

God is One - God is Three - God became Man

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PART I

THOUGHTS ON THE CREDO OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Pope Paul VI marked the close of the year of faith on the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, 1968, with his proclamation of The Credo of the People of God a declaration of the sacred traditional faith of the Catholic Church for this day and age.

This pamphlet presents some reflections on and exposition of this faith from the pen of the Reverend H. A. Johnston, S.J.

Originally published as a series of articles in the Australian Messenger of the Sacred Heart in 1969-70, they have been edited to form a series of three pamphlets. Part I (this pamphlet) discusses the meaning of faith, the mystery of God and the work of our redemption by Christ.

Part II and Part III, to be published in April and May, 1971, will tell of the work of the Holy Spirit, the perfecting of man by grace, the mystery of the Church, the Eucharist and man's final destiny.

-THE EDITOR.

1. I BELIEVE

It seems natural to begin by asking ourselves what is the meaning of the word Credo and what it stands for. Credo is a Latin word meaning "I believe". Our English word "creed" is derived from it, as well as other words, like credible. But besides its literal meaning Credo stands for something more, for a formula containing a summary of our faith; it is equivalent to our English word Creed.

This twofold meaning of Credo, (1) "I believe", and (2) "what I believe", has a parallel in our English word faith. Faith is in the first place the act or virtue of the person who believes, but it also stands for what he believes, as when, for example, we speak of the Catholic faith.

In this pamphlet we shall be concerned mainly with the second meaning, for we shall be examining the summary of what we, as Catholics, believe in the formula recently set forth for us by Christ's vicar, the Pope. At the same time it is very necessary for us to have a clear understanding of what we mean by faith in the primary sense; in other words, to know why we believe as well as what we believe.

What Faith Is

Faith is one of the ways in which we find out facts. We all know that we derive knowledge from different sources. One source is our senses. We run into something in the dark and we feel it. If there is light we see it. We can hear an aeroplane hidden above the clouds. In everyday life, as we know, we are constantly getting information from our senses.

Obviously we should be inferior to animals, whose senses are often keener than ours, if we had no higher source of knowledge. But we differ from the animals in having the power of reasoning. When Robinson Crusoe saw a footprint on the sand of his desert island, he was able to draw the conclusion that there was another human being there, though he had not yet seen him. From a knowledge of their speed and their distance from the sun (things that can be found by sense observation) astronomers can estimate the weight of the planets from many millions of miles distance.

Yet, with all the advantage that reason gives us, our knowledge would be very limited if we had only sense and intellect to rely on. By far the greater part of our knowledge comes from quite a different source, information we receive from others.

Information From Others

When you listen to the broadcast of a race result, you do not see it yourself, and you could not have known it by reasoning (though perhaps sometimes you think you can, to the bookmakers' delight and prosperity); you get the information through the word of another.

If I had to sacrifice all the knowledge I obtain from others I should find myself very badly off indeed. Nearly all my knowledge of science comes that way; I accept it on the word of scientists. All my knowledge of past history comes through the testimony of others. If my knowledge of geography were restricted to the part of the earth I have seen for myself, it would be very small indeed. The news in the daily papers comes to me on the evidence of reporters and news services. We can say that all this knowledge comes to us through faith, human faith, which means accepting information on the word of another.

Divine Faith

But the faith we are now concerned with is divine faith, that is, accepting truth on the word of God. This is an entirely new source of knowledge, and of course a very precious one. We must, it is clear, first establish that God has spoken, either directly or through an accredited messenger; but once that is done there is a whole new world of truth opened up to us. Let us examine some of the striking characteristics of divine faith.

(1) God may make known to us different kinds of truth. He may, make known to us truths about himself and truths about our own destiny which, in theory at least, we might make out for ourselves by the use of our reason. But our reason has its limitations, and not all of us have the natural endowments or the training or the time necessary for the investigation of profound truths. But we can all know these things easily and with certainty if God deigns to become our teacher.

Then there are other things, truths that depend on God's free will and truths that are completely beyond our power of discovering or even of comprehending, which we can know only if God chooses to make them known to us. We could not know that there are three Persons in God unless God Himself told us so. Even when we know this truth through God's teaching we cannot fully understand it. Not that mysteries like this create any difficulty for faith. God is infinite and our minds are finite. It is absolutely impossible that what is finite should contain, embrace, or enclose what is infinite. We cannot even put a quart in a pint pot.

(2) Divine faith, therefore, transcends reason; that is, it gives us truth that could not be acquired by reason alone and may be beyond our power of understanding. But it is not on that account unreasonable. On the contrary, faith is eminently reasonable.

We take the word of men. We should only make ourselves ridiculous if we refused to accept any truth that we could not verify for ourselves. But if it is reasonable to accept the word of men, how much more reasonable it is to accept the word of God. This brings us to another point.

(3) We are absolutely safe when we have the word of God for a truth. We cannot always trust our senses, for we can easily be deceived about what we see or think we see. Our earth is travelling round the sun at a rate of nearly 20 miles a second; but to our senses we seem to be absolutely motionless.

Our reason can make mistakes; even the youngest of us is not infallible. Weakness of intellect or want of attention or impetuosity or prejudice or pride can seriously affect our judgement and lead us into error. Human testimony cannot always be relied on. But God cannot make mistakes, nor can He deceive us. Once we have God's word for anything we know that it is absolutely impossible that this should not be true.

(4) A special characteristic of divine faith is that there is an obligation for me to accept God's word. I may be imprudent or unreasonable in refusing to take man's word for a thing or to accept the teaching of a scientist; but these have no special authority to teach me or to demand my submission to their views. It is different with God. I am a creature and as such am in duty bound to accept the teaching of my Creator and to obey Him. That is why pride - reliance on myself and my own powers and reluctance to submit to God - is a great obstacle to faith.

(5) But though I am bound to believe, it counts to my credit when I do believe. I merit by my faith. The reason is that faith is free: I am not forced to accept God's word. It is true that faith is an assent of the mind, but that assent is given in response to an act of the will.

I am not free with regard to the testimony of my senses; when I see a thing in normal conditions it does not depend on my free choice whether I accept its reality or not. Similarly, if something is perfectly clear to my mind, for example, that two and two make four, it is not in my power to doubt it; the truth forces itself upon me.

Faith a Free Act

But it is different when someone tells me something; I do not find myself forced to accept it, even if I believe in the honesty of the person. The reason is that the fact itself is not presented to me, but only someone's testimony to it. This leaves the truth itself hidden from me. That is why there is always a certain obscurity about faith; and that is why the act of faith is a meritorious act. I honour God by accepting His word when nothing forces me to do so.

We are familiar with the last beatitude of the Gospels: "Blessed are those who have believed without seeing". That brings us back to the beginning, where Our Lady is called blessed because she has believed that the word of God would be fulfilled in her. The gift of faith is one for which we should be very grateful.

2. THE POPE'S CREDO

Having dealt with the meaning of Credo in general, we now turn to this particular Credo, which was issued at the end of the Year of Faith, 1968. It is not, of course, a new creed, for a creed is only a summary of the truth which God has revealed to us, made known through scripture and the teaching of the Church, and that can never be a different truth. We may recall what St. Paul said to the Galatians:

"I am astonished at the promptness with which you have turned away from the one who called you and have decided to follow a different version of the Good News. Not that there can be more than one Good News: it is merely that some trouble-makers among you want to change the Good News of Christ; and let me warn you that if anyone preaches a version of the Good News different from the one we have already preached to you, whether it be ourselves or an angel from heaven, he is to be condemned." (Galatians 1: 6-8).

And the letter of Jude, we remember, speaks of "the faith which has been once and for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude vv. 3 and 5). It is our glory and happiness to possess this truth of God which can never fail, and the Credo which the Pope has given us is a call to renew our gratitude for our faith and our fidelity to it. The Pope is the divinely appointed head of the Church and the Vicar of Christ, which is another reason why we should welcome his Credo. Respect for and obedience to the Pope have always been regarded, and rightly so, as the mark of the true Catholic.

The Pope is the successor of St. Peter, a fact which is repeated over and over again in the decrees of the Second Vatican Council; and there is no higher authority in the Church of God than a general Council with the Pope at its head.

Vicar of Christ

Christ was, as he himself asserted, the true shepherd, but when he was leaving the earth he appointed a deputy to take his place. Our Lord had said earlier that He wanted His sheep to form one flock under one shepherd. Now Peter is constituted shepherd of that flock. St. Ambrose surely expressed the mind of Christ when he said, "Where Peter is, there is the Church"; the shepherd identifies the flock and makes it a flock.

That what was given to Peter was given also to His successors hardly needs arguing. Christ was preparing a Church that would last to the end of time. As the apostles had successors in the Church, so also the head of the apostolic band. The foundation Christ laid was not just a scaffolding, to be removed when the building had been set up.

Can we claim to be Christ's sheep, of whom He said, "I know mine and mine know me", unless we allow ourselves to be guided by the shepherd to whom Christ committed us? So we accept with joy and gratitude this Credo of the Pope. In the introduction to it he writes:

"Just as once at Caesarea Philippi Simon Peter, in the name of the twelve apostles, declared that Christ was truly the Son of God, in contrast with the opinions of men, so today his lowly successor and shepherd of the whole Church, raises his voice to give the strongest testimony to divine truth. It was for this reason that the truth was entrusted to the Church, that she might announce it to all nations."

3. "WE BELIEVE IN ONE GOD"

Every creed begins with God, and in a true sense it may be said to end there. God is truth itself, so there can be no truth which is not found in God. Our belief in every truth that is revealed is belief in God, for when we accept God for what He is, we accept His whole revelation of Himself.

Similarly, when we love God that love governs our whole life. St. Augustine gives as a rule of life, "Love, and then you may do what you like". This does not mean, of course, that if we have some sentimental love of God we are not bound by any law and can do what we please, but rather that if we love God truly we are so bound to Him that we cannot fail to do His will in everything.

A passage in the book of Revelation reads: "I am alpha and omega (which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, as we might say A and Z), the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

There is also a chapter of A'Kempis which begins: "Here is my God and my all." Then the author pauses and asks, "What more do I wish, and what greater happiness can I desire?" And after repeating the opening words, he adds, "Enough is said for one who understands."

"For one who understands," that is just our trouble. God is everything to us in Himself, but it is very difficult for us - indeed impossible - to understand Him as He really is, while we are in this world. We have no direct perception of God; we know Him only through the creatures in which His being and perfection are imperfectly revealed.

Beauty Ever Ancient, Ever New

We could go through the whole of creation, for example, and gather - as a bee gathers honey from innumerable flowers - all the beauty that can be found in created things: the beauty of nature in the skies at night, at sunset, or at dawn; the beauty of flowers and trees, of mountains and valleys, of light and shadow, of rockbound coast; the beauty of man and beast and insect; the beauty of art and literature and human character; the beauty of music and the songs of birds. If we could unite all this beauty into one, how breath-taking it would be. Yet, compared with the beauty of God it would be as nothing. No matter what degree of beauty we had reached, it would still be finite, whereas the beauty of God is infinite.

But there is more than that. The beauty of God is not merely far greater, it is different in kind. Beauty in creatures is an accidental thing; it can come and go. and it is not the very nature of the being that possesses it. But it is different with God. It is not so much that He possesses beauty as that He is beauty itself. And so with goodness and wisdom and all other perfections. Consequently there is nothing in this world which can represent God as He really is.

Helen Keller had some idea of what colour and sound meant, but she did not know them as they really are, because she was blind and deaf. She knew them through imperfect comparisons and from a description of the effect they had on those who could see and hear. But the true nature of colour and sound were hidden from her.

Words Inadequate

So it is with our knowledge of God in this life. All the words, we use of God, his being and perfection, are inadequate. They are drawn from and represent created things. When we transfer them to God we do our best to get rid of the imperfections and limitations inherent in them, but we are still left with ideas and terms which belong to created things and can be applied to God only imperfectly; created things have some likeness to God, but it is a very imperfect one. They point towards Him and give hints of what He is, but His real nature will be known to us only in eternity.

Jesus Christ has given us a much better idea of God than we could obtain for ourselves, and God has ways of communicating a knowledge of Himself to us in prayer. But it remains true that the knowledge of the highest mystic is very different from what the beatific vision will give us when we reach our final home.

God is in His Heaven

Yet, though our efforts can never meet with complete success, we must always keep trying to grow in knowledge and love of God. The knowledge and love of God we shall have in eternity, which will be the source of our perfect happiness, will be in proportion to the knowledge and love we have acquired, with the help of God's grace, during this present life.

Even on earth, we must constantly be reminding ourselves, our true happiness can be found in God alone. St. Augustine expressed a profound truth when he said:

"You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts can find no rest till they rest in you."

Our human minds were given us to seek and grasp the truth; but God is truth itself. Our wills were given us that we might embrace and enjoy what is good; but God : is goodness itself. We were made for God as a key is made to fit into a lock and turn sweetly in it. There are many things in the world today that may tend to make us anxious and fearful, but it is a consolation to know that God exists, and that there is another world of perfect goodness and happiness which is our true home.

But we must not make the mistake of thinking of God as a wonderful being whom we can admire and adore, but who is far away from us...

"...dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16).

He is in a true sense closer to us than we are to ourselves; He is our creator. God has created a whole hierarchy of beings, among whom we have our place. He has created the material world with all its complexity, into the secrets of which men are constantly delving; He has created animal life in its great variety; He has created purely spiritual beings whom we call angels.

Man is the Crowning Piece

The crown of the visible creation is man. God is our creator. He uses secondary causes, created beings, for the production and maintenance of our bodies, but ultimately matter also came into being through creation (that is, the production of being, reality, where there was nothing before), and our souls came directly from the hand of God.

But we must not think of creation as something that happened in the past and is over and done with. God is the only source of existence, and when He gives it to a creature through creation He has to continue to give it always. God could not create something that no longer depended on Him for its existence, because a creature no longer dependent on God would be a contradiction.

When you lift a stone from the bottom of a pond and hold it at the surface, it is there, not because it is the nature of a stone to float but because you are supporting it. Take away your hand and it sinks to the bottom again. When you sing or play on an instrument, there is music because you are producing it. You stop and the music stops. So God drew us out of nothingness when He first created us, but equally He has to continue to give us existence every moment or we should cease to be. In this sense He is always creating us.

It is this close union with God which is our great dignity and our glory. If you wanted to write your autobiography, but lacked the time or skill necessary for the task, you might still accomplish it, very briefly but adequately by writing: "I came from God; I belong to God; I am going to God". Nothing else matters compared with that. We have our Lord's words: "This is eternal life, to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

There are many nowadays who do not believe in God. There are academic atheists who refuse to accept the existence of God, and there are practical atheists, a much larger number, who give God no place in their lives. This is a situation which concerns us believers.

The theoretic atheists are to be dealt with by those who are qualified to do so; it is the practical atheist with whom we ordinary believers have to deal. The Vatican Council has told us that it is the duty of the Church (that is, of us all) to make God the Father and His incarnate Son present and in a sense visible in the world. Men cannot see God, but they can see us, the children of God. Our interest in others, our readiness to help those in need, our spirit of self-sacrifice, our high principles, the otherworldliness of our aims and ambitions, these are the proofs of the existence of God and His action in the world that men will accept.

"Imitate the perfection of your heavenly Father," our Lord said to us. "Be imitators of God as beloved children," was St. Paul's advice. Show the family, likeness, since you belong to the household of God.

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

4. GOD IS ONE - GOD IS THREE

God is most truly one, not merely in the sense that there can be only one God but also because His nature is one undivided and indivisible reality. He has all perfections, but not (as we are almost forced to imagine it) through the addition of perfection to perfection, but as having them all identical with Himself in one absolutely simple being.

The Trinity

At the same time we know by revelation that there are in God relations which do not clash with His perfect unity; that in the supreme reality which is God there is a society of persons. These relations are identical with the divinity, but are distinct from one another. This is the primary mystery of our religion, that in the absolute unity of the divine nature there are three Persons.

We can easily distinguish nature and person in human beings. If we point to Peter, say, we might ask, "What is he?" The answer would be, "He is a man", one who possesses a human nature. If we ask, "Who is he?" we are told that he is Peter, a particular person.

We must remember, of course, that these terms, nature and person, like all terms derived from created things, are not applied to God in exactly the same sense. They are imperfect when applied to God, but we have no other terms to use.

While admitting that this is a profound mystery which is beyond our power of comprehending, we can still go some way in explaining what it means.

The relations in God which constitute the Persons must be spiritual, for God is a purely spiritual being; they must arise from the activity of God's mind and will.

Father, Son...

God knows himself fully and perfectly. He is the only one who does. When we know an object we form an idea or concept of it in our mind and this represents the thing known. This concept is something added to our mind, which did not have it before. But nothing can be added to God, for no

addition can be made to infinity. Furthermore addition means composition which is opposed to God's absolute unity.

So God's concept of himself (to use human terms) must be identical with His very being; but yet there is that opposition or relation between the knower and what is known. The Father, therefore, by His knowledge of Himself begets the perfect image of Himself which is the Son.

And Holy Spirit

Father and Son must love one another with an infinite, perfect love; but, again, that love cannot be distinct from their being; it is the divine substance, but gives rise to a new relationship which is the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son.

This does not, of course explain the mystery, but it shows the direction in which we must go in trying to understand it, as far as that is possible.

Mysterious Man

It may help to remember that even in ourselves there are mysteries of a somewhat similar kind. Ordinarily in our acts of knowledge we, the subjects knowing, are distinct from the object known. But we are aware that we can think of ourselves, and we can make our own thoughts the object of reflex thinking. Similarly, we can love ourselves, though ordinarily the lover and the one loved are different. If, then, even a finite spirit, such as is found in man, provides us with mysteries, how much more should we expect mysteries, and much more profound mysteries, in the case of a spiritual being that is infinite.

There are in God, therefore, relations of origin, Father generating the Son, the Son generated by the Father, Holy Spirit proceeding from Father and Son. But here again we must be on guard against transferring to God what goes with relations of origin in creatures.

If one creature is the origin of another the one that is the origin has priority over the other. The cause must be given before you can posit the effect. And the effect is dependent on its cause. But in relations due to origin in the Blessed Trinity there is no priority of time and no dependence of one on the other, no inferiority or subjection. That is part of the mystery. All the divine Persons are equal in every way, because they all possess one and the same divine nature and all its perfection.

We are not to allow ourselves to think that the Father possesses part of the divine nature, and the Son part, and the Holy Spirit another part; that would be, of course, impossible. The whole of the divinity is in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. It is not that there is one thing, the divine nature, and at the same time three things, the three Persons. No; there is only one thing, one absolute reality, and three relations in that one absolute reality. Let us recall a passage in St. John's Gospel (14: 8-10): 'Philip said to Jesus: "Lord, show us the Father and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "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?" '

That was the same as saying: We are distinct persons, but not separate beings.

A Necessity of God's Nature

Another truth we must know about the Blessed Trinity is that God is necessarily threefold in person. If, we had been brought up without knowledge of this mystery, as was the case of the Jews of old

and is the case today with some religions that believe in one God, we might have regarded it as more natural to think of God as one in person as in nature. Yet that is an impossibility; there could not be a God of one person; the ultimate reality must necessarily be threefold in person.

God is a necessary being; that is, He must exist and he must be just what He is; it is absolutely impossible that He should be other than He is. It is true that we could not know that antecedently, but once the Trinity has been revealed to us, then we know that it is the essential nature of God, which could not be other than it is.

A mistake we must guard against is that of looking on the Trinity in God as a static thing, as if there were three Persons in God from all eternity, and that is all there is about it. No; the Blessed Trinity is a real life in God, something that is going on perpetually. The Father is for ever begetting the Son and from the Father and the Son the Holy Spirit is perpetually proceeding.

But, you may say, all this is very abstract, not to say puzzling; does it mean anything for us beyond demanding our faith and our adoration?

It must be confessed that for many it does not. They are baptized in the name of the Trinity, they make the sign of the cross, invoking the Trinity, and they recite the Glory be to the Father; but this great truth of our faith does not really enter into their lives. This is a great loss.

This mystery was the chief point of Christ's revelation to us. He made known the mystery, first by himself appearing as a man, yet as a divine person distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit, then by His words, by what He told us of himself, of His Father, and of the Holy Spirit. No other doctrine is so fully set forth in the New Testament. It must surely have been for our benefit that it was made known to us.

If we do not know and take an interest in the Blessed Trinity, we do not know God and are not interested in God, the only real God; we are in danger of making for ourselves an unreal God, a God of one person, an impossible God. There can be only one God, and He is necessarily a God of three Persons.

But in a special way we are losers if we neglect the Blessed Trinity, because it is our great privilege to share in the inner life of the Trinity through grace, which is a preparation for a more perfect sharing in eternity: The life of the Blessed Trinity is our supernatural life too.

5. GOD BECAME MAN

The Incarnation can be called the centre of our Christian life, because it is not only the source of all the Christian revelation but also the source of all the graces and blessings we enjoy in this life or shall enjoy throughout eternity. Just as from the sun comes all the light and heat which makes life on this earth possible, so from the teaching of Christ and from His merits we derive every good that is ours in this life and in the next.

The word "incarnation" comes from Latin and means literally "becoming flesh", that is, becoming man. It stands for the doctrine that the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, remaining absolutely unchanged in His divine nature, took to Himself and made His own a complete human nature, body and soul.

This human nature did not become a human person, for to be a person a human nature must be independent and responsible for itself, whereas the human nature which the Son of God assumed did not have this independence. It was taken possession of by the higher personality of the Word of

God. This mystery - and it is a profound mystery - is in a sense the opposite of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity: in the Trinity the three Persons possess one and the same nature; in the incarnation one Person possesses two distinct natures, one divine and one human.

Jesus - True God and True Man

Jesus Christ is, therefore, truly God, possessing the divine nature from all eternity, but just as truly man, because he possessed a human nature from a certain point in time. We can never hope to understand fully this marvellous work of God, but what we can know provides more than enough matter for wonder and for rejoicing.

All creation is linked up with this mystery. The Son as God gives existence to all creatures; as Son He is their model (what philosophers call the exemplary cause) ; and He is also the final cause, the end for which everything was created.

"He is the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and earth, everything visible and everything invisible... All things were created through Him and for Him." (Col. 1:15-16).

Creation might be regarded as an extension of the divine generation of the Son, so that when He came into the world He was coming to what was His own, to take His place as its head. It was the Father's plan, we are told, "to bring everything together under Christ as head". (Eph. 1: 10).

God's Revelation of Himself

The Incarnation is first of all God's revelation of himself. To know God as He is in His divine nature is impossible for us in this life; but God has condescended to make himself known to us in a human nature, through which we are led to His divinity.

First we know the Son who became man for us. Then through Him we know the Father, who is one God with Him, and the Holy Spirit whom He is to give us. Christ is described in the New Testament as "the image of the unseen God" and "the perfect copy of His nature". Both by His actions and His teaching, Christ brings us a knowledge of His Father. Addressing His Father He said: "I have made known your name to the men you gave me out of the world". (John 17:6). ("Name", we recall, stands for the nature of the Father, which He communicates to the Son.) It is only through the Son that we can know the Father:

"No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Matt: 11: 27).

"I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except by me". (John 14: 6).

A Perfect Teacher

In human matters we can never find the perfect teacher. However, in the most important and difficult of all arts, the art of living as children of God, we have an absolutely perfect teacher, Jesus Christ. God and man.

From Him we learn all about our eternal destiny, our relation to himself, to His Father, and to the Holy Spirit; He teaches us the road we must follow, the dispositions we must cultivate, and the virtues we must practice; He points out the helps that are at our disposal and the dangers we must avoid.

He is unlike other teachers in this, that, whereas other teachers can do little or nothing for the pupil who has not the ability for the subject being taught, Christ can give to His pupils (granted a willingness on their part) both the light they need in order to understand His lessons and the strength and courage to put these lessons into practice.

He is not a teacher in theory alone; He lives our life himself and gives us the example of what He teaches. He lives as He bids us live, asking nothing of us that He has not done himself, with a perfection which we can never reach.

He lived a life of self-sacrifice in the highest, degree: He loved us even to the point of dying a terrible death for us; He submitted himself in everything to His Father's will. We are not, therefore, just listening to the lessons of a perfect teacher; we are studying and imitating a model.

The Father has chosen us with the intention that, in St. Paul's words, "we should be fashioned into the likeness of His Son". It is a very high destiny indeed, and a serious responsibility that is placed upon us.

Redemption in Christ

The Son of God came on earth to redeem us. We had been created for eternal life with God, but we had been separated from Him by sin. Man had turned away from God, his last end, and was following a path of his own choosing which could lead only to destruction. But "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not be lost but may have eternal life". (John 3: 16).

Man could not redeem himself, properly speaking, but God found a way which almost made it seem as if he could. God's Son made himself truly one of us; He took our sinful nature - though without sin himself - becoming almost like a lost sheep or a prodigal son for our sakes.

In taking one particular human nature as His own He planned to identify himself with the whole of our humanity, including it all in himself. Then he offered in our name, and as identified with us, an act of perfect reparation, submission and love to His Father; He died to the merely human life and rose to a new and glorious one.

It is through baptism that we unite ourselves with Christ in His death and gain the right to share in His resurrection. This is a central theme of St. Paul's teaching; we can take one passage as an example:

"You have been taught that when we were baptized in Christ Jesus we were baptized in His death; in other words, when we were baptized we went into the tomb with Him and joined Him in His death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life. If in union with Christ we have imitated His death, we shall also imitate Him in His resurrection." (Rom. 6: 4-5).

It is this union with Christ that is the supreme benefit conferred on us through the Incarnation.

A Living Union

But we must not think of this union with Christ as only a moral union, a union of mind and will; it is far more than that, it is a living union. By the grace He merited for us Christ conferred on us a share in His own divine life:

"God sent His only Son into the world that we might live by Him" (1 John 4: 9).

Thus we become children of God in a new way. We could already be called children of God in virtue of our creation by God, but now we are his children in a higher way by sharing in the sonship of Christ.

"Think of the love the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are." (1 John 3: 1).

No longer is Christ described merely as the only-begotten Son; He is now, in the words of St. Paul, "first-born of many brethren" (Rom. 8: 29).

"When the appointed time came, God sent forth His Son... to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might become adopted sons" (Gal. 4: 5-7).

"You are, all of you, sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 3: 26).

Divine Adoption

We are, by adoption, what Christ is by nature. But when we use the term adoption we must be careful not to confuse it with human adoption, where a husband and wife take a child and agree to treat it as if it were truly their own; but there are no ties of blood established, and no inherited gifts or qualities transmitted.

It is different when God adopts us; by His grace He makes a real change in us and gives us a share in a mysterious way in the divine nature itself. We have the authority of God's inspired word for that statement: "sharers in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1, 4).

This means that, sharing in the sonship of Christ, we are introduced into the very life of the Blessed Trinity, the Father communicating the divine life in imitation of the generation of His Son, the son identifying us with himself and the Holy Spirit sharing with us that love which is the very life of God. The future life of glory becomes ours by right:

"If God has made you son, then He has made you heir" (Gal. 4: 7).

"If we are children, we are heirs as well, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ". (Rom. 8: 17).

Sharing in the same life, we must all be truly one, in imitation of the unity of the divine Persons. So St. Paul insists that the difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free man, circumcised and uncircumcised, male and female, means nothing, "for you are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3: 29) ; "There is nothing but Christ in everyone" (Col. 3: 11).

6. CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD

"He was buried, and by his own power rose on the third day, raising us by His resurrection to that sharing of the divine life which is grace."

So we read in the Credo which we are studying. It may, perhaps seem strange that our elevation to the life of grace is attributed to the resurrection of Christ. But we are prone to making the mistake of regarding the death of Christ as the sole cause of our redemption, whereas His death, resurrection, and glorification, were only parts of one redemptive process. St. Paul never separates the death of Christ from His resurrection. For instance, he writes:

"He was put to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification". (Rom. 4: 25).

These words are not to be taken, however, as meaning that the forgiveness of our sins is something different from our justification (or sanctification); they are only two aspects of the same thing. Our

sins are forgiven only through the infusion of grace; the infusion of grace means the forgiveness of our sins. This view of the importance of the resurrection of Christ in the work of salvation is very clearly put before us in the Decree on the Liturgy of the Vatican Council:

"Christ the Lord accomplished the work of human redemption and the perfect glorification of God chiefly through the paschal mystery of His blessed passion, His resurrection from the dead, and His glorious ascension" (No. 5).

"The paschal mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, from which mystery all the sacraments and sacramentals derive their power" (No. 61).

"On this day (Sunday) the faithful ought to gather together in order that, hearing the word of God and partaking of the eucharist, they may recall the passion, resurrection and glory of the Lord Jesus, and give thanks to God who has given them a new and a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1: 3). (No. 106).

Central Teaching of the New Testament

The resurrection may be called the central teaching of the New Testament. It is referred to more than 30 times in the gospels, and nearly a hundred times in the whole of the New Testament, figuring in 17 out of its 27 books.

It was Christ himself, as we know, who first mentioned His resurrection, foretelling it on several occasions, a fact which the apostles later appealed to. When they came to preach the good news of Christ after the coming of the Holy Spirit, the resurrection was their central theme. This comes out very clearly in five addresses made by St. Peter and six by St. Paul, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

The first address of Peter was made to the crowd on the day of Pentecost:

"He spoke about the resurrection of the Messiah... ; "You killed Jesus the Nazarene, but God raised him to life... and we are all witnesses to this fact" (cf. Acts 2: 22-32).

The second was to the people in the temple area (3: 12-26). The third was when Peter and John had to appear before a meeting of the Jewish leaders (4: 8-12). The fourth was again before the Jewish leaders (5: 29-32). The fifth was to Cornelius and his household (10: 34-43). In all of these the resurrection plays an important part. Peter's first letter contains three separate statements about the resurrection (in chapters one and three).

St. Paul's Testimony

But it is in St. Paul that the subject of the resurrection of Christ receives its full development. Six of his talks recorded in the Acts put forward the resurrection as of primary importance.

At Antioch of Pisidia he repeated the argument St. Peter had used from Psalm 15 (16) (Acts 13: 17-41). At Thessalonica he spent three sabbaths proving that the Messiah was destined to suffer and to rise from the dead (Acts 17: 2-3). At Athens he excited the ribaldry of the cynical Athenians by putting forward this doctrine (Acts 17: 18-34). But the real dogmatic development comes in his great letters, in all of which the doctrine has a prominent place, in Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians, as well as in the second letter to Timothy; it is also found in Hebrews.

The 15th chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians, is devoted entirely to the subject of Christ's resurrection and our resurrection through His. He begins by asserting the fact of Christ's resurrection and gives a list of witnesses who can vouch for it. How, then, he asks, can some people say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ did not rise, and both Paul's preaching and his convert's faith have no meaning. Moreover, he and others would be proved to have committed perjury before God, because they swore that God had raised Christ to life.

The fact is, he repeats, that Christ did rise from the dead and He was only the first of a series, the first-fruits of a rich harvest. This connection between Christ's resurrection and ours is found asserted by St. Paul in at least eight other places.

Physical Resurrection

That the resurrection was a physical one, a resurrection of Christ's body, cannot be doubted, if we are willing to accept the evidence of the New Testament. The resurrection is always spoken of, both by our Lord himself and His followers, as of the same order as the events which precede it, it is part of a series: mocked, scourged, crucified, died, buried, rose.

It is assigned to "the third day" (what we, in our manner of speech, would normally call the second day), but this would have no meaning if we are to understand by resurrection simply the glorification of Christ, for this, of course, came immediately at His death. What became of the body? All the witnesses testify that it was not in the tomb on the first day of the week, and our Lord's enemies had to invent a story to account for this. The explanation of the empty tomb which the New Testament and the Church give us is that of the angels:

"He is not here, for He has risen, as He said."

This physical resurrection is supported by an abundance of evidence. St. John tells us that when Jesus said:

"Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up", "He was speaking of the sanctuary that was His body, and when Jesus rose from the dead His disciples remembered that He had said this" (John 2: 19).

Jesus said to Magdalen, "Do not cling to me". (When St. Matthew writes that the women "clasped His feet", He is probably referring to the same incident.) We remember the words our Lord used to His apostles: "Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh as you see I have."

There is, then, hardly any need for faithful Catholics to be disturbed if they come across strange views about the resurrection of Christ, a doctrine found so clearly set forth in the New Testament and taught authoritatively in so many Councils and professions of faith. The strange views sometimes put forward are often called new, but in most cases they are only old rejected theories resurrected.

In the early years of this 20th century Pope St. Pius X condemned the following proposition:

"Faith in the resurrection of Christ did not originally concern the fact itself of the resurrection, but rather the immortal life of Christ with God."

It is better for us to be associated with Christ's Church rather than be among those whom Jesus...
"reproached for their incredulity and obstinacy because they refused to believe those who had seen
Him after He had risen." (Mark 16: 14).

Nihil Obstat: BERNARD O'CONNOR, Diocesan Censor. Imprimatur: J. R. KNOX Archbishop of
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