture accepted from the socio-cultural environment (giving the instruments in the priestly ordination).

The most important liturgical gestures are:

- the *sign of the cross* (used in the blessing of persons and things),
- *striking one's breast* (a sign of repentance and humility),
- *looking upward* (used by Jesus and included in Eucharistic Prayer I),
- *anointing* (a symbol of the grace infused with the sacrament),

- *giving of ashes* (a sign of humility, repentance, resurrection, and trustful prayer),
- *laying on of hands* (signifying a supernatural action being performed by God),
- *raising and extending hands* (prayer, seeking and expecting help from God),
- *joining one's hands at the chest* (a gesture of prayer when the hands are not extended), and
- *extending hands to give the sign of peace.*

The most important liturgical body *postures* are:

- *standing* (a sign of joy and the freedom of God's children),
- *kneeling* (a sign of repentance, penance, or adoration),
- *sitting down* (the attitude of a disciple listening to the teacher),
- *bowing one's head* (reverence given to the name of Jesus, Mary, or the saint of the day),
- *bowing the body* (toward the altar when there is no tabernacle, within the Profession of Faith at the words, "*by the power of the Holy Spirit*", during the prayers, "*Almighty God, cleanse*" and "*Lord God, we ask you to receive,*" and in Eucharistic Prayer I at the words, "*Almighty God, we pray*"),
- *prostration* (only on Good Friday and in priestly ordination), and
- *procession* (a symbol of the pilgrim Church, done several times within the Mass and in some solemn celebrations around the church or in the streets).<sup>50</sup>

The Church also uses some *material elements* in the liturgy. Some of these elements, which prolong and widen the meaning of the sacramental signs, are:

- *bread and wine* (sharing the same bread and wine symbolizes the unity and fraternity among Christians),
- *oil* (this means spiritual and corporal fortitude, pouring of grace, sanctification and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, communication of a divine power, and consecration of sacred objects),
- *ashes, water, and incense* (signs of penance, purification, and adoration, respectively),
- *light* (sign of Christ, the light of the world, also a mark of honor),

- *sacred vestments, and*
- *liturgical colors.*<sup>51</sup>

## 22a) Sacred Vessels and Liturgical Items

It is useful to know and be able to identify the sacred vessels and liturgical items used in worship, especially those used for the celebration of Mass.

The sacred books used in the Mass are called the *Lectionary*, which contains all the readings, Psalms, and Gospels, and the *Sacramentary*. They are placed either on the self-standing *lectern* (or *ambo*) for the readings or on a small folding bookstand on the altar during the Mass.

Vessels should be made from solid materials that are considered noble in a particular region. Preference should be given to materials that do not easily break or become unusable.

Metal vessels should ordinarily be gilded on the inside if the metal rusts. Vessels that serve as receptacles for Eucharistic bread (ciborium, pyx, monstrance) could be made of nonmetal materials that are prized in the region (e.g., hard wood) as long as they are suitable for sacred use.

Sacred vessels should be blessed, thus dedicating them to sacred use.

The *chalice* is a cup used at Mass to hold the precious blood of Christ. The bowl of chalices and other vessels that serve as receptacles for the blood of the Lord should be made of nonabsorbent material. The base, however, may be made of any other solid and worthy material.

The *paten* is a shallow dish on which the host is placed.

The chalice and paten hold a place of honor among the requisites for the celebration of Mass, since they are used in presenting, consecrating, and receiving the sacred species.

The *ciborium* is a covered cup in which the small, consecrated hosts are kept. It is usually covered with a veil.

The *corporal* is a linen cloth, about 20 inches square, upon which the chalice and paten are placed. It is customarily pleated in four folds overlapping inwardly so that no fragment of the consecrated host may be dropped. It is carried in a burse.

The *pall* is a stiff cardboard, typically square, covered with linen. It is used as a cover for the chalice to protect it from dust and other foreign matter.

The *purificator* is a small linen towel used to dry the priest's fingers and the chalice at the end of the Mass.

The *chalice veil* covers the chalice before and after its use at Mass.

The *Communion plate* is held under the chin of the communicant (or the hands if the Eucharist is received in the hand) to catch any particle of the sacred host that may fall. The Communion cloth, placed over the rail, has a similar purpose.

The *altar bell* is rung to alert those present at key moments of the Mass.

The *cruets* are two small bottles or vessels containing the wine and water to be used for the consecration and for the ablutions after Communion.

A *censer* or *thurible* to burn incense is used in solemn Masses. The *incense boat* is a vessel in which incense is kept. A small spoon is used to transfer incense from the boat to the censer.

## 22b) Priestly Vestments

The function of sacred vestments in liturgical worship is twofold:

- i) To highlight the diversity of ministries.
- ii) To contribute to the beauty of the rite.

The *amice* is a rectangular piece of white linen, worn beneath the alb.

The *alb* is a full-length white linen vestment. It is the vestment common to ministers of every rank. It symbolizes the garment in which Christ was clothed by Herod and the purity of soul with which the sacrifice of the Mass should be offered. In some other liturgical ceremonies, the minister may wear a *surplice* instead of an alb. A surplice is a short, wide-sleeve garment of white linen.

The *cincture* is a belt, girdle, or cord tied around the waist of the alb. It symbolizes chastity and mortification of the senses.

The *stole* is a long, narrow band worn over the neck. It should never be left off at Mass or other rites directly connected to the Mass. It symbolizes the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ and the dignity of the ministerial priesthood.

The *chasuble* is a sleeveless outer garment worn by the priest at Mass. It is worn over all the other vestments, and is made of silk or some other rich material, usually decorated with symbols. It is patterned after the traveling cloak used by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Originally, it was a large circle of cloth with an opening in the center for the head of the priest. It symbolizes charity, which must cover all our actions.

At solemn Masses, the deacon wears a *dalmatic*. It is an outer liturgical vestment with short sleeves, open at the sides and made of the same material as the vestments of the celebrant.

The *cope* is worn by the priest in processions and other services.

The beauty of the vestments should derive from the materials and design, rather than lavish ornamentation. Representations on vestments should consist only of symbols, images, or pictures portraying the sacred. Anything not in keeping with the sacred is to be avoided.

## 22c) Colors of the Liturgical Vestments

The colors of the liturgical vestments are meant to express the specific character of the mysteries of the faith being celebrated, symbolize different truths, or convey sentiments. Customarily, the color of these liturgical vestments (the chasuble, the dalmatic, the stole) is repeated in other items (the chalice veil, the tabernacle veil, the corporal burse, and even the frontal of the altar when it is made of cloth).

The color *white* is the symbol of purity, majesty, and glory. It is used on the feasts of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and saints who are not martyrs (pastors, Doctors of the Church, virgins, and holy men and women in general).

*Red* symbolizes love, fire, the blood of martyrdom, and royalty. It is used on Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Pentecost, the Lord's Passion, and the feasts of the apostles, evangelists, and martyrs.

*Green* symbolizes hope, youth, progress, life, and continuous growth. It is used in Masses of Ordinary Time.

*Violet* symbolizes humility, penance, and austerity. It is used in Lent and Advent. It may also be used in Masses for the dead.

*Black* symbolizes mourning. It may be used in Masses for the dead.

*Rose* lightens the austerity and penitential rigor of violet. It may be used on the Third Sunday of Advent and on the Fourth Sunday of Lent.

*Light blue* symbolizes our Blessed Mother. It may be used on her feasts, following the regulations of the local bishop.

On solemn occasions, more precious vestments may be used even if not of the color of the day.<sup>52</sup>



## **23. Songs and Music**

“The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art. The main reason for this pre-eminence is that as a combination of sacred music and words, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy.”<sup>53</sup> Song and music are closely connected with the liturgical action. The criteria for their adequate use are their expressive beauty as prayer, the unanimous participation of the assembly, and the sacred character of the celebration.

## 24. Sacred Images

A sacred image or liturgical icon primarily represents Christ; it cannot represent God invisible and incomprehensible. The Incarnation of the Son of God, however, has inaugurated a new “economy” of images.<sup>54</sup>

In other times, God, who did not have body or figure, could not be represented by an image. But now he has appeared in the flesh, and has lived among men; thus, I can make an image of what I have seen of God ... with unveiled face we contemplate the glory of God.<sup>55</sup>

Christian iconography transcribes the evangelical message, which the Sacred Scripture transmits through words and images. Image and word shed light on each other:

To express briefly our profession of faith, we conserve all the traditions of the Church, written or unwritten, which have been transmitted to us without alteration. One of them is the use of images. This is in accordance with the evangelical history; we believe that, truly and not merely in appearance, God the Word became flesh. This is so useful and profitable, because things that are mutually clarified have without doubt a reciprocal significance.<sup>56</sup>

All the symbols of the liturgical celebration refer to Christ, as do the sacred images of the Most Blessed Mother of God and the saints. They signify, in effect, Christ, who is glorified in them. They manifest the “cloud of witnesses” (Heb 12:1) that continues participating in the salvation of the world. We are united to them, above all, in the sacramental celebration. Through the icons, man, the image of God, is finally transfigured in his image (cf. Rom 8:29; 1 Jn 3:2):

Following the divinely inspired teaching of our holy Fathers and the tradition of the Catholic Church (since we acknowledge this tradition to be of the Holy Spirit who dwells in her), we defined with all exactitude and care that the venerable and holy images, as well as the image of the precious and life-giving cross—either painted, in mosaic, or in other suitable material—should be exposed in the holy churches of God, in the sacred vessels and ornaments, in the walls and in frames, in houses and in the roads; this includes the images of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, our Immaculate Lady the holy Mother of God, the holy angels, and all the saints and the just.<sup>57</sup>

“The beauty and color of the images inspire my prayer. It is a feast for my eyes, in the same manner that the sight of the fields inspire my heart to give glory to God.”<sup>58</sup> The contemplation of the sacred images, united to the meditation of the word of God and the singing of liturgical hymns, forms

part of the harmony of the signs of the celebration. Thus, the mystery that is celebrated is engraved in the memory of the heart and then expressed in the new life of the faithful.

1. Cf. CCC, 1137–1139.
2. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1136.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1136–1144.
4. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1140–1144.
5. SC, 26.
6. *Ibid.*, 27.
7. LG, 10.
8. SC, 14.
9. Cf. PO, 2, 15.
10. Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 153ff.
11. SC, 28.
12. *Ibid.*, 10.
13. Cf. Pius XII, Enc. *Mediator Dei*, 3, 20, 23–24.
14. SC, 11.
15. Cf. J.A. Abad Ibañez and M. Garrido Bonaño, O.S.B., *Iniciación a la Liturgia de la Iglesia*.
16. St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 65–67.
17. Cf. CCC, 1200–1203.
18. SC, 102; cf. CCC, 1164.
19. Cf. J.A. Abad Ibañez and M. Garrido Bonaño, O.S.B., *Iniciación a la Liturgia de la Iglesia*.
20. SC, 106.
21. Cf. CCC, 1166–1167.
22. Cf. CCC, 1168–1171.
23. Cf. *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*.
24. Cf. SC, 107.
25. Cf. *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*.
26. CCC, 1169.
27. Cf. *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*.
28. Cf. *Ibid.*
29. Cf. *Ibid.*
30. SC, 103.
31. *Ibid.*, 104; cf. 108, 111; CCC, 1173.
32. Cf. *General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*.
33. SC, 84.
34. *Ibid.*; cf. CCC, 1174.
35. SC, 83.
36. *Ibid.*, 100; cf. CCC, 1175.
37. SC, 90; cf. CCC, 1176.
38. Cf. CCC, 1177–1178.
39. SC, 89.
40. St. Basil the Great, *Regulae Fusiis Tractatae*, PG 31, 1015.
41. Cf. *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*.

- 42. Cf. CCC, 1179–1186.
- 43. Cf. *PO*, 5; *SC*, 122–127; CCC, 1181.
- 44. Cf. *SC*, 7.
- 45. Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 259; CCC, 1182, 1383.
- 46. Cf. *SC*, 128; CCC, 1183, 1379.
- 47. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 271; cf. CCC, 1184
- 48. Cf. CCC, 1189, 1145–1152.
- 49. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1153–1155.
- 50. Cf. J.A. Abad Ibañez and M. Garrido Bonaño, O.S.B., *Iniciación a la Liturgia de la Iglesia*, pp. 62ff; CCC, 1148.
- 51. Cf. J.A. Abad Ibañez and M. Garrido Bonaño, O.S.B., *Iniciación a la Liturgia de la Iglesia*, pp. 71ff; CCC, 1147.
- 52. Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 306–309.
- 53. *SC*, 112, cf. CCC, 1156–1158, 1191.
- 54. Cf. CCC, 1159–1162.
- 55. St. John Damascene, *Imag.*, 1.16.
- 56. Third Council of Nicaea, A.D. 787.
- 57. DS 600.
- 58. St. John Damascene, *Imag.*, 1.27.

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## The Liturgy of the Sacraments

# **LITURGY OF THE MASS**

## **25. Elements of the Mass**

The liturgy of the Mass is composed of two main elements forming a single action: the Liturgy of the Word, and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.<sup>1</sup>

## **26. The Introductory Rites**

The Introductory Rites have a twofold purpose: to make the gathering faithful into a community, and to help them prepare themselves to listen to God's word and celebrate the Eucharist properly.<sup>2</sup> The Rites are like an opening to or preparation for the sacred action. The Introductory Rites are integrated by the following elements:

- Entrance Song
- Veneration of the Altar
- Greeting of the Congregation
- Penitential Rite
- Kyrie
- Gloria
- Opening Prayer or Collect

## 27. The Liturgy of the Word

Readings from Scripture and the chants between the readings form the body of the Liturgy of the Word. These elements are arranged in the following order:

- First Reading
- Responsorial Psalm
- Second Reading (only on Sundays and greater celebrations)
- Gospel Acclamation (*Alleluia* or another chant)
- Gospel
- Homily
- Profession of Faith (or Creed)
- General Intercessions (or Prayer of the Faithful)

In the readings from Scripture, God speaks to his people, opening the mystery of Redemption and salvation to them and nourishing their spirit. Christ is present to the faithful through his own word. The homily explains and expands these readings. Through the chants, the people make God's word their own. In the Profession of Faith, they affirm their adherence to it. Finally, having been nourished by this word, they present their petitions for the needs of the Church and the salvation of the whole world.<sup>3</sup>

On Sundays and holidays, there are three readings arranged thus: the first from the Old Testament, the second from the New Testament (epistles, Acts of the Apostles, Revelation), and the third from the Gospel. Thus, God's own teaching brings the Christian people to a greater knowledge of the continuity of the work of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

The very important biblical passages are featured on Sundays and solemnities of the Lord. In this way, the more significant parts of God's revealed word are read to the assembly of the faithful within a reasonable period of time.

Weekdays present a second series of texts from Scripture, and in a sense, these complement the message of salvation that is explained on Sundays and solemnities of the Lord.

The order of readings for Sundays and solemnities extends for a period of three years. Each year within that period is marked with a letter A, B, or C.



For weekdays (or ferial days), the cycle is for only two years, designated I and II, for odd and even years. Each of these cycles (for Sundays and weekdays) runs its course independently.<sup>5</sup> This arrangement provides texts for every day of the week throughout the year.

The readings provided by the weekday cycle should be used in ordinary celebrations (memorials) of the saints. Nevertheless, a series of proper readings are also given for celebrations of the saints. These are adapted readings that bring out some particular aspects of a saint's spiritual life or apostolate. These accommodated readings may take the place of the weekday readings in some instances. However, since the first concern of the priest is the spiritual benefit of the faithful, he must always be careful not to impose his personal preference on them. Above all, he is advised to not omit too often or needlessly the readings assigned for each day in the weekday lectionary.<sup>6</sup>

## **28. The Liturgy of the Eucharist**

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is comprised of three sections: the Preparation of the Gifts, the Eucharistic Prayer, and the Rite of Communion.

## **28a) The Preparation of the Gifts**

In the Preparation of the Gifts, the bread and wine with water—the elements that Christ used—are brought to the altar. The washing of the priest's hands and the Prayer over the Gifts (a presidential prayer) close the Preparation of the Gifts.

## 28b) The Eucharistic Prayer

In the Eucharistic Prayer, the Church gives thanks to God for the whole work of salvation, and the gifts of bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.<sup>7</sup> The chief elements of the Eucharistic Prayer are the following:

- *Thanksgiving* (expressed mainly in the *Preface*): In the name of the entire people of God, the priest praises God the Father and thanks him for the whole work of salvation or for some special aspect of it corresponding to the day, feast, or season.
- *Acclamation*: Joining with the angels, the congregation sings or recites the *Sanctus*. This acclamation is an intrinsic part of the Eucharistic Prayer, and all the people join with the priest in singing or reciting it.
- *Epiclesis* (invocation): In special invocations, the Church calls on God's power and asks that gifts offered by human hands be consecrated (that they become Christ's body and blood) and that the Victim to be received in Communion be the source of salvation for those who will partake of it.
- *Narrative of the Institution and Consecration*: With the words and actions of Christ, the sacrifice that he himself instituted at the Last Supper is celebrated. Under the appearances of bread and wine, he offered his body and blood, gave them to his apostles to eat and drink, and then commanded that they reenact this mystery.
- *Anamnesis* (memorial): In fulfillment of the command received from Christ through the apostles, the Church keeps his memorial by recalling especially his Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension in this way.
- *Oblation*: The oblation or offering of the victim is part of a sacrifice. In this memorial, the Church, particularly the Church then assembled, offers the spotless Victim to the Father in the Holy Spirit. The Church's intention is that the faithful not only offer the Victim but also learn to offer themselves and so to surrender themselves—through Christ the Mediator—to an ever more complete union with the Father and with each other, so that, at last, God may be all in all.

- *Intercessions:* The intercessions make it clear that the Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the entire Church and all her members, both living and dead, who are called to share in the salvation and Redemption purchased by Christ's body and blood. This part includes also the commemoration of the saints, in whose glory we hope to share.
- *Final Doxology:* The praise of God is expressed in the Doxology, to which the people's acclamation is an assent and conclusion.

## 28c) Variety of Eucharistic Prayers

In the Roman rite, the first part of the Eucharistic Prayer, known as the Preface, has acquired many different texts through the course of the centuries. There were 20 prefaces in the Missal at the time of Pope John XXIII.

The second part, known as the Canon, assumed an unchanging form. In contrast, the Eastern liturgies have admitted a certain variety in their anaphoras. After the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI added three more Eucharistic Prayers, keeping the very venerable Roman Canon. Some more Eucharistic Prayers have been added recently.

The Roman Canon is called *Roman* because it originated in Rome at the end of the fourth century. It developed its present form during the pontificate of Gregory the Great (seventh century) and has had no significant changes since then.

It consists of 15 prayers, which are often described as “tiles in a mosaic.” We may look at all 15 and see their total effect, or we may go line by line and enjoy each prayer.

The First Eucharistic Prayer may be used any day. It is particularly fitting on days when there are special texts for the prayer “*In union with the whole Church*” and the prayer “*Father, accept this offering.*”

The Second Eucharistic Prayer is the most ancient anaphora. It closely follows the *Anaphora of Saint Hippolytus*, written at about A.D. 215. It is vigorous, clear, and has a solid biblical and theological background. Its features make it particularly suitable for weekdays. Although it has its own preface, it may also be used with other prefaces.

The Third Eucharistic Prayer is rich with overtones of ancient Alexandrian, Byzantine, and Maronite anaphoras. It expresses the doctrine of the Eucharist as the sacrifice of Christ in a particularly clear way. It gives prominence to the Holy Spirit, naming him four times. It is particularly suited to Sundays and holidays; it may be said with any preface.

The Fourth Eucharistic Prayer provides a more comprehensive summary of the history of salvation. It borrows some elements from Eastern liturgies and even the liturgy of the synagogue. It is a profoundly biblical prayer that recounts the main events in the history of salvation, and links this history to its center: Christ. This Eucharistic Prayer has a fixed preface. It cannot be used, therefore, when a Mass has its own proper preface.<sup>8</sup>

There are other Eucharistic Prayers for special occasions: three for children's Masses, two for Masses of reconciliation, and one for ecclesial gatherings.

## 28d) The Rite of Communion

Through the Breaking of the Bread, the unity of the faithful is expressed. Through Communion, they receive the Lord's body and blood in the same way that the apostles received Communion from Christ's own hands.<sup>9</sup>

In the early Church, the Communion Rite was simple. The Anaphora was followed by the Breaking of the Bread, then by the Lord's Prayer and Communion. A crown of prayers and ceremonies were added through the centuries. Nowadays, the Communion Rite is ordered thus:

- i) *The Lord's Prayer*, preceded by the invitation to pray and followed by the embolism and the people's acclamation
- ii) *Rite of Peace*
- iii) *Breaking of the Bread* with the commingling, while the *Agnus Dei* is said or sung
- iv) *Personal preparation* of the priest
- v) *Invitation* to the sacred banquet by showing the host to the faithful
- vi) *Communion of the priest and the faithful*<sup>10</sup>
- vii) *Communion Antiphon* (from the Prayer Texts) or song
- viii) *Silent prayer*, if opportune
- ix) *The Prayer after Communion* (from the Prayer Texts)

The Concluding Rite is quite simple. It includes the:

- blessing,
- dismissal, and
- kissing of and reverence to the altar.



## 29. How to Use the Missal

For practical purposes, there are three sets of formulas that should be assembled for the Mass:

- i) *The Ordinary of the Mass* contains most of the fixed prayers of the Mass.

The Gloria and Creed (Profession of Faith) are sung or said on Sundays and solemnities (the Gloria is not used during the Advent and Lenten seasons) and in solemn local celebrations.

- ii) *The prayer texts* vary each day of the year. This set includes the Entrance Antiphon, Presidential Prayers (the Opening Prayer, the Prayer over the Gifts, and the Prayer after Communion), and the Communion Antiphon.

The Entrance and Communion Antiphons may be sung or read by the people, read by the priest, or replaced with an appropriate chant.

- *Sundays and solemnities*: Prayer texts are given for each Sunday and solemnity; these are the same for a given day every year.
- *Weekdays*. Each day of the year (outside Ordinary Time) has its own set of prayer texts. On weekdays of Ordinary Time, the prayer texts may be taken from the preceding Sunday, from another Sunday of Ordinary Time, or from the prayers for various occasions given. It is always permissible to use only the Opening Prayer from these Masses.

This makes available a wider selection of texts and affords an opportunity to restate the themes of prayer for the liturgical assembly. It also permits adaptation of the prayer to the needs of the people, the Church, and the world.<sup>11</sup>

- *Celebrations of the saints*. Prayer texts are also given for the celebrations of the saints. These are grouped in two sets: the *Proper of the Saints* (arranged for the saint celebrated each day of the year), and the *Common of Saints* (arranged by “categories”: martyrs, pastors, virgins, etc.). Specifically:
  - If there are proper texts for a particular saint, these should be used.
  - If the Missal refers to a Common (or several Commons), the most suitable of these should be chosen.

- In addition to the Common referred by the Missal, it is always possible to choose one from the Common of Holy Men and Women, which refers to sanctity in general.
- The Prayer over the Gifts and Prayer after Communion, unless they are proper, may be taken from either the Common Masses or the weekday of the current season.
- *Ritual Masses, Masses for various needs, votive Masses, and Masses for the dead.* A fourth group of prayer texts is given for use on certain days according to particular pastoral reasons.
- iii) *The Readings* are usually taken from the continuous reading for every day of the year.
- *Sundays and solemnities* have three readings. The third reading is from the Gospels. Sunday readings are arranged according to a three-year cycle (A, B, and C). Each liturgical year begins in Advent, even though these are the last weeks of the preceding civil year.
- *Feasts* have their own set of (two) readings.
- *Weekdays* have their own readings for each day of the year. Unless a solemnity or feast occurs, these readings are to be used regularly on the days to which they are assigned.<sup>12</sup>
  - For Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter seasons, both readings follow an annual cycle; a set of readings is given for every day.
  - For weekdays during the 34 weeks of Ordinary Time, the First Readings follow a biannual cycle (called I and II, for odd and even years, respectively), while the Gospels (with Gospel Acclamations) follow an annual cycle.
- Celebrations of the saints follow these rules:
  - Unless it is a solemnity or feast, the readings may be taken from the weekday readings of the current season (or memorial with proper readings, as mentioned earlier in this chapter).
  - For compelling pastoral reasons, other readings may be chosen for memorials of the saints. The *Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass* provides two groups of readings:
    - a. The *Proper of the Saints* provides the first group of readings.

- b. The *Common of the Saints* provides the second, more extensive group of readings. There are, first, appropriate texts for the different classes of saints (martyrs, pastors, virgins, etc.), then, a great many texts that deal with holiness in general. These are for alternative use whenever the Commons are indicated as the source for the choice of readings.<sup>14</sup>
- For *ritual Masses*, *Masses for various needs and occasions*, *votive Masses*, and *Masses of the dead*, the readings are taken from either the texts given for these Masses (grouped together as in the *Common of Saints*) or the weekday cycle.

## **30. Other Sacraments**

The particular celebration of each sacrament is described, together with its dogmatic aspect, in the treatise on the sacraments.

# SACRAMENTALS

## 31. What Are the Sacramentals?

Sacramentals are sacred signs which in a sense imitate the sacraments. They signify certain effects, especially spiritual ones, and they achieve these effects through the intercession of the Church.<sup>15</sup>

This “imitation of the sacraments” implies both similarity and dissimilarity to them. Therefore:

- sensible signs are used, composed of both matter and form;
- it can be said that the sacramentals were instituted by Christ, inasmuch as Christ gave the Church the power to institute them. In some cases, as in exorcisms, he even demonstrated how to do them. Still, strictly speaking, the sacramentals were instituted by the Church, who can and does change them when she deems it appropriate. Specifically, this power belongs to the Apostolic See<sup>16</sup>;
- the sacramentals confer actual graces and assistance. Thus, they indirectly help one merit an increase of sanctifying grace;
- they do not confer grace *ex opere operato*, but through the actions of the recipient and of the Church. Their effectiveness is based on the impetratory value (i.e., by way of request) of the prayers of the Church and on the quality of the dispositions of the subject.

There are several *kinds of sacramentals*. Some are blessed or consecrated *objects* through which the faithful receive spiritual benefits. Examples of this type are holy water, the scapular, blessed candles or palms, and, generally speaking, all blessed objects used exclusively for the worship of God.

Sacramentals may also be *actions* that the Church enriches with special graces. For example, the recitation of an act of contrition, the imposition of ash, exorcisms, processions, pilgrimages, and the funeral rites.

Most of the sacramentals consist of *blessings*, like those of churches, objects devoted to divine worship, rosaries, scapulars, houses, the nuptial blessing, and the blessing of water.

The *effects* of sacramentals can be divided into four groups:

- i) Actual graces

- ii) Forgiveness of venial sins
- iii) Protection against the attacks of the devil
- iv) Temporal benefits (like the blessing of the fields)

## 32. Rite of Funerals

The Church celebrates funeral rites for her children. These rites are not a sort of purification for the deceased, mere intercessions, or expression of condolences. The Church celebrates the paschal mystery so that those who were incorporated in Christ through Baptism may be received in heaven with him.<sup>17</sup> The following aspects are emphasized in the rite:

- The certainty of the resurrection in Christ; thus, the *hope of resurrection* is the central theme of the funeral
- The uncertainty of salvation; thus, the intercessions for the deceased are offered
- The festive character of the funeral
- The bonds of communion between the living and the dead
- The veneration of the body (together with the soul, it will be glorified)
- The profound meaning of life and death for a Christian

## **32a) Plans of Funerals**

The Roman Ritual gives three plans of funerals<sup>18</sup>:

- i) The first plan allows for three stations: in the home of the deceased, in the church (usually with the celebration of the Mass, and the “final commendation and farewell” when the body is incensed and sprinkled with holy water), and at the cemetery.
- ii) The second plan has two stations: in the cemetery chapel and at the grave.
- iii) The third plan has one station: the home of the deceased.



## 32b) Masses for the Dead

Masses for the dead may be celebrated on obligatory memorials and on ferial days (except Ash Wednesday and Holy Week) in the following cases:

- On learning of a death
- On the occasion of a burial
- On the first anniversary of the death.

Other Masses for the dead may be celebrated whenever votive Masses are permitted, provided these Masses are actually applied for the dead.

1. Cf. CCC, 1345–1355.
2. Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 24.
3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 31; CCC, 1349.
4. Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 318.
5. Cf. *Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass*, 65.
6. In a dozen cases, the readings correspond to biblical passages that mention the saint (as in the case of St. Barnabas, St. Martha, etc.) or about the event in the saint's life that the Mass is celebrating. These readings must take the place of the weekday readings for the same day. Cf. *Ibid.*, 83.
7. Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 48; CCC, 1352–1354.
8. Cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 322d. A preface is considered “proper” in a strict sense when it is attached to Masses celebrated on the very day of the feast or during its *octave*. There are prefaces indicated for the entire seasons of the year, but these are not to be regarded as “proper” in a strict sense (*Notitiae*, 5 [1969] 323, no. 1).
9. Cf. *Ibid.*, 48; CCC, 1355.
10. “Communion under both kinds may be granted also to the laity when the bishops think fit, not only to clerics and religious but also to the laity, in cases to be determined by the Apostolic See” (*SC*, 55). Cf. CCC, 1390.
11. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 323.
12. Cf. *Ibid.*, 319.
14. Cf. *Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass*, 70.
15. *CIC*, 1166; cf. CCC, 1667–1676.
16. Cf. *CIC*, 1167.
17. Cf. CCC, 958, 1032, 1055, 1371–1372, 1684–1690.
18. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2300.

# The Sacraments

by Enrique Moliné

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**THE SACRAMENTS**  
by Enrique Moliné

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The Sacraments in General

# 1. Introduction

The sacraments are the seven great means that God has given the Church so that her members may grow in the life of grace.<sup>1</sup> The first five correspond to the different needs of the Christian's spiritual life: birth, growth, nutrition, cure in sickness, and preparation for the soul's union with God. The other two correspond to the needs of Christian society: the Christian priesthood and the Christian family.

Following this division, we will study:

- the sacraments of Christian initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist,
- the sacraments of healing: Penance and Anointing of the Sick,
- the sacraments for the needs of the community: Holy Orders and Matrimony.<sup>2</sup>

In this analysis of the sacraments, we will study both the doctrine of faith (*dogma*) and the practical norms regulating their administration and reception (*morals*). The special nature of the Sacrament of Marriage warrants the inclusion of a study of the properties and obligations of natural marriage, which is a traditional approach.

As theologians examined the doctrine of faith of each of the sacraments, some properties common to all were identified. This led to the term *sacrament* being used exclusively to refer to these seven rites. This systematic device was, fundamentally, the work of the Scholastic movement, which reached its zenith in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The fundamental documents of the Magisterium of the Church on the seven sacraments are the following:

- The *Decree for the Armenians*. In 1439, the Ecumenical Council of Florence composed this document to the Armenians so that they could officially know the faith of the Roman Church. Among other things, the decree contains an "Instruction on the Sacraments," which closely follows a work of St. Thomas Aquinas on the same topic.
- The documents of the Council of Trent. In order to correct the Protestant errors, the Council had to expound all the doctrine about the sacraments in detail. Between 1547 and 1563, eight council sessions were devoted to this subject.

## 2. The Essence of the Sacraments

*A sacrament is an external or sensible sign, instituted by Christ, that causes the grace it signifies.*<sup>3</sup> We will study the elements of this definition in detail:

- It is *sensible*. It is known through the external senses. A merely internal perception, such as an image produced by the imagination, would not be a sacrament.
- It is *a sign*. It is something that represents a reality (the signified thing) distinct from the sign itself. The sign is an intermediary between the signified thing and the subject who knows it. Some signs, like the letters of the alphabet, are based solely on convention. The sacramental sign, however, bears a natural resemblance to the signified reality. Thus, the washing or anointing of the body signifies the cleansing or comforting of the soul, respectively.
- It is *instituted by Christ*. Only God can give grace, and, therefore, only he can decide what means or channels he will use to communicate it to us.
- It *causes the grace* it signifies. The sacraments communicate both sanctifying grace and the specific grace of each sacrament.

### 3. The Sacraments are Sensible and Material Signs

The sacraments are sensible and material signs (words and actions), accessible to mankind. They really bestow the grace that they signify; they do this through the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

God our Lord is infinite; his love is inexhaustible; his clemency and tenderness toward us are limitless. He grants us his grace in many other ways, but he has expressly and freely established, as only he can do, seven effective signs to enable men to share in the merits of the redemption in a stable, simple and accessible way.<sup>5</sup>

We may wonder why God wanted to use material means to give us his grace. It may well be for pedagogical reasons, since in our present corporeal condition, material things help us grasp what is spiritual. In a certain way, we come to understand supernatural realities through our senses. The humanity of Christ, words and actions, songs and music, sacred images, and other sacred objects have a similar pedagogical function.

We could go even further than the pedagogical aspect. “Authentic Christianity, which professes the resurrection of all flesh, has always quite logically opposed *dis-incarnation*, without fear of being judged materialistic. We can, therefore, rightfully speak of a Christian materialism, which is boldly opposed to those materialisms that are blind to the spirit.”<sup>6</sup>

What are the sacraments, which early Christians described as the footprints of the Incarnate Word, if not the clearest manifestation of this way that God has chosen in order to sanctify us and to lead us to heaven? Don't you see that each sacrament is the love of God, with all its creative and redemptive power, giving itself to us by way of material means?<sup>7</sup>

## 4. Errors Regarding the Sacraments

The doctrine about the sacraments was a main source of error in the teachings of the sixteenth-century Protestant reformers. They denied the existence of some sacraments and heretically misinterpreted the essence of the rest.

In general, they retained only the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Eucharist. As to the latter, only Luther accepted the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Still, he erroneously claimed that the substance of bread and wine were present alongside the body and blood of our Lord (a doctrine known as *consubstantiation*).

In various ways, Protestant groups denied that the sacraments really cause grace. Some thought that the sacraments would only awaken faith—the reception of grace being a consequence. Others claimed that the sacraments were only signs of having already received grace, of membership in the Church and union with it. This is not surprising, since they held an erroneous doctrine on grace, understanding it as the mere non-imputation of sin.

## **5. The Sacraments in the Old Testament**

“The Church of Christ was prepared in marvelous fashion in the history of the people of Israel and in the Old Alliance.”<sup>8</sup> Through the action of the Holy Spirit, certain sacramental rites in the Old Law prefigured the sacraments of the New Law. These rites were circumcision (which prefigured Baptism),<sup>9</sup> the paschal lamb and the bread of the presence (which prefigured the Eucharist [cf. 1 Cor 5:7]), the various purification and expiation rites (which prefigured Penance), and the consecration of Levites and priests (which prefigured the Sacrament of Holy Orders).<sup>10</sup>

These rites, however, did not confer sanctifying grace as the seven sacraments do. They merely prepared the soul for the reception of grace.<sup>11</sup> This essential difference clearly illustrates the contrast between that time (when redemption had only been promised) and the present time (when it has already been achieved by Christ).<sup>12</sup>



## 6. The Institution of the Sacraments by Christ

God is the principal author of all the sacraments. Only God has the power to give the capacity to confer supernatural grace to a sensible and material sign.

He established the sacraments through the humanity of Christ. The mysteries of the life of Christ brought salvation to mankind. What was visible in our Savior has been passed to his mysteries (sacraments). The sacraments are like “forces coming” from the body of Christ (cf. Lk 5:17; 6:19; 8:46). We can say, then, that Christ is:

- the principal author of the sacraments through his divinity,
- the ministerial or instrumental author through his humanity.

*All of the sacraments were instituted by Christ.* This is affirmed in the documents of the Council of Trent, though not in those exact words.<sup>13</sup> This council defined that the Church cannot change the substance of the sacraments.<sup>14</sup> If the Church cannot change them, she certainly could not have had the authority to establish them in the beginning (as some medieval authors erroneously held).

*Christ so specifically determined the matter and form of the sacraments that it is not licit to substantially change them.* Christ could have determined each of the minor details of the administration of the sacraments (*individual* determination), but all authors agree that he did not: These details have changed with time and differ with the rites of the Catholic Church.

Christ could have determined the nature of each sacrament in a general way (*generic* determination), for example, by telling his apostles, “I want you to establish a rite signifying the cleansing of the soul from sin. I, with my power, will give that rite the capacity actually to forgive sin. It is up to you to decide the matter and form of the rite.” If that were the case, Christ would still be the author of the sacraments, but the Church would have power over their matter and form. The Council of Trent, however, defines that this was not so.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, we must hold that Christ specifically determined the matter and form of each sacrament (*specific* determination), leaving the accidental aspects open to changes. An example of such a change is the

above-mentioned differences between the Latin Rite and the other rites of the Catholic Church.

## 7. The Sacraments of the Church

The Holy Spirit leads the Church “into all the truth” (Jn 16:13); under his influence, the Church recognized the treasure received from Christ (the sacraments) and determined their “dispensation” (cf. Mt 13:52; 1 Cor 4:1).

The sacraments belong to the Church. They exist:

- *through the Church*, because she is the instrument of Christ’s action; he acts through her by virtue of the mission of the Holy Spirit, and
- *for the Church*, because “the sacraments constitute the Church.”<sup>16</sup>

United to Christ, her head, the Church celebrates the sacraments as a priestly community structured by the baptismal priesthood of all the faithful and the ministerial priesthood.

The Holy Spirit prepares the faithful for the reception of the sacraments through the word of God and through faith. The faith of a well-disposed heart receives the word of God. The sacraments strengthen and express that faith.<sup>17</sup>

## 8. Matter and Form of the Sacramental Sign

God speaks to people through actions and words—closely linked—that shed light on each other.<sup>18</sup> The sacramental sign is composed of two elements, called matter and form by way of analogy with the metaphysical composition of material beings.

The *matter* is the material and sensible action or gesture; the *form* is the accompanying words that declare the special meaning of that external action or gesture. For example, to wash with water is the matter of Baptism, and its form is the words “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” To baptize precisely means “to wash.”

From the above-mentioned matter, which is specifically called *proximate matter*, we can distinguish *remote matter*, which is the basic material element used in the action or gesture. By analogy, any equivalent element is called remote matter, even if it is not material. In the case of Baptism, the remote matter is natural water.

This analysis is especially useful in determining what is required in each case for a sacramental sign—therefore a sacrament—to exist.

Matter and form must be united to constitute a sacramental sign. The type of union needed varies with the sacrament, as we will see when we study them individually. In the Eucharist, for example, the priest must say the words of the consecration in the actual and close presence of the bread and wine. In Holy Orders, however, there is a certain interval between the laying of the hands (matter) and the words of the consecration (form). Still, both are part of the same rite.

## **9. The Matter and Form of the Sacraments are Immutable**

Since the sacramental sign has been instituted by Christ, it is evident that only Christ can change it, and he does not. The Church received the command to keep and administer the sacraments. She has also received the power to adapt the administrative details to human needs, provided the substance is not changed, as the Council of Trent recalled.<sup>19</sup>

We have, then, to clarify the distinction between an accidental and a substantial change:

## 9a) Changes in the *Remote Matter*

- There is a *substantial change* when it is generally recognized that the material element has changed. This is shown by a change in name, usage, or signification. For example, when a strong dye is added to water, there is more pure water there than in, say, seawater. However, it is no longer water, but ink, and its use is no longer called washing. Therefore, it cannot be used for Baptism.
- There is an *accidental change* when people generally recognize that the matter is still the same. In the case of Baptism, it is indifferent whether the water comes from a well or from the tap, or is hot or cold.

## 9b) Changes in the *Form*

- There is a *substantial change* when the words no longer manifest the meaning of the action. For example, it would be invalid to say “I baptize you in the name of the Sts. Peter and Paul ...”
- There is an *accidental change* when the new words keep the same meaning, for example, “I do baptize you” instead of “I baptize you.”

All of this is especially useful when one has to judge about the validity of a sacrament or the lawfulness of administering it in a certain way. Thus, the following principles apply in the administration of the sacraments:

- Whoever introduces a *substantial change* in the matter or form of a sacrament renders it invalid. If they do so knowingly, they commit a very serious sin.
- Whoever introduces an *accidental change* does not render the sacrament invalid, but if it is done knowingly and without sufficient cause, that person commits a sin. The gravity of the sin depends on the extent of the change. This would be the case, for example, of a priest who, while giving absolution, feels “inspired” to add his own comments, or alter the order of the words, but kept the same essential meaning. He might say something like: “By virtue of my powers, I forgive all your mortal sins and all the venial sins you are sorry for, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; so that henceforth you may be a good child of God.” The *Code of Canon Law* specifies that “the liturgical books, approved by the competent authority, are to be faithfully followed in the celebration of the sacraments.”<sup>20</sup>

## 10. Doubtful Cases

Except in cases of grave spiritual need, the use of *doubtful matter*—of whose suitability for the sacrament one is not morally sure—is a mortal sin. One unnecessarily risks performing an invalid sacrament, thus, depriving the subject of the grace.

If there is any doubt about the capacity of a subject to receive a sacrament that cannot be resolved, the sacrament may be administered conditionally. In this way, the sacrament is not wasted, since if the condition is not met, there is no sacrament. For example, if one doubts whether the subject is validly baptized or not, the following formula should be used: “If you are not baptized, I baptize you ...” If one doubts whether the subject is still alive, the Anointing of the Sick may be administered, but the form must be preceded by the words: “If you are alive.” In this way, both dangers are avoided: The sacrament is not wasted, nor is a person who is really in need (and who would otherwise suffer a great spiritual harm) deprived of the grace.



## 11. The Number of the Sacraments

The existence of the following sacraments is a dogma of faith: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. The councils of Florence and Trent both defined this.<sup>21</sup>

Tradition—in both the Eastern and the Western sources—agrees with this enumeration. However, as we said before, the use of the expression “seven sacraments” started only at the beginning of the twelfth century, and the study of their common properties began even later. This is because the term *sacrament* had a wide range of meanings before then. It included many other rites and sacred ceremonies, such as blessings and consecrations of persons or things. Nevertheless, each of the seven sacraments was well known from the beginning, and their properties, which were likewise known and expounded, are what we understand the term *sacrament* to mean.

In the study of the sacraments, we could first study each of the rites that are now called sacraments, then infer their common properties and formulate a general doctrine of the sacraments. However, we will take that for granted and follow the usual reverse approach, which is easier and clearer.<sup>22</sup>

All the sacraments are ordained in a special manner to the Eucharist—the center of them all—in which not only grace but also the very Author of grace is given.<sup>23</sup>

## 12. Necessity of the Sacraments

The Church affirms that the sacraments are *necessary for salvation* for the believers of the New Covenant.<sup>24</sup> Some sacraments are necessary for the Christian community (Holy Orders and Matrimony), while others are necessary for the individual (Baptism, Penance, Eucharist, Confirmation, and Extreme Unction—also called Anointing of the Sick).

Among the latter, two are necessary means, that is, without them (or at least, the desire of receiving them) there is no salvation. These are Baptism and, for those who have committed mortal sins after Baptism, Penance. Some authors hold that the Eucharist is also necessary for those who have reached the use of reason.

## **13. Sacraments of the Living and Sacraments of the Dead**

The *sacraments of the living* are those that, in order to produce grace, require that the subject already enjoy the life of grace, that he be in the state of sanctifying grace (without any mortal sin).

The primary purpose of the *sacraments of the dead* is to transmit the life of grace to those deprived of it. Strictly speaking, these are Baptism and Penance, although the other sacraments can also have this effect in an accidental way, particularly the Anointing of the Sick.

## 14. Effects of the Sacraments

The sacraments produce *supernatural grace*.<sup>25</sup> Three of them also produce *character*.<sup>26</sup>

It is a dogma of faith that *the sacraments themselves communicate grace to all those who do not obstruct their action*. The Council of Trent defined this dogma.<sup>27</sup> Many testimonies of Scripture and Tradition support this definition (cf. Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26; 2 Tm 1:6; Ti 3:5; 1 Pt 3:21).

The Council of Trent's definition emphasized that the sacraments communicate grace "by themselves" (*ex opere operato*, "by the very action that is realized"). This was meant to refute the error that the Protestants were spreading: that they produce grace *ex opere operantis*, "by the action of the minister or the subject."

The sacraments are thought to cause grace through *physical instrumental causality*. This means that the sacraments have a real power of their own to produce grace. This differs from moral causality, in which the performance of the sacramental sign would immediately move God to grant his grace. In the second case, the physical causality of the sacraments is merely instrumental, that is, an instrument that God, supreme cause of all graces, wants to use just as a painter uses his brush.<sup>28</sup>

## 14a) Sanctifying Grace

The grace conferred by the sacraments is *sanctifying grace*: a free gift of God that produces a supernatural participation in the divine nature, thus making us children of God.

The *sacraments of the dead* communicate this grace by themselves for the first time (*first grace*). Occasionally, they may cause its increase, as in the case of a person in the state of grace who goes to Confession (*second grace*).

The *sacraments of the living* increase sanctifying grace by themselves, though occasionally they may also cause its first communication. This would be the case, for example, of a person in the state of sin who, sincerely thinking he is in the state of grace, receives a sacrament in good faith.

The amount of sanctifying grace that is received depends on the attitude and dispositions of the subject: attention, devotion, or desire to improve.<sup>29</sup>

## 14b) Sacramental Grace

Besides conferring or increasing sanctifying grace, each sacrament produces a specific type of grace called *sacramental grace*. This is one of the reasons why there are multiple sacraments. Sacramental grace can be described as the right to receive the *actual graces* needed to fulfill the obligations born of the sacrament or to better achieve its end. Actual grace is the specific supernatural help that is needed to perform a good action.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the sacramental grace of Baptism, among other things, gives the help that is needed to lead a clean and sinless spiritual life. The grace of Confirmation strengthens us to face temptations and difficulties. The sacramental grace of the Eucharist nourishes and develops the spiritual life. The grace of the Anointing of the Sick, among other effects, comforts the soul at the moment of death. Holy Orders gives the right to receive help for the proper fulfillment of the duties that it imposes. Marriage gives the help that is needed to comply with the demands of married life.

## 14c) Revival of the Sacraments

As we have mentioned, the sacraments do not produce grace if there is an obstacle to receiving grace in the subject. This obstacle consists in the lack of the necessary dispositions—for example, lack of faith in the sacrament, or reception of a sacrament of the living while in the state of sin. One should note that obstructing the grace of God is a serious sin.

In some sacraments, the grace that is missed due to an obstacle can be recovered later, after the obstacle that was present during the reception of the sacrament has been removed. This is called the *revival of the sacrament*. The sacraments that are subject to revival are those that are received only once or only once while some specific conditions persist. Specifically, these are Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Marriage. Holy Eucharist and Penance cannot be revived.

The necessary and sufficient condition for revival of a sacrament is the presence of the disposition that was lacking when the sacrament was invalidly received.

## 14d) The Character

Three of the sacraments—Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders—confer a *character*. This is *an indelible spiritual sign impressed on the soul*. Hence, these three sacraments may be received only once.<sup>31</sup>

This idea of a sign or seal appears several times in the Scriptures (cf. 2 Cor 1:21–22; Eph 1:13–14; 4:30). St. Thomas compares the sacramental character to the ensign or badge of a soldier: He remains a soldier even when he is not at war.<sup>32</sup> We could think of it as an indelible tattoo showing enlistment in an army.

However, the real nature of the character is not known with certainty. Theologians agree that the characters conferred by these three sacraments are different from each other, but theologians are not unanimous in the description of their respective specific properties.

The character is usually explained in terms of a progressive enrichment of the soul's identification with Christ as priest. Thus, aside from grace producing a similarity with Christ according to his nature, these three sacraments produce, through the character, different stages or degrees of similarity with Christ according to his priestly functions.<sup>33</sup>

In effect, the character has the following effects for a Christian:

- The individual is distinguished from all others who do not have it.
- The individual is consecrated in a special manner for the worship of God.
- All of this is made possible through his special configuration with Christ the priest.



## **14e) Other Effects of the Sacraments**

As a consequence of their principal effects, which are grace and character, the sacraments produce a general enrichment of Christian life and a greater unity among the faithful of the Church.<sup>34</sup>

The present *Code of Canon Law* points out that, as “actions of Christ and of the Church, they are signs and means by which faith is expressed and strengthened, worship is offered to God and our sanctification is brought about. Thus they contribute in the most effective manner to establishing, strengthening and manifesting ecclesiastical communion.”<sup>35</sup> In the sacraments, the Church receives the dowry of her inheritance as the bride of Christ. She participates in eternal life, although still a pilgrim, waiting for the blessed hope—the glorious appearance of our God and Savior Jesus Christ (cf. Ti 2:13).<sup>36</sup>

## 15. Minister of the Sacraments

Christ is always the principal minister united to his body, the ecclesial community.

Not *all* the members of his Mystical Body, however, have the same function. God calls some to render a special service to the community: the ministers.

The minister needs special empowerment or consecration to administer the sacraments. He is *consecrated* through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, which enables him to act as representative of Christ, the Head. This consecration is needed to administer all the sacraments except Baptism and Marriage.

The minister is an icon, and representative, of Christ the Priest. For this reason, in administering the sacraments, he must fully conform to the intentions of Christ. Thus, a special power is needed to administer them—not any minister can administer all the sacraments. He must also intend to do what the Church does, and properly apply the form to the matter.

*Only a validly consecrated man*, or at least one lawfully chosen for this purpose by a legitimate authority, can administer the sacraments.<sup>37</sup>

The *ordinary* minister is the person who, by his office or position, has the responsibility of administering a certain sacrament. For example, the bishop is the ordinary minister of the Sacrament of Confirmation. The *extraordinary* minister can administer it in case of need, but, at times, a special delegation is also required. For example, the extraordinary minister of Confirmation is a priest who is duly delegated by the bishop.

There are also *particular ministries*, not consecrated through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, whose functions are determined by the liturgical traditions and pastoral needs. Among these are the acolytes, readers, commentators, and singers, all of whom perform a liturgical ministry.<sup>38</sup>

## 15a) The Holiness of the Minister

Neither the faith nor the state of grace of the minister is necessary for the *valid administration* of a sacrament. This was defined by the Council of Trent,<sup>39</sup> confirming definitions of the Council of Constance,<sup>40</sup> other particular councils,<sup>41</sup> and decisions of previous popes.<sup>42</sup> Several passages of Sacred Scripture (cf. 1 Cor 4:1; 1 Cor 3:5, 7; Mt 7:22) and testimony from Tradition support this view.

However, except in cases of pressing need, the *lawful administration* of a sacrament does require the minister to be in the state of grace. It is understood that a pressing need exists when a person needs the sacrament for his salvation: Baptism, Confession, or the Anointing of the Sick in danger of death, and some other cases we will see later.

## 15b) The Intention of the Minister

There are different types of intention:

- *Actual* intention is explicitly present here and now.
- *Virtual* intention is an actual intention that one had before, never retracted, and at present—though not renewed and perhaps not even noticed—continues to influence one's actions. It is, thus, called *virtual* because it continues to give its *virtus*, its “force,” to the action. For example, a person who wants to pay several bills keeps the virtual intention of paying even if he gets distracted and thinks of other things while signing the checks. If he did not intend to pay, he would not sign them. A priest who has to say Mass and puts on the vestments has the virtual intention of celebrating Mass, even though he may not be explicitly thinking that he wants to celebrate the holy sacrifice. The priest who sits in the confessional and, after hearing the penitent, gives absolution has the virtual intention of administering penance, even if he is not explicitly thinking that he wants to forgive sins.
- *Habitual* intention is an actual intention that one had before and never retracted, but at present does not influence one's actions. This would be the case of a student who initially wants to get good grades, but later forgets and becomes lazy, or the person who wants to reach sanctity, but later disregards the exercises of piety.
- *Interpretative* intention is the intention that one presumes that a person would have if that person were conscious of the real situation, even though he never had (and does not now have) that intention. This would be the case of a validly baptized person who is brought up in heresy and persists in it in good faith. If he falls into a coma, one may presume that, were he to know his true situation, he would ask for sacramental absolution and the Anointing of the Sick. On these grounds, the sacraments could be administered.  
All of this can be summarized as follows:
- *Actual* intention is present, influences the action, and the agent is aware of it.
- *Virtual* intention is present, influences the action, but the agent is not aware of it.

- *Habitual* intention was present in the past as actual but does not currently affect the necessary actions, which are left undone.
- *Interpretative* intention was never present, is not present now, and does not affect the agent, who never thought about it. However, as its definition shows, it is not unreal either.

After this clarification, we can establish the following principles:

- For the *administration* of the sacraments, the minister must have *actual or at least virtual* intention, since the actions must be properly and fully human.
- For the *valid reception* of the sacraments, it is usually enough to have *habitual intention* or, in case of pressing necessity, at least *interpretative* intention.

Concerning the object of the intention, *the minister must intend to do what the Church does through the sacraments*. It is not necessary to intend what the Church intends, but only what she actually does, even if what she does is not known explicitly. For example, in an extreme case, a Muslim midwife may baptize a child out of sympathy for the Christian mother who died in the delivery, wanting to do “what Christians do.” If the matter and form are properly used, the Baptism is valid. In practice, however, it would be repeated with a conditional clause.

## **15c) The Attention of the Minister**

For *valid administration* of the sacraments, it is enough for the minister to have *external attention*, which is the absence of any other simultaneous action that would make interior attention impossible.

For *lawful administration*, it is further required to have *internal attention*, which is the application of the mind to the actions at hand, that is, the absence of voluntary distractions.

## 15d) The Obligation of Administering the Sacraments

“Sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who opportunely ask for them, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them.”<sup>43</sup> The *Code of Canon Law* states the right of the faithful to receive the sacraments, which was explicitly mentioned in a document of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>44</sup>

Those entrusted by office with the care of souls (like the parish priests) are *obligated by justice* to administer the sacraments to their subjects. In cases of extreme need, they must even risk their lives to fulfill that obligation.

For other ministers, it is an *obligation of charity*. It is a grave obligation if the denial of the sacrament could result in grave scandal or great spiritual harm. This would be the case of a priest called in the middle of the night to assist a dying person because, although he is not the parish priest, he lives nearby.

In case of a pressing need, a minister who is not in charge of that soul is also obliged to administer the sacraments, even if it is a great inconvenience to him. However, in cases of ordinary or light need, the obligation is not that strict.

## 15e) The Obligation to Deny the Sacraments

The obligation to deny the sacraments can be summarized in the following principles:

- *It is never lawful to administer a sacrament to a subject who is incapable of receiving it* such that the sacrament is clearly wasted. For example, it is never lawful to confirm or give Communion to an unbaptized person, to give the Anointing of the Sick to somebody who has been clearly dead for many hours, or to give absolution when there is certainly no repentance.
- *It is not lawful to administer a sacrament to a subject who is unworthy, except for a very serious reason.* This would be irreverence toward a sacred thing; the minister would be unfaithful to the mission received from Christ, and greater harm would be caused to the subject (cf. Mt 7:6).

Those unworthy of receiving the sacraments are: excommunicates until they are absolved; heretics until they abandon their heresy and are reconciled; public sinners until they repent, give public satisfaction, and go to Confession; and—for the sacraments of the living—those in mortal sin.

The *very serious reason* mentioned above exists when:

- *the sacramental seal of confession would be violated.* This may happen, for example, when a priest denies Communion to a person whom he had previously denied the absolution;
- *the person asking for the sacrament would suffer a very serious infamy if it is denied.* For example, a priest who denies Communion to someone whom he knows had committed adultery and has not yet gone to Confession would cause the person to suffer infamy;
- *the faithful would suffer scandal.* When observing the refusal to administer a sacrament to an unworthy person and not knowing the cause of the refusal, the faithful as a whole may be alarmed and refrain from the sacraments for fear of being publicly rejected.

For practical purposes, two rules could be followed:

- i) The sacraments (except Marriage, in which the priest is only a witness) should be denied to public sinners who are not known to



have repented, and to private sinners when they ask for them in private.

- ii) The sacraments should not be denied to private sinners who ask for them in public.

## 15f) Simulation and Dissimulation of the Sacraments

The *simulation* of a sacrament is any change in its matter, form, or the necessary intention that the minister does in private in order to make it invalid and thereby deceive the recipient. It is never licit. It is a deception, and it also can have serious consequences for the person who wants to receive the sacrament.<sup>45</sup>

The *dissimulation* of a sacrament is the performance of a non-sacramental rite that those around deem sacramental. This is the case, for example, of a confessor who has to refuse absolution to a penitent and, telling him so, gives him an ordinary blessing so that those around do not realize that he was not absolved. Dissimulation is lawful when a proportionate cause warrants it.

## 16. The Subject of the Sacraments

*Only while in this life can people receive the sacraments.* Still, not everyone can receive all the sacraments: Those who are not baptized can receive only Baptism, while those who are already baptized can receive the others; a child cannot receive the Sacrament of Marriage.

For the *valid reception* of a sacrament, the following conditions are required from the subject:

- Previous reception of the Baptism of water for the reception of the rest of the sacraments<sup>46</sup>
- The intention of receiving it if the subject has use of reason<sup>47</sup>

For the *lawful reception* of the sacraments, the following conditions are required:

- Repentance for the sacraments of the dead; the state of grace for the sacraments of the living
- Receiving them with reverence
- Not asking them from a minister who is certainly unworthy, unless there is a proportionately grave cause (for example, in danger of death, one could ask a priest who is publicly living in sin for confession or for the Anointing of the Sick; actually, these cases are explicitly permitted by law).

1. Cf. CCC, 1210–1666.

2. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1113, 1210–1211.

3. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1131.

4. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1084, 1145–1162.

5. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 78.

6. *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, 115.

7. *Ibid.*

8. LG, 2.

9. Cf. ST, III, q. 70, a. 1.

10. Cf. *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 102, a. 5. Many authors, St. Thomas among them, support the existence of sacramental rites prior to the promulgation of the Old Testament law since the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise: cf. *Ibid.*, III, q. 61, a. 3; q. 65, a. 1, ad 7; CCC, 1093–1096.

11. Cf. ST, III, q. 62, a. 6, ad 3.

12. Cf. DS 1602.

13. Cf. DS 1601; CCC, 1114–1116.

14. Cf. DS 1728.
15. Cf. DS 1728.
16. St. Augustine, *Civ.*, 22,17; cf. *ST*, III, q. 64, a. 2 ad 3.
17. Cf. *CCC*, 1117–1134.
18. Cf. *Ibid.*, 53, 1153–1155.
19. Cf. DS 1728, 3857ff.; *CIC*, 841; *CCC*, 1125, 1205.
20. *CIC*, 846.
21. Cf. DS 1310, 1601; *CCC*, 1113, 1210.
22. Cf. *Roman Catechism*, 2.21; *ST*, III, q. 65, a. 1. Following the doctrine of St. Thomas, the *Roman Catechism* gives the following arguments to show that it was fitting for Christ to institute precisely these sacraments and no others: There is a certain analogy between the natural and the supernatural life. As regards the former, the individual needs five things and society needs two. The individual must be born (which, in supernatural life, is achieved by Baptism), grow in strength (Confirmation), be nurtured (Eucharist), be healed when sick (Penance), and recover after the sickness (Anointing of the Sick). Society needs to be governed (Holy Orders) and to perpetuate itself (Marriage).
23. Cf. *ST*, III, q. 65, a. 3.
24. Cf. DS 1604; *CCC*, 1129.
25. Cf. DS 1606.
26. Cf. DS 1609.
27. Cf. DS 1606–08; *CCC*, 1084, 1127–1128.
28. Cf. *ST*, III, q. 62, aa. 1, 3, 4.
29. Cf. DS 1528–29; *CCC*, 1128.
30. Cf. *ST*, III, q. 62, a. 2; *CCC*, 1129, 2003.
31. Cf. DS 1310, 1609; *CCC*, 1121, 1272, 1304, 1582.
32. Cf. *ST*, III, q. 63, a. 5 ad 3.
33. Priesthood, being a special dedication to the worship of God, is closely related to the sacraments. In the lowest degree, Baptism enables the faithful to offer worship that will be acceptable to God. It also enables them to receive the sacraments. In the second degree, Confirmation enriches and strengthens this ability with a special indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Finally, in the highest degree—essentially different from the other two—Holy Orders confers the ability to make and distribute the sacraments. The Second Vatican Council teaches the essential difference between the common priesthood of the faithful and ministerial priesthood, as well as the fact that both are ordained to one another. Both participate in the priesthood of Christ, but in different ways (cf. *LG*, 10, 11).
34. Cf. *Ibid.*, 7; *CCC*, 1117–1118.
35. *CIC*, 840.
36. Cf. *CCC*, 1130.
37. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1115, 1120, 1136–1144.
38. Cf. *SC*, 29; *CCC*, 1143.
39. Cf. DS 1612.
40. Cf. DS 1154.
41. Cf. DS 123.
42. Cf. DS 356, 793, 914.
43. *CIC*, 843.
44. Cf. *LG*, 37.
45. Cf. DS 2129.
46. Cf. *CIC*, 842.
47. Cf. *ST*, III, q. 68, a. 7 ad 2.

61

Baptism

## 17. Nature and Institution

In a strict sense, Baptism is a sacrament instituted by Christ, in which, through the washing with water and by invoking the three divine Persons, the spiritual regeneration of humanity is achieved. The *Roman Catechism* defined Baptism as “the sacrament of regeneration by water in the word.”<sup>1</sup>

“In Baptism, our Father God has taken possession of our lives, has made us share in the life of Christ, and has given us the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

## 17a) Name

The word *baptism* comes from a very similar Greek term meaning “immersion,” “bathing,” or “washing.” In the New Testament, *to baptize* usually means “to wash,” “to clean with water.” Through immersion, the catechumen is symbolically buried in the death of Christ, and resurrected with him (cf. Rom 6:3–4; Col 2:12) as “a new creature” (2 Cor 5:17).

Baptism is also called *the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit* (cf. Ti 3:5) and *illumination*, because it enlightens the souls of those who receive it.<sup>3</sup>

## **17b) Baptism Prefigured in Sacred Scripture**

The mystery of Baptism was prefigured in some events of the Old Testament:

- Water is seen as the source of life. At the beginning of the world, “the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (Gn 1:2).
- Noah’s ark is a type of salvation through Baptism.
- Seawater is also a symbol of death and the mystery of the cross. Through the waters of the Red Sea, Israel was led out of slavery.
- After crossing the Jordan River, the people of God entered the Promised Land, a symbol of eternal life.
- The most important of the prefigurations is the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. With his Passion and Death, the waters of Baptism were available for all humanity. The flow of water and blood from his pierced side are symbols of Baptism and the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup>



## **17c) Institution of Baptism**

The institution of Baptism by Christ—as with the other sacraments—is a truth of faith.<sup>5</sup> There are, however, different opinions about the exact moment of its institution. Christ may have done it when he was baptized by John in the Jordan, in his conversation with Nicodemus, during his public life when the apostles were baptizing, or after his Resurrection when he commanded the apostles to go to all corners of the world and baptize all people (cf. Mt 3:13–17; Jn 3:5, 22; 4:1–2; Mk 16:16).

## **17d) Baptism in the Church**

Since the day of Pentecost, the Church has administered the Sacrament of Baptism as Jesus commanded (cf. Acts 2:38). Baptism always appears united to the profession of faith (cf. Acts 16:31–33).

Through Baptism, the believer shares in Christ's death, is buried, and is resurrected with him (cf. Rom 6:3–4; Col 2:12). Those who have been baptized have “clothed themselves with Christ” (Gal 3:27).<sup>6</sup>

## 18. The Matter and Form of Baptism

With the soaking of water, in Baptism, the incorruptible seed of God's word produces its life-giving effect (cf. 1 Pt 1:23; Eph 5:26). St. Augustine said of Baptism, "The word is united to the matter [the element of water], and the sacrament is done."<sup>7</sup>

The *proximate matter* of Baptism is the application of water to the body of the candidate, such that anyone could say that a true washing takes place. The present law of the Church requires that this washing be done by way of a triple immersion in water, or by a triple effusion of it, according to the custom of each place.<sup>8</sup>

In the second case (pouring water on the person to be baptized), the water should be poured over the head, except in some exceptional cases in which this is not possible. The water must touch and flow over the skin.

The *remote matter* is true and natural water.<sup>9</sup> In case of necessity, what is still commonly called and considered water may be used, even if it is mixed with other substances.

The *form* of Baptism is the words: "(*Name*), I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The words are different in the Eastern rite of the Catholic Church, but they mean exactly the same thing. They expressly mention the three divine Persons and the action of baptizing and, therefore, are also valid.<sup>10</sup> The form of Baptism, as can be seen from the meaning of the words, should be said by the same person applying the proximate matter.

## 19. Effects of Baptism

Baptism produces a complete spiritual regeneration<sup>11</sup> through the following closely related effects:

- The new birth in the Holy Spirit. Baptism brings about the infusion of sanctifying grace with the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup>
  - The forgiveness of all sins—original and personal, mortal and venial.<sup>13</sup> For the forgiveness of personal sins, the one baptized must have repented of all of them. Otherwise, the Baptism would remain formless and ineffective until that repentance; at that moment, its effects are revived.
  - The remission of all punishment due to sin.<sup>14</sup> This covers both the eternal punishment (which is always remitted when mortal sins are forgiven and sanctifying grace is infused) and temporal punishment.
  - Baptismal character. This is an indelible sign that creates a similarity with Christ and gives the capacity for the reception of the other sacraments.<sup>15</sup>
  - Sacramental grace. This, in the case of Baptism, is sanctifying grace itself, together with the right to receive special helps to exercise the faith, lead a truly Christian life, and worthily receive the other sacraments.
  - The incorporation to the Church.<sup>16</sup> Baptism makes us sharers in the common priesthood of the faithful. It is also the source of the following responsibilities and duties:
    - To belong to Christ
    - To profess before humanity the faith that one has received from God through the Church
    - To be submissive to others, to serve them, to participate in the apostolate
    - To be obedient and docile to the pastors of the Church, to show them respect
- It is also the source of the right:
- to receive the sacraments,

- to be sustained with the word of God, and
- to be nourished with the other spiritual helps of the Church.

Nevertheless, some temporal consequences of original sin remain: suffering, sickness, death, weakness, and a certain inclination to sin usually called *concupiscence*, or *fomes peccati*.<sup>17</sup>

The Christian must imitate Christ and suffer with him in order to be rewarded with him. God wants to use these wounds caused by original sin as occasions for us to fight and to merit greater virtue and glory. Only on the day of the resurrection of the body will Baptism show its full power over these scars of original sin, which were not removed in this life.

## 20. Necessity of Baptism

*Baptism is a necessary means for eternal salvation.* Jesus Christ affirmed this, absolutely and without exception, in his conversation with Nicodemus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5).<sup>18</sup>

However, with regard to the infusion of sanctifying grace and the forgiveness of sins (but not with regard to the character), “*Baptism by water*” may be replaced by:

- *Baptism by blood* or martyrdom, that is, violent death for the sake of Christ. This applies either to those with<sup>19</sup> or without the use of reason.<sup>20</sup>
- *Baptism by desire*, which is an act of love of God united to the desire—even implicit—of receiving Baptism.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, Baptism by desire can be received only by adults with the use of reason, not by children or the insane.

This highlights the importance of baptizing children as soon as possible: In case of necessity, there is no way they can avail themselves of Baptism by desire.<sup>22</sup> In fact, except for the special case of Baptism by blood, the Church does not know of any means other than Baptism of water for the forgiveness of original sin in children. Another reason for the early Baptism of children is that it allows the supernatural life (grace, virtues, and gifts) to take root in their souls as soon as possible.

Most theologians teach that children dying in original sin do not suffer the pains of hell, but they do not enjoy the beatific vision either. According to St. Thomas, they enjoy a natural knowledge and love of God.<sup>23</sup>

## 21. Minister of Baptism

In a *solemn Baptism*, all the ceremonies prescribed in the ritual are performed. The *minister of solemn Baptism* is the *bishop, priest, or deacon*.<sup>24</sup> Its administration is reserved to the parish priest; any other priest or deacon needs his permission to administer it lawfully. This permission is always presumed in case of necessity.<sup>25</sup>

When some of the ceremonies that are ordinarily prescribed in the ritual are omitted, the *Baptism* is called *private* or *non-solemn*. This could happen in case of a pressing need or danger of death. Private *Baptism* may be validly administered by *any person* capable of performing the sacramental sign, that is, of applying the proper form to the proper matter.<sup>26</sup> Even a heretic can do it, provided he intends to do what the Church does. For its *lawfulness*, there should be a cause that makes solemn *Baptism* impossible. Further, for its administration, the priest should be preferred to the layman, and the Christian to the non-Christian.

## 22. Subject of Baptism

“*Every unbaptised person, and only such a person, can be baptised.*”<sup>27</sup> No special condition is required of children or those who are permanently deprived of the use of reason. At least habitual intention is required of adults. Specific criteria apply in each case:

- For the *Baptism of children*, the following principles hold:
  - Catholic parents “are obliged to see that their infants are baptized within the first few weeks.”<sup>28</sup> The preparation of the parents required by the current ecclesiastical law should not delay the *Baptism*.
  - Baptism should not be administered to children without the consent of their parents or if there is no hope that the child will be educated in the Catholic faith.<sup>29</sup>
  - In danger of death, any unbaptized child who has not yet reached the use of reason may be baptized, even if the parents object.<sup>30</sup>
- The *unborn* who are not likely to be born alive and *aborted fetuses* while still alive can and should be baptized. If there is doubt about their being alive, conditional *Baptism* should be administered: “If you are alive, I baptize you ...”<sup>31</sup> At times, this can be done even when the subject is still inside the womb of the mother. It is important that all Catholic medical personnel be familiar with these obligations and the way to fulfill them.
- For the *Baptism of adults* (by adult, we mean a person who is no longer an infant and has the use of reason<sup>32</sup>), the following conditions must be met:
  - For the *validity* of the *Baptism*, the subject should have the *intention* of receiving it. Intention should ordinarily be explicit, but it may also be implicit, as in the case of a dying and unconscious person who had wanted to be baptized.
  - For its *lawfulness*, the candidate must know the *principal truths of the faith* (the existence of the One and Triune God, his Incarnation, and the existence of a reward or punishment) and



the *principal obligations* of a Christian.<sup>33</sup> In principle, the preparation of catechumens should give them a sufficient knowledge. Furthermore, the candidate should be tested in Christian life during the period of catechumenate and should be sorrowful for any sins committed. In danger of death, however, a promise to observe the commandments of the Christian religion is enough to be baptized.<sup>34</sup>

Those who were baptized in a heretical sect should not be baptized again when they return to the Church. However, if there are grounds to doubt the validity of that *Baptism* (by a defect either in the matter or form of the sign or in the intention of the minister), a conditional *Baptism* should be administered.<sup>35</sup>

In that case, they should first abjure the heresy and make a profession of faith. Then, they should receive the conditional *Baptism*: “If you are not baptized, I baptize you ...” Afterwards, they should confess their sins and receive a conditional absolution. This is done because, if the first *Baptism* was valid, the second will be invalid. Thus, they need to be absolved only of the sins committed after the first *Baptism*. But, if the first is invalid, the second will be valid, and there will be no more sins to be forgiven through confession.

## 23. The Ceremonies of Baptism

“Though *Baptism* may be celebrated on any day, it is recommended that normally it be celebrated on a Sunday or, if possible, on the vigil of Easter.”<sup>36</sup>

In solemn *Baptism*, the presence of the *godparents* is required (a man, a woman, or both).<sup>37</sup> In the *Baptism* of a child, parents and godparents jointly assume the responsibility for the child’s Christian education. In the *Baptism* of an adult, the godparents commit themselves to help that person in his Christian initiation.<sup>38</sup>

The godparents must be Catholic, have themselves received the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Holy Communion, and lead a Christian life. They must be over 16 years old, have the preparation needed to fulfill their role, and be ready to fulfill it. Godparents are chosen by the catechumen, the parents, or, in their absence, the parish priest or minister.<sup>39</sup>

The *Baptism* of children can be celebrated within the Mass. Some of its rites are common to the solemn administration of other sacraments. Others are specific to Baptism: imposition of the name, commitment on the part of parents and godparents to ensure the Christian education of the child, exorcism and pre-baptismal anointing, blessing of the water, renunciation of Satan and profession of faith (made by parents or godparents in the name of the child), Baptism proper, anointing with chrism, and handing on of a lighted candle.<sup>40</sup>

The *name* that is given in Baptism should be a Christian name, or at least one that is not foreign to Christian sentiment.<sup>41</sup>

The *Baptism* of adults follows a similar rite with logical differences: the catechumen himself does the renunciation of Satan and the profession of faith.<sup>42</sup> Usually, the Sacraments of Confirmation and First Communion follow; thus the three sacraments of Christian initiation are received together.<sup>43</sup>

1. *Roman Catechism*, 2.1.4; cf. CCC, 1213–1284.
2. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 128.
3. Cf. CCC, 1213–1216.
4. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1223–1225.
5. Cf. DS 1601.
6. Cf. CCC, 1226–1227.
7. St. Augustine, *In Io. Ev.*, 80,3; cf. CCC, 1228, 1239.
8. Cf. CIC, 854.
9. Cf. DS 802, 1314, 1615.
10. Cf. DS 1314; CCC, 1240.
11. Cf. ST, III, q. 66, a. 9; CIC, 849.
12. Cf. DS 1515, 1530; CCC, 1262–1274.
13. Cf. DS 1515.
14. Cf. DS 1515.
15. Cf. DS 1609.
16. One of the effects of Baptism is building up the body of the Church: cf. ST, III, q. 39, a. 6 ad 4; CIC, 849.
17. Cf. DS 1515.
18. Cf. DS 1618.
19. Cf. ST, III, q. 87, a. 1 ad 2.
20. This is proven by the ancient celebration of the feast of the Holy Innocents.
21. Cf. DS 1524.
22. Cf. DS 1626–27.
23. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.* 2.33.2.5; *De Malo*, 5.3.
24. Cf. CIC, 61.
25. Cf. *Ibid.*, 857, 862.
26. Cf. *Ibid.*, 861.
27. *Ibid.*, 864.
28. *Ibid.*, 867.
29. Cf. *Ibid.*, 868.
30. Cf. *Ibid.*
31. Cf. *Ibid.*, 871.
32. Cf. *Ibid.*, 852.
33. Cf. *Ibid.*, 865.
34. Cf. *Ibid.*
35. Cf. *Ibid.*, 869.
36. *Ibid.*, 856.
37. Cf. *Ibid.*, 873.
38. Cf. *Ibid.*, 872.
39. Cf. *Ibid.*, 874.
40. Cf. *Ordo Baptismi Parvulorum*: AAS 61 (1969) 548; English text in *The Rites of the Catholic Church* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1976), p. 197ff.
41. Cf. CIC, 855. The former *Code of Canon Law* (1817), 761, specified that if the parents were adamant on giving a non-Christian name to the child, the parish priest should add in the registry the name of a saint to that chosen by the parents.
42. Cf. *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum*: AAS 64 (1972) 252.
43. Cf. *Ibid.*; CIC, 866.

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## Confirmation

## 24. The Nature and Institution of Confirmation

The Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation constitute the set called “the sacraments of Christian initiation.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Old Testament, the prophets announced that the *Spirit of the Lord would be upon the Messiah* (cf. Is 11:2). The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus during his Baptism in the Jordan was the sign that he was the expected Messiah. But the fullness of the Spirit was not to remain in the Messiah alone; it was to be communicated to the entire *Messianic people* (cf. Ez 36:25–27; Jl 3:1–2). The apostles received the same Spirit, first on Easter (cf. Jn 20:22) and again on Pentecost day (cf. Acts 2:1–4).

There is a very clear and direct reference to the existence and administration of this sacrament in the Acts of the Apostles. First, we learn that the deacon Philip had baptized many persons in Samaria.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 8:12–17).

Henceforward, the Apostles—following the will of Christ—communicated to the newly baptized Christians the gift of the Holy Spirit by laying on the hands. This gift was to complete the grace of Baptism (cf. Acts 8:15–17; 19:5–6). This explains why, in the letter to the Hebrews (cf. Heb 6:2), the doctrine on Baptism and the laying on the hands are mentioned among the first elements of Christian formation. Catholic Tradition has always considered this laying on the hands as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation; a sacrament that perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church.<sup>2</sup>

Very soon, to better signify the gift of the Holy Spirit, an anointing with perfumed oil (chrism) was added to the imposition of the hands. This anointing illustrates the name of “Christian,” which means “anointed.” The name comes from Christ, whom “God anointed ... with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:38).<sup>3</sup>

There are abundant testimonies of the Fathers of the Church from the times of Tertullian and St. Cyprian, and of other ecclesiastical writers, proving the early addition of oil to the rite.

The Sacrament of Confirmation has been given different names: laying on of hands (a name that was also applied to Holy Orders),

sacrament of chrism, and sacrament of fullness. It seems that St. Ambrose of Milan was the first to use the term *confirmation*: “You have received the spiritual sign, the sign of wisdom; God the Father has sealed you, Christ the Lord has confirmed you and has given you the gift of the Spirit in your heart.”<sup>4</sup>

*Confirmation* can be defined as the *sacrament instituted by Christ in which the baptized—through the laying on of hands and the anointing with chrism, together with some sacred words—receive the Holy Spirit in order to publicly confess the faith with fortitude, by word and deed.*

The Council of Florence taught the Catholic doctrine on Confirmation, extensively quoting from the above-mentioned text of the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>5</sup> Against the Protestant errors, the Council of Trent defined, “If anyone says that the Confirmation of baptized persons is a useless ceremony and not rather a true and proper sacrament; or that at one time it meant nothing other than a certain catechesis by which those nearing adolescence gave an account of their faith before the Church: let him be anathema.”<sup>6</sup>

It is not known when the *institution* of Confirmation by Christ took place. Some think that it was instituted in the Last Supper. This would explain the custom of consecrating the chrism on Holy Thursday, documented as early as the third century. Others hold that it was instituted after the Resurrection but was not in force until after Pentecost Sunday. What we know for certain is that Christ instituted this sacrament, and that it was not administered until after the descent of the Holy Spirit over the apostles on Pentecost Sunday, “because in this sacrament the fullness of the Holy Ghost is bestowed, which was not to be given before Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension; according to John 7:39: ‘As yet the Spirit was not given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.’”<sup>7</sup>

## 25. The Matter and Form of Confirmation

The *remote matter* is the chrism. This is one of the oils consecrated by the bishop in the Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday (the others are the oil of catechumens used in the pre-baptismal anointing, and the oil of the sick used in the Anointing of the Sick).<sup>8</sup> The chrism is olive oil mixed with a small amount of balsam.

The *proximate matter* of Confirmation is the “anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand.”<sup>9</sup> The laying on of the hand, however, is not necessary for the validity of the sacrament.<sup>10</sup>

The anointing with chrism after Baptism, in Confirmation, and in Holy Orders is the sign of a consecration. Through Confirmation, the Christian participates in a more intense manner in Jesus’ mission and in the fullness of the Holy Spirit that he possesses. Thus, the life of a Christian exudes “the aroma of Christ” (2 Cor 2:15).<sup>11</sup>

The *form* is the words accompanying this anointing: “Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>12</sup>

## 26. The Effects of Confirmation

The effects of Confirmation are the following:<sup>13</sup>

- *Increase of sanctifying grace*, specifically, of the *gifts of the Holy Spirit*.
- *Sacramental grace*, which is the right to receive the special help needed to exercise the virtue of fortitude in the public profession of one's faith. This also includes the help that is required for the spiritual or interior struggle.<sup>14</sup>
  - Because of this, it is said to be a certain consecration to serve Christ as a soldier, to be *miles Christi*, "to spread the faith by word and deed"<sup>15</sup> and not to be ashamed of the cross.
  - Confirmation strengthens our bond with the Church.
  - Even more, this sacrament introduces us deeply in divine filiation that make us say, "Abba, Father" (cf. Rom 8:15).
- *Character* is proper to this sacrament, which is an indelible sign creating a new kind of relation with the priesthood of Christ.

Confirmation includes the renewal of the promises of Baptism. But this does not mean that it is a mere personal assumption of these obligations by the adolescent before the community.<sup>16</sup> This is shown by the practice of administering Confirmation to children before the age of reason if they are seriously ill.<sup>17</sup>



## **27. The Necessity of Confirmation**

Confirmation is not necessary as a means for salvation. It is not certain whether it is necessary by strict precept. There is no doubt, however, that Confirmation is very advantageous for the development of Christian life and completing the work of salvation.<sup>18</sup> Otherwise, Christ would not have instituted it.

Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist form a unit. Without Confirmation, the Sacrament of Baptism is valid, but Christian initiation remains incomplete. The present law specifies that “the faithful are obliged to receive this sacrament at the appropriate time.”<sup>19</sup>

## 28. The Minister of Confirmation

“(The bishops) are the original ministers of Confirmation”<sup>20</sup> Thus, the Acts of the Apostles explains that two apostles were sent for the confirmation of the converts of Philip the deacon (cf. Acts 8:14–17). The apostles enjoyed the fullness of the priesthood that all bishops have.

Therefore, the diocesan bishop should administer Confirmation in person or through another bishop. If necessary, however, he can delegate this power to other priests.<sup>21</sup>

The extraordinary minister is the priest. A presbyter who has this faculty by virtue of either the universal law or a special concession of competent authority also confers this sacrament validly.<sup>22</sup>

The following have, by law, the faculty to administer confirmation:

- i) within the confines of their jurisdiction, those who in law are equivalent to a diocesan Bishop;
- ii) in respect of the person to be confirmed, the priest who by virtue of his office or by mandate of the diocesan Bishop baptizes one who is no longer an infant or admits a person already baptized into full communion of the catholic Church;
- iii) in respect of those in danger of death, the parish priest or indeed any priest.<sup>23</sup>

## 29. The Subject of Confirmation

*“Every baptized person who is not confirmed, and only such a person, is capable of receiving confirmation.”*<sup>24</sup>

In order to receive Confirmation *validly*, a baptized person with the use of reason must also have the *intention* (at least habitual) to receive it.

In order to receive it *lawfully*, a baptized person with the use of reason should also *be in the state of grace* (since it is a sacrament of the living), and should *have had the necessary instruction*.<sup>25</sup>

The preparation for this sacrament should lead the Christian to a closer union to Jesus and the Holy Spirit, to its promptings, inspirations, and gifts, so that the subject can better assume the apostolic responsibilities of Christian life.

Regarding *the age of the subject*, the general practice of the Latin Church is to not confirm children before the age of reason. It can be done before this age if there is danger of death or for other just reasons. For example, if the subject would otherwise have to wait for many years (after reaching the age of reason) before being able to receive it, it is appropriate to administer the sacrament sooner.

Under normal conditions, Confirmation should be administered to the faithful “at about the age of discretion.”<sup>26</sup> However, the bishops’ conferences have the power to set a more suitable age so that, as the present Ritual says, the children receive the sacrament when they are more mature and have received the necessary formation.

In any case, the reception of Confirmation—one of the sacraments of Christian initiation—should not be delayed too much. The child would be deprived of an important help in his fight against temptations.

## 30. The Ceremonies of Confirmation

On Holy Thursday, during the Chrism Mass, the bishop consecrates the holy chrism for his diocese.

If possible, the rite of Confirmation should take place in a church and during Holy Mass.<sup>27</sup> In this case, Confirmation is administered between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, as is usual for the sacraments that are received during Mass.

The rite begins with the renewal of the baptismal vows (renunciation of Satan) and a profession of faith, followed by the laying on of hands over all to be confirmed. The last gesture signifies the gift of the Spirit.

The essential rite is the anointing with chrism on the forehead of each one of the recipients. The minister does the anointing by laying on his hand and making the sign of the cross with his right thumb, while saying the form.

The kiss of peace, with which the rite ends, signifies the ecclesial communion of the bishop and all the faithful.<sup>28</sup>

A *godfather* or *godmother* must be present. It is advisable to have the same one as in baptism if it is not inconvenient, although this is not required. In principle, the godparents must meet the same requirements as those of Baptism and should have already received the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist; that is, they should have already completed the Christian initiation, which starts with Baptism.<sup>29</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 1285–1321.
2. Paul VI, Ap. Const. *Divinae Consortium Naturae*.
3. Cf. CCC, 1285–1289.
4. St. Ambrose, *De Mysteriis*, 7.42: PL 16.403.
5. Cf. DS 1317–19.
6. DS 1628.
7. *ST*, III, q. 72, a. 1 ad 1.
8. Cf. *CIC*, 880.
9. *Ibid.*
10. This is clarified in an answer of the Pontifical Commission for the Interpretation of the Decrees of the Second Vatican Council on June 9, 1972: AAS 64 (1972) 526.
11. Cf. CCC, 1293–1301.

12. “*Accipe signaculum doni Spiritus Sancti.*” Cf. *CIC*, 880; Paul VI, Ap. Const. *Divinae Consortium Naturae*: AAS 63 (1971) 659; *Ordo Confirmationis*, 9: AAS 64 (1972) 77, English text in *The Rites*, p. 310.
13. Cf. *CCC*, 1302–1305.
14. Cf. *ST*, III, q. 72, a. 5 ad 1.
15. *LG*, 11.
16. Cf. DS 1628.
17. Cf. *CIC*, 889, 891.
18. Cf. *ST*, III, q. 72, a. 1 ad 3.
19. *CIC*, 890; cf. *CCC*, 1306.
20. *LG*, 26.
21. Cf. *CIC*, 882; *CCC*, 1312–1314.
22. Cf. *CIC*, 882.
23. *Ibid.*, 883.
24. *Ibid.*, 889; cf. *CCC*, 1306–1311.
25. *CIC*, 889.
26. *Ibid.*, 891.
27. Cf. *Ibid.*, 892–893; *CCC*, 1311.
28. Cf. St. Hippolytus, *Traditio Apostolica*, 21.
29. Cf. *CIC*, 881.

## The Holy Eucharist

FAITHFUL TO THE Lord's command, the Church continues enacting exactly what he did on the eve of his Passion: "He took bread ... He took the cup ..."

The Holy Eucharist is the vertex of the sacraments. Those who are elevated to the dignity of royal priesthood through Baptism, and configured deeply to Christ through Confirmation, share in the sacrifice of the Lord with the entire community through the Eucharist.<sup>1</sup>

## 31. The Nature of the Eucharist

The name *Eucharist* has been chosen to refer to this sacrament since the times of St. Ignatius of Antioch (early second century). It is a Greek term (*eucharistein*) meaning “act of thanksgiving,” and it refers to Jesus’ act of thanksgiving when he instituted it, as both the Gospels and St. Paul relate (cf. Mt 26:27; Mk 14:23; Lk 22:17, 19; 1 Cor 11:24).

The other names that emphasize one aspect or another of this sacrament:

- *Banquet of the Lord* (cf. 1 Cor 11:20): It is the supper that the Lord celebrated with his disciples on the eve of his Passion and the anticipation of the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rv 19:9).
- *Breaking of the Bread* (cf. Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11): The early Christians—forming one body—called it the breaking of the one bread in which all participated.
- *Synaxis*, or *Eucharistic Assembly*: The Eucharist is the visible expression of the Church (cf. 1 Cor 11:17-34).
- *Memorial* of the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord.
- *Holy Sacrifice*: It enacts the only sacrifice of Christ and includes the offering of the Church.
- *Holy and Divine Liturgy*, *Holy Mysteries*, and *Holy Sacrament*: It is the center of all liturgical celebration.
- *Holy Communion*: In it, we are united to Christ, forming one body.
- *Holy Mass*: It ends by sending the faithful (*missio*) to fulfill God’s will in their daily lives.<sup>2</sup>

*In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, “Christ the Lord himself is contained, offered and received,”*<sup>3</sup> with his body, blood, soul, and divinity.

These three aspects are closely related. Consequently, we will study:

- the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist,
- the Holy Communion, and
- the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

## 32. The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist

*Christ is truly, really, and substantially present in the Eucharist.*

Christ died, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father where he intercedes for us. However, he is also present in the Church when she prays (cf. Mt 18:20), performs acts of mercy (cf. Mt 25:40), preaches the word of God (cf. 1 Cor 1:17), rules and governs the people of God (cf. Eph 5:23–24), administers the sacraments (cf. Acts 2:38), and offers the sacrifice of the Mass in his name and in the person of his minister (cf. 1 Cor 11:23–25). Moreover, Christ is present in his Church *in the Eucharistic species above all*.<sup>4</sup>

Five texts of the New Testament explicitly support this teaching. The first is the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel, where our Lord, during his Eucharistic discourse in Capernaum, announced the institution of the Holy Eucharist. His words demand a literal interpretation: His flesh is true food and his blood is true drink (cf. Jn 6:25–59).

Additionally, the narratives of the institution of the sacrament itself during the Last Supper contain the same doctrine. These are found in the three synoptic Gospels and in the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians (cf. Mt 26:26–29; Mk 14:22–25; Lk 22:19–20; 1 Cor 11:23–27). Paul's account adds a strong corollary, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and the blood of the Lord."

As for the witness of Tradition, it would be difficult to find a better documented topic. The Fathers abundantly report the faith of the apostles and the first Christians in the Real Presence. This is hardly surprising, given the central role of the Eucharist in the life of the Church and of each Christian.

The Magisterium of the Church defined the presence of our Lord in the Eucharist whenever heresy threatened this truth. For example, the Sixth Roman Council of A.D. 1079 (non-ecumenical), the Fourth Lateran Council, the Council of Constance, and, in particular, the Council of Trent defended this truth.<sup>5</sup> An encyclical of Pope Paul VI again proposed the doctrine of Trent, illustrating it with many testimonies from the Tradition of the Church.<sup>6</sup>



### 33. Transubstantiation

Christ becomes really present in the Eucharist through transubstantiation, by which all the substance of the bread becomes the body of Christ, and all the substance of the wine becomes his blood without altering the appearances (accidents or species) of bread and wine.<sup>7</sup>

The term *transubstantiation* (change of substance while the accidents remain) is linguistically parallel to the more usual *transformation* (change of form while the matter remains). The latter describes natural changes whereas the former refers to a supernatural change that is absolutely impossible in nature. It can happen only through divine intervention, and actually happens only in the Eucharist, in which the whole substance—not just the substantial form—changes.

The term *transubstantiation* was introduced in the twelfth century and was used by the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>8</sup> The Council of Trent also used it and declared that the word was particularly suitable to describe this admirable conversion.<sup>9</sup>

## 34. The Manner of the Real Presence

Regarding the manner of Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist, we must affirm with the Council of Trent that Christ is present, whole and entire, in each of the Eucharistic species.<sup>10</sup> This is because Christ has resurrected and is alive, and wherever his body is, his blood, soul, and divinity will also be there.

Specifically, by virtue of the explicit meaning of the words of the consecration ("This is my body"), all the substance of bread becomes the body of Christ. By concomitance, his blood, soul, and divinity also are present. The same is true of the consecration of the wine into the blood of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Christ is also present—whole and entire—in each of the parts into which the Eucharistic species can be divided,<sup>12</sup> provided these parts keep the accidental properties of bread and wine. This way of being present is called *ad modum substantiae*, "in the manner of the substance."<sup>13</sup>

The Real Presence is conditional upon the permanence of the accidents, or appearances, of bread and of wine. When these are corrupted or disappear, the sacramental presence of Christ also disappears.<sup>14</sup>

## **35. Holy Communion, Our Spiritual Food**

In the Last Supper, Jesus gave the apostles his body and blood to eat. In every Mass, Christ gives himself to us as spiritual food (Holy Communion).<sup>15</sup>

The external form of food is highly appropriate to signify the union with Christ that is caused in this sacrament. However, there is a discrepancy when comparing the Eucharist to food. Whereas the person fed assimilates food, the person receiving the Eucharist becomes assimilated into Christ.

## 36. The Matter and Form of the Eucharist

We are filled with wonder as we consider how Christ chose to use bread and wine to remain sacramentally present among us and to give us spiritual nourishment.<sup>16</sup> These are simple and ordinary foods, “fruit of the earth and work of human hands,” as the Offertory of the Mass reminds us. “The miracle of the holy Eucharist is being continually renewed and it has all Jesus’ personal traits. Perfect God and perfect man, Lord of heaven and earth, he offers himself to us as nourishment in the most natural and ordinary way. Love has been awaiting us for almost two thousand years.”<sup>17</sup>

The *remote matter* of the Eucharist is wheat bread and grape wine because, as the Church has defined, this is what Jesus Christ used.<sup>18</sup>

For the *validity* of the sacrament, the *bread* must be made from wheat flour mixed with natural water and baked, that is, ordinary wheat bread. For its *lawfulness*, the Latin Rite requires that it be unleavened, and the Eastern rite requires that it be fermented.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it must be fresh, in order to avoid the danger of corruption.<sup>20</sup>

For the *validity* of the sacrament, the *wine* must be natural, uncorrupted grape wine. For its *lawfulness*, a small amount of water must be added.<sup>21</sup>

The *form* is the words of the consecration, which are the same words Jesus used and are recorded in the New Testament.<sup>22</sup> These words are literally, “This is my body,” and “This is the chalice of my blood.”<sup>23</sup>

The *application of the form to the matter*—the consecration—is done within the Holy Mass. For its *validity*, it must be done over a concrete, determinate, and physically present matter. Otherwise, the words of the form would not make sense. The present liturgical laws must be observed for its *lawfulness*. These bind in conscience, seriously or lightly, according to their importance. Consecration outside the Mass is never licit.<sup>24</sup>

## 37. The Effects of Holy Communion

Upon receiving the Eucharist, an intimate union is established between God and the receiver: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (Jn 6:56). That is why this sacrament is usually called *Communion* (“to receive Communion,” “to communicate”). Through this union with Christ, Christian participants in the Eucharist are also united among themselves.

The Eucharist is the sacred banquet to which all Christians are invited. “O sacred banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of his Passion is renewed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us,” says an ancient and well-known liturgical prayer.<sup>25</sup>

The Eucharist is the *perfect food for the supernatural life of the soul*. The Holy Eucharist nourishes the soul in the same way that ordinary food nourishes the body.<sup>26</sup>

- It sustains the spiritual life just as material food maintains corporal life.<sup>27</sup> It increases the infused virtues—especially charity—while it increases sanctifying grace. Accordingly, the Eucharist *increases our union with Christ*.
- By strengthening our spiritual life, the Eucharist *drives away the danger of committing mortal and venial sins*.
- It *forgives venial sins* and reduces temporal punishments.<sup>28</sup>
- The union with Christ makes it a bond of unity with all Christians. It strengthens the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ: *The Eucharist makes the Church*.
- It is a *pledge of eternal life* and, in a certain way, the beginning of eternal life.

In a special way, the Eucharist represents the Passion and Resurrection of Christ: it contains the same Christ who suffered, died, rose from the dead, and is now glorious in heaven with the marks of his Passion. This same passion is carried out in the Mass in a special, real way, since, as we will see, the Mass is the renewal of the sacrifice of the cross.<sup>29</sup>

Like the rest of the sacraments, the Eucharist produces its effects by itself (*ex opere operato*), but the individual benefit depends on the quality of the recipient’s personal dispositions.

## **38. Communion under Both Species**

Since the whole Christ is contained under each of the species, the effects of the Eucharist are not greater when Communion is received under both species than when it is received under only one species.<sup>30</sup> That is why, for evident practical reasons, it is usually received under the species of bread only.

The Eucharist is taken under both species in some cases. This is done in order to clearly signify the participation of the faithful in the sacrifice of the Mass.<sup>31</sup> Special care should be exercised to avoid any danger of irreverence.

In case of necessity, the Eucharist may be received only under the species of wine.<sup>32</sup>

### 39. The Necessity of Receiving the Eucharist

The Lord encouraged all to receive him in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.<sup>33</sup> *Actual reception of the Eucharist is not a necessary means for salvation.*<sup>34</sup>

However, the *desire to receive it* (reception *in voto*) *is a necessary means.*<sup>35</sup> For baptized persons with use of reason who know of this sacrament, the desire must be explicit (cf. Jn 6:54).

*By divine precept*, it is necessary for all baptized persons with use of reason to receive the Eucharist several times in their life and when death is imminent.<sup>36</sup>

*By ecclesiastical precept*, it is necessary for all Catholics to receive the Eucharist at least once a year after their first Communion and, if possible, during Easter time.<sup>37</sup> Receiving the Eucharist in this season should usually be possible, since the time allowed for the fulfillment of this precept is quite long. Depending on the particular place, it may extend from Ash Wednesday to Trinity Sunday.

Frequent or daily reception of the Eucharist is, of course, most useful to all Christians. The faithful with the necessary dispositions are encouraged to take Communion when they participate in a Mass. Spiritual communions are useful too.

## 40. The Minister of the Eucharist

*Only a priest can validly consecrate the Eucharist.*<sup>38</sup> The conditions for a lawful consecration will be discussed in the next chapter.

With respect to the *distribution* of the Eucharist, “*the ordinary minister of holy communion is a Bishop, a priest or a deacon.*”<sup>39</sup>

The *extraordinary minister* for the distribution of the Eucharist is the (permanent) acolyte or another faithful (the so-called *lay minister*) who, “where the needs of the Church require and ministers are not available,”<sup>40</sup> has been legitimately delegated as prescribed by the law.

These are the criteria to determine the need to delegate a layman for the distribution of the Eucharist:

- There is no ordinary minister or acolyte.
- The ministers cannot distribute it themselves due to sickness, old age, or the demands of their pastoral ministry.
- Due to the great number of communicants, the distribution would take an excessively long time.

A bishop can grant the authority to delegate laymen to his auxiliary bishops, episcopal vicars, and episcopal delegates. Priests may also receive this authority personally from the bishop, but they may delegate only for one specific occasion in each case.<sup>41</sup>

Such delegations are always exceptional, since they are extraordinary ministers. In each case, they are justified by the good of the faithful.



## **41. The Subject of the Eucharist**

*Any living and baptized person who does not obstruct grace by mortal sin can fruitfully receive the Eucharist.*

Since the twelfth century, the policy of the Catholic Church in the Latin Rite has been to not give Communion to children before the age of reason. Also, it is not given to those who lack the use of reason due to sickness or those who are unconscious.

Those who have only partial use of reason can receive Communion at the moment of death, provided there is no danger of irreverence.

## **41 a) Dispositions of the Soul**

The dispositions required to fruitfully receive the Eucharist are:

- not to be aware of any mortal sin that is not yet absolved,
- not to be under excommunication or interdict (these penalties will be discussed later on), and
- to approach the sacrament with devotion.

If one is aware of having committed a mortal sin, making an act of perfect contrition is not enough to receive communion in good conscience. While perfect contrition certainly forgives the sin and recovers sanctifying grace, no one can be sure of having attained it. Whoever is aware of having committed a mortal sin should not approach the Eucharist without having received absolution in the Sacrament of Penance first. Only when there is no available confessor combined with the grave necessity to receive Communion could an exception be made, but this very seldom occurs.<sup>42</sup>

## **41b) Dispositions of the Body**

- The Eucharistic fast must be kept. One must abstain from all food or drink at least an hour before receiving Communion. Water and medicines do not break this fast.<sup>43</sup> The sick, the elderly, and those taking care of them can receive Communion even if they have taken something during the preceding hour.<sup>44</sup>
- Out of respect for the sacrament, it is advisable to be clean, groomed, and properly dressed when going to Communion.

## 42. The Manner of Receiving Holy Communion

The Church has always required respect and reverence for the Eucharist at the moment of receiving it from the faithful. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. A.D. 315–386), instructing the newly baptized, writes, “Come forward also to the cup of his blood, not reaching out with your hands, but bowing and in attitude of worship and reverence.”<sup>45</sup> It has long been the custom in the Church to receive the sacred host kneeling, according to the human way of behaving, because this genuflection expresses adoration. More recently, we have been told:

With regard to the manner of going to communion, the faithful can receive it either kneeling or standing, in accordance with the norms laid down by the Bishop’s Conference. When the faithful communicate kneeling, no other sign of reverence towards the Blessed Sacrament is required, since kneeling is itself a sign of adoration. When they receive communion standing, it is strongly recommended that, coming up in procession, they should make a sign of reverence before receiving the sacrament. This should be done at the right time and place, so that the order of people going to and from communion is not disrupted.<sup>46</sup>

For many centuries, Holy Communion had been distributed by placing it directly on the tongue. This practice is still in force.<sup>47</sup> It expresses the faithful’s reverence for the Eucharist, and it is the best way to avoid profaning the Eucharist. To receive Holy Communion in this way does not detract in any way from personal dignity; rather, it is part of the preparation needed to receive the Eucharist fruitfully.

When the bishops, with the approval of the Holy See, authorize the reception of Holy Communion in the hand in their territory, the faithful need to be instructed on the doctrine of the Real Presence of our Lord in the Eucharist. Thus, any danger of profanation resulting from dispersing the fragments that might break off the hosts or from not having clean hands is avoided. One cannot say it does not matter if these particles stick to the communicants’ fingers and end up in pockets or bags. That would be a glaring lack of reverence for the body of the Lord. Worship implies reverence. Whatever hinders reverence hinders worship.

The same law points out that Communion in the hand can never be imposed in such a way as to exclude the traditional usage or make it difficult. Further, even where the practice of Holy Communion in the hand

is lawfully allowed, each Catholic is free to decide whether he will receive the Eucharist on the tongue or in the hand.<sup>48</sup>

In the optional rite of Communion in the hand, the communicant should place his cupped left palm upon the right. The minister places the sacred host on the left palm. Stepping aside, yet still facing the minister, the communicant conveys the sacred host to his mouth with the right hand. The minister should ascertain that the host is consumed immediately.

## **43. Repetition of Communion within the Same Day**

The ordinary practice is to receive Communion only once a day. However, one can receive communion for a second time in the same day, provided it is done within the context of Holy Mass.<sup>49</sup> This is the case of a person who, having received Communion in the morning as is his practice, later in the day attends a Mass on the occasion of some special celebration (matrimony, funeral, etc.). This is also the case of a person who receives communion during the midnight Mass at Christmas or Easter and receives communion again at the next morning's Mass.

Logically, one can receive Communion again to consume the Eucharist in exceptional cases (to prevent its profanation, in case of a fire, etc.). Additionally, in danger of death, it is highly recommended to receive the Viaticum even if one has already received Communion that day.<sup>50</sup>

## **44. First Communion**

“For holy communion to be administered to children, it is required that they have sufficient knowledge and be accurately prepared, so that according to their capacity they understand what the mystery of Christ means, and are able to receive the Body of the Lord with faith and devotion.”<sup>51</sup> However, in danger of death, it is sufficient that they are able to “distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food and receive communion with reverence.”<sup>52</sup>

“Sufficient knowledge,” or the use of reason, is presumed to be reached at the age of seven.<sup>53</sup> It seems, then, that First Communion should be received around that age. Parents have the primary responsibility for making sure that their children receive the required preparation.<sup>54</sup>

The Church has established that children must make their first confession before their first Communion, even if they are not aware of having committed any mortal sin.<sup>55</sup>

## 45. Reservation of the Eucharist

The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, as we have seen, is not limited to the moment of its celebration. It lasts as long as the species of bread and wine are not corrupted. Because of our faith in the Real Presence of Christ, the Eucharist is rendered a true adoration.<sup>56</sup> We express this faith, among other ways, by kneeling or deeply bowing in adoration. The Church gives adoration to the Eucharist during Mass and outside it by:

- carefully reserving the consecrated hosts in the tabernacle for silent adoration and to bring it to the sick or impeded,<sup>57</sup>
- presenting them to the faithful for adoration (benediction with the Blessed Sacrament), and
- organizing public processions and other Eucharistic devotions.

And so we learn to thank our Lord for his kindness in not limiting his presence to the time of the sacrifice of the altar. He has decided to stay with us in the host which is reserved in the tabernacle. For me the tabernacle has always been a Bethany, a quiet and pleasant place where Christ resides. A place where we can tell him about our worries, our sufferings, our desires, our joys, with the same sort of simplicity and naturalness as Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.<sup>58</sup>

Since the earliest times, the desire to lavish the utmost manifestations of delicacy and adoration on the Blessed Sacrament has crystallized in a great number of canonical norms on its reservation. Their fulfillment has traditionally been one of the main concerns of the bishops in their pastoral visits to the churches in their dioceses. The present *Code of Canon Law* also devotes considerable attention to this matter.<sup>59</sup>

Specifically, it establishes that the custody of the Eucharist is the responsibility of the parish priest or another priest. It cannot be reserved in just any place of worship, but only in those that meet special conditions of dignity, safety, etc. It has to be kept in a ciborium, on top of a corporal, and inside a tabernacle. At least one vigil lamp must continually burn before it. The consecrated hosts must be renewed periodically, at least every 15 days.

The exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, both in the ciborium and in a monstrance, and the Eucharistic processions are also regulated by the Code.



1. Cf. *CCC*, 1322–1419.
2. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1322–1332.
3. *CIC*, 897.
4. Cf. *SC*, 7; *CCC*, 1373.
5. Cf. DS 700, 803, 1256, 1636, 1651.
6. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Mysterium Fidei*, Sep. 3, 1965.
7. Most of the magisterial documents mentioned in the footnotes above in reference to the Real Presence also mention this admirable conversion. Cf. *CCC*, 1375–1376.
8. Cf. DS 802.
9. Cf. DS 1652.
10. Cf. DS 1651, 1653, 1199, 1321; *CCC*, 1374, 1377.
11. Cf. DS 1640.
12. Cf. DS 1653.
13. Cf. *ST*, III, q. 76, a. 4 ad 1; a. 5.
14. Cf. *Ibid.*, q. 77, a. 4.
15. Cf. *CCC*, 1382–1405.
16. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1333–1339, 1412.
17. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 151.
18. Cf. DS 1320.
19. Cf. DS 1303.
20. Cf. *CIC*, 924, 926.
21. Cf. *Ibid.* The Council of Trent explains that Christ apparently did it that way, and that the water recalls that which came out of his side wound and symbolizes the union of the faithful with Christ their head; cf. DS 1748.
22. Cf. DS 1321.
23. Cf. DS 1637.
24. Cf. *CIC*, 927.
25. *O Sacrum Convivium*.
26. Cf. *CCC*, 1391–1401.
27. Cf. *ST*, III, q. 79, a. 1.
28. Cf. DS 1638.
29. Cf. *CIC*, 897.
30. Cf. DS 1729.
31. Cf. *CIC*, 925; *CCC*, 1390; the cases in which communion under both species is allowed are listed in no. 242 of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* included at the beginning of the Roman Missal.
32. Cf. *CIC*, 925.
33. Cf. *CCC*, 1384, 1388–1389.
34. Cf. DS 1734.
35. Cf. *ST*, III, q. 73, a. 3; q. 79, a. 1 ad 1.
36. Cf. DS 1638; St. Alphonsus, *Theol. Mor.*, 1.6.290, 295.
37. Cf. *CIC*, 920.
38. Cf. DS 802; *CIC*, 900; *CCC*, 1410–1411.
39. *CIC*, 910.
40. *Ibid.*, 230.
41. Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Inst. *Immensae Caritatis*: AAS 65 (1973) 265–266.
42. Cf. *CIC*, 916; DS 1661; *CCC*, 1385–1386, 1415.

- 43. Cf. *CIC*, 919; *CCC*, 1387.
- 44. Cf. *CIC*, 919.
- 45. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catecheses*, 5.22.
- 46. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Inst. *Inaestimabile Donum*, Apr. 17, 1980, 11.
- 47. Cf. Paul VI, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Inst. *Memoriale Domini*, May 24, 1969, AAS 61 (1969) 541–47.
- 48. Cf. *Ibid.*; Paul VI, Inst. *Immensae Caritatis*, Jan. 29, 1973.
- 49. Cf. *CIC*, 917.
- 50. Cf. *Ibid.*, 921.
- 51. *Ibid.*, 913.
- 52. *Ibid.*
- 53. Cf. *Ibid.*, 97.
- 54. Cf. *Ibid.*, 914.
- 55. Cf. *Ibid.*
- 56. Cf. DS 1656; *CIC*, 898; *CCC*, 1378–1381.
- 57. Cf. DS 1654, 1656, 1657.
- 58. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 154.
- 59. Cf. *CIC*, 934–944.

64

# The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

## 46. The Holy Mass

It seems that the term “Holy Sacrifice of the Mass”—which comes from the Latin *mittere*, “to send”—was used as early as the fourth century by St. Ambrose of Milan (339–397). Other terms have also been used to refer to the Mass, especially *Eucharist*, *Breaking of the Bread*, and the *Supper of the Lord*, an expression of ancient Christian tradition but often incorrectly employed by Protestants.<sup>1</sup>

The three divine Persons are present in the sacrifice of the altar. By the will of the Father, with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, the Son offers himself in a redemptive sacrifice...

The Mass is, I insist, an action of God, of the Trinity. It is not a merely human event. The priest who celebrates fulfils the desire of our Lord, lending his body and his voice to the divine action. He acts, not in his own name, but *in persona et in nomine Christi*: in the person of Christ and in his name.<sup>2</sup>

## 46a) Sacrifices

Generally speaking, sacrifice (from *sacrum facere*, “to make sacred” or “to transform into something sacred”) is an act of religious virtue, the highest form of adoration. It can be more strictly defined as *the offering of something sensible—a victim—in order to show the supreme excellence of God and his supreme dominion over all creatures. The victim should be destroyed, or at least partially removed from human use, as an act of submission to the divine majesty.* A sacrifice is not merely an *oblation*. Whereas an oblation only offers something to God (as in the case of alms), a sacrifice also *immolates*, or somehow destroys, what is offered. Thus a real sacrifice requires:

- a physical, sensible thing,
- the destruction of this thing, or at least the change of its natural use (killing an animal, burning food, or pouring wine or oil over the altar),
- a legitimate minister (the main role of the priest, both in natural religion and in the Old Testament, is offering sacrifices),
- that it be offered to God in acknowledgement of his supreme and absolute authority over humanity and nature.

## 46b) The Mass is a Sacrifice

The Mass is the *memorial of the sacrifice of the Lord*. It meets all of the above conditions of a sacrifice. It is the perfect sacrifice that the Old Testament prefigured variously by the sacrifice of Abraham, the sacrifice of Melchizedek, the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, and the sacrifice prophesied by Malachi (cf. Gn 22:1–13; 14:17–20; Ex 12:1–14; Mal 1:10–11).

Consequently, the Holy Mass is the only sacrifice of the New Law: The messengers who heralded the coming of a person are no longer needed once that person has arrived.

When our Lord instituted the Eucharist during the last supper, night had already fallen. *This indicated*, according to St. John Chrysostom, *that “the times had run their course.”* The world had fallen into darkness, for the old rites, the old signs of God’s infinite mercy to mankind, were going to be brought to fulfillment. The way was opening to a new dawn—the new pasch. The Eucharist was instituted during that night, preparing in advance for the morning of the resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

It is a dogma of faith that the Holy Mass is a true sacrifice. Although the Church had acknowledged this truth since her beginning, the Council of Trent solemnly defined this against the Protestant heresy.<sup>4</sup>

It is also a dogma of faith that the sacrifice of the Mass is the “renewal,” without bloodshed, of the blood-shedding sacrifice of Calvary.<sup>5</sup> Instead of *renewal*, the terms *re-presentation* (to make present once again) or *reenactment* (to perform once again) might be used. However, this could lead to a misunderstanding, since they are also used to denote dramatic and other essentially fictional representations, which is clearly not the case here. Thus, none of these terms exactly describes what happens in the Mass. Rather, the Mass incorporates us into a *present* redeeming act of Christ, which is substantially the same as the sacrifice of the cross. We use the expressions *reenact*, *re-actualize*, and *make present* to signify this occurrence.

## 47. The Institution and Essence of the Mass

During the Last Supper, our Lord anticipated the bloody sacrifice that he would accomplish once and for all on the cross the following day for the Redemption of the world.<sup>6</sup>

The Gospel narrative states that after the traditional songs, our Lord, departing from Jewish custom, got up and washed the disciples' feet with the "second water" intended to be used for washing the hands of the guests toward the end of the meal. Then, he sat down and gave them the commandment of love (cf. Jn 13:1–17). He expressed his desire (cf. Lk 22:15ff) to eat that Passover with them, since he would not eat any other. Meanwhile, he told the disciples that he would not drink of the fruit of the vine any more (cf. Lk 22:18). The hour of his Passion was approaching.

Then he took bread, possibly a loaf that had been left on the table as custom required to indicate that no more food was going to be served, marking the end of the meal. He pronounced over it a "blessing" or "thanksgiving." He consecrated the bread—"This is my Body ..."—broke it, and gave it to the disciples.

Toward the end of the meal, probably when the third cup was served, he consecrated it—"This is the cup of my blood ..." (Lk 22:20)—and gave it to them to drink.

After the institution of the Eucharist, Christ commanded the apostles to celebrate it until his return and "constituted them as priests of the New Covenant."<sup>7</sup>

With this ceremony, our Lord anticipated his own immolation and oblation, which were to be accomplished on Calvary the following day. At the same time, he instituted the Mass to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross. The Mass, however, is not merely a "renewal" of that supper. It is a *mystical and real renewal, or reenactment, of the death of Christ on the cross*—just as the Last Supper was a mystical and real anticipation of that death.

"Do this in memory of me." With these words, Jesus meant: "Do not just hold a remembrance or memorial, a theatrical representation of what I have done. Rather *do this*, what I myself have done as I have done it. Do not celebrate a new sacrifice, different or unrelated to my oblation, but offer exactly what I have offered and drink the chalice that I have drunk."

Jesus instituted the Eucharist during the Jewish paschal celebration. He was bringing the paschal feast to its completion; he was renewing it and replacing it with the definitive sacrifice.

During the Last Supper, Jesus made a reference to the Sinai covenant: The New Covenant sealed with his blood was to be the eternal one. What had only been foreshadowed now became a reality: communion of life between God and man. When Jesus said in the Last Supper, “This cup ... is the new covenant in my blood” (Lk 22:20), he was repeating Moses’ very words. However, now it became the new alliance that will never be broken. Those who receive the Eucharist become part of the new people of God. The old sacrifices offered in the Temple came to an end. The sacrifices of bullocks, goats, and lambs offered by the Jews found completion in Christ’s sacrifice.

The immense value of the Mass comes precisely from its identity with the sacrifice of the cross: Both are one and the same sacrifice.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly, the offering is the same on the cross and in the Mass: Christ, really present in the Mass in a sacramental way. The offerer, the principal priest, is also the same, since the minister of the Mass acts in the name and in the person of Christ. Only the manner in which the sacrifice is offered differs: Christ shed his blood on the cross, while in the Mass, there is no bloodshed.<sup>9</sup>

There are, however, some easily understood accidental differences between the sacrifice on the cross and that of the Mass:

- Christ offered himself on the cross in his “passible” state: subject to suffering and death. In the Mass, he is in his glorious state: immortal and free from all sufferings.
- Christ offered himself on the cross directly, whereas in the Mass, he does so through the priest. In a certain way, the priest is identified with Christ at the moment of the consecration in which the priest acts in the person and name of Christ—*in persona et nomine Christi*.
- Christ earned our redemption on the cross; in the Mass, that redemption is applied to us.

The *essence* of the sacrifice of the Mass is the sacramental separation of the body and blood of our Lord through the double consecration of the bread and wine. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the whole of Christ is actually present under both species. The crucial moment of the Mass is,



therefore, the *consecration*. The species are later destroyed in the *communion of the priest*, which does not belong to the essence of the Mass.<sup>10</sup> Still, it does belong to the integrity of the sacrifice, and, consequently, the priest must consume both species.

## **48. The Mass: The Sacrifice of the Church**

The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church.<sup>11</sup> The Church, the body of Christ, offers herself in union with the offering of her head, Christ. The Church unites herself to Christ in his intercession for all humanity. Christ is the only priest and victim; the entire Church participates in this double role. The life of the faithful, their praise, their suffering, their work, and their prayer are united to Christ. This total offering, thus, acquires a new value.

In the Mass, the entire Church—even those members in heaven—is, with Mary, at the foot of the cross participating in the offering and intercession of Christ.

The Passion and death of Jesus summarizes and crowns the redemptive work carried out during his life. The Holy Mass, a bloodless renewal of this sacrifice done by the Church, similarly summarizes and crowns her saving work, which is a continuation of that of Christ.

Consequently, the Holy Mass is both the center of the life of the Church and of the life of each of the faithful. “In a special way Christ stays with us in the daily offering of the holy Eucharist. That is why the Mass is the center and source of Christian life.”<sup>12</sup> “With Christ in our soul, we end the holy Mass. The blessing of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit accompanies us all day long, as we go about our simple, normal task of making holy all honest human activity.”<sup>13</sup>

## 49. The Minister of the Holy Mass

Christ fundamentally offers the sacrifice of the Mass. He is the priest and the victim. The pope is associated in a special way in every celebration of the Mass. The local bishop is always responsible for the Eucharist—his name is mentioned—even though a priest *celebrates* Mass in the name of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

In a different sense, the Mass is also *offered* by the faithful who attend it. As the Roman Canon indicates: “Remember all of us gathered here before you... We offer you this sacrifice of praise for ourselves and those who are dear to us.” Even those who are absent participate in the offering of the Mass:

May this offering be effective for the salvation of all men—*Orate, fraters*, the priest invites the people to pray—because this sacrifice is yours and mine, it is the sacrifice of the whole Church. Pray, brethren, although there may not be many present, although materially there may be only one person there, although the celebrant may find himself alone; because every Mass is a universal sacrifice, the redemption of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (cf. Rv 5:9).<sup>15</sup>

## 50. The Ends or Effects of the Holy Mass

The ends of the Mass exactly correspond to the ends of the sacrifice of Calvary, as we could also have deduced from their identity. There are four:

- i) *Latreutic*: the adoration of God<sup>16</sup>
- ii) *Eucharistic*: thanksgiving<sup>17</sup>
- iii) *Propitiatory*: atonement for the sins of the living and the dead<sup>18</sup>
- iv) *Impetratory*: petition of supernatural and natural goods

These ends are attained in the following manner:

- Insofar as the Mass is the work of Christ, the ends are reached *ex opere operato*; insofar as it is the work of the celebrant and the attendants, *ex opere operantis*, that is, according to the quality of their dispositions.
- The effects directly related to God (adoration and acts of thanksgiving) are produced infallibly, but those dependent on people (propitiation and impetration) are not. As is generally the case with prayers, the impetratory effect is attained if the request is convenient for the subject possessing the proper dispositions to receive it.

## 51. The Fruits of the Holy Mass

There are four fruits of the Mass:

- i) *General* benefit the whole militant and suffering Church:

Through the communion of the saints, all Christians receive grace from every Mass that is celebrated, regardless of whether there is an attendance of thousands of persons, or whether it is only a boy with his mind on other things who is there to serve.<sup>19</sup>

- ii) *Special* benefit those attending the Mass.

- iii) *Most special* benefit the priest who celebrates it.

- iv) *Ministerial* benefit those for whom the Holy Mass is offered.<sup>20</sup>

## **52. The Application of the Fruits of the Mass**

Only the priest celebrating the Mass can apply the ministerial fruits. It can be offered for the living or the dead. In the latter case, it is offered as a suffrage, that is to say, it is offered to God in the hope that he considers it according to his infinite justice and wisdom.<sup>21</sup>

## 53. The Obligation to Celebrate Mass

Remembering always that in the mystery of the Eucharistic Sacrifice the work of redemption is continually being carried out, priests are to celebrate frequently. Indeed, daily celebration is earnestly recommended, because, even if it should not be possible to have the faithful present, it is an action of Christ and of the Church in which priests fulfill their principal role.<sup>22</sup>

The Second Vatican Council made this recommendation with the same words as the old Code.<sup>23</sup>

In the old Code, priests (merely because they were priests) were bound to say Mass only several times every year, although it was recommended that they celebrate at least on Sundays and holidays of obligation.<sup>24</sup>

Any ecclesiastical office (bishops, parish priests, etc.) brings with it the additional obligation of saying Mass and offering it for the people on many important celebrations and all Sundays. These are specified both for the entire Church and for each diocese.<sup>25</sup> The Mass offerings received and accepted also entail an obligation to say Mass.

On some days of the year (i.e., Christmas, All Souls' Day), priests of the Latin Rite are allowed to celebrate three Masses. For pastoral reasons, they may also receive permission to say two Masses on ordinary days and three Masses on holy days of obligation. This permission is given by the bishop either in general or for specific cases.<sup>26</sup>

## **54. Mass Offerings**

The origin of Mass offerings derives from the early offering of bread and wine made by the faithful at the offertory. Since they would bring more than was needed, what was not used in the Mass was left for the priest's sustenance and for almsgiving.

The Mass offering is not a payment for the Mass—this would be simony. The Mass offering is alms given to the priest for his sustenance on the occasion of asking him to apply the Mass for a specific intention. Regarding the amount, the practice established in the diocese must be followed. Needless to say, the donor may also be more generous.<sup>27</sup>

The Mass offering must not be confused with the allowance that could be given to a priest for transportation expenses or for celebrating the Mass in a specific place and time.



## **55. The Manner of Celebrating of the Holy Mass**

Since the Holy Mass is the most important rite of the Church, it is not surprising that canon law, since the earliest times, meticulously specifies the manner of its celebration, down to even the smallest details.

There are abundant prescriptions about the place, altar, sacred vessels, vestments, gestures of the priest, and words he has to say. All these norms bind in conscience with greater or lesser gravity according to the importance of each one.

## 56. The Most August Sacrament

In summary, we will quote the opening canon of the chapter devoted to this sacrament in the present *Code of Canon Law*:

The most august sacrament is the blessed Eucharist, in which Christ the Lord himself is contained, offered and received, and by which the Church continually lives and grows. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, the memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord, in which the Sacrifice of the cross is for ever perpetuated, is the summit and the source of all worship and Christian life. By means of it the unity of God's people is signified and brought about, and the building up of the body of Christ is perfected. The other sacraments and all the ecclesiastical works of the apostolate are bound up with, and directed to, the blessed Eucharist.<sup>28</sup>

1. Cf. CCC, 1337–1372.
2. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 86.
3. *Ibid.*, 155. Author's emphasis; cf. St. John Chrysostom, *In Matt. Homiliae*, 82.1 (PG 58.700).
4. Cf. DS 1739, 1758; CCC, 1357, 1365ff.
5. Cf. DS 1743, 1753; CCC, 1366.
6. Cf. CCC, 1337–1344.
7. DS 1740.
8. Cf. C. Belmonte, *Understanding the Mass*, 3; CCC, 1367.
9. Cf. DS 1743; CCC, 1365.
10. This is *sententia communior*: cf. D.M. Prummer, O.P., *Manuale Theologiae Moralis* (Barcelona: Herder, 1955), 3.232–233.
11. Cf. CCC, 1368–1372.
12. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 102.
13. *Ibid.*, 91.
14. Cf. CCC, 1369.
15. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 89.
16. Cf. CCC, 1361.
17. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1359–1360.
18. Cf. DS 1743, 1753.
19. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 89.
20. Cf. CIC, 901.
21. Cf. CCC, 1371.
22. CIC, 904.
23. Cf. PO, 13.
24. Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici* of 1917, c. 805.
25. Cf. CIC, 388, 429, 534.
26. Cf. *Ibid.*, 905.
27. Cf. *Ibid.*, 945–958.

28. *Ibid.*, 897.

## The Sacrament of Penance

THROUGH THE SACRAMENTS of Christian initiation, a person receives a new life in Christ. Still, we carry this life in “earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7). Jesus, the physician of our souls, wanted his Church to continue the work of healing and salvation that he began. This is the purpose of the sacraments of healing: Penance and Anointing of the Sick.<sup>1</sup>

Human life is in some way a constant returning to our Father’s house. We return through contrition, through the conversion of heart which means a desire to change, a firm decision to improve our life and which, therefore, is expressed in sacrifice and self-giving. We return to our Father’s house by means of that sacrament of pardon in which, by confessing our sins, we put on Jesus Christ again and become his brothers, members of God’s family.<sup>2</sup>

## 57. The Virtue of Penance

Before studying the Sacrament of Penance, we must briefly consider the virtue of penance, since they are closely related.

*The virtue of penance is a supernatural habit that inclines the person to be promptly sorry for a sin committed, insofar as it is an offense to God, with the resolve not to do it again.* That resolve, or purpose of amendment, is a necessary element of true sorrow.<sup>3</sup>

The virtue of penance is a radical reorientation of the whole life, a return and conversion to God. This conversion of heart is accompanied by contrition or repentance (*animi cruciatus* or *compunctio cordis*), and includes:

- hatred for sin,
- sorrow for the offense done to God,
- the desire to atone for the sins committed, and
- the resolve not to sin in the future.

In Sacred Scripture and the writings of the Fathers of the Church, the internal virtue of penance finds its expression in three exercises: *prayer, fasting, and almsgiving*. To these expressions of penance, we should add all the *works of mercy*—corporal and spiritual—practiced in daily life. These include gestures of reconciliation, attention to the poor, defense of justice and rights, acknowledgment of our faults, fraternal correction, amendment of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, and enduring persecution for justice's sake. The safest way of penance is to take up one's cross and follow Jesus.

The Eucharist is “the antidote to free us from our daily faults and to preserve us from mortal sin.”<sup>4</sup> Reading Sacred Scripture, the Liturgy of the Hours, or any sincere *act of piety* or devotion awakens the desire for conversion in us. The *times and days of penance* (Lent, Fridays of the year) are particularly suitable for spiritual retreats, reception of the Sacrament of Penance, penitential pilgrimages, and other acts of expiation.<sup>5</sup>

## **57a) The Necessity of the Virtue of Penance**

The virtue of penance *is necessary for all sinners, both as a means and by precept* (cf. Lk 13:5).<sup>6</sup>

Those in the state of mortal sin should, logically, make an act of contrition as soon as possible. If they have been in that state for a long time or are in danger of death, refusing to repent would mean an additional sin.

Furthermore, contrition is needed whenever the state of grace is required (for example, for the reception of a sacrament of the living).

In all these cases, the required act of penance is the reception of the Sacrament of Penance if it is possible to receive it.

## 58. The Existence of the Sacrament of Penance

Only God can forgive sins (cf. Mk 2:7). Jesus forgave sinners and gave the apostles the power to forgive sins and the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church.

Even in the first centuries, abundant witnesses attest to the Church's exercise of the "power of the keys" or "binding and loosing," that is, of forgiving sins. Christ promised this power first to Peter (cf. Mt 16:19), later granted it to all the apostles (cf. Mt 18:18), and, through them, gave it to all their successors (cf. Jn 20:23). Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God.<sup>7</sup>

Extant ancient writings discuss the scope of this power in depth: whether all sins could be forgiven or whether some particularly grievous ones could or should not be forgiven by the Church. The conclusion that they reach is that the Church can forgive all sins without exception.<sup>8</sup>

There are also abundant testimonies dating from the first centuries on the practice of public penance. This was reserved for particularly grievous and sometimes public sins. In these cases, the procedure required for reconciliation with God and the Church was also public.

The direct testimonies on private penance, which is the form practiced now, are from a later time. This may be due to the very private nature of this form of reconciliation. This led some to say—from the first Protestants to recent times—that the present practice of penance was a more or less recent ecclesiastical invention, unknown in the early Church.

In spite of the scarcity of testimony just mentioned, the Magisterium explicitly teaches, "the method that the Catholic Church has always observed from the very beginning, and still observes, of confessing secretly to the priest alone," is not "foreign to the institution and command of Christ," nor is it "of human origin."<sup>9</sup>

## 59. Nature and Institution of the Sacrament of Penance

The Sacrament of Penance is also called the Sacrament of Conversion, of Confession, of Forgiveness, and of Reconciliation.

*Christ instituted the Sacrament of Penance to forgive by sacramental absolution, in the manner of a judgment, all the sins committed after Baptism by a person who confesses them with due repentance.* The new *Code of Canon Law* concisely states:

In the sacrament of penance the faithful who confess their sins to a lawful minister, are sorry for those sins and have a purpose of amendment, receive from God, through the absolution given by that minister, forgiveness of sins they have committed after baptism, and at the same time they are reconciled with the Church, which by sinning they wounded.<sup>10</sup>

The institution of the Sacrament of Penance principally took place after Christ's Resurrection, when he told the apostles, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'" (Jn 20:21–23).<sup>11</sup>

The whole scene—the solemn gesture of blowing over them, telling them to receive the Holy Spirit, comparing their mission with his own, and, above all, the last words—clearly shows that the power to forgive sins was conferred. Clearly, it is not just a command to announce the forgiveness of sins, as the prophets often did.

Furthermore, as the Council of Trent defined in condemning the Protestant errors, this sacrament was instituted *in the manner of a judgment*.<sup>12</sup> Holy Scripture clearly shows this judicial character in the promise of the power of the keys, which is the power to judge according to divine law and to forgive or not to forgive (cf. Mt 16:19; 18:18; Jn 20:23). The minister, precisely because he has to judge and pass a sentence, must know the case, including the sins and the present dispositions of the penitent. Therefore, the penitent must reveal both to the minister through a *confession*.

In the early Church, the reconciliation of those who had committed very grievous sins (homicide, adultery, idolatry) was tied to long periods of



public penance. In the seventh century, following the monastic tradition of the East, Irish monks introduced the practice of “private” penance, even for venial sins, as it is practiced today in the European continent.<sup>13</sup>

## 60. The Proximate and Remote Matter of Penance

The *proximate matter* is the three acts of the penitent: *contrition*, *confession*, and *satisfaction*. We will study them in detail.

The *remote matter* is the sins committed after Baptism, insofar as one loathes them and wants to be freed of them.<sup>14</sup>

The *necessary matter* is *all* the mortal sins committed after Baptism that are not yet confessed and forgiven by sacramental absolution.<sup>15</sup>

The *free matter* is *all* the venial sins committed after Baptism<sup>16</sup> and all venial or mortal sins that are already absolved in prior confessions.

The matter can be certain or doubtful, depending on whether one positively knows that the sins concerned are indeed sins or is not sure that they are sins.

For the validity of the sacrament, there must be *sufficient matter*, that is, necessary or free matter, provided it is certain. Mere imperfections and doubtful sins are *insufficient matter*. Therefore, if one wants to go to Confession and has no necessary and certain matter, one must mention some free and certain matter in order to receive the sacrament.

## 61. The Form of the Sacrament of Penance

The *form* of the sacrament is *the words of the absolution* pronounced by the confessor. Its nucleus is the words, “I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>17</sup>

The absolution must be given orally in the presence of the penitent. Only for serious reasons can the absolution be conditional: for example, when there is doubt as to whether the penitent is alive or not or whether he has sufficient use of reason.

## 62. The Celebration of the Sacrament of Penance

The Sacrament of Penance may be administered according to three different rites:<sup>18</sup>

(1) *The rite for the reconciliation of one penitent.*

This is the usual manner of administering the Sacrament of Penance.

(2) *The rite for the reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution.*

This rite may be followed when one wants to give special solemnity to this sacrament as, for example, during a mission, or in Lenten retreats.

The rite consists of some scriptural readings, the preaching of a sermon, a time for examination of conscience, and the common recitation of the general confession prayer. Afterward, each of the penitents individually confesses to one of the confessors present. The confessors individually judge, impose the penance, and absolve the penitents one by one.

This rite is at times referred to as the “communitarian celebration of the Sacrament of Penance.” This and the previous rite are the only ordinary means by which one of the faithful, conscious of having fallen into mortal sin, can be reconciled with God and the Church.<sup>19</sup>

(3) *The rite for the reconciliation of many penitents with a general confession and absolution.*

In contrast to the previous two rites, this rite does not have individual confessions. A general penance is imposed, which each penitent may supplement with voluntary acts, and general absolution is given to all at the same time.

Aside from true contrition, there is an additional requirement for the validity of this absolution: At the moment it is granted, each penitent must make the resolution to go to individual confession as soon as possible.<sup>20</sup>

This rite is often called “general absolution.”

## 63. Regulations on General Absolutions

By its nature, general absolution is to be given only on exceptional occasions. This is acknowledged by the very decree that established it, which also says that individual, integral confession and the corresponding absolution is still the only ordinary way for the faithful to be reconciled with God and the Church. Only when it is physically or morally impossible can individual confession be dispensed.<sup>21</sup>

This decree specifies the cases in which this rite may be used: (a) when one is in danger of death, and (b) when a large number of penitents, due to the lack of confessors to hear them individually and through no fault of their own, would be deprived of sacramental grace or Communion for a long time. However, if confessors were to be available at a nearby place or in the near future, this rite would not be licit. The document specifically declares that a great gathering of penitents, as in a pilgrimage or an important holy day, *does not* justify the use of this rite.

When the faithful receive a general absolution, the sins thus forgiven must be mentioned in the next individual confession. This must be done as soon as possible and before receiving another general absolution. Further, the Church's precept of going to Confession at least once a year is not fulfilled by a general absolution.

Clearly, general absolutions are the exceptions to the rule and do not do away with the need for individual confession. It would be a great abuse of the sacrament to present this rite as a valid alternative to individual confession.

## 64. Effects of the Sacrament of Penance

The effects of the Sacrament of Penance are the following:<sup>22</sup>

- *The Sacrament of Penance can forgive all sins*, mortal as well as venial (cf. Ez 18:21–23; Is 1:18).
- *Venial sins* may also be forgiven through acts of repentance done outside the sacrament.<sup>23</sup> Even so, sins for which one does not repent are not forgiven, even within the Sacrament of Penance. These are the sins for which one retains some attachment and lacks the resolve to correct.<sup>24</sup>
- *Reconciliation with God* occurs through *sanctifying grace* infused in the soul.<sup>25</sup> That is why, in Confession, mortal sins are either all forgiven or all retained.
- *Reconciliation with the Church* is accomplished.
- *Remission of eternal punishment* due to mortal sins takes place.
- *Partial remission of the temporal punishment* due to mortal sins also occurs.<sup>26</sup>
- *Merits* obtained through good works while in the state of grace and lost through mortal sin are *revived* through penance (cf. Ez 33:12).<sup>27</sup>
- *Peace*, serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation are found.
- *Sacramental grace* is a sort of spiritual force to successfully fight off temptations in areas related to the sins confessed.

## 65. Necessity of the Sacrament of Penance

The Sacrament of Penance (or the sincere and active intention to receive it) is *necessary as a means for salvation* for all who have committed mortal sins after Baptism or after their last good confession.<sup>28</sup>

By *divine precept*, sacramental confession is an obligation:

- *in itself*, for sinners in danger of imminent death, and a few times during one's life,
- *on the occasions* when a person who is in mortal sin wants to receive a sacrament of the living.

By *ecclesiastical law*, “after having attained the age of discretion, each of the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year.”<sup>29</sup> One should not restrict oneself to the bare minimum required by the law; when confessions are far apart, it is more difficult to distinguish mortal sin from venial sin. Also, it is not advisable to fulfill the precept of yearly communion with a great load of venial sins.

Children should go to the Sacrament of Penance before receiving their first communion.<sup>30</sup>

## **66. Minister of the Sacrament of Penance**

Christ entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to the apostles (cf. Jn 20:23; 2 Cor 5:18). The bishops (their successors) and the priests (collaborators of the bishops) continue exercising this ministry. For the validity of the Sacrament of Penance, divine law requires the minister to have received priestly ordination<sup>31</sup> and to have jurisdiction over the penitent.<sup>32</sup>

Jurisdiction is necessary due to the judicial character of the Sacrament of Penance. A judge can pronounce sentence only on someone under his jurisdiction.<sup>33</sup>



## 66a) The Power to Hear Confessions

Generally speaking, those entitled to hear confessions by right are the pope, the cardinals, and bishops. Those entitled by office are the bishop, the canon penitentiary, the parish priest, and those who take their place. Other priests have this power by delegation of the bishop.

Regarding the scope of this faculty, one who has it in one place automatically has it in all places. The local bishop, however, can deny this faculty to alien bishops (as to the lawfulness) and priests (as to the validity).

These regulations eased out the stricter norms of the previous Code, as was required by the increased mobility of the laity and clergy in our times.<sup>34</sup>

Any priest can validly absolve a penitent who is in danger of death, even if he has no license and even if a qualified confessor is also present.<sup>35</sup>

The pope or the local bishop can limit jurisdiction by reserving the absolution of some sins to himself, especially those that, at a given time, are considered particularly pernicious (*reserved sins*).<sup>36</sup> The present Code, however, does not mention this reservation.<sup>37</sup>

## 66b) The Obligations of the Confessor

As we have already said, for the *validity* of the sacrament, the confessor must have received Holy Orders and have jurisdiction.

In addition to those mentioned in the above section, for some specific cases, the requirements for its *lawful* administration are the following:

- The confessor must be in the state of grace, as is necessary for the administration of *all* the sacraments (cf. Lv 22:3).
- He should have sufficient knowledge. Those granting the license to hear confessions should ascertain the qualifications of the candidates through an examination or in some other way.<sup>38</sup>
- He should practice prudence and other Christian virtues, such as zeal for souls, patience, and fortitude.
- He must be able to pass a just judgment on the sins heard and on the need to repair the damages caused to third parties, if any.
- He must be able to discern whether the penitent has the required dispositions, so that he may accordingly give, postpone, or deny the absolution.<sup>39</sup> For this, he can prudently ask questions from the penitent—at times, he must do so.<sup>40</sup> He should deny absolution if the penitent refuses to avoid voluntary (that is, not unavoidable) proximate occasions of grave sins.
- He must know how to teach and encourage the penitent, eliciting true contrition and resolution of amendment.<sup>41</sup>
- He must impose the appropriate satisfaction for the penitent.<sup>42</sup>
- The proper place for hearing confessions is the confessional box, which should meet the requirements set by the bishops' conference. In any case, a confessional with a separation screen should be available for the penitents who want to use it. Apart from a case of real necessity, confessions should be heard in a confessional equipped with a fixed grille.<sup>43</sup> The minister can lawfully decide to follow this general rule, for a just reason, even if the penitent requests otherwise. It is highly advisable to always hear confessions of women inside a confessional with separation screen. Actually, in most places, it is obligatory to do so, except in special cases like sickness. The bishops

may prescribe more concrete regulations for the priests and the faithful under their care.

- The confessor must strictly keep the sacramental seal, that is, he should keep secret all that the penitent said as part of the confession, as well as whatever may put the sacrament in a bad light. This obligation admits no exceptions.<sup>44</sup>

## 66c) The Duty to Hear Confessions

The duty to hear confessions is:

- *A serious obligation of justice* for pastors toward those entrusted to them,
- *A serious obligation of charity*, in case of urgent need, for all confessors; in case of danger of death, this extends to all priests (even if they have no licenses, are excommunicated, or defrocked).

Generally speaking, a confessor should always be willing to hear the confessions of the faithful when they reasonably ask for it. Furthermore, all those who have souls in their care should make it easy for the faithful to go to Confession by being available at regular and convenient times.<sup>45</sup>

## **67. Abuses Against the Sacrament of Penance**

The most serious abuses of the Sacrament of Penance, which are heavily penalized by ecclesiastical legislation, are the absolution of one's accomplice in sins of impurity (which is valid and licit only in case of danger of death) and solicitation against chastity during Confession,<sup>46</sup> which the penitent is obliged to denounce. The false accusation of such solicitation on the part of the penitent is also heavily penalized.<sup>47</sup>

## **68. The Subject of the Sacrament of Penance and Acts of the Penitent**

The subject of the Sacrament of Penance is *the baptized person who has committed some sin after Baptism and is capable of repenting it.*

As we saw earlier, the proximate matter of the sacrament is the three acts that the penitent must perform: repentance, confession, and satisfaction.

## 68a) Repentance

*Repentance*, or *contrition* in its broad sense, is “a deep sorrow and detestation for sin committed, with a resolution of sinning no more.”<sup>48</sup>

When this sorrow is due to charity, that is, when one is sorry for the offense caused to God, it is called *perfect contrition* or simply *contrition* (in its strict sense). If the sorrow is due to fear of the deserved punishment, it is called *imperfect contrition* or *attrition*.

Attrition is sufficient for the forgiveness of sins if it is accompanied by confession and absolution.<sup>49</sup> Contrition is sufficient for the forgiveness of sins if it is accompanied by the effective desire to go to Confession, even if one does not actually manage to do so because it is not possible.<sup>50</sup>

*Contrition*, either perfect or imperfect, has to be:

- *internal*. The mere external recitation of the formula for contrition is not enough;
- *supernatural*. It should be based on supernatural motives. The shame of having done something improper or debasing is not enough for repentance;
- *supreme in one's appreciation*. One must consider sin as the worst evil and be ready to suffer anything rather than fall into sin again. But this does not mean that the penitent ought to consider and imagine *all* the possible sufferings before choosing them rather than sin; a general consideration is enough;<sup>51</sup>
- *universal*. It should extend to all mortal sins that are not yet forgiven, without exception.

Another requirement for the validity of the sacrament is the *resolution not to sin again*. It must be at least implicit, and without it, there is no true repentance.<sup>52</sup> This resolution has to be:

- *firm*. This is perfectly compatible with the fact that the penitent may eventually sin again, or that he foresees the possibility—or even the probability—of falling again. What is required is that, at the moment of the confession, the penitent resolutely wants to fight in order to avoid falling again. The fact that one falls back into sin is no indication that the resolution of amendment was not sincere, “for even

as he truly runs who afterwards sits, so he truly repented who subsequently sins”<sup>53</sup>;

- *effective*. The penitent must really want to apply all the necessary means to avoid falling again: prayer, watchfulness, etc. He should effectively want to avoid the occasions of sin and be willing to repair, within his capacities, the damage caused to others (e.g., in the case of theft, scandal, slander);
- *universal*. He should want to avoid all types of mortal sin. If the confession is about some free matter, the resolution should extend to *all* the sins confessed. This implies all mortal sins, if already forgiven mortal sins were mentioned. If not, it could extend to one venial sin, a certain type of venial sin, all deliberate venial sins, or limiting their frequency.



## 68b) Confession

*Confession*, strictly speaking, refers to the *self-accusation of sins committed after Baptism, made to the confessor so that he may forgive them*.<sup>54</sup>

Confession is necessary by *divine precept* as well as by *ecclesiastical decree*. It is necessary by divine precept because Christ established this sacrament as a judgment, and no one can judge the unknown. This is the interpretation of Tradition and the Council of Trent.<sup>55</sup> Necessity by ecclesiastical precept is documented as early as the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>56</sup>

### (1) *Characteristics of Confession*

Confession has to be:

- *simple*, without useless or verbose explanations,
- *humble*, since one is seeking pardon,
- *done with rectitude of intention*, that is, one should seek forgiveness and not intend to show off or have other such motives,
- *modest and discreet*, without using obscene language or revealing the sins of others,
- *an accusation of guilt*, not just a narration of events in order to inform,
- *truthful*, without any falsehood as to the number, species, and circumstances that change the species of mortal sins (it is highly desirable, of course, that truthfulness should extend to all that is mentioned in Confession),
- *oral*, that is, expressed in words said and not by gestures or in writing, except in case of unavoidable necessity,
- *secret*—no one can be obliged to publicly confess his sins (public confessions are usually not prudent), and, above all,
- *complete*, as we will now see more in detail.

### (2) *Integrity of Confession*

According to the Council of Trent, the penitent, according to his capacities, is obliged to confess *all the mortal sins* that were committed after Baptism and are not yet confessed.<sup>57</sup>

*Material integrity* refers to absolutely *all* the sins committed. Such integrity is not always necessary, as we will see later.

*Formal integrity* refers to all mortal sins that, all circumstances considered, the penitent has to confess immediately. Formal integrity is always necessary for Confession. It is normally achieved through an earnest examination of conscience.

### (3) *Extent of integrity in Confession*

For the confession of mortal sins to be complete, one must mention the following:

- The *species* of the sin.<sup>58</sup> It is not enough to say that one has committed a sin against a particular commandment or virtue. The species or type of sin must be mentioned, down to the most specific class or division.
- The *number* of sins committed.<sup>59</sup>
- All the *circumstances* altering the species of mortal sins or changing a venial sin into a mortal sin. Stealing a “silver object” is not the same as stealing a blessed chalice. Petty theft is not the same as stealing valuable objects.<sup>60</sup>
- Whether there was an *external act* or not. The latter in itself does not modify the morality of the internal decision, but it is a great help for the confessor to assess the intensity of that voluntary act.
- The *effects* of such act, so that the confessor may judge whether it is necessary to repair possible damages.

There is no need to confess *doubtful sins* unless the doubt is well grounded, that is, there is real possibility of having committed them. In that case, the following criteria apply:

- If one doubts whether an act that is clearly a sin has been committed or not, there is no strict obligation to confess it, but it is advisable to do so, specifying that one is not sure.
- If the doubt refers to the seriousness of a sin certainly committed:
  - when one doubts the gravity of the matter, it is advisable to confess it in order to form one’s conscience. In any case, one is bound to resolve the doubt;
  - when the doubt refers to one’s full consent or perfect advertence, those who commit that sin with relative frequency

must confess it, specifying that there is doubt. Those who seldom fall into such sin are not bound but are advised to do so;

- If one doubts whether a mortal sin had been confessed or not, it must be confessed again unless the grounds for doubting are extremely weak.

The confession of venial sins is not strictly necessary, but is highly recommended by the Church. The habitual confession of venial sins serves to form one's conscience, fight bad inclinations, allow oneself to be cured by Christ, and progress in the life of the Spirit.<sup>61</sup>

(4) *Causes excusing from material integrity in Confession*

- Physical impossibility:
  - Extreme illness, as in the case of a dying person who could hardly speak or think
  - Muteness or ignorance of the confessor's language
  - Lack of time due to imminent danger of death
  - Invincible ignorance or forgetfulness
- Moral impossibility:
  - Persons prone to scruples
  - Danger to the life of the penitent, the confessor, or a third party
  - Danger of scandal or sin for the confessor (which is extremely rare)
  - Danger of breaking the sacramental seal
  - Danger to the good name of the penitent because it is not possible to mention the sin without being overheard by others

As much as possible, one should not reveal the identity of an accomplice unless it is absolutely necessary for the integrity of the confession. Without mentioning the accomplice, a husband could never accuse himself of having convinced his wife to take contraceptives, or a wife could not confess having convinced her husband to make bad use of the conjugal act.

In order to ensure the integrity of the confession, one is required to *examine one's conscience* before going to the sacrament. This examination must be done with due diligence. However, it should never become agonizing out of fear of omitting some sin.<sup>62</sup>

(5) *Sins forgotten in Confession*

When one or more mortal sins are not mentioned in Confession out of forgetfulness, they are also forgiven by that same confession. However, the obligation remains to mention them in the next confession, identifying them as forgotten in the previous confession. Thus, if a person who usually goes to Confession every 15 days suddenly remembers a mortal sin that he failed to confess, he may go on receiving Communion as usual and mention it in his next confession.

On the other hand, knowingly concealing a mortal sin makes the confession invalid. One has to go again to Confession and mention:

- the sacrilege of making a bad confession,
- the omitted sin, and
- all the mortal sins that were mentioned on that occasion, which were not forgiven because the confession was invalid.

These latter must also be confessed again when the confession is invalid for other reasons, either by the penitent's fault (lack of contrition) or the confessor's (he was not a real priest, or he did not give the absolution).

(6) *General confession*

General confession is the confession of sins already forgiven on previous occasions, covering all or a major part of one's life. It is not advisable for scrupulous persons. It may be beneficial in other cases. The opinion of one's own confessor should be sought if one wants to make a general confession.

## 68c) Satisfaction

The sacramental absolution takes away the sin, but one still has to fight the disorder that sin left behind. Further, one has to “satisfy” or “atone” for one’s sins. This *satisfaction*, often called penance, is the *atonement for the temporal punishment incurred through sin by means of good works imposed by the confessor and accepted by the penitent*.

The confessor is obliged to impose penance,<sup>63</sup> which has to be proportionate to the number and seriousness of the sins confessed, considering, of course, the capacity of the penitent.

In order for the sacrament to be valid, the penitent has to accept the penance and have the desire to fulfill it. If the penance is left unfulfilled, the confession remains valid, but a new sin is committed, which could be mortal (if the penance imposed was heavy) or venial (if it was light). If the penance is not fulfilled due to involuntary forgetfulness or because some circumstance made its fulfillment impossible, no sin is committed. If circumstances make it difficult to fulfill the penance imposed, the penitent may ask the same confessor, or even another, to change it.

## 69. Ecclesiastical Penalties

Ecclesiastical penalties are usually studied as an appendix to the Sacrament of Penance.

Some penalties are essentially punitive, aimed at the restoration of the damaged order and causing an exemplary and healthy aversion to the fault in question. Among these are demotion and the privation of a position. They can be lifted by dispensation.

Other penalties have a corrective purpose and are thus called “medicinal.” These are mainly the so-called *censures*: excommunication, interdict (*interdictum*), and suspension. They are lifted through absolution.

Censures can either be established by the laws of the Church or applied to a person by passing a condemnatory judicial sentence. The former can automatically accompany the crime (*latae sententiae*, “implied sentence”) or may require a sentence by a judge (*ferendae sententiae*, “requiring a sentence”).

*Excommunication* is the exclusion of a person from communion with the Church. The excommunicated person cannot administer or receive the sacraments or hold any ecclesiastical office. If the penalty is imposed or declared by a condemnatory sentence, its consequences are reinforced, that is, the excommunicate cannot validly perform acts of government in the Church, and his ministerial participation in acts of worship has to be rejected.<sup>64</sup>

An *interdict* does not sever communion with the Church, but the faithful that are affected cannot receive the sacraments or exercise their ministry in the sacred ceremonies. In the past, places could also be put under interdict (local interdict). According to the terms of the interdict, it would be forbidden to say Mass, to give ecclesiastical burial, etc. in the place put under interdict. This type of interdict is not included in the new Code.<sup>65</sup>

A *suspension* forbids clerics the exercise of all or some of the acts proper to Holy Orders, the power of government, and their office. Thus, the suspension *a divinis* forbids the participation in acts of divine worship.<sup>66</sup>

For the imposition and absolution of these penalties, the procedures established by canon law must be followed in detail. The absolution of some penalties is reserved to the Roman pontiff.

## 70. Indulgences

The point of departure for understanding indulgences is the abundance of God's mercy, made manifest in the cross of Christ. Jesus crucified is the greatest "indulgence" that the Father has offered humanity, allowing the forgiveness of sins and the possibility of filial life (cf. Jn 1:12–13) in the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 5:5; 8:15–16).

However, this gift, in the logic of the Covenant that is the heart of the entire economy of salvation, does not reach us without our acceptance and correspondence.

Keeping this in mind, it is not difficult to understand how reconciliation with God, freely offered and rich in mercy, implies at the same time a laborious process, which involves man's personal responsibility and the Church's sacramental mandate. For the pardon of those sins committed after Baptism, this process is centered on the Sacrament of Penance, but is also developed after its celebration. In fact, man must be progressively "cleansed" of the negative consequences that sin has produced in him (and that the theological tradition calls "penalties" and "residues" of sin).

At first glance, speaking of penalties after sacramental pardon could seem inconsistent. The Old Testament, however, shows us how it is normal to undergo reparation penalties after the pardon. In fact, in 2 Samuel, the humble confession of King David obtains for him God's forgiveness, but not the suppression of his punishment (cf. 2 Sm 12:13–14). The paternal love of God does not exclude punishment, though it is always included within the merciful justice that works for the good of man by re-establishing the order violated by sin (cf. Heb 12:4–11).

Thus, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that sin has a double consequence: First, mortal sin deprives us from communion with God and makes us incapable of eternal life; this deprivation is called *eternal punishment* for sin. Second, every sin—even venial—entails an inordinate attachment to some creature. This attachment should be purified, either here on earth through penance, or after death in a state called purgatory. This purification cleanses the *temporal punishment* for sin.<sup>67</sup> In this context, temporal punishment expresses the condition of suffering of a person who is both reconciled to God and still marked by the "residue" of sin, and

thereby unable to fully open himself to grace. Precisely in view of this complete healing, the sinner is called to embark on a road of purification toward the fullness of love.

A Christian is not alone in this purification. He counts on God's grace, and the treasury of merits of all other Christians, on earth and in heaven, all united in the Mystical Body of Christ. The same temporal punishment is "medicinal" insofar as man lets it work toward his deep conversion. This is also the meaning of the "satisfaction" required in the Sacrament of Penance.

The meaning of indulgences must be understood within this horizon of the total renewal of man in virtue of the grace of Christ the Redeemer, through the ministry of the Church. Indulgences have their historical origin in the ancient Church's awareness of being able to express the mercy of God by lessening the canonical penance required for the sacramental remission of sins. However, this mitigation was always balanced by personal and communitarian responsibility, which would take on, by way of substitution, the "medicinal" function of the penalty.

Now, we can understand how indulgences are the "remission in the sight of God of the temporal punishment due to sins, the guilt of which has already been forgiven. A member of Christ's faithful who is properly disposed and who fulfils certain specific conditions, may gain an indulgence by the help of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, authoritatively dispenses and applies the treasury of the merits of Christ and the Saints."<sup>68</sup>

Therefore, the Church has a treasury from which she "dispenses" by means of indulgences. Such "distribution" is not meant as a sort of automatic transferal, as if they were "things." It is rather an expression of the Church's full faith in being heard by the Father when it asks him to mitigate or annul the sorrowful aspect of the penalty—in view of the merits of Christ and, as his gift, of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints. This shows forth the medicinal aspect of the way of grace.

It is therefore clear that, far from being a sort of "discount" for the obligations of conversion, indulgences are instead an aid to carry out those obligations more quickly, generously, and radically.

The Roman pontiff can grant indulgences for the entire Church, and a bishop, with certain limitations, can do so for his diocese. Other persons can



also grant indulgences when authorized by law or by the Roman Pontiff.<sup>69</sup>

*Plenary indulgences* fully forgive the temporal punishment; *partial indulgences* forgive only part of it.<sup>70</sup>

To receive a plenary indulgence, a spiritual disposition is required that excludes “every affection towards all sin, even venial.”<sup>71</sup>

It would be a mistake to think that this gift can be received by simply carrying out some exterior deed. On the contrary, the deeds are required as an expression and support on the road to conversion. In particular, they manifest the faith in God’s abundant mercy and in the wonderful reality of communion that Christ has realized, indissolubly uniting the Church to himself as his body and his spouse.

Partial indulgence forgives a portion of temporal punishment equivalent to what would be forgiven by performing that same work if it were not endowed with indulgence. We could say that the indulgence doubles the merit of the work.<sup>72</sup> In the past, partial indulgences were measured by periods of time. This seems to refer to the periods of public penance practiced in the early Church.

In order to gain an indulgence, one must:

- have the intention of receiving it,
- be in the state of sanctifying grace, and
- perform the work prescribed.

In order to gain a *plenary* indulgence, one must:

- go to *Confession* within eight days before or after performing the enjoined work,
- receive *Communion* on the day or within eight days after performing the work,
- pray for the Roman pontiff, and
- not be attached to any sin, no matter how small.

In the unfathomable mystery of divine wisdom, this gift of intercession can benefit even the faithfully departed, who receive its fruits according to their condition. The merit of an indulgence may be applied to oneself or to the holy souls in purgatory.<sup>73</sup> However, since these souls do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Church, the application of the indulgences is done as a supplication (*per modum suffragii*), which the Church addresses to our Lord in favor of that particular soul.

1. Cf. CCC, 1422–1498.
2. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 64.
3. Cf. ST, III, q. 85, aa. 1–3.
4. DS 1638.
5. Cf. CCC, 1430–1439.
6. Cf. ST, III, q. 86, a. 2.
7. Cf. CCC, 1441–1445.
8. Cf. DS 802.
9. DS 1706; cf. DS 1679–83.
10. CIC, 959.
11. Cf. DS 1670.
12. Cf. DS 1679, 1685, 1789.
13. Cf. CCC, 1446–1449.
14. Cf. ST, III, q. 84, a. 2.
15. Cf. DS 1680.
16. Cf. DS 1680.
17. Cf. DS 1323, 1673.
18. Cf. *Ordo Paenitentiae*: AAS 66 (1974) 172; CCC, 1480–1484.
19. Cf. CIC, 960.
20. Cf. *Ibid.*, 962.
21. Cf. *Pastoral Norms for the Doctrine of the Faith*: AAS 64 (1972) 510–514. A summary of these norms is included in the above-mentioned *Ordo Paenitentiae*, and an even briefer one is found in CIC, 961–963, and in CCC, 1483.
22. Cf. CCC, 1468–1470, 1496.
23. Cf. DS 1680.
24. Cf. ST, III, q. 87, a. 2, ad 2.
25. Cf. DS 1600.
26. Cf. DS 668, 1543.
27. Cf. DS 1582.
28. Cf. DS 1671.
29. New *Ordo Paenitentiae*, Dec. 2, 1973, 34; cf. CIC, 989; CCC, 1457.
30. Cf. CIC, 914; CCC, 1457.
31. Cf. DS 1710; CIC, 965; CCC, 1461–1467.
32. Cf. DS 812, 1323, 1686; CIC, 966.
33. Cf. DS 1687.
34. Cf. CIC, 967–969.
35. Cf. *Ibid.*, 976.
36. Cf. DS 1687.
37. Canons 893–900 of the 1917 *Codex Iuris Canonici* were devoted to these sins, but the present CIC does not consider them.
38. Cf. CIC, 970.
39. Cf. *Ibid.*, 980.
40. Cf. *Ibid.*, 979.
41. Cf. *Ibid.*, 978.
42. Cf. *Ibid.*, 981.

43. Cf. *Ibid.*, 964.
44. Cf. *Ibid.*, 983–984.
45. Cf. *Ibid.*, 986; *CCC*, 1464.
46. Cf. *CIC*, 977, 1387.
47. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1390, 982; *CCC*, 1463.
48. DS 1676; cf. *CCC*, 1451–1454.
49. Cf. DS 1558.
50. Cf. DS 1677.
51. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibetales*, 1.9.
52. Cf. DS 1676.
53. *ST*, III, q. 84, a. 10, ad 4.
54. Cf. DS 1680; *CCC*, 1455–1458.
55. Cf. DS 1679.
56. Cf. DS 812.
57. Cf. DS 1682, 1707.
58. Cf. DS 1682, 1707.
59. Cf. DS 1682, 1707.
60. Cf. DS 1681, 1682, 1707.
61. Cf. DS 1680; *CIC*, 988; *CCC*, 1458.
62. Cf. DS 1682, 1707; *CCC*, 1454.
63. Cf. DS 1692, *CIC*, 981, *CCC*, 1459–1460.
64. Cf. *CIC*, 1331; *CCC*, 1463.
65. Cf. *CIC*, 1332.
66. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1333.
67. Cf. *CCC*, 1472.
68. *CIC*, 992; cf. *CCC*, 1471–1479.
69. Cf. *CIC*, 995.
70. Cf. *Ibid.*, 993.
71. Sacred Penitentiary, *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*, norm 6: AAS 60 (1968) p. 25.
72. Cf. Paul VI, Ap. Const. *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, 12 and norm 5: AAS 59 (1967) 5–24; Sacred Penitentiary, *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*, norm 6: AAS 60 (1968) 413–419.
73. Cf. *CIC*, 994.

## Anointing of the Sick

BY THE SACRED Anointing of the Sick and the prayer of priests, the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord that He may raise them up and save them. Indeed, she exhorts them to contribute to the good of the People of God by freely uniting themselves to the passion and death of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

## 71. Nature and Institution

Christ's compassion toward the sick was a sign that "God has visited his people" (Lk 7:16). Jesus "has borne our grief and carried our sorrows" (Is 53:4). Still, he did not cure all the sick. His cures announced a more radical healing: the victory of his paschal mystery over sin and death.

For a Christian, the acceptance of death can be considered an act of worship, adoration, and reparation all at the same time. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is, thus, in a way, a consecration of death in which we identify ourselves with Christ, who willed his own death in atonement for our sins.<sup>2</sup>

*The Anointing of the Sick, or "Extreme Unction," is a sacrament in which, through the anointing with the blessed oil and the prayer of the priest, the faithful who are capable of committing personal sins and who are seriously ill receive health of soul and, at times, bodily health as well.*

This sacrament, instituted by Christ like all the rest, was promulgated by the apostle James (cf. Jas 5:14). We do not know the moment of its institution, although it was announced at least partially when Christ sent his disciples by pairs to preach and heal the sick, anointing them with oil (cf. Mk 6:7–13). The Council of Trent cites both of the above texts when it defines the existence of this sacrament.<sup>3</sup>

## 72. The Matter and Form of the Anointing of the Sick

The *proximate matter* of this sacrament is the anointing of the forehead and hands of the sick person with oil, which is carried out by the priest. If the condition of the subject makes this inconvenient, the anointing may be done on another part of the body.<sup>4</sup>

The *remote matter* is the oil used for anointing, which has to be:

- olive oil or, when this is not available, another vegetable oil,<sup>5</sup>
- blessed by the bishop for this purpose during the Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday; however, in case of emergency, the priest may bless the oil immediately prior to the administration of the sacrament.<sup>6</sup>

The *form* of the sacrament consists of the words said by the priest during the anointing. In the Latin Rite, the words are, “Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.”<sup>7</sup>

## 73. Effects of the Anointing of the Sick

Anointing of the Sick is a sacrament of the living. Thus, in principle, it ought to be received in the state of grace. It is immediate preparation for entrance into glory.<sup>8</sup>

Its proper effect is likened to the finishing touch, the ultimate perfection of the effects of the Sacrament of Penance: it completely erases the residue left by sins that are already forgiven, and strengthens the person to avoid sins in the future.<sup>9</sup> This sacrament has two types of effects:

i) *Direct effects:*

- It unites the sick person to Christ's Passion for his own good and the good of the entire Church.
- It fills the sick person with peace by producing great confidence in the divine mercy. It also gives more strength to resist the temptations of the devil, who seems to double his efforts to bring a soul to damnation at this particular moment. This confidence and strength, in turn, helps one to bear the discomfort and pain that is brought about by the illness.<sup>10</sup>
- When the sick person is properly disposed, it eliminates the traces left by sin, and forgives all venial sins.
- It heals the body if such is advantageous to the salvation of the soul.
- It prepares the sick person to enter eternal life.

ii) *Indirect effects:* The Anointing of the Sick also forgives mortal sins when the following conditions are both met:

- It is doubtful whether the sick person can receive the Sacrament of Penance, even conditionally (because, for example, the sick person was already unconscious).
- The sick person had repented of his sins before losing consciousness, at least in a general and implicit way.<sup>11</sup>

Because of these effects, the Anointing of the Sick is an invaluable sacrament for the sick who have lost consciousness. The best service that one can do for them is to make sure that they receive it.

## **74. The Necessity of Receiving the Anointing of the Sick**

Although this sacrament is not necessary as a means for salvation, it is not licit for anyone to scorn its reception. The obligation to receive it is considered light in itself unless there is danger of grave scandal or a formal contempt of the sacrament.



## **75. The Minister of the Anointing of the Sick**

*“Every priest, but only a priest, can validly administer the anointing of the sick.”*<sup>12</sup>

Regarding its *lawfulness*, the administration of this sacrament belongs to the priests with care of souls: the parish priest or his substitute, the chaplain of a clinic or hospital, etc. For a reasonable cause, any priest may administer it with the consent—at least presumed—of the pastor of the sick person. In case of necessity, any priest can do it, even if the pastor’s permission is not presumed.<sup>13</sup>

The present law of the Church allows priests to carry the holy oils with them in order to facilitate the administration of this sacrament in urgent and unexpected cases.<sup>14</sup>

## **76. The Subject of the Anointing of the Sick**

“The anointing of the sick can be administered to any member of the faithful who, having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger by reason of illness or old age.”<sup>15</sup>

It would be useless to administer a sacrament whose purpose is to perfect penance and erase the remains and effects of sin to those who cannot commit personal sins—like a child or someone who has never attained the use of reason.

The danger of death does not have to be imminent and certain—the beginning of danger is enough. However, it must be due to sickness or old age. In any case, one should not procrastinate.<sup>16</sup> Experience shows that the sick persons receiving this sacrament do not get frightened by its reception. On the contrary, they are filled with peace, even those who were estranged from the sacraments.

This sacrament can be repeated when one falls sick again or if one’s condition deteriorates within the same sickness.<sup>17</sup>

## 77. The Celebration of the Anointing of the Sick

As a sacrament, the Anointing of the Sick may be celebrated in a community or in a liturgical manner within the family, in a hospital or in the church, and for one sick person or for a group.

The present ritual allows several ways of administering the sacrament. The usual way is to first hear the confession of the sick person and then anoint him and give him the Viaticum.<sup>18</sup> In cases of urgent need or when the person is unconscious, the anointing is performed immediately,<sup>19</sup> although it is advisable to absolve the person *sub conditione* first.

When there is doubt about whether the sick person is still alive, a conditional anointing should be performed, saying first “If you are alive ...” There can be reasonable doubt as long as death is not evident (*rigor mortis* or decay), since it may well happen that real death—the separation of the soul from the body—takes place some time after apparent death.<sup>20</sup>

Conditional anointing can also be administered when there is doubt about the seriousness of the sickness or the ability to use reason.<sup>21</sup> Again, a conditional clause must precede it: “If you are able ...”

Common celebration of the anointing for several sick persons is also permissible.<sup>22</sup>

1. LG, 11; cf. CCC, 1499–1532.

2. Cf. CCC, 1500–1513.

3. Cf. DS 1695, 1716; CCC, 1526–1527.

4. Cf. *Ordo Unctionis Infirmorum*: AAS 65 (1973) 5, no. 23; CIC, 998, 1000; *The Rites*, p. 587; CCC, 1519, 1531.

5. Cf. *Ordo Unctionis Infirmorum*: AAS 65 (1973) 5, no. 20.

6. Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 21; CIC, 999.

7. *Ordo Unctionis Infirmorum*: AAS 65 (1973) 5, no. 25.

8. Cf. ST, I-II, q. 102, a. 5, ad 3; III, q. 65, a. 1, ad 4; CCC, 1520–1523, 1532.

9. Cf. ST, III, q. 65, a. 1.

10. Cf. *Roman Catechism*, 2.5.15.

11. Cf. DS 1696; *Roman Catechism*, 2.5.14.

12. CIC, 1003. Author’s emphasis; cf. CCC, 1516, 1530.

13. Cf. CIC, 1003.

14. Cf. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 1004; cf. *CCC*, 1514–1515, 1528–1529.
16. Cf. *CIC*, 1001.
17. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1004.
18. Cf. *CCC*, 1517–1525.
19. Cf. *Ordo Unctionis Infirmorum*: AAS 65 (1973) 5, no. 30.
20. Cf. *CIC*, 1005.
21. Cf. *Ibid.*
22. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1002.

## Holy Orders

THERE ARE TWO sacraments—Holy Orders and Marriage—whose end is the salvation of others. They contribute to the building of the People of God.

In these two sacraments, those who were *consecrated* through Baptism and Confirmation for the common priesthood of all the faithful may receive a particular consecration. Those who receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders are *consecrated* “to nourish the Church with the word and grace of God in the name of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

## 78. The Priesthood of Christ

The chosen people were constituted by God as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6; cf. Is 61:6). However, God chose one of the twelve tribes of Israel—the Levites—for liturgical service (cf. Nm 1:48–53). The priesthood of the tribe of Levi was instituted to announce the word of God and offer sacrifices on behalf of the whole people. Their sacrifices, however, could not achieve definitive salvation (cf. Heb 5:3; 7:27; 10:1–4ff), which can be achieved only through Christ’s sacrifice. The Levitical priesthood was a prefiguration of the priesthood of the New Covenant.<sup>2</sup>

The redeeming sacrifice of Christ is one and unique; it was accomplished once and for all; it becomes present in the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Church. Similarly, the priesthood of Christ is one and unique; it becomes present through the ministerial priesthood. “Only Christ is the true priest; the others are his ministers.”<sup>3</sup>

There are two ways of participating in the one priesthood of Christ:

- i) *The common priesthood of the faithful*, which is conferred through Baptism and Confirmation
- ii) *The ministerial priesthood* of the ordained minister, which is at the service of the common priesthood of the faithful<sup>4</sup>

## 79. The Hierarchical Nature of the Church

*By divine institution, the Church is hierarchical; the sacred power is transmitted through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.*<sup>5</sup> “By divine institution some among Christ’s faithful are, through the sacrament of order, marked with an indelible character and are thus constituted sacred ministers; thereby they are consecrated and deputed so that, each according to his own grade, they fulfill, in the person of Christ the Head, the offices of teaching, sanctifying and ruling, and so they nourish the people of God.”<sup>6</sup>

In order to approach this subject properly, we should keep the following principles in mind:

- All the Christian faithful are radically and fundamentally equal.
- All the faithful are radically called and empowered to participate in the mission of the Church, which is the sanctification of all her members. This call and power is received in Baptism and perfected through Confirmation.
- Additionally, there are other priestly functions, primarily related to the Holy Eucharist, the pardon of sins, and the other sacraments. These functions include authoritatively preaching the word of God and governing the faithful in all that refers to the Kingdom of God.
- For these latter functions, a different radical power is required. The ministerial priesthood—received through the Sacrament of Holy Orders—differs in its essence, not just in degree, from the common priesthood of the faithful—as the recent popes have insistently asserted.<sup>7</sup>

## 80. The Nature and Institution of Holy Orders

*Holy Orders* can be defined as *the sacrament that confers the spiritual power and the grace that is needed to properly fulfill the ecclesiastical functions*. As was mentioned earlier, these powers refer to these duties:

- *The Eucharist*. During the Last Supper, Christ asked his apostles to renew the sacrifice of the cross in an unbloody manner, doing what he had just done (cf. Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24–25).
- *The forgiveness of sins*. This power was first promised to Peter (cf. Mt 16:19), then to the other disciples (cf. Mt 18:18), and finally—after the Resurrection—was communicated when Christ “breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’” (Jn 20:22–23).
- *The preaching of the faith, the administration of the sacraments, and government* in all that refers to faith and the sacraments. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19–20).

We also have proof that after his Resurrection, Christ confirmed the supreme power entrusted to Peter in a special manner (cf. Jn 21:15–17).

All these powers would have been of little use if they had disappeared with the apostles. Therefore, *Christ commanded them to transmit these powers to their successors*, which they did. They laid their hands upon those whom they had chosen (cf. Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tm 4:14; 2 Tm 1:6); they appointed presbyters and bishops to rule the local churches (cf. Acts 14:23; 20:28), to administer the sacraments (cf. 1 Cor 4:1), and to watch over the purity of doctrine and to foster virtuous life (cf. 1 Thes 3:2; 1 Cor 4:17; 1 Tm 1:1–12; 5:19–22; Ti 1:5–9).

Accordingly, the Church has always explicitly and solemnly taught the existence of this sacrament. Her teaching has been all the more insistent when fighting heresies, as during the Council of Trent against the Protestants, or in recent times against modernism and neomodernism.<sup>8</sup>

In the Sacrament of Holy Orders our Father God has made it possible for some members of the faithful, by virtue of a further and ineffable



communication of the Holy Spirit, to receive an indelible character on their soul which configures them to Christ the priest so that they can act in the name of Jesus Christ, head of his mystical body. By virtue of this ministerial priesthood—which differs essentially and not only in degree from the common priesthood of the faithful—the sacred ministers can consecrate the body and blood of Christ, offering God the holy sacrifice. They can pardon sins in sacramental confession and carry out the ministry of teaching the peoples “about everything that refers to God” (Heb 5:1)—and nothing more.<sup>9</sup>

## 81. Different Degrees of Orders in the Church

In ancient Rome, the term *order* [*ordo*] designated a body of individuals constituted in the civil sense. *Ordinatio* was the ceremony of admission into that *ordo*. Similarly, there are constituted bodies in the Church (cf. Heb 5:6; 7:11) called *ordo episcoporum*, *ordo presbyterorum*, and *ordo diaconorum*. The *ordinatio* is the conferral of Sacrament of Holy Orders. By divine institution, *the hierarchy of the Church is made up of bishops, presbyters, and deacons.*<sup>10</sup>

The three degrees of orders constitute a single sacrament, which implies that there are different degrees of participation in Christ's unique priesthood. The bishops and presbyters participate as ministers in the priesthood of Christ (they are designated in Latin as *sacerdotes*); the deacons help and serve the other two orders.

## 81 a) Bishops

The fullness of priestly power is found in the highest order, the *episcopate*.<sup>11</sup> The bishops are the successors of the apostles. One is constituted a member of the episcopal body by virtue of the sacramental consecration and by hierarchical communion with the head (the pope) and members of the college.<sup>12</sup> Each bishop is the visible head of the particular church under his care. He rules his dioceses with ordinary authority, subject only to that of the pope. Further, he shares with his brothers in the episcopate—in a collegiate manner—*solicitude for all churches*.

The Eucharist celebrated by the bishop has a special signification as an expression of the Church gathered around the altar under the bishop, who visibly represents Christ. However, the bishops' powers are not greater than the priests' in the consecration of the Eucharist. Still, their power is certainly greater regarding the other sacraments and the instruction and government of the faithful. Only bishops can confer the Sacrament of Holy Orders. They are also the ordinary ministers of Confirmation and the blessing of oils and some objects destined for sacred uses. They confer to the priests whatever power these may have to rule the faithful and preach authoritatively the word of God.

## 81b) Priests

The priests (presbyters) are true priests, united to the bishops in the priestly dignity, and they depend on the bishops for their pastoral tasks. They form a body (the *presbyterium*) around the bishop to help him serve the people of God. The priests' mission is universal—the mission Christ entrusted to the apostles—but it is usually specified in the care of a parish community or some ecclesiastical office given by the bishop.

*The tasks of priests* are consecrating the body and blood of the Lord, forgiving sins, announcing the Gospel, caring for the faithful with their example and doctrine, and administering the sacraments that do not require episcopal powers.

## 81c) Deacons

The deacons are ministers ordained for the service of the Church.

The deacons' tasks consist in assisting the priest and the bishop in liturgical celebrations and the ministry of the word, sharing in the pastoral government and service of charity, administering solemn Baptism, reserving and distributing the Holy Eucharist, officiating the benediction with the Blessed Sacrament, assisting at marriages when properly delegated, and assisting at blessings and funerals.

The ministries—*lector* and *acolyte*, which have taken the place of the former *minor orders*—are different from sacred Holy Orders. Neither of those ministries is a sacrament.

## 82. The Matter, Form, and Rite of Holy Orders

The *matter* of Holy Orders is the laying on of hands by the ordaining bishop.<sup>13</sup>

The *form* consists of the words of the ritual accompanying the laying on of the hands by the bishop. In this case, the union of words and laying on of hands is not immediate but moral; they are united by being part of the same rite.<sup>14</sup>

The ordination is always done during the Mass, before the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and always in accordance with the approved rite. In the Latin Rite, it begins with the presentation and election of the candidates and the litany of the saints. These rites are a preparation for the solemn act of consecration.

Afterwards, the newly ordained bishops or presbyters are anointed with holy chrism, a sign of the special anointing of the Holy Spirit. He makes their ministry fruitful. A bishop is given the *Book of the Gospels*, the ring, the miter, and the crosier. These are symbols of his mission of announcing the word of God, of his fidelity to the Church—the bride of Christ—and of his office as shepherd of the Lord’s flock. A presbyter is given the paten and chalice. He is called to present the sacrifice of the people of God. A deacon is given the *Book of the Gospels* to proclaim the Gospel of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

## 83. The Effects of Holy Orders

### 83a) Character

In this sacrament, the character consists in a special configuration of the subject to Christ, as head of the Mystical Body. This enables him to participate in Christ's priesthood in a most unique way. The character is indelible: The vocation and mission received at his ordination marks a man as a priest forever.<sup>16</sup> The priest thus becomes:

- an authoritative *minister* ("servant") of the word of God (teaching role). "The priest is also an *educator in the faith*; he has to train the faithful so that they achieve full Christian maturity; this is expressed in a living charity and in the continuous search for the will of God... In carrying out this mission, the priest must realize that he is a minister of the Gospel and a pastor of the Church, and be careful to avoid ever appearing to mix his sacred mission with any ideological or sectarian interest;"<sup>17</sup>
- a *minister of the sacraments*, especially the Eucharist (sanctifying role);<sup>18</sup>
- a *minister of the people of God*, for which he is made a member of the hierarchy within his own degree (governing role).

There is a *hierarchy of order*, which is comprised of bishops, priests, and deacons, ordained to offering the holy sacrifice and the administration of the sacraments.

There is also a *hierarchy of jurisdiction*, which the pope and the bishops in communion with him comprise. With regard to the latter, there are other accidental degrees that have developed through the centuries: cardinals, patriarchs, metropolitans or archbishops, etc. Priests and deacons, as such, belong to this hierarchy only through their cooperation with their respective bishops.

## 83b) Grace

Holy Orders, like other sacraments of the living, *increases sanctifying grace*. It also brings *sacramental grace*, which, in this case, consists in the help that is needed to properly perform the functions of the degree of orders received.<sup>19</sup>



## 84. The Minister of Holy Orders

Christ “gives” some men as apostles, some as evangelists (cf. Eph 4:11). Further, he continues acting through the bishops. Thus, “*The minister of sacred ordination is a consecrated Bishop.*”<sup>20</sup> Only a bishop can *validly* ordain. Priests, not enjoying the fullness of Holy Orders, do not have the capacity to confer this sacrament. This was defined by the Council of Florence and confirmed by the Council of Trent.<sup>21</sup>

There are further requirements for the *lawfulness* of the ordination:

- If a bishop ordains a layman to the diaconate, he must incardinate him in his own diocese, unless he receives dimissorial letters from the bishop who will incardinate the deacon in a different diocese.
- A deacon should be ordained to the priesthood by his own bishop or by another only at the request of the proper bishop.<sup>22</sup>
- For the episcopal consecration of a priest, the consecrating bishop must make sure that the appropriate pontifical mandate had been issued, and he should be assisted by at least two other consecrating bishops.<sup>23</sup>

Observing the cautions required by canon law, the ordaining minister must also establish, by himself or through another person, that the following conditions are met:

- The candidate must meet the requisite qualities, which will be discussed below.
- In the judgment of the bishop, he must be beneficial to the ministry of the Church.
- The candidate must be free from any irregularity or impediment to his ordination.<sup>24</sup>

## 85. The Subject of Holy Orders

By divine institution, “*only a baptized man can validly receive sacred ordination.*”<sup>25</sup> Christ wanted those who publicly exercise the sacred ministry in his name to be men. Thus, he chose his apostles among his male disciples.

Neither the apostles nor their successors ever ordained women, despite the fact that priestesses were common in the Greek world they lived in after leaving their Jewish communities. The Church acknowledges that she is bound by this decision of our Lord.

With that decision, Christ probably intended to stress that priests celebrate the Holy Mass *in persona Christi*, “in the person of Christ.” The sacramental symbolism requires a natural likeness between the priest and Christ, who was and is a male.<sup>26</sup>

The dignity of women is in no way diminished by their not being eligible for ordination. The most exalted human person is the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, but Christ chose not to call her to the ministerial priesthood. However, she participates in the priesthood of her Son in a most eminent degree as co-redemptrix and mediatrix of all graces.

On the other hand, all the faithful—both men and women—equally participate in the common dignity of the children of God. Except for this incapacity to be ordained, women enjoy in the Church the same rights and duties as men.<sup>27</sup>

For the ordination to be *valid*, the candidate must have the intention to receive it.<sup>28</sup>

For the ordination to be *lawful*, there are further conditions:

- The candidate must have a *divine vocation*, which is comprised of:
  - sound faith,
  - proven virtue and firm and steadfast resolution,
  - aptitude for the exercise of the functions proper to Holy Orders (age, etc.),
  - sufficient knowledge,
  - right intention (the glory of God and the salvation of souls).<sup>29</sup>
- He must have received the Sacrament of Confirmation.

- He must *submit to the bishop a request for ordination* written in his own hand, attesting that he freely asks to be ordained to the diaconate or priesthood, and that he will devote himself for life to the ecclesiastical ministry.<sup>30</sup>
- Being a sacrament of the living, the candidate must be *in the state of grace*.

## 86. Obligations of the Clergy

The law of the Church, for reasons rooted in the mystery of Christ and his mission, imposes *celibacy* on all priests of the Latin Church.<sup>31</sup>

This measure is particularly convenient, as celibacy allows a greater surrender to Christ, a closer imitation of his example, and greater availability for the service of the Church and all souls. Further, it offers an eschatological witness by showing the reality of eternal life, “for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage” (Mt 22:30).<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, the Latin Church reserves priesthood for those who have received the gift of celibacy, which is freely granted by God and freely exercised by those who receive it.<sup>33</sup>

Celibacy is also required for unmarried candidates to the permanent diaconate.

The *other obligations* of the clergy are:

- special *obedience* to the pope and one’s own bishop,<sup>34</sup>
- *availability* to perform whatever assignment is received,<sup>35</sup>
- *holiness of life*,<sup>36</sup> which includes praying the Divine Office and other exercises of piety,<sup>37</sup>
- *continued studies* and intellectual formation,<sup>38</sup>
- *wearing the clerical attire*,<sup>39</sup>
- *abstaining from some* activities and occupations that are forbidden to clerics.<sup>40</sup>

1. LG, 11.

2. Cf. CCC, 1539–1543.

3. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Hebr.*, 7.4.

4. Cf. CCC, 1533–1547.

5. Cf. DS 1764; *PO*, 2.

6. *CIC*, 1008.

7. This issue is discussed at length by Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo, *Faithful and Laity in the Church* (Shannon, Ireland: Ecclesia Press, 1972), pp. 19–24; *Ibid.*, *On Priesthood* (Princeton:

- Scepter Press, 1974), p. 20ff.
8. Cf. DS 1752, 1771, 1773.
  9. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 79.
  10. Cf. DS 1776; *CIC*, 1009; *CCC*, 1537–1538, 1554–1557, 1593–1596.
  11. Cf. Pius XII, Ap. Const. *Sacramentum Ordinis*, Nov. 30, 1947: DS 3860; *CD*, 15.
  12. Cf. *LG*, 22.
  13. Cf. Pius XII, Ap. Const. *Sacramentum Ordinis*: DS 3859; *CIC*, 1009; *CCC*, 1573, 1597.
  14. Cf. Paul VI, Ap. Const. *Pontificalis Romani Recognito*, AAS 60 (1968) 369–73; *CIC*, 1009.
  15. Cf. *CCC*, 1574; *CIC*, 1010.
  16. Cf. *CIC*, 1008; *CCC*, 1581–1589.
  17. Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo, *On Priesthood*, pp. 24–25.
  18. Cf. *PO*, 5.
  19. Cf. DS 1326.
  20. *CIC*, 1012; cf. *LG*, 21; *CCC*, 1575–1576, 1600.
  21. Cf. DS 1326, 1777.
  22. Cf. *CIC*, 1015–1016.
  23. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1013–1014.
  24. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1025, 1050–1052.
  25. *Ibid.*, 1024; cf. *CCC*, 1577–1580, 1598.
  26. Cf. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 26–27; Paul VI, Rescript to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Nov. 30, 1975 and March 23, 1976: AAS 68 (1976) 599–601; Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (*Inter Insigniores*), Oct. 15, 1976: AAS 69 (1977) 98–116; *CCC*, 1577.
  27. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations*, 14.
  28. Cf. *CIC*, 1026.
  29. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1029.
  30. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1036.
  31. Cf. *PO*, 16; *OT*, 10; Paul VI, Enc. *Sacerdotalis Coelibatus*; *CCC*, 1579–1580, 1599.
  32. Cf. Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo, *On Priesthood*, pp. 39–56.
  33. Cf. *CIC*, 277.
  34. Cf. *Ibid.*, 273.
  35. Cf. *Ibid.*, 274.
  36. Cf. *Ibid.*, 276.
  37. Cf. *Ibid.*
  38. Cf. *Ibid.*, 279.
  39. Cf. *Ibid.*, 284.
  40. Cf. *Ibid.*, 285–286.

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## Marriage as a Natural Institution

## 87. Introduction

The intimate partnership of life and the love, which constitutes the married state, has been *established by the Creator* and endowed by him with its own proper laws ... this sacred bond no longer depends on human decision alone.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, when Christians get married, through that very act, they receive a sacrament. Any study on the sacraments must, then, include the Sacrament of Marriage.

God has also placed in our body the power to generate, which is a participation in his own creative power. He has wanted to use love to bring new human beings into the world and to increase the body of the Church. Thus, sex is not a shameful thing; it is a divine gift, ordained to life, to love, to fruitfulness.

This is the context in which we must see the Christian doctrine on sex.<sup>2</sup>

To understand marriage, we must first examine the married state, just as to understand a contract, one must first study the terms of the agreement. The married state, however, is not a sacrament in itself.

On the other hand, both the married state and the way to enter into it are essentially the same for Christians and non-Christians. The only substantial difference is that the act of getting married produces supernatural effects in Christians: These are the effects proper to the sacrament.

The above implies that to understand marriage, we will have to study matters concerning natural ethics. Therefore, all that is said in the following pages about the married state and marriage applies to all persons unless the context clearly indicates that it refers only to Christians. We will consider several closely connected aspects:

- Natural ethics aspects, like the ends and properties of marriage
- Sacramental aspects, like the essence of the sacrament, its institution, effects, and its minister
- Indirect consequences of the sacrament, like the jurisdiction of the Church over the marriage of Christians

Before going into a systematic study of the topic, we will discuss some important background considerations.

Compared to that of animals, the development of human beings is remarkably slow. Since humans also have an immaterial element, that development is both spiritual and material: Development consists of the

affective life, language, and moral conscience. All these are developments of the potentialities that the new being possessed from the beginning.

The purpose of education is to foster this development. The word *education* comes from *educere*, “to draw out of,” to help draw out and develop what is inside. Therefore, when we say that *the primary purpose of marriage is the offspring* (as well as the good of the spouses), we must specify that it covers *both procreation and education of the offspring*.

This truly human and spiritual aspect of the education of the child is made possible by the spiritual faculties that the child already has. However, the quality of this education greatly depends on the human and spiritual level of his environment, which is essentially created by the parents. We must then consider the fundamental element that makes this atmosphere conducive to the education of a new being: the true love of the parents and its projection into the family environment.

Human sexual love is in itself directed to reproduction within the family. Its two characteristics, naturally resulting from the purpose of marriage, are usually called *essential properties of marriage*:

- *Unity* (one man with one woman)
- *Indissolubility* (lasts throughout life)

This truly human, faithful love creates the family atmosphere that is needed for the proper human—therefore spiritual—development of the children.

Further, the spiritual growth of the parents themselves—their truly human behavior—also depends on this faithful love. Any other sexual union would hinder it. Faithful love is also the foundation of what is usually called the *mutual help and the remedy of concupiscence*. Therefore, fidelity to the unity and indissolubility of marriage is still needed after the children have grown up, or in the case of childless couples.

This chapter and the next will be devoted to marriage. We will first study it *as a natural institution*: its nature and ends, its essential properties (unity and indissolubility),<sup>3</sup> and the obligations of the spouses regarding conjugal relations. In the next chapter, we will study it *as a sacrament*: the celebration of marriage, its impediments, and the validation of invalid marriages.



## 88. Natural Marriage and Civil Law

*Civil law should protect marriage*—as it does other human realities—*in order to foster truly human behavior*. However, this behavior ultimately depends on human freedom.

One of the most pernicious consequences—which often goes unnoticed—of the legalization of divorce and the remarriage of divorcees is the trivialization of love and marriage. Legal divorce harms the whole civic community by creating a general state of opinion adverse to marriage: There is a more or less vague belief that one marries with the intention of making it last, but if it turns awry, there is always the possibility of ending it and trying again. This trivialization of love and marriage negatively affects all couples—not only those who divorce—and fosters less-than-human behavior.

This is a valid reason that those who do not intend to get a divorce have the right to oppose its legalization, just as those who do not want to steal can validly oppose the legalization of theft. This does not mean that they are only trying to preempt future dalliances of their spouses (or the danger of being robbed); it is a matter of public interest.

## 89. The Church and Marriage of Christians

The Church has a certain jurisdiction over the marriage of Catholic faithful, since, for them, the act of entering the married state constitutes a sacrament. Still, the act in itself—the mutual consent—is essentially the same as for non-Christians.

Since the sacrament cannot be separated from the natural marriage, and no other institution can have any power over the sacraments, the Church has exclusive jurisdiction over the marriage of the faithful, except for its merely civil effects.

It is, then, up to the Church to establish the procedures for Christians to get married, and only the Church can determine the obstacles to marriage (impediments), the way to remove them (dispensations), or judge concrete situations, like the validity or nullity of specific marriages.

The *pronouncements of the Church on aspects of marriage belonging to natural law* (unity, indissolubility, or improper use of marriage) neither apply only to Catholics nor are exclusively addressed to them. These are *authoritative declarations of a universal nature and apply to all marriages, Catholic or not*.

Thus, the doctrine of the Church on the indissolubility of marriage or the immorality of contraception is not, as some claim, “only for Catholics.” Natural law applies equally to everyone, even to those who deny its existence. Catholics know that breaking natural law necessarily brings evil consequences on the natural level. The authentic interpretation of the Magisterium of the Church does not add anything new to a pre-existent law and obligation, which are implicit in the judgment of a non-deformed conscience.

With the help of the Church’s authentic interpretation of natural law, the faithful can act according to the requirements of human dignity or rectify their mistaken opinions. When a Catholic, enlightened by the authentic interpretation of the Magisterium, follows natural law, he or she is also acting in obedience to the Church. Still, in the final analysis, he is obeying natural law.

Some of the doctrinal principles on marriage, its nature, and its ends may at times seem too demanding. When this happens, we should not forget that God is the author of nature, and he does not impose harmful or unrealistic laws. All people without exception are called to a difficult goal:

sanctity. Further, within each individual's own state, all receive the necessary graces. Additionally, Catholic spouses receive the additional graces of the Sacrament of Marriage.<sup>4</sup>

## 90. The Nature of Marriage

*Marriage is “the conjugal union of man and woman, contracted between two qualified persons, which obliges them to live together throughout life.”*<sup>5</sup> Significant points in this definition are the following:

- *Union*: This refers to the internal and external consent by which marriage is contracted (marriage *in fieri* [“in its making”], which, for Catholics, is a sacrament) and also to the permanent bond arising from that contract (marriage *in facto esse* [“already done”], the bond itself is not a sacrament).
- *Conjugal*: Man and woman get married in order to lead a legitimate conjugal life by mutually giving and receiving the right to the marital act, which is in itself open to procreation.
- *Of a man and a woman*: This shows its unity and the evident distinction of sexes.
- *Of two qualified persons*: Natural or positive law bars some people from either marrying or marrying a certain person.
- *To live together throughout life*: Marriage is indissoluble. This undivided communion requires union of home life (roof, board, and bed), union of wills through charity, and the desire to act in agreement.

## 91. The Essence of Marriage

### 91a) Marriage *in fieri*: The Consent

The essence of marriage *in fieri* is the legitimate manifestation of mutual consent, that is, *the marriage contract*. For Catholics, this is also the essence of the Sacrament of Marriage.

“A marriage is brought into being by the lawfully manifested consent of persons who are legally capable. This consent cannot be supplied by any human power.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently, marriage *in fieri* is essentially a contract. The material objects of this contract are the very persons of those who get married. The formal object is the marital way of life. Those who get married should intend—or at least should not exclude—the mutual, exclusive, and perpetual right over the body of the other party for the marital act directed to procreation. Since that right is the formal object of the contract, its exclusion renders the contract null and void. Its eventual exercise, however, is not essential for the validity of the contract.

Marriage *in fieri* is a very special type of contract, since only some accidental aspects of the terms are left to the discretion of the parties.

## **91b) Marriage *in facto esse*: The Permanent Bond**

The consent that the spouses give and receive is sealed by God (cf. Mk 10:9). The covenant of the spouses is integrated into God's covenant with mankind: "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love."<sup>7</sup> Established by God, this bond is an irrevocable reality. It is the origin of a covenant that is guaranteed by God's fidelity. Thus, the essence of marriage *in facto esse* is *the permanent bond created by a legitimate marriage contract*. The act of entering the contract is transitory, but the bond it creates is permanent in itself. Not even the Church has power to challenge this disposition of divine wisdom.

## 92. The Divine Institution of Marriage

*Natural marriage* is not a human invention—it was *instituted by God*. Much has been written about evolutionary interpretations of marriage. A summary of these theories can be found in some moral theology manuals.

However, the Book of Genesis clearly shows that the institution of marriage is closely related to the creation of man (cf. Gn 1:26–30; 2:18–24). From the very beginning, marriage was part of God’s design for the world and for humanity. The author of human nature (God) and its redeemer (Christ) have protected, strengthened, and elevated marriage through laws that are not merely human arrangements, but are divine laws.

The Gospels also attest to the divine institution of marriage. One passage adds a particularly interesting interpretation, directly attributing the words of Genesis right after the creation of Eve to God: “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one’?” (Mt 19:4–6; cf. Gn 2:23–24).

Our Lord manifested his right to legislate marriage when he referred to its indissolubility in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt 5:31–32).

Matrimony was neither established nor restored by man but by God. It has been protected, strengthened, and elevated not by the laws of men, but by those of God; he is the author of human nature, and of Christ who restored that same nature. Consequently, these laws cannot be changed according to men’s pleasure, nor by an agreement of the spouses themselves that is contrary to these laws. This is the teaching of Sacred Scripture (cf. Gn 1:27ff; 2:22ff; Mt 19:5ff; Eph 5:23ff); this is the constant, universal tradition of the Church; this is the solemn definition of the Holy Council of Trent, which in the words of Sacred Scripture teaches and reasserts that the permanent and indissoluble bond of matrimony, its unity and strength, have their origin in God.<sup>8</sup>

## **92a) The “Legitimate” Marriage of Non-Christians**

The strength and greatness of the grace of Christ are extended to all people, even those outside the Church, because of God’s desire to save all mankind. Grace shapes all human marital love and strengthens both created nature and matrimony “as it was in the beginning.” Men and women, therefore, who have not yet heard the Gospel message are united by a human covenant in *legitimate marriage*. This legitimate marriage is not without authentic goodness and values, which assure its stability. These goods, even though the spouses are not aware of it, come from God the Creator and are included, in a certain inchoative way, in the marital love that unites Christ with his Church.<sup>9</sup>



## 93. The Purpose of Marriage

By its own natural character, the matrimonial covenant is ordered toward *the good of the spouses* and *the procreation and upbringing of children*.<sup>10</sup> These two aspects are not unrelated; there is a close connection and complementarity between them.

Divine revelation explicitly affirms this principle of natural law. This allows us to clearly determine the purpose of marriage. After the creation of man and woman, the Book of Genesis manifests the purpose of the difference of sexes: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (Gn 1:28). Also, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gn 2:18).

## 93a) The Procreation and Upbringing of Children

The expression “be fruitful and multiply” clearly shows the immediate and principal intention of God when he instituted marriage: the procreation and upbringing of children.

The procreation and upbringing of children should give unity and consistency to the marital society. This not only *de facto*, but also *de jure*. It follows that the whole conjugal life—not just love and the “right to the body” (the *ius in corpus*), but the common life and mutual help as well—should be completely ordered to that end.

The Magisterium has often declared and recalled that “Christian marriage is not only ordained to the spiritual union and material welfare: it is primarily ordained by God to procreation, so that mankind increases and fills the earth according to the divine command.”<sup>11</sup>

## **93b) Parents' Responsibility in the Education of Children**

Bringing up the offspring is one aspect of the purpose of marriage. This is a very important responsibility of parents, and it cannot be abdicated: "The parents are the first persons responsible for the education of their children, in human as well as in spiritual matters."<sup>12</sup>

This topic is discussed in another treatise in connection with the virtue of piety, which is part of justice. However, we should recall that parents have the inescapable obligation of choosing the teachers or the schools of their children, and watching over what they do, read, and learn. Since this is a duty, civil law should recognize and protect the parental rights needed to fulfill it: among others, the rights to choose, establish, and operate schools.

## 93c) The Good of the Spouses

The Church has never undervalued the importance of the good of the spouses. She has always accorded this due relevance, which stems from its ordination to the good of the offspring.

Pius XII stressed that one should not act “as if the secondary end [the good of the spouses] did not exist, or at least as if it were not a *finis operis* established by the very architect of nature.” However, he also warned against considering “the secondary end as equally principal, depriving it of its essential subordination to the primary end [the procreation and upbringing of children], which would necessarily and logically lead to nefarious consequences.”<sup>13</sup>

Marriage is, in itself, directed to procreation. Still, this does not mean that procreation must always be the purpose of those who get married, or that the end of marriage depends on the motivations of the contracting parties. Whatever the motives of those who marry, be it convenience or love, the purpose of marriage itself is still the same. Marriage is not dissolved when convenience disappears or love fades out. It is also not dissolved when there is no offspring, because the basic ordination to procreation still remains. Pope Pius XII warned:

By virtue of the Creator’s will, marriage as a natural institution does not have for its primary end the personal perfection of the spouses, but the procreation and upbringing of new life. All the other ends, even if they are included in the nature of marriage, are not there in the same degree as, and even less in a higher degree than, the primary end. They are essentially subordinated to the primary end. This applies to all marriages, even barren ones, just as all eyes are made and destined for seeing, even though in some abnormal cases, due to external and internal conditions, a particular eye cannot see.<sup>14</sup>

## **94. Blessings and Demands of Conjugal Love**

Pope John Paul II outlines the properties and characteristics of marriage:

Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter - appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility. In a word it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love....<sup>15</sup>

We will now study these essential properties and characteristics in detail.

## 95. Unity (Monogamy)

By its own nature, conjugal love demands the unity and indissolubility of the communion of persons, which encompasses the entire life of the spouses.

“The unity of marriage, distinctly recognized by our Lord, is made clear in the equal personal dignity that must be accorded to man and wife in mutual and unreserved affection.”<sup>16</sup> *The marriage bond is exclusive, so much so that simultaneous polygamy is absolutely forbidden by natural and divine positive law. The only legitimate and true spouse is the first wife or husband.*<sup>17</sup>

Some authors explain the polygamy of the Old Testament patriarchs as a divine dispensation. It was probably granted after the Deluge to foster the growth of the people of God. Therefore, it also may have been granted to other peoples.

This was possible because the union of one man with several women, unlike the opposite case, only secondarily infringes natural law. It does not essentially frustrate the ends of marriage.

Polygamy was formally abolished in the New Law when Christ restored marriage to its original purity, thereby abolishing the law of repudiation (cf. Mt 19:3–9; Mk 10:1–12).<sup>18</sup>

After the bond has been dissolved by the death of one spouse, a second marriage is possible. This is clear from St. Paul’s letters:

- It is better for the celibate and widowers not to marry again, but they may do it (cf. 1 Cor 7:8–9).
- A woman does not commit adultery if she marries again after the death of her husband (cf. Rom 7:3).
- In some cases, young widows should marry again (cf. 1 Tm 5:14).

## 96. Indissolubility

*By divine institution, the marriage bond is perpetual and indissoluble.*

With the words of Holy Scripture, the Magisterium of the Church affirms that God instituted marriage, giving it a perpetual and indissoluble bond that no human law may break.

Christ's teaching solemnly confirmed this law of human nature by instituting the sacrament that sanctifies marriage. As we will see in the next chapter, this action of Christ infuses a specific sacramental grace into the souls of those who receive the Sacrament of Marriage. Christ invites them to follow him by changing their conjugal life into a divine path on earth. Thus St. Paul says, "This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church" (Eph 5:32). Actually, marriage is a truly divine vocation for those persons who are meant for this state, as St. Josemaría Escrivá untiringly taught at a time when this doctrine had been practically forgotten.<sup>19</sup>

*By divine law, a marriage that is ratified (legally contracted) and consummated (the spouses have performed the conjugal act ordained to procreation at least once) is indissoluble.*<sup>20</sup>

Although the sacramental element may be absent from a marriage as is the case among unbelievers, still in such a marriage, inasmuch as it is a true marriage there must remain and indeed there does remain that perpetual bond which by divine right is so bound up with matrimony from its first institution that it is not subject to any civil power. And so, whatever marriage is said to be contracted, either it is so contracted that it is really a true marriage ... or it is thought to be contracted without that perpetual bond, and in that case there is no marriage, but an illicit union opposed of its very nature to the divine law, which therefore cannot be entered into or maintained.<sup>21</sup>

Any union that excludes the perpetuity of the bond *cannot be considered a marriage*. This is the case of temporal marriage, trial marriage, or marriage with right to eventual divorce, just to mention a few such aberrations. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council teaches:

The intimate partnership of life and the love, which constitutes the married state, has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws; it is rooted in the contract of its partners, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent. It is an institution confirmed by the divine law and receiving its stability, even in the eyes of society, from the human act by which the partners mutually surrender themselves to each other; *for the good of the partners, of the children, and of society* this sacred bond no longer depends on human decision alone... The intimate union of marriage,

as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable unity between them.<sup>22</sup>



## 96a) Divorce

The matrimonial vocation was engraved in the very nature of man and woman as they came out from the hands of the Creator. Unfortunately, evil entered the relations between man and woman in the forms of discord, spirit of dominion, infidelity, jealousy, and conflicts. The origin of these disorders is not in man's nature, but in *sin*. The first sin cut off human relations with God and resulted in the rift between man and woman. Nevertheless, the order of creation subsists, although it is gravely damaged. To heal the wounds of sin, man and woman need the help of God's grace, which God never denies (cf. Gn 3:21; Heb 4:16). Without this help, man and woman cannot accomplish the union of lives for which God created them "in the beginning."<sup>23</sup>

Our Lord insisted on the original intention of the Creator, who planned indissoluble marriage (cf. Mt 5:31–32; 19:3–9; Mk 10:9; Lk 16:18; 1 Cor 7:10–11) and disavowed the tolerance introduced during the Old Law (cf. Mt 19:7–9). Thus, divorce, the *dissolution of the marriage bond granted by civil authority*, is in itself null and void before God. Any civil law that allows divorce (separation of the spouses and dissolution of the bond so that they can marry again) is grievously wrong. Divorce does not just violate sacramental marriage, as some people claim, but even violates natural marriage.<sup>24</sup>

The existence of a divorce law implies that nobody can get married *forever*. Those who get married easily develop the idea that it is not a definitive commitment. They will not try hard enough to overcome difficulties that otherwise could be solved. Such a law encourages extramarital flirtations, since the possibility exists for them to grow into formal relations. There is no need to say anything of the effects of a broken marriage on the children, which are the most evident of all the effects.

Obviously, if Catholics are convinced that a divorce law is harmful to society, they have the right to oppose it by all legal means. Claiming that "just because they don't want to get a divorce, they should not hinder those who want one," is a fallacy: One should oppose the legalization of murder even if one does not plan to kill anybody.

Those divorced persons who contract a new civil marriage while the legitimate spouse is still alive contradict the Law of God taught by Christ.

Still, they are not completely separated from the Church. They may live their Christian life (above all by educating the children in the faith), but they cannot receive Holy Communion.

## 96b) Dissolution of the Marriage Bond in Some Cases

The pope has the ministerial power to dispense, for a just cause, some obligations of divine law contracted by a free human act. He can, thus, suspend or dispense members of the faithful from formal vows and positive or negative oaths.

A traditional example of this principle is that *the pope can dissolve a marriage that is ratified (contracted) but not consummated* (no marital act has been performed yet).<sup>25</sup> Two other cases are particularly relevant in mission lands:

- i) The *Pauline Privilege* is based on a text of St. Paul (cf. 1 Cor 7:12–15). Ratified and even consummated marriage among non-Christians can be dissolved if, after the baptism of one spouse, the unbaptized party refuses to continue common life in peace and without offense to God. The unbaptized party is considered to refuse if common life implies danger of sin for either the converted party or for the children, if the baptized party cannot practice religion or instruct the children in the faith, if the unbaptized party tries to keep other wives or in some way violate the sanctity of marriage.<sup>26</sup>
- ii) The second case is sometimes called the *Petrine Privilege*. When an unbaptized man with several likewise unbaptized wives receives Baptism in the Catholic Church, he may keep one (but not necessarily the first) as his legitimate wife. The same applies in the much less frequent case of a woman with several husbands.<sup>27</sup>

## 96c) Separation of the Spouses

*The spouses must maintain their common conjugal life*—which implies sharing a bed and house as is necessary for the attainment of the ends of marriage—unless a lawful reason excuses them.<sup>28</sup> Separation of the spouses, while maintaining the marital bond intact, may be legitimate in some cases. A separation of bed and house can lawfully be done for proportionate reasons:

- Mutual consent:
  - As regards the bed, both temporary and perpetual separation are possible.
  - As regards the house, a temporary separation is allowed for proportionately serious reasons (e.g., travel), but it is not advisable to maintain this situation for a long time.
- In other cases, separation of the spouses united by a Christian marriage is lawful only when the causes considered by canon law are present and *after the local bishop has issued a sentence*. In some special cases, the innocent spouse can sever common life on his or her own authority. These are the legitimate causes of separation:
  - The formal adultery of the spouse, in certain conditions (this separation is in itself perpetual)<sup>29</sup>
  - That one spouse occasions grave spiritual or bodily danger to the other or to the children, or otherwise makes conjugal life too difficult (this separation is temporary, and, in principle, common life should be reestablished when the cause for separation disappears)<sup>30</sup>

In both cases, “the innocent spouse may laudably readmit the other spouse to the conjugal life.”<sup>31</sup>

As for the recourse to civil courts, only an ecclesiastical court can grant separation to Catholics. However, after that has been granted, Catholics can file a petition for a civil separation in order to obtain the merely civil effects of the sentence already pronounced by the ecclesiastical judge: alimony and child custody.<sup>32</sup>

## **97. Conjugal Fidelity**

Conjugal love, by its own nature, demands an unbreakable fidelity from the spouses. This is a result of giving oneself to the other spouse in marriage. Genuine love is definitive, not fleeting.<sup>33</sup>

## **98. Fertility: Openness to Life**

Fertility—openness to life—is one aspect of the purpose of marriage. It is also a blessing. Conjugal love tends by itself to be fecund. A child does not come from outside to be added to the spouses' love; rather, the child rises up from the mutual love and giving of the spouses. Thus, the Church is in favor of life, teaching that “every marital act should be open to the transmission of life.”<sup>34</sup> “This doctrine, often explained by the Magisterium, is founded on the inseparable connection—that God wanted and man cannot break by his own initiative—between the two aspects of the marital act: the unitive aspect, and the procreative aspect.”<sup>35</sup>

## 98a) The Marital Act

*The marital act is lawful and even meritorious, provided it does not go against the purpose of marriage.*<sup>36</sup> Equally lawful are the actions accompanying the marital act.

This is merely logical, since it is included in the plan of God. It is the only way—positively wanted by God—to fulfill the commandment given in Genesis: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gn 1:28).

However, the marital act was rejected as unlawful by heretics who considered the body—and, hence, its perpetuation—evil. Among these are some Gnostic and Manichaean sects of the early centuries and the medieval Cathari.

With regard to chastity in married life, I can assure all married couples that they need not be afraid of showing affection for each other. On the contrary, this inclination is at the root of their family life. What our Lord expects from them is that they should respect each other and that they should be loyal to each other; that they should act with refinement, naturalness, and modesty. I must also tell them that the dignity of their conjugal relations is a result of the love that is expressed in them. And there will be love if those relations are open to fruitfulness, to bringing children into the world.

...

A married couple should build their life together on the foundation of a sincere and pure affection for each other, and on the joy that comes from having brought into the world the children God has enabled them to have. They should be capable of renouncing their personal comfort; and they should put their trust in the providence of God.<sup>37</sup>

These words lead us to relate the marital act to new life. *The marital act must be open to the possibility of a new life.* There is no need to directly intend the procreation of a new life every time; it is enough that no voluntary obstacle to conception is raised. Thus, the marital act is lawful for sterile couples, during pregnancy, or during the woman’s infertile period.

This openness to the possibility of a new life must be present in every single marital act, not just in conjugal life as a whole.<sup>38</sup> Thus, any action before or during intercourse that attempts to prevent conception is immoral. This is so whether that result is sought as an end or as a means.<sup>39</sup> This, of course, includes the use of contraceptive hormones. Their use can be accepted only for therapeutic purposes, provided the medicinal effect sought is not a result of contraception.

The state is responsible for the well being of its citizens. It may intervene to guide the demography of the population by objective and respectful information, but never by authoritarian decisions or coercion. No authority can supplant the initiative of the spouses. The state is not authorized to recommend the use of immoral contraceptive means.<sup>40</sup>



## 98b) The Marital Debt

*Marital debt* is what is due to the other spouse, that is, *the right the other spouse has to the marital act*.

Both spouses are bound by justice to render the marital debt when the other spouse seriously and reasonably asks for it (cf. 1 Cor 7:5).

This is, in itself, a serious obligation, since it constitutes the proximate matter of the marriage contract. It admits small matter, for instance, when it is not denied but postponed, provided no danger of incontinence or serious quarrel is caused by the postponement.

If the request is unreasonable or not serious, there is no obligation. Further, there is no obligation toward the still unforgiven adulterous spouse.

In itself, there is no obligation to ask for the marital debt. Still, it may be necessary on some occasions: to prevent the incontinence of the other spouse or to strengthen mutual love.

## 98c) Periodic Continence

*Periodic continence is the limitation of sexual intercourse to the infertile days of the woman.*

*Birth control by periodic continence is lawful only under specific circumstances and for serious reasons* (physical or psychological health or financial problems).

The Magisterial documents dealing with this subject use expressions like “grave reasons,” “serious reasons,” “force majeure,” “sufficient and safe moral reasons,” “serious causes,” “proportionate and serious reasons,” “just causes,” and “just reasons.” Obviously, this does not apply to light reasons, to just any reason, or to circumstances found in most or even in many cases.<sup>41</sup>

In the absence of serious reasons, periodic continence is immoral. The seriousness of the causes must be proportionate to the time that this method will be used. A few months use is not the same as an indefinite period or even forever.

When there is no sufficient reason and one of the spouses insists on using periodic continence, the other spouse may materially cooperate according to the rules explained below.

## 98d) Cooperation in the Sin of the Spouse

When one of the spouses tries to abuse marriage by preventing procreation in the marital act, the other spouse:

- must try to dissuade him or her,
- is not obliged to render the marital debt,
- cannot formally cooperate with the erring spouse, that is, cannot be in agreement with him or her, which would be the case if the sin were internally or externally approved.

*Passive and material cooperation*, however, may be lawful in some circumstances:

- Cooperation is *material* when the innocent party disapproves of the contraceptive action, often manifests his or her opposition, and tries to dissuade the other party.
- Cooperation is *passive* when the innocent party is not the cause of the other's sin in the final analysis (for instance, by complaining about the inconveniences of another pregnancy).

*For material and passive cooperation to be lawful:*

- there must be a proportionately serious cause: for example, to avoid serious quarrels, to prevent the adultery of the other party, or to avoid proximate danger of incontinence;
- the merely material and passive cooperation of the wife to the onanism of the husband, intercourse with a temporarily or permanently sterilized spouse, or intercourse with a preventive device (condom) to impede conception may be lawful for very grave reasons.<sup>42</sup> However, the material and passive cooperation in the sin of sodomy (or with some instrument) is never lawful because of the lack of proportion between the gravity of the sin and any evil that the innocent party may seek to avoid. In these cases, the innocent party must forcibly resist the act, as if it were a rape.

These causes never justify the cooperation of the husband when the wife has taken abortifacient drugs (for example, drugs preventing the implantation of the fertilized ovum). This is not only cooperation in a marital act that is a serious sin for the wife, but also cooperation to a possible provoked abortion. Such an awful, grievous crime bears no

proportion at all to the evils that would be avoided by passive and material cooperation.<sup>43</sup>

We should recall that “human love—pure, sincere, and joyful—cannot subsist in marriage without the virtue of chastity, which leads a couple to respect the mystery of sex and ordain it to faithfulness and personal dedication.”<sup>44</sup>

1. GS, 48.
2. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 24.
3. Cf. CIC, 1056.
4. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 21, 25.
5. Cf. CCC, 1601–1666; *Roman Catechism*, 2.7.3; John Paul II, Enc. *Familiaris Consortio*, Nov. 22, 1981; St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 22–30; *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer*, 87–112.
6. CIC, 1057
7. GS, 48.
8. Pius XI, Enc. *Casti Connubii*, Dec. 31, 1930: DS 3700.
9. Cf. *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents 1969–1985*, 8A Propositions on the Doctrine of Christian Marriage, p. 169.
10. Cf. CIC, 1055. The terms *primary end* and *secondary end* have been used to designate these two aspects of the purpose or end of marriage (cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici* of 1917, c. 1213). These terms were relatively new in the Magisterium’s texts, but the reality they stood for was not. The present Code does not use them. This silence does not seem to imply that they should necessarily be rejected. However, one must keep always in mind—as it was done before its publication—the close connection and complementarity between both ends. The first time the expressions *primary end* and *secondary end* appeared in a magisterial document was in the 1917 *Codex Iuris Canonici*. Until then, the Magisterium had referred to these ends as *goods* or *blessings of marriage*, of which they are a part.  
The term *goods of marriage* goes back to St. Augustine. It comprises the good of *offspring* (with all that refers to procreation and education), the good of *fidelity* (with all that refers to conjugal fidelity and the marital debt), and the good of the *sacrament* (with all that refers to the sacramental grace and the indestructible bond that is created by their mutual consent). The Scholastics started a separate study of the ends, creating a more precise terminology that found great acceptance. Its use in the 1917 Code was a novelty as regards the official terminology, but not the concepts themselves.  
The Second Vatican Council did not use these terms. The reason given for this omission was that the document dealing with marriage (*Gaudium et Spes*) was a pastoral document intended for a wide audience, and it was not proper to use specialized juridical terminology. Besides, the priority that was given to the good of offspring by the wording and context of the document was deemed sufficient. This was the answer given by the authors when the issue was brought up during the preparation of numbers 48 and 50 of *Gaudium et Spes*, as recorded in the acts of the meetings.

The present *Code of Canon Law* neither uses the term *ends* nor sets any formal priorities. “The marriage covenant,” says canon 1055, “of its own very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children.” [In the Latin original, *bonum* seems to have a deeper meaning than mere well being.] However, since the new Code basically follows the doctrinal orientation of the Vatican II documents, this canon should be understood in the same sense as the two points of *Gaudium et Spes* mentioned above and, certainly, in continuity with the previous Magisterium. Cf. CCC, 1643–1654.

11. Pius XI, Motu Proprio *Qua Cura*, Dec. 8, 1938.
12. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 27.
13. Pius XII, Address of Oct. 3, 1941. The expression *finis operis* refers to the purpose of the action considered in itself, independently of the intention of the agent (which is called *finis operantis*). Thus, the proper end of alms is helping the needy neighbor, even though the *finis operantis* may be different: atoning for one’s own sins, for example.
14. Pius XII, Address to the Italian Association of Catholic Midwives, Oct. 29, 1951: AAS 43 (1951) 835–54.
15. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 13.
16. GS, 49.
17. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Casti Connubii*: DS 3176; ST, Suppl., q. 59, a. 3, ad 4.
18. Cf. CCC, 2387.
19. Cf. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 22–30; *The Way*, 27, 360.
20. Cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Casti Connubii*.
21. *Ibid.*, 34.
22. GS, 48.
23. Cf. CCC, 1606–1608.
24. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1650, 2382–2386.
25. Cf. CIC, 1142.
26. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1143–1147.
27. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1148.
28. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1151; CCC, 1649, 2383.
29. Cf. CIC, 1152.
30. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1153.
31. *Ibid.*, 1155.
32. In the exceptional case when civil law does not provide for a separation without dissolution of the bond, Catholics could apply for a divorce if these civil effects are especially necessary. However, some precaution must be observed: Relatives and acquaintances must be plainly told that one is against divorce and certainly has no intention to marry again while the spouse is alive. Scandal must be avoided by not spreading the news or by explaining the necessity of that measure.
33. Cf. CCC, 1646–1651, 2364.
34. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 11.
35. *Ibid.*, 12; cf. Pius XI, Enc. *Casti Connubii*; CCC, 2366–81.
36. Cf. GS, 49.
37. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 25.
38. Cf. Paul VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 11.
39. Cf. *Ibid.*, 14.
40. Cf. CCC, 2372.
41. Cf. *Ibid.*, 2368–2371.
42. In the case of a husband who uses a preventive device (condom) to avoid procreation, for example, the wife must put forth a resistance relative to the evil of contraception that she must also avoid. She must roundly manifest her disagreement with the husband and try, with

supernatural and human means, to lead him to the upright use of marriage. But, it does not mean that she can *never* allow the union through her marital cooperation when there are grave reasons and she actively manifests her opposition.

43. Most contraceptive drugs have three main effects, achieved in different ways: preventing ovulation, preventing fecundation of the ovum, and preventing the survival of the fertilized ovum. *Since practically all contraceptive drugs now in use have abortive effects* (primarily or as a side effect), we must affirm as a general criterion that in these cases, the passive cooperation of the male is illicit. Only in some specific cases, when the abortive effect is known to be impossible or extremely improbable and truly accidental, could the lawfulness of cooperation be considered. This must be certified by a specialized doctor with sound Christian moral views. Further, all the other conditions mentioned in the text must be fulfilled.

44. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 25.

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## Marriage as a Sacrament

## 99. The Marriage of Two Baptized Persons is a Sacrament

The married state is so important that *Christ raised the marriage between Catholics to the level of a sacrament*: “The marriage covenant ... has, between the baptized, been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament. Consequently, a valid marriage contract cannot exist between baptized persons without its being by that very fact a sacrament.”<sup>1</sup>

In Sacred Scripture, a text from St. Paul clearly shows this sacramental nature: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church... ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.’ This is a great mystery [sacrament], and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church” (Eph 5:22–23, 25, 31–32).

It is not the use of the term *sacrament* (*mysterion* in the original Greek, *sacramentum* in the Vulgate) that makes this text relevant, since that term did not acquire its present meaning until a much later period. What really matters are the essential properties brought to light:

- Marriage between Catholics is the sign of a sacred reality: the union of Christ with the Church.
- It is a sensible sign, since the marriage contract must be manifested externally.
- It causes grace, since it is a “great mystery ... in reference to Christ and the Church.” There is nothing particularly mysterious in natural marriage, so the above “mystery” seems to refer to the sacramental effect as supernatural cause of grace.

Notably important among the testimonies of the Fathers of the Church are two texts from St. Augustine and one text from St. Leo the Great.<sup>2</sup>

The Eastern churches, which broke away from Rome many centuries ago, also hold that marriage is a sacrament. This implies that the belief was widespread in the early Church, since, after their separation from Rome, these churches have not accepted any of the changes introduced in the West.

The tenderness of our Lord is truly infinite. See how gently he treats his sons. He has made marriage a holy bond, the image of the union of Christ and his Church (cf. Eph



5:32), a great sacrament on which is based the Christian family that has to be, with God's grace, a place of peace and harmony, a school of sanctity.<sup>3</sup>

## 100. Institution of the Sacrament of Marriage

Christian marriage is an effective sign or sacrament of Christ's Covenant with his Church. The motive for conjugal fidelity is God's fidelity to his Covenant with mankind, and Christ's fidelity to his Church.

As a sacrament, marriage was *instituted by Christ*. The moment of its institution is not known. Authors suggest it was either the wedding at Cana (cf. Jn 2:1–11), the abolition of the repudiation law (cf. Mt 19:6), or some unspecified time between the Resurrection and the Ascension of the Lord.

## 101. The Matter and Form of Marriage

*The matter and form of sacramental marriage are the very same matter and form of the natural and legitimate marriage contract.*

The sacrament exists the very moment the natural contract is established between baptized persons by virtue of that same contract. No other condition is required. This means that the *natural contract is a sacrament*, that is, it produces both sanctifying grace and sacramental grace when established between Catholics.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the contract in itself, we can affirm the following:

- The *remote matter* of the contract is the persons who get married or, according to other authors, the right over their bodies for procreation.
- The *proximate matter* is the signs or words by which the giving of the body, or the marital right, is manifested.
- The *form* is the mutual acceptance of this surrender, manifested externally.

Pope Benedict XIV affirms, “The legitimate contract is both the matter and the form of the sacrament of marriage, to wit: the mutual and legitimate surrender of the bodies, manifested in words and signs that show their internal attitude, is the matter; and the mutual and legitimate acceptance of the bodies is the form.”<sup>5</sup>

## 102. Minister of Marriage

*The ministers of marriage are the spouses themselves.* The blessing of the priest is merely a sacramental.<sup>6</sup>

The presence of the priest has been necessary only since the Council of Trent. This requirement was established, together with the marriage banns, in order to curb secret or clandestine marriages. While these were true and valid marriages, they often caused great disorder.<sup>7</sup>

The local bishop, parish priest, or his legitimate delegate attends the marriage as an active and qualified witness. He asks the contracting parties to manifest externally their consent, and he receives that manifestation in the name of the Church. His presence is required by ecclesiastical law for the validity of the act, just as civil law requires the presence of a public official or notary public for the validity of some juridical acts. In a case of real need, however, it can be dispensed with.

## 103. Subject of Marriage

*The legitimate subject of marriage is any baptized person who is not prevented by law.* Impediments will be considered in the following sections.

For the *lawful* reception of the sacrament, one must have sanctifying grace, because marriage is a sacrament of the living—it is not meant to confer the first grace. Receiving it in mortal sin (aside from the sacrilege committed) impedes the supernatural effects of the sacrament. However, these can be revived when the subject recovers God's grace.

## 104. Effects of Marriage

As a natural institution, marriage generates a perpetual and exclusive *bond*, and it has the blessings, demands, and characteristics that were studied in the preceding chapter.

Moreover, in a Christian marriage, the spouses are strengthened and become, as it were, “consecrated” by a *particular sacrament* for the duties and dignity of their state.<sup>8</sup> The Sacrament of Marriage has the same natural effects and normal characteristics of every natural conjugal love, but it adds a new significance that both purifies and strengthens the natural union, and elevates it to the extent of making it the expression of specifically Christian virtues.<sup>9</sup>

## **104a) The Supernatural Effects of the Sacrament of Matrimony**

The supernatural effects of the Sacrament of Marriage are as follows:

- An increase of sanctifying grace
- Sacramental grace
- The right to receive in the future all actual graces that are needed to duly fulfill the ends of marriage

This sacrament increases for the spouses the permanent source of their supernatural life, sanctifying grace; and it gives them special additional gifts, good inspirations, and seeds of grace, at the same time augmenting and perfecting their natural faculties. Thus husband and wife can have more than an abstract appreciation of all that pertains to the goals and duties of their married state; they can have an internal realization, a firm conviction, an efficacious will, and an actual accomplishment of it. Finally, this sacrament gives them the right to ask for and receive the help of actual grace as often as they need it to fulfill the duties of their state.<sup>10</sup>

## 105. Apostolic Celibacy

Christ is the center of all Christian life. Union with him is superior to all other family or social bonds (cf. Lk 14:26; Mk 10:28–31). From the beginning of the Church, there have been men and women who have foregone the good of marriage to be closer to Jesus (cf. Rv 14:4; 1 Cor 7:32). The act of contracting marriage is a sacrament, while deciding to live celibately for apostolic reasons is not. However, *apostolic celibacy is a more excellent state than marriage*. This has always been the teaching of the Church, repeated more insistently since the Protestants challenged it.<sup>11</sup>

Celibates can unite themselves to Christ with an undivided heart. They can give themselves more freely, in him and for him, to the service of God and mankind. Nothing hinders their service of his Kingdom and the work of spiritual regeneration.<sup>12</sup> The Second Vatican Council applies these reasons to sacerdotal celibacy, but they have a wider meaning and perfectly apply to apostolic celibacy.

This applies only to the situation considered in itself. It is obvious that, in individual cases, married people can be holier than celibates. These two realities—the Sacrament of Matrimony and apostolic celibacy—come from the Lord. He gives them meaning and grants the necessary grace to live in either state according to his will (cf. Mt 19:3–12). Further, for each person, the most perfect path is always what God asks of him.



## 106. The Domestic Church

Christ wanted to be born into the Holy Family of Joseph and Mary. Actually, the Church is “God’s family.” From the beginning, the nucleus of the Church was generally constituted of those who became believers with their entire household (cf. Acts 18:8).

In our day, in a world that is frequently hostile to the faith, a family of believers is like a hearth radiating living faith. The Second Vatican Council called the family “the domestic Church”—*Ecclesia domestica*.<sup>13</sup>

Matrimony is a divine vocation that God gives to many. Married couples are to sanctify themselves in this vocation and to sanctify other souls through it. Thus:

- The home is where the spouses and children must sanctify themselves *through the fulfillment of all their daily duties*.
- Marital and family life should be a *school of Christian life* for the children, a center of apostolic activity with the other members of one’s own family and with relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

## 107. Jurisdiction over Marriage

The sacramental nature of Catholic marriage has some juridical consequences. As was already mentioned, *because of its sacramental nature, only the Church has the power to judge and determine all that refers to the essence of Christian marriage.*

This is so because in marriage between baptized persons, the marriage contract and the sacrament cannot be separated: Where there is true marriage, there is also a sacrament. Only the Church has jurisdiction over the sacraments.

This exclusive ecclesiastical jurisdiction was clearly defined by the Council of Trent against the Protestant errors.<sup>14</sup> When they denied the sacramental nature of marriage, they also denied the jurisdiction of the Church. The words of Leo XIII are also relevant in this regard:

And let no one be misled by that distinction so highly vaunted by the supporters of the civil power who separate the nuptial contract from the sacrament, with the intention of committing the contract to the power and judgment of the civil authority, reserving to the Church the sacramental aspects. As a matter of fact, such a distinction—more truthfully a sundering—cannot be approved of, since it is certain that in Christian marriage the contract cannot be separated from the sacrament. And therefore it is impossible for the contract to be genuine and lawful, unless it is at the same time a sacrament. For Christ the Lord enhanced matrimony with the dignity of a sacrament. But matrimony is the actual contract, provided it is made according to law. A further consideration is that as a consequence matrimony is a sacrament because it is a sacred sign and produces grace, and reflects the mystical marriage of Christ with the Church. The image and likeness of this marriage are found in the bond of the perfect union that joins together a man and a woman, and this is nothing more than matrimony itself. Thus it is evident that among Christians every marriage is by its very nature and essence a sacrament. And nothing is more repugnant to the truth than to say that the sacrament is a kind of embellishment of the contract, or a property extrinsic to and flowing from it, and that the sacrament can be distinguished and separated from the contract by the will of man.<sup>15</sup>

The same doctrine is affirmed in the present *Code of Canon Law*: “Matrimonial cases of the baptized belong by right to the ecclesiastical judge.”<sup>16</sup> The establishment and dispensation of impediments also belongs to the ecclesiastical authority.<sup>17</sup>

*Civil authority has jurisdiction over the merely civil effects of the canonical marriage of Catholics, and only over these civil effects.*<sup>18</sup>

This is logical, since the purpose of civil authority is the temporal welfare of the citizens. Some of these civil effects are the union or separation of property or the inheritance rights of spouses and children.

## 107a) Declaration of Nullity of a Marriage

The Church does not have the power to dissolve a valid, sacramental marriage that has been consummated. Thus, the word *annulment* is incorrect. The Church may only declare a marriage *null and void* upon investigation and evidence that the marriage did not exist from the very beginning because of some defect in the consent, deficiency in the form, or the existence of an impediment.

When a case of declaration of nullity is filed in a Church marriage court, both partners must consider their marriage valid until the contrary is declared. Only after the marriage is declared invalid are the parties free to marry again. This is not the granting a divorce, but of simply declaring the nullity, or nonexistence, of a previously *presumed* marriage.

A married couple may undergo disagreements and even serious quarrels. We could say that there had been a failure in that marriage. This should not be made equivalent to the non-existence of a valid marriage. A matrimonial *separation* (see above, number 96c) could be advisable in many of those cases.

## 107b) Mixed Marriages

A mixed marriage is one between a Catholic and a non-Catholic baptized person. *In mixed marriages, the power of the Church indirectly extends to the non-Catholic spouse.* The ecclesiastical laws apply to the Catholic party and, since marriage cannot have different effects for each of the spouses, they must apply equally to the other person.

To *lawfully* engage in a mixed marriage, a Catholic needs *permission* from the competent ecclesiastical authority. The permission is not granted unless the following conditions are met:

- The Catholic partner must declare that he or she will always remove any danger to the faith and promise that the children will be educated in the Catholic religion.
- The other partner is to be informed of these promises and obligations of the Catholic partner.
- Both partners are to be instructed about the purposes and essential properties of marriage, which cannot be excluded by either of them.<sup>19</sup>

## 107c) Disparity of Cults

There is disparity of cults in a marriage between a Catholic and a non-Christian. *When a Catholic marries a non-Christian, neither of the parties receives the sacrament.*

Obviously, the non-Christian (i.e., an unbaptized person) cannot receive it, since Baptism is the gate of all sacraments. The baptized spouse does not receive it either, since marriage has the general characteristic of causing the same effects on both parties. Further, the contracting parties are the ministers of marriage, and an unbaptized person cannot administer a sacrament to a baptized one.<sup>20</sup>

The marriage of a Catholic to an unbaptized person needs a *dispensation* in order to be *valid*. The dispensation is not granted unless the conditions mentioned above are fulfilled.<sup>21</sup>

## **107d) Marriage between Non-Christians**

*A marriage between non-Christians is not subject to the jurisdiction of the Church.* However, it is subject to the just laws and impediments established by civil authority.

This does not mean that the Church's teaching on marriage applies only to Catholics. We already said that what the Church declares belongs to natural law, and applies to all human beings: to non-Christians, because they are human beings, and to Catholics, because they are human beings as well as Catholics.

## 108. Preparation for Marriage

The *betrothal* is a bilateral or unilateral promise of marriage. It was very important in the past, but its importance to the Church has practically disappeared. At present, it is regulated only by particular laws that the episcopal conference may issue.<sup>22</sup>

Before the celebration of marriage, the absence of any impediment that prevents it must be established. This investigation is concluded by the publication of *marriage banns*.<sup>23</sup>

The candidates must *be instructed* about the obligations of spouses. Since one of these obligations is the education of their children in the faith, the pastor should, during this instruction, verify that they sufficiently know the fundamental truths of the faith. However, a couple's refusal to undergo instruction is not a sufficient reason to deny them the sacrament.<sup>24</sup>

Catholics who have not received the Sacrament of Confirmation should receive it before marriage if no great inconvenience is involved. Since one should receive the Sacrament of Marriage in the state of grace, it is likewise recommended that they receive the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist beforehand as well.<sup>25</sup>



## 109. The Matrimonial Consent

Marriage is brought into being by the lawfully manifested consent of legally capable persons. Therefore, no human authority can make up for this consent.<sup>26</sup>

“Matrimonial consent is an act of the will by which a man and a woman by an irrevocable covenant mutually give and accept one another for the purpose of establishing a marriage.”<sup>27</sup>

*Matrimonial consent* must be *true*, *free*, and *deliberate*; *actual* (to get married here and now); *mutual* and *simultaneous*; *externally* and *lawfully manifested* (according to the requirements of ecclesiastical law); and *unconditional*.<sup>28</sup>

Regarding the validity of the consent, a conditional consent may make the marriage null. It is certainly null if the condition concerns the future, or if it goes against the essence of marriage and is expressly placed.<sup>29</sup>

The marriage would also be void if there is ignorance or substantial error about the essence of marriage,<sup>30</sup> but not if the error is about its unity, indissolubility, or sacramental nature (provided the consent did not depend on that error).<sup>31</sup> A marriage would be void also if one of the parties internally and positively excludes marriage itself or one of its essential properties or elements.<sup>32</sup>

Consent is null if there is a mistake about the identity of one of the parties (this is rare but possible), but not if the error is about a quality of the person, unless this quality was directly and principally intended. If the consent of one party is secured by deceit about an important quality of the other, the marriage is invalid.<sup>33</sup>

Grave fear imposed externally that makes marriage the only option invalidates the contract.<sup>34</sup>

## 110. The Form of the Celebration of Marriage

The presence of the minister of the Church (and the witnesses) visibly expresses that Matrimony is an ecclesial reality. Thus, the Church usually demands the ecclesiastical form for the celebration of marriage. *The marriage of Catholics is valid only when contracted in the presence of the local bishop or parish priest* (or of a priest delegated by either of them) *and two other witnesses*. This is so by an express disposition of the Church, which has the power over this matter. It was originally issued by the Council of Trent, and slight modifications have been introduced since then.

If delegation is granted, it must be expressly given to a specific person. A general delegation must be given in writing. A special delegation must be given only for a specific marriage. This power can be sub-delegated only in some concrete cases. A deacon is also eligible. With the authorization of the Holy See, a lay person can also be appointed if no priest or deacon is available.<sup>35</sup>

The above paragraphs describe the ordinary form of marriage. When this form is not possible, and when the parish priest or bishop is not accessible without great inconvenience, the extraordinary form is lawful and valid. In this case, only two witnesses are needed. This could happen when there is danger of death, religious persecution, scarcity of priests that would impose a delay of more than one month, etc.<sup>36</sup>

The Church does not acknowledge the exclusively civil marriage of Catholics (that is, contracted only in the presence of a civil magistrate) as true marriage. It is considered public concubinage.

## 111. Marriage Impediments

Marriage impediments are certain circumstances in a person that make him incapable of validly contracting a marriage.<sup>37</sup>

Some impediments correspond to natural law, while others correspond to divine or ecclesiastical law. The *purpose* of marriage impediments is the protection of the sanctity of marriage.

We will briefly describe the impediments listed by the present Code, ordering them according to the aspect of marriage they protect.

Those protecting the *freedom or due deliberation* of the consent are the following:

- *Insufficient age.* Men must be over 16 years and women over 14; the bishops' conference may set a higher limit.<sup>38</sup>
- *Abduction.* A man cannot contract a marriage with a woman who has been abducted, or retained with a view to marry her, for as long as this situation lasts.<sup>39</sup>

The impediments protecting the *fulfillment of the marriage contract* are:

- *Impotency:* the impossibility to perform the marital act, when it is antecedent and perpetual,<sup>40</sup>
- *Existing bond:* when a previous marriage has been contracted, for as long as the other spouse is alive,<sup>41</sup>
- *Holy Orders,*<sup>42</sup>
- *Religious profession:* when a public and perpetual vow of chastity has been made in a religious institute.<sup>43</sup>

The impediments of *relationship* protect the intimate relations of the members of the same family so that they do not go beyond their proper limits:

- *Consanguinity:* natural relationship in the direct line, and up to the fourth degree inclusive in the collateral line (that is, four steps or less between those related through a common ancestor)<sup>44</sup>
- *Affinity:* the relationship between one spouse and the relatives by consanguinity of the other in the direct line<sup>45</sup>

- *Public propriety*: a sort of *quasi-affinity* between the parties to an invalid marriage or to a public or notorious concubinage, and those related to them by consanguinity in the direct line and in the first degree<sup>46</sup>
  - *Legal relationship*: relationship by reason of adoption in the direct line or in the second degree of the collateral line<sup>47</sup>
- Finally, impediments protecting, respectively, the *faith* of the Catholic spouse and the children and *conjugal fidelity* are the following:
- *Disparity of cult*: when one party is baptized while the other is not<sup>48</sup>
  - *Crime*: adultery with murder of the innocent spouse by either of the adulterers, or complicity in the murder of the spouse even if there is no adultery<sup>49</sup>

## 112. Dispensations from Impediments

Some impediments cease by themselves, like insufficient age. Others may cease by dispensation, which is the relaxation of the law that would have made that marriage invalid, granted by the legitimate authority in a specific case.

Dispensations can be granted by the diocesan bishop, except in the cases reserved to the Holy See. The Holy See alone has authority over the impediments of Holy Orders, public vows of chastity in a religious institute, and crime.<sup>50</sup> In some urgent cases, and within certain conditions, the parish priest or the confessor also can grant the dispensation.<sup>51</sup>

Among the causes that justify a dispensation are, difficulty in finding another spouse, the advisability of regularizing a *de facto* situation, the danger of contracting civil marriage if it is denied, etc. However, not all impediments can be dispensed. In fact, some are never dispensed.

## 113. Validation of an Invalid Marriage

If a marriage is found to not have been validly contracted, several *solutions* are possible:

- The spouses can be left in their good faith when one foresees that, if they were to know their real situation, they would not be willing to validate it, but would persist in it to their own harm and that of their children.
- They can live together as brother and sister if the nullity is not public and there are grounds to hope that they will be able to do it.
- The spouses can separate. This is the only possibility when the impediment cannot be dispensed and they are not able to live as brother and sister.
- The marriage can be validated.

Generally speaking, the *validation* consists in doing what was omitted when the marriage was contracted.

- If the marriage is invalid because the proper form was not followed (defect of form), it should be repeated in the proper way in the presence of the parish priest and two witnesses.
- If a former impediment has ceased (e.g., the proper age has been reached), the consent should be manifested again in the proper way.
- If the impediment still exists, they must ask for a dispensation and renew their consent.
- If what was missing is precisely the consent, they should give it.<sup>52</sup>

When a marriage is found to be null, but there was true consent or it was given later and the spouses persist in their consent, the ecclesiastical authority may grant a retroactive validation called radical sanation (*sanatio in radice*).

This validation can be granted only by the Holy See or, in some specific cases, by the diocesan bishop. It includes the dispensation from an impediment, the dispensation from the law requiring a renewed consent, and a retroactive effectivity of the marriage from the moment it was first celebrated.

The radical sanation can be granted even if one or both spouses are unaware of it.<sup>55</sup>

1. *CIC*, 1055; cf. *CCC*, 1617.
2. Cf. St. Augustine, *De Bono Coniugali*, 24 (PL 40. 394); *De Nupt. et Concup.* 1.7 (PL 44. 424); St. Leo I, Ep. 92 *ad Rusticum*, 4 (PL 54. 1204). “In marriage, let the goods of marriage be loved: offspring, fidelity, and the sacrament.” In these few words, St. Augustine crystallized the teaching of faith on the purposes of matrimony.
3. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 78.
4. Cf. Leo XIII, Enc. *Arcanum*: DS 3146.
5. Benedict XIV, Const. *Paucis*, Mar. 19, 1758.
6. Cf. *ST*, Suppl., q. 42, a. 1, ad 1; q. 45, a. 5; *CCC*, 1623.
7. Cf. DS 1813–1814.
8. Cf. *CIC*, 1134; *CCC*, 1638.
9. Cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 13; *CCC*, 1643.
10. Pius XI, Enc. *Casti Connubii*: DS 3714.
11. Cf. DS 1810; *PO*, 16; *CCC*, 1618–1620.
12. Cf. *PO*, 16.
13. *LG*, 11; cf. John Paul II, Ap. Ex. *Familiaris Consortio*, 21; *CCC*, 1655–1658.
14. Cf. DS 1812.
15. Leo XIII, Enc. *Arcanum*: DS 3145–46.
16. *CIC*, 1671.
17. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1125.
18. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1059, 1672.
19. Specifically, their declaration and establishment is the exclusive competence of the pope: cf. *Ibid.*, 1075.
20. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1086.
21. Although some authors hold that the baptized party receives a true sacrament, the opposite opinion is more common and agrees with the *praxis* of the Roman Curia.
22. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1062.
23. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1066–1070.
24. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1063–1064; *CCC*, 1632. See also the commentary on these canons in the University of Navarre edition: *Código de Derecho Canónico* (Pamplona, Spain: EUNSA, 1983). Two aspects are pointed out: first, the advisability of attending the preparatory courses that the competent authority may organize for couples wanting to get married; second, the need to prevent the nonattendance of these courses from becoming a *de facto* or *de jure*—a new impediment for marriage.
25. Cf. *CIC*, 1066.
26. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1057.
27. *Ibid.*, 1057; cf. *CCC*, 1625–1632.
28. Cf. *CIC*, 1095–1107.
29. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1102.
30. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1096.
31. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1099.
32. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1101.
33. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1097–1098.
34. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1103.
35. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1108–1112; *CCC*, 1630–1631.

36. Cf. *CIC*, 1116.

37. The 1917 Code, following a well-established tradition, distinguished between *diriment impediments*—the ones here defined—and *impediment*, or *hindering impediments*, which make the marriage illegal but not void. The latter have disappeared in the present Code, which still uses the term *diriment impediments*. Here, we call them simply “impediments,” since there is no longer any danger of confusion. The new Code has also slightly changed the diriment impediments.

38. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1083.

39. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1089.

40. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1084.

41. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1085.

42. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1087.

43. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1088.

44. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1091.

45. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1092.

46. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1093.

47. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1094.

48. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1086.

49. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1090.

50. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1078.

51. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1079–1080.

52. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1156–1160.

55. Cf. *Ibid.*, 1161–1165.