

Truth And The Incarnation

A Map of Life – Part 2

By Frank J. Sheed.

London Catholic Truth Society No.do112a (1933)

1A. THE INCARNATION.

THE human race then had broken its right relation of friendship with God, as we saw earlier when we considered the creation and the fall of man: men had lost the way because they had lost the life (without which the way cannot be followed) and the truth without which the way cannot even be known. To such a world Christ, who had come to make all things new, said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." In those three words – way, truth, life – Christ related Himself quite precisely to what man had lost: as precisely as a key fits a lock. In the precision of that threefold relation, we are apt to overlook the strangest word in the phrase – the word "am."

Men needed truth and life: what they might have expected was one who would say, "I have the truth and the life": what they found was one who said, "I am the truth and the life." This strange word forces us to a new mode of approach. If a man claims to have what we want, we must study what he has. If a man claims to be what we want, we must study what he is. With any other teacher the truth he has is our primary concern – the teacher himself is of no importance save as the bearer of truth, and his work is done when he has given it. With Christ, the teacher is primary: He cannot simply give us the truth and the life, and then have done with us. He can only give us Himself, for He is both. This point must be insisted on, not as a figure of speech, but as a strict fact. It is a map we are making, not a poem; and what is now being said, mysterious as it is, is strictly and literally true. Our study of the road of life has brought us to an examination of truth and life: we cannot understand the road if we do not understand them. But if Christ is the truth, then we must understand Him: if He is the life, then He must live in us.

Obviously, then, our map-making cannot progress till we are clear about Who and what Christ is, because the road we are to travel depends even more on what He is than on what He did.

1B. THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST.

Christ is God-made-man: that is He is truly God and He is truly man. He is God – with the nature of God: He took to Himself and made His own a complete human nature – a real human body and a real human soul. He is, then, one person – God – with two natures – divine and human. Nor is all this mere abstract matter, of no real concern to us. Everything in our life is bound up with the one person and the two natures of Christ. We must grasp this central luminous fact, or everything remains in darkness.

The distinction between person and nature is not some deep and hidden thing to which philosophy only comes after centuries of study. It is, on the contrary, a distinction so obvious that the smallest child who can talk at all makes it automatically. If in the half-light he sees a vague outline that

might be anything, he asks, "What is that?" If, on the other hand, he can see that it is a human being, but cannot distinguish or does not recognize the features, he asks, "Who is that?" The distinction between what and who is the distinction between nature and person. Of every man the two questions – what is he? and who is he? – can be answered. Every man, in other words, is both a nature and a person. Into my every action, nature and person enter. For instance I speak. I, the person, speak. But I am able to speak only because I am a man, because it is of my nature to speak. I discover that there are all sorts of things I can do: and all sorts of things I cannot do. My nature decides. I can think, speak, walk: these actions go with the nature of man, which I have. I cannot fly, for this goes with the nature of a bird, which I have not.

My nature, then, decides what I can do: it may be thought of as settling the sphere of action possible to me. According to my nature, I can act: apart from it, I cannot. But my nature does not do these things – I, the person, do them. It is not my nature that speaks, walks, thinks: it is I, the person.

A man may then be thought of as a person – who acts – and a nature – which decides the field in which he acts. In man, there is simply one nature to one person. In Christ, there are two natures to one person: and our minds used to the one-nature-to-one-person state of man tend to cry out that there is a contradiction in the idea of two natures to one person.

But once it has been grasped that "person" and "nature" are not identical in meaning: once it has been grasped that the person acts and the nature is that principle in him which decides his sphere of action, then we see that mysterious as Our Lord's person and nature may be, there is no contradiction. God the Son, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, assumed – took to Himself – a human nature: made it His own: not simply as something which He could use as a convenient sphere to act in, but really as His own: just as our nature is our own.

(Footnote: In the previous sentence, I referred to the Trinity. Something will be said of the doctrine of the Trinity in Chapter 4 of this booklet.)

In us the relation of person and nature is such that not merely do we say, "I have a human nature" (as we might say, "I have an umbrella") but person and nature are so fused in one concrete reality that we say, "I am a man." So God the Son can say not only, "I am God with a human nature to act in" but in the most absolute fullness of meaning He can say, "I am man." He does not simply act as man: He is man – as truly man as we.

This one person has two spheres of action: Christ our Lord could act either in His nature as God or in His nature as man. Remember the principle stated a few paragraphs back, that it is not the nature that acts, but the person. Therefore, whether He was acting in His divine nature or in His human nature, it was always the person who acted: and there was only the one person – God.

Then this is the position. Christ is God: therefore whatever Christ did, God did. When Christ acted in His divine nature (as when He raised the dead to life), it was God who did it: when Christ acted in His human nature (as when He was born, suffered and died), it was God who did it: God was born, God suffered, God died. For it is the person who acts: and Christ is God.

1C. THE ATONEMENT.

The next paragraph must be read with the closest attention or the map will not be properly understood.

Because Christ was God and Man, He was able to effect the reconciliation of God and man. The human race had broken the first relationship of oneness by sin: and of itself, the human race with all its imperfections on it could make no offering to God in reparation for its sin. Literally, the human race could not make reparation. Yet for the human act of rebellion, a human act of atonement was required: for the sin of human nature, only an act of human nature could satisfy – yet this act of human nature man could not perform. Christ was God and Man. The acts He performs in His human nature were truly human acts: yet because every action is of the person, they were acts of God, whose every act is of infinite value: Christ could make the necessary reparation. That particular action of His human nature which Christ chose as an offering-in-reparation – a sacrifice – was His death: at the age of thirty-three, He was crucified upon Calvary.

This was the atonement. By it, the breach between God and the human race was closed. The race was redeemed from that condition of separation from God into which the sin of Adam, the representative man, had plunged it. Heaven, the final and eternal union of God and man, was once more possible to man. For even the holiest man of the time between Adam's fall and Christ's death was still a member of the human race, a member of the race that had lost oneness with God, and as such debarred from heaven. But, by this re-making of the oneness, not only was Life – the Supernatural Life – set flowing with new richness for the elevation of man's soul: but that Life could now in heaven receive the full and complete flowering which before Calvary was impossible to it.

Christ had come "to save His people from their sins": He had come that man "might have life and have it more abundantly." These two purposes are in reality the same purpose – the effect of sin is the destruction of the Supernatural Life: a soul in sin is a soul that lacks the Supernatural Life: sin is removed by the pouring into the soul of that life – as darkness is removed by the turning on of the light. So far, then, for the first part of Christ's mission: He had reconciled the human race to God: He had brought back the rich store of Supernatural Life.

1D. CHRIST AS TEACHER.

There remains to be considered the other need of man – Truth. As we have seen this involves as a minimum that man shall be taught the purpose of his existence and the laws by which he must live. Christ taught this necessary minimum-and much more. The laws will be discussed in detail in Chapters 9 and 10 (of my book, A Map of Life. They make up the third booklet in this series.) Here notice only two things:

- (a) He took the ten commandments given to the chosen people of Israel by God some fifteen hundred years before – most of them beginning with "You shall not" and summed them up into two, both beginning "You shall": for the first three commandments, which set out our duty to God, He expressed concisely as "You shall love God"; and the remaining seven, which set out our duty to our neighbour, He expressed equally concisely as "You shall love your neighbour." In other words, all the commandments lie implicit in this twofold love;
- (b) Just as the commandments are summarized and made positive, so they are traced back from external conduct to the internal root of conduct, from actions (commanded or prohibited) to love – a state of the soul: and sins of the mind – or heart – or intention become as serious as sins of the exterior action: the yielding of the mind to lust not only is as bad as adultery, it is adultery; the yielding of the mind to murder not only is as bad as murder, it is murder. The essence of sin is now

clear – it is the soul of man twisting itself out of the right relation to God. That is sin. Nothing else is. And the laws which express the right relation are all forms of love.

So much, for the moment, for the laws to be obeyed. On the truths to be believed – including the minimum requirement of the purpose of man's existence, of what was in the mind of God when He made man – Christ is equally revealing and equally fundamental. The purpose of man's existence is to come to God. This includes a multitude of things, but principally, because man is an intelligent being, it involves some revelation of the nature of God: the more man knows of his goal, the more likely he is to make for it effectively. Thus, He revealed to man that in the divine nature are three persons – God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost: that He Himself was the Second Person, God the Son. Of this supreme mystery of the Trinity and of mystery in general, something will be said in Chapter 4 of this present booklet. Here we must consider not the revelation of God that our Lord gave by teaching, but the revelation of God that Our Lord gave simply by being.

Mankind has never been without means of acquiring some knowledge of God: in the Universe, we have God's work before our eyes and by examining any work, we can learn something of the workman. But, in practical fact, not much. We can learn more about a boilermaker by five minutes' face-to-face conversation with him than by five years' examination of the boiler he has made. Similarly, though we learn many things about God from contemplating the Universe He has made, there is something a little remote and shadowy about such knowledge. And this for the further reason that we can know nothing of what is involved in making a universe. But if we could see God – not making a universe – but obeying His mother, feeling hunger, paying taxes, receiving insult: then instantly we should be on our own ground. For all these things, we have done ourselves. Now because Christ was God, all these things are there for men to see. God did obey His mother, suffer hunger, pay taxes, receive insult. Christ, then, in a sense, is God translating Himself into our nature. And the difference between God acting in His own nature and God acting in ours is as great as the difference between a man talking in his own language and the same man talking in ours. For in the first case such a man can convey some things to us – but rather by signs than speech – and we catch what he has to say haltingly and uncertainly: in the second case, he really speaks to us and we know what he wants to communicate.

Thus, the fact that Christ is God takes on a new significance. As we first used it, it was as a fact about Christ: now we see it as an even more revealing fact about God. Christ – acting in our nature, which He had made His – yes, Him we can study and make our own: to realize that the knowledge thus acquired of Christ is true of God is altogether revolutionary. For only by learning that Christ is Love have men learnt that God is love: and that is almost the greatest gift of Christianity to the world.

Our Lord's life upon earth seems to have been especially devised with the purpose of bringing man into the closest possible intimacy with God. The general outline of His life is sufficiently well known. He was born of a virgin, the wife of a carpenter of Nazareth, during the reign of the Roman Emperor, Augustus. Then, with the exception of one strange incident when he was aged twelve, there is silence till he reached the age of thirty. Then came three years of teaching and the working of miracles. The leaders of the Jewish people turned against Him and more or less forced the Roman Governor to have Him executed. He was nailed to a cross and after three hours, He died. On the third day, He rose again from the dead, and after forty days, He ascended into the heavens and vanished from the eyes of men.

Within this framework, there are two rich streams of human contact, a greater and a less. The greater, naturally enough, was through His mother. From her He had drawn His human body: if man may call Him brother, it is solely through her. She lived with Him throughout the years before His public life began: to please her He worked a miracle at Cana and began His public ministry sooner than He had meant. When He died, He committed her to the care of John, the follower that He loved best: and this apostle, who became as a son to her, later wrote a gospel, in which from the beginning men have found a deeper insight into Our Lord than in any other. It would have been strange had it been otherwise – if any man could have lived in such intimacy with the mother of Christ and had no richness to show for it.

The second stream was through His apostles – the men He gathered round Him, and prepared with especial care as the instruments for the spread of His kingdom among men. It is important to grasp here the mode of Christ's revelation of His own Godhead. Obviously had He begun with the statement that He was God, the road would have been closed. Some would have disbelieved Him: those who believed would have been far too overcome with terror at the majesty of God and their own sinfulness to make any progress in human intimacy with Him. What actually happened was that these men came to know Him as men can only know one in whose company they constantly are, in every variety of circumstance. Gradually – or rather with sudden bursts forward followed by fallings away – they came to the feeling that He must be God and ultimately to the full knowledge that He was. But before that time they had come to know Him: to know Him as a friend and not only as a master: from men who had companioned with Christ for three years, even the discovery that He was God could not take away the certainty that He was love: so that God, too, must be love. The fruit of our Lady's thirty years with Christ and the apostles' three years with Him, enshrined in part in the gospels, is the very essence of the Christian tradition, woven into the very fabric of the Christian mind.

If we compare the attitude to God of the most pious pagans with that of the Christian the gulf is enormous. In the Christian attitude, there is a warm personal devotion not to be found elsewhere. For other men have seen the Works of God, but Christians have seen God.

These two truths, God is love and Law is love, are the two specifically Christian truths, unknown outside the Christian revelation. It is difficult to say which idea would have come upon the world with a greater shock. For outside Christianity, God has seemed to be a master or even a tyrant, but never love: and as a consequence, law has seemed to be force, or even cruelty, but never love. And even inside Christianity, it is hard to hold, continuous and never dimmed, the idea of God and law as love: for there come moments when another face seems to be presented to us; but putting aside feeling or no feeling, we now know. And we know because Christ was God.

Here then in outline is God's answer to man's need. The human race needed first to be reunited to God (that Heaven might once more be open to it), and second it needed the Life and the Truth by which it might attain Heaven once salvation became a possibility. Christ our Lord – God-made-man – made the act of reparation that reunited the human race with God and so made Heaven a possibility, He brought back for man the rich profusion of the Supernatural Life, and He revealed to man not only the necessary truths of purpose and law but a great store of truth besides. The next question is how man was to obtain what Christ had brought.

2A. THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST.

So far we have seen that for the intelligent living of life, men need to know the purpose of their being and the laws by which they should govern their lives: and it has been established that man is totally incapable of finding these out for himself and can know them only if God reveals them.

Further, we have seen that for the achievement of his purpose – namely, to live the life of Heaven – the natural life of man is not sufficient: that men need certain further powers-in the soul, that these flow from the Supernatural Life, that men must acquire this Supernatural Life here upon earth; and again that they cannot acquire it for themselves, but can have it only if God gives it.

These three things – truth, law, life – we have seen, would have been necessary in any condition of the human race. But the first man – Adam – complicated the position by breaking the friendship of the human race with God and so closing heaven to the race. Heaven then had to be made once more a possibility, after which the three original requirements would still be in force. Christ came to offer Himself as sacrifice to God in atonement for the sin of the race, and so opened Heaven once more to man; and He brought the gifts man needed of truth, law and life. On the question how men were to obtain these gifts from Him the last chapter closed.

Now to this question there is a very simple and satisfying answer. While He was upon this earth, Christ gathered a small band of followers, the disciples. Of these He selected twelve – the Apostles, of whom one, Peter, was singled out from the others – took them about with Him, taught them, and when He was about to leave the earth gave them a commission to teach the truths and the laws He wished men to know: to administer the sacraments by which His life might flow to the souls of men. Thus, when He left the world, He left His followers as a body among whom were officials, with Peter at their head, who could transmit the truth, the law, the life men needed: by joining this body, then, men could receive from its officials what all men need. Christ extended their commission to all nations: that it might survive the ages, He extended it to the end of the world: that the teaching and the life might never fail, He promised to be with them in the work He had given them to do. Thus, then, you have His arrangement. His followers, still united with the successor of Peter, the visible point of unity, were to be one body till the end of time: and in that body they should receive teaching which is infallible, because Christ is with it, and sacraments which are channels of true life, because Christ is with them.

The Church, thus understood, is a great thing: a thing immeasurably beyond man's deserts, and fulfilling the three primary needs. But that is not all. He who sees only that, is missing the depth of it.

For observe that, as stated, it leaves two questions unsettled. The first is this: the work of God among men is a close-knit, deeply-intertwined thing without loose ends. Why then should men share in the benefits of Christ's atonement? He offered a redeeming sacrifice – but where do men come in? How can they share in His act?

And the second is this: Christ said: "I am the Way, and Truth and the Life." The description of the Church set out above would be perfect if He had said have: but He said am. What has become of that mysterious word?

2B. "I AM THE LIFE."

Let us consider the second question first: Christ is the life, the life that must live in us if we are to be capable of Heaven. Christ then must live in us. How? How can one being live in another? Here we must follow very closely. We dare not abandon the phrase with a vague feeling that its general

meaning is obvious and edifying, but that it will not bear too close inspection. For He comes back to this idea of His living in men again and again, literally scores of times. Like every word of Christ, this one demands the closest scrutiny. No words were ever weighed as His were, and if by chance, we should forget that, Saint Paul shocks us back to attention: "I live, yet now not I, but Christ lives in me."

At the same time, Our Lord constantly speaks of our living in Him. There is then a twofold 'in'. He must live in us. We must live in Him.

In our own natures, we find the clue to the answer. Our bodies are composed of countless cells, living cells. The cells, we say, are living in the body. It would be truer to the order of real values to say that the body is living in the cells. That is the right order of thought. The cells live not with their own life, but with the life of the body. There is one life of the whole man and by it, the cells of his body live. Somehow then we must be in Christ as the cells are in our body: then Christ will live in us as we live in our bodily cells. Here again thought might falter: but Saint Paul works it out very clearly. Christ, living on this earth, had a human body, in which He worked among men. He taught with His lips, healed with His hands, converted sinners with the look of His eyes, gave Supernatural Life with His breath, made atonement with the suffering of His body. And all this, done through His body, was done by Himself, God. He has left the earth: He is eternally in Heaven at the right-hand of the Father: but He still works among men in His body, no longer in His natural body, the body that was brought into being in the womb of Mary by the power of the Holy Ghost, but in His mystical body, the Church, the body that was brought into being in the Upper Room after His ascension by the power of the Holy Ghost. The Church, then, is His body, linked to Him really, organically, inseparably, as a body to its head: His life flows through the Church as my life flows through my body.

My body has cells: and so has His. And as I live in the individual cells of my body, so He lives in the individual cells of His body. Membership of His Church then means more than joining up with a useful organization from which many spiritual benefits may be derived. His Church is – mysteriously but really – His body. Joining it means being built into His body – that is to say incorporated with Him. Once we are thus incorporated with Him, we are cells in His body, He can live in us.

That is the Church – the living body of Christ. Because of this, Christ could say to Saul when he was persecuting the Church – "Why persecute you Me?" So, Christ's own words: "I am with you all days even to the end of the world," have a more immense depth of meaning than we at first knew. So we see the meaning of that strange word am – "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." To be in the way we must be in Him: to possess the truth we must possess Him: to have the life in us, He must live in us.

2C. REDEEMED HUMANITY.

To this idea of the Church we have come, following up the second of the two questions left unsolved: it will now be seen that we have found the answer to the first as well – how can Christ's atonement be shared in by us? It is easy enough to see how we are involved in Adam's loss: for Adam is the representative man, the ancestor of all men. In him, by nature all men were incorporated. But men may be incorporated in Christ too, not by nature but by super-nature, not by birth but by baptism, the first of the sacraments (treated more fully in Chapter 11 of my book, *A Map of Life*. It is the first section of the fourth booklet in this series). That is the immense

importance of baptism, repeated again and again by Saint Paul: "Being baptized in Christ we have put on Christ." (Footnote: These booklets are concerned with God's plan for mankind in what may be called its normal working. There is no discussion here of the position of those who are not baptized or of baptized non-Catholics.)

Incorporated with Adam by birth, which makes us men, we share in his loss: incorporated with Christ by baptism, which makes us Christians, we share in His act of redemption. Both Adam and Christ are representative men: Adam because he is the first man, Christ because He is the perfect man. Adam was the head of the human race: Christ is the head of redeemed humanity. We come from Adam: we come to Christ.

In this view of the Church, we see how all our needs are met. Incorporated, built into the mystical body of Christ, we share in the benefits of His atonement, we are reconciled with God, and to us, as members of redeemed humanity, Heaven is once more open. From that Church, which is thus united with Christ, we receive Christ's teaching – so that we may know the truths bearing on the meaning and purpose of our lives, and the laws by which we may live rightly. In that Church we are so united to Christ that the Supernatural Life pours into our souls. The whole of man's needs are thus met, those needs which have been kept constantly in mind from the beginning of these booklets.

But there is a wider horizon yet. This mystical body of Christ is the Church. But the Church is not only a thing of this world. It contains not only its members still in this life, but also all who have died with the Supernatural Life in their souls – whether having attained their goal, they who are in heaven, or in final preparation for Heaven, they who are in Purgatory.

The mystical body is a growing body. All who die with the Supernatural Life are in it for ever: each new member is a new cell. There will come a point, Saint Paul tells us, when the mystical body will have grown to its perfect stature, in some such way as a natural body reaches its fullest development. When that time comes, the human race will have achieved its purpose and the world will come to an end. For there is a purpose for the whole race as well as for the individual man, and the end of the world will be not simply a decision by God that the world has gone on long enough, but will definitely mean that the race has achieved its purpose.

But the end of the world is not yet. And meanwhile the Church is in the world, acting upon its members, acting upon the world at large. Not all its members here below are fully receptive of the life of Christ: some, as we shall see in a moment, while remaining members, have totally shut off from their souls the stream of Christ's life. Thus the Church, the actual visible Church here below, presents itself under a double aspect. In so far as it is Christ Himself living in men – for the teaching of truth, for the promulgation of the moral law, for the life-giving work of the sacraments – it is perfect. In so far as it is considered in its human members (even its officials) vivified in their varying degrees or not vivified at all by the life of the Body, it is always short of perfection, sometimes very far short. But perfect it is one day to be.

2D. THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

Meanwhile see how the map of life grows in the light of this fact of the Church. We have to live our lives not as isolated units, but as members of a living thing, united organically with Christ and with all men, living and dead, who are in the love of God. This is the full force of the Communion of Saints – the oneness of all men in Christ.

Because we are members of Christ's Body, we are one with Him: and also we are one with one another. In a body, one member can help another: if the foot be hurt, the hand can tend it. So in the mystical body: one man can help another, by prayer and teaching and sacrifice. Here upon earth our prayers for one another are thus fruitful: we can pray for the souls in Purgatory: the souls in Heaven can pray for us. It has to some been a difficulty that death should be no barrier to this stream of prayer. That one living Christian should pray for another, or ask another to pray for him, has always seemed obviously right. But within the Body of Christ, death makes no difference. The soul of one who has left this world is not less a member of the same body as we, but is living more intensely with the life of Christ, which we also share. If we should have asked him to pray for us during his life, we do so now more than ever. One striking characteristic of the Catholic Church is that real friendships do exist between her children still upon earth and one or other of the saints in heaven. Sin is a barrier between souls: death is not. There is this constant flow of prayer throughout the whole body: for we are not members simply of one society, we are members of one thing – a living thing.

2E. LIFE IN THE BODY.

It is necessary now to see what all this comes to in practical effect upon us. We are cells in the body of Christ, so that He lives in us and we have one life in common with all men, in this world and the next, who are in the love of God. But observe that all this refers to the Supernatural Life – the life by which man is to be able to live the life of heaven. Supernaturally we, the cells, live with the life of Christ. But our natural life is not destroyed: and naturally we live with our own lives. Now it is part of our nature that we have free will, and part of our natural life to exercise it. We can do so in one of three ways: we can yield our wills wholly to God: or we can yield them to God, but not wholly: or we can reject God. And according to the use we thus make, will be our state in the mystical body. If we yield ourselves wholly to the Supernatural Life, the life of the mystical body, then we are living supernaturally at the fullest intensity. If our wills are not wholly yielded to God, then we hinder the flow of the Supernatural Life in us and though we are living supernaturally, though we are still sharing the life of the body so that Christ really lives in us, yet that life is not present in its fullest intensity.

And if, being once incorporated – that is, built into the body of Christ – our wills turn against God and reject Him for self – then we shut off the stream of life altogether and though we remain in the body we are dead cells – retaining our natural life, which is of no avail for salvation – but without the Supernatural Life. (Footnote: For a more detailed discussion of the state of those who have lost the Supernatural Life, see Chapters 11 and 12 of my book, *A Map of Life*, under the heading, *The Supernatural Life*. This is the first half of the fourth booklet in this series.) While we are still in this world, Supernatural Life may be set flowing again, as we shall see. But if at the moment of our earthly death we are thus dead cells in the body, we are cut out from the body and eternally lost.

Sufficient has been said to show how our position in the Church lays open to us life and the knowledge of truth and law. It remains now to examine the truth, the law and the life in detail. Two chapters will be devoted to each of these. This booklet will deal with the 'Truth'. See Chapters 9 and 10 of my book, *A Map of Life* for the question of the 'Law', (the third booklet of this series), and Chapters 11 and 12 for the question of the 'Life' (in the first half of the fourth booklet in this series).

3. TRUTH:

(A) THE TEACHING CHURCH.

WE have seen that man, by membership of Christ's Church, receives the three things necessary – truth, law, life. The next step is to examine each of these three in more detail. This chapter and the next will be concerned with Truth.

Christ gave to His Church, in the person of its first officials, the apostles, a mass of truth concerning God and man: concerning the nature of God, His threefold personality, His attributes, His purpose in making man, the means by which His purpose was to be achieved. This teaching, given by Christ to the apostles, was by them passed on to others, who in their turn passed it on. Some of it was, by the inspiration of God, written down. The part written down, what we now call the New Testament, was small in relation to the whole mass of teaching, but of priceless value.

3(a). THE SCRIPTURES.

In thus inspiring men to write God was continuing in the Church what He had begun with His chosen people. This fact of Inspiration marks off certain books from all other writings in the world. It involves a special relation of God to the human author and to the thing written, not to be found elsewhere. God so acted upon the mind and will of the author that what was written was what God wanted written. The inspired writing of the Jews – collected together in the Old Testament – were in sum a record of the Creation and Fall of Man, God's dealing with fallen humanity and the preparation for the coming of a Saviour. The New Testament shows the Saviour actually in the world, doing the work he came to do, and arranging for its continuation to the end of time. It falls roughly into three divisions: (1) The Four Gospels (already touched upon in the first chapter of this booklet) are records of Christ's life upon earth; (2) The Acts of the Apostles and a handful of letters – written mainly by Saint Paul – show the Church facing its first disciplinary and doctrinal problems; (3) The Apocalypse is a series of visions concerned mainly with the universal conflict of good and evil and its ultimate issue.

3(b). DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE.

The Church then, by the time the last apostle died, had all the mass of truth the apostles had taught, the whole of it by word of mouth, a part of it in writing. She might have simply gone on, through the nineteen centuries or more since, repeating what had been taught, reading what had been written. In this case, she would have been a preserver of truth – but scarcely a teacher. She would have been a piece of human machinery, but not a living thing, not the Mystical Body of Christ. In fact, she not only repeated what the apostles had been taught: she thought about it, meditated on it, prayed by it, lived it. And, doing all this, the Church came to see further and further depths of truth in it. And, seeing these, she taught these too. Everything was contained in what Christ had given the apostles to give the Church: but though everything was there, it was not all seen explicitly – not all at once. A rough comparison may make the position clear: a man brought into a dark room begins by distinguishing little: then he sees certain patches of shadow blacker than the rest: bit by bit he sees these as a table and chairs: then, as his eyes grow accustomed to the obscurity, he sees things smaller still – pictures, books, ash trays – and so on to the smallest detail. Nothing has been added to the contents of the room: but there has been an immense growth in his knowledge of the contents. So with the Church. She has, generation by generation, seen deeper and deeper. This development in the Church's understanding of what has been committed to her is not like anything else in the world. Science, for instance, progresses, but its progress consists to a large extent in discovering and discarding its own errors. The teaching of the Church develops by seeing further truths. At

every stage, the Church adds something: but not at the cost of discarding anything. At every stage, all she teaches is true: at no stage does she teach all that is contained in the Truth.

This development – which we find in theology and nowhere else – combines two things: the work of men's minds, the over-ruling protection of God. In theology, as in science, progress comes by the minds of men working on what they have been taught: but left to themselves, men may simply make further mistakes. In science, they do so. In the teaching of the Church, they do not: and the reason is that God intervenes, to prevent the teaching of error by His Church. God's actions – whether revelation or sacrament or miracle – are never labour-saving devices: God does not do them to save men the trouble of doing what they can very well do for themselves. In revelation, for instance, God teaches men what they could not (at any rate could not with absolute sureness) find out for themselves: but having given them that, He leaves it to them to meditate upon it and arrive at a clearer understanding of it. He does not do their thinking for them.

3(c). THE TEACHING CHURCH.

But if we are to say that in the teaching of the Church there are no mistakes, it is necessary to look a little more closely at what we mean by the phrase "the Teaching Church." The first teachers in the Church were the apostles: their successors are the bishops. The bishops are the teaching body of the Church. Therefore, since God will not have His Church taught error as to His doctrine, He will not allow the bishops to teach error. This or that bishop or group of bishops may give wrong teaching in theology. But what is taught by the bishops as a body cannot be wrong. On some given subject, it might be difficult to know what the bishops as a body do teach: in that case, they might be gathered together in a General Council where they could state their teaching and so place it beyond doubt. But however we come by the knowledge, once we do know what the bishops as a body teach, we know the certain truth, for their teaching is guaranteed by God. And that is the ordinary way in which the Catholic does learn God's truth – from the teachers appointed by his bishop. But there is another way – an extraordinary way. The bishops as a body are not allowed by God to teach what is wrong on matters of faith or morals revealed by Him: this is what we mean when we say they are infallible. But one of them, the Head, Christ's representative on Earth, the Bishop of Rome, whom we call the Pope, is infallible, independently of the other bishops. And in case of doubt as to what bishops teach, a definition by the Pope himself is sufficient to inform us of the truth.

(Footnote: Theses booklets are concerned with Catholic doctrine from a special point of view, the view of a map-maker. Infallibility, therefore, is treated only as it bears upon the Catholic's need to learn the truth. It may be useful to consider it for a moment in its effect upon the man who has it. It has no necessary effect at all. His infallibility exists, not for his own sake, but for ours. It is of no more benefit to him than it is to us. It does not make virtue easier for him or sin less attractive. It does not, therefore, make the salvation of his soul any easier. It is simply a way in which God uses him for the preservation of truth. And as it does not affect his character, so it does not arise from it. If by chance a bad man is Pope, it is just as necessary for us that he should be prevented from teaching error and just as easy for God to prevent him!)

But if the body of bishops, with the Pope at their head, are the sole infallible teachers of doctrine, they are not the only people in the Church who are studying doctrine. Every Catholic does it to some extent: theologians give their lives to it. Throughout the ages there has never ceased to be a stream of solid thinking on theology. Now this thinking is the thinking of men: the result of their thinking may be the emergence of some truth not previously so clearly seen; but likewise the result

of their thinking may be error. How shall men know which it is? It is for the bishops to decide. If it is true, then they adopt it and teach it. If it is false, God does not allow them to adopt it and teach it. An erroneous view might become current, even widely current. Sooner or later, the teaching authority acts and the erroneous view is declared to be erroneous. A theologian who has fallen into error may persist in his error – become a heretic. The very task of refuting him leads to a closer examination and thus to a better understanding of the doctrine at issue.

But the decision of the bishops as a body – or of the Bishop of Rome as head – is final. And that, as we have seen, is watched by God: He does not allow them to teach His Church what is wrong. He does not add new teaching or fill their minds with new doctrine: for that, they must use their minds in the ordinary way of man. But he prevents falsehood from being taught by them.

To put this matter in a nutshell. The ordinary man has three courses open to him – he may say what is right, he may say what is wrong, or he may be silent. The infallible man has only two. He is prevented by God from saying what is wrong. He may therefore say what is right, or he may be silent. As to which of these alternatives he shall pursue in a particular case, what is to decide? As between teaching what is right and remaining silent, his infallibility will not help. It prevents him from teaching what is wrong. It can do no more for him. What, then, is to decide whether he shall teach right or remain silent? He can say what is right only if he knows what is right – if, that is, he has made the fullest possible use of all the means of acquiring knowledge. If he does not know the right answer, he must remain silent: and this might very well happen. A Pope does not necessarily by some miracle know the whole of Catholic doctrine, the answer to every doctrinal question that could be raised. The Church, of course, is over-ruled by the providence of God, and if some teaching were at a given moment essential for the Church's well-being, God would see that we had it. But I am concerned here with the human machinery, so to speak, of infallibility. And it remains true that what he does not know he cannot teach. But in no case can he teach what is wrong: for God will not let him, lest we, the members of the Church, be led into error.

One further thing remains to be said. We believe what the Church teaches because the Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, because, therefore, her teaching is the voice of Christ Himself. Among the mass of the things she teaches and the moral laws she propounds, some are, as it were, easy for the human mind, some difficult. For some we seem to see a score of reasons, for some we see no reason at all, some actually might seem to us against reason. But all alike we accept on the one secure ground – that the Church teaches them. We do not accept the easy ones because we can see why, and the others only by an act of Faith. We accept the easy ones – because the Church teaches them; and we accept the difficult ones – because the Church teaches them. When a doctrine or a moral law is presented to us, we may ask what are the reasons for it, but only that we may the better comprehend it, not that we may decide whether or not to obey it. For that, we only ask does the Church teach it. For it is thus that Christ would have us know the Truths by which our lives are to be lived.

4. TRUTH:

(B) THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY.

THUS then we are in a position to learn from the Church the truths Christ entrusted to her, and these truths cover not only the bare minimum of necessary things – purpose and law – but also much besides for the further enrichment of man's mind and man's life. All that is set forth in these booklets is simply the general outline of it. It contains the great mysteries of the Trinity, the

Creation, Grace, the Redemption, the Mystical Body, the Sacraments, Hell and Heaven. Some of these have already been looked at, at least in part: the others will be looked at in later chapters in these booklets. Here I wish to speak only of mystery in general and of the greatest of all mysteries, the Trinity.

4(a). MYSTERY.

First, of mystery. As used by theologians the word does not mean a truth of which we cannot know anything: it means a truth of which we cannot know everything. Mystery there must be once we touch the nature of God. He is the Infinite, the Immeasurable, the Limitless. We are finite, measured, limited on all sides. It is impossible that we should totally contain God in our minds so as totally to comprehend Him. But by His loving kindness, we are endowed with a nature that can know something of Him – some little by its own powers, vastly more by what He tells us of Himself in the mysteries He has revealed.

But a mystery is not merely a truth about God which we cannot discover for ourselves and can know only if God reveals it. If it were only that, the subject would present no difficulties. There is the further fact already suggested: that, even when God has revealed it to us, it remains a truth about an infinite being and is therefore not fully comprehensible by us. And the trouble is that it first presents itself to the mind as an apparent contradiction in terms. Thus the mystery of the Trinity appears as a statement that there are three Persons, each of them God, yet not three Gods. Transubstantiation appears as a statement that what, by every test known to man, is bread is yet the Body of Christ. And so with the others. Now contradiction is the enemy of thought. If any article of belief presented for the mind's acceptance appears to contain a contradiction within itself, then the mind cannot be at ease with it. So that a mystery of religion presents itself first to the mind rather as a burden than as a light.

Now in some cases the sense of contradiction arises from a sheer misunderstanding of the doctrine and can be removed instantly by a correct statement. But in others, it arises from a defect in the mind – the defect of superficiality.

Two statements appear to be at variance. The mind scrutinizes them more closely and still cannot see how they are to be reconciled. Now the fact that the mind cannot reconcile the two statements may originate either in the statements or in the mind: either the statements may be in fact irreconcilable, or the reconciliation may be at a depth to which the mind cannot pierce. This double possibility will always be obvious to a mind that has realized that the surface of a thing is not the whole of it.

For the mind to proceed from the affirmation that it cannot reconcile two statements to the affirmation that they are in contradiction is legitimate only on one condition: that both are fully understood. If two statements are fully comprehended and yet cannot be reconciled, then there is real contradiction and one of them must be false. But in these mysteries of religion, it soon becomes clear that the truths concerned plunge rapidly into depths where the mind cannot follow them. It still cannot see how they are to be reconciled: but realizing how immeasurably more there is in them than it can comprehend, will not assume that one of them must be false.

The result is that though it may still find them irreconcilable, this ceases to be a burden to it. The sense of contradiction, the one burden the mind finds intolerable, has vanished. The discovery of its own limitation does not thus trouble it. And the discovery that there are depths beyond depths of truth is the strongest possible stimulus to the mind.

For to call a doctrine a mystery is not to warn men's minds off it, as though it were something on which thought cannot profitably be employed. It is not to be conceived as a blank wall barring further progress: it is to be thought of rather as an endless gallery, into which we can advance ever deeper, to the great enrichment of our minds, but to the end of which we shall never come. Or better still think of it as an inexhaustible well of truth – a well from which for all eternity we can drink our fill yet which in all eternity we shall never drink to the last drop – so that we shall never know thirst. This infiniteness of truth is the most splendid assurance we can have of eternal happiness: for it means that the mind can for ever progress, that it will for ever be enriched by new draughts of truth, yet that it will never reach the end of truth. This inexhaustibility of truth is our guarantee against stagnation of the mind: it guarantees to our minds the possibility of progress through all eternity.

Mystery then is not the prohibition of thinking, but actually an invitation to think. The mysteries revealed by God are revealed as food for the mind, not as dangerous things that should be left alone. Every mystery contains a central nucleus of truth that is comprehended, surrounded on all sides by things that we do not comprehend. Think of it as a globe of light surrounded by darkness. The man who rejects mystery is rejecting the central globe of light and accepting the impenetrable darkness. Whereas for the man who accepts it, the light grows and expands, sending longer and longer rays into the darkness around.

4(b). THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

Thus the doctrine of the Trinity, at first seen only as a sheer challenge to Faith grows steadily more luminous to the mind which accepts it and comes humbly to the study of what the Church has seen in it. This truth that the Godhead is absolutely one essence, one single concrete Something: yet that there are three Persons owning the one Nature – the one self-same identical Nature: this truth not only grows more luminous as the ideas of Person and Nature are studied, as the relation of Father and Son and the Spirit proceeding from both is meditated on; but throws a flood of light on the whole of our understanding of life.

The doctrine that in the unity of the Godhead there are three Persons truly distinct is the Supreme mystery revealed by Christ. Beyond it is no further mystery, for it deals with the innermost life of God. In a sense, man need never have been taught it apart from the Incarnation: for it is God in His unity who acts in relation to created beings, the threefold Personality being a fact of His own inner life, of His own internal activity, of that activity which remains within His own nature and does not directly affect the beings He has created. But it is a property of love that it wants not only to know but also to be known by the person loved. God loving us, wants us to know Him in His deepest and most secret life, and so gives us here upon earth a glimpse of that truth which it is man's proper destiny to spend eternity in contemplating. And, apart from that desire of God's to be known by man, the distinction of Persons has in fact a direct bearing on man's life since it was the Second Person, and not God in His threefold Personality, who became man for our salvation.

It is the supreme mystery in a double sense: it deals with the highest truth: and it is most inaccessible to the created mind. Yet certain elements of it can be grasped by us.

In the first place, it states that in the one Divine nature there are three Persons. The distinction between nature and person has already been discussed in the first chapter of this booklet, and the reader might very well return to it before proceeding here. Summarizing what is there said: Nature and Person are both principles of action but in different senses – the Person being that which acts,

the Nature being that by which he acts. In man, nature and person coalesce in one concrete living being: but the attempt to analyse these two principles which in us are fused into one has two results: (1) it makes clear that we are far from reaching down into the depths of either principle: their deepest depths escape us and it would be a bold man who would dogmatise as to their uttermost possibilities; (2) it at least suggests to us that the total expression of one nature in one person which is in us is not the only possibility. Person may be seen as the "centre of attribution in a rational nature" – that to which the actions of a rational nature are attributed. In an infinite nature, might there not be more than one such centre of attribution? Is the idea of one single mind and one single will three times focused totally self-contradictory?

No one dare affirm that there is any such contradiction. The mind of man may say, "I cannot see the possibility": it dare not say, "I see the contradiction." To the mind thus faltering comes the revelation of God that it is so: and contained within the revelation are certain truths, which help the mind to progress in it. God has not simply revealed to us a handful of words.

The Three Persons – the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost – each possess the one Divine nature: they do not share it: they each possess it in its totality. It is important to grasp exactly what this means. Men, we say, have one nature, in the sense that they all are human and human nature is one thing. But though Brown and I are of one nature, I cannot think with Brown's mind nor love with Brown's will. I must think with my own mind and love with my own will. So that, although in a general sense human nature is one, in the concrete each man has his own nature and acts in it. With the Three Persons of the Trinity this is not so. There is but one Divine nature, one Divine mind, one Divine will. The three Persons each use the one mind to know with, the one will to love with. For there is but the one absolute Divine nature. Thus, there are not three Gods, but one God. The Christian revelation cannot allow the faintest derogation from pure monotheism. The three Persons, then, are not separate. But they are distinct. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God. But the Father is not the Son, nor the Son the Holy Ghost, nor the Holy Ghost the Father.

What distinction can there be in three Persons who each possess the totality of one and the same nature? A distinction of Relations. (Footnote: These relations, as we shall see, are subsistent and not, as relations are in created beings. mere accidents.)

What then are these relations?

For the relation between the First and Second Persons, the Gospels use two terms. The Second Person is the Son: and He is the Word. Both, by different approaches, bring us to the same Truth.

A son proceeds from his father by generation. One of the enormous difficulties in all discussion about God is that we are forced to use human language. Having been built up by the mind of man for the expression of man's experience, human language is necessarily inadequate for the expression of the Divine. Yet it is the best we have. No higher is within our power. And provided the inadequacy is remembered, there is no harm done. But, in addition to the sheer inadequacy of speech, for which there is no remedy, there is another way in which language can mislead: and this can be remedied by taking thought. Ideas which are in themselves quite simple get tied up in our minds with other ideas, because in human experience the two things are always found together. Thus, the moment we think of the words "father" and "son" we think of the father as older than the son, as existing before the son. But in applying words to the understanding of God, we must get at the essence of the word and take away from it whatever ideas belong merely to the condition of human life.

The relation of "paternity" in the Godhead is not modelled upon human paternity: on the contrary, human paternity is a shadow of the absolute fatherhood of the First Person of the Trinity. Thus, a very slight examination of the idea of generation as such shows that the time-element does not belong to it. Generation means simply the origin of a living thing from another living thing, by communication of substance, unto similitude of nature. Wherever in the origin of a being these two conditions are fulfilled – communication of substance, similitude of nature – then there is son-ship. The time element proceeds not from the nature of son-ship, but from the finite nature of man: he must reach a certain point of development before he can generate a son. But in an infinite being, to whom time is not, there is no such requirement. God the Father eternally generates God the Son, who is thus co-eternal and, as a consequence of likeness in nature where the nature is infinite, co-equal.

The term Word – the Word of the Mind, which is Thought – brings us to the same truth and in a way to a greater point of understanding. The First Person, as thinker, thinks. Now that which is produced by the act of thinking, what we call the "term" of the act, is a thought. With men, the thought is more or less adequate to the object they are thinking about. But with God, whose intelligence is infinite, the thought is absolutely adequate to the object. In this instance, God's thought is of Himself, and since it is absolutely adequate, it is the Perfect Image of Himself, and so living, co-eternal, equal in all perfections: a Person. Thus, even more clearly than Son-ship, this notion of the Word shows the Second Person as the perfect image of the First: shows also how there is no new nature produced, for there is no more complete oneness of nature than that which exists between the Thinker and the Thought.

Thus, we have the First Person and the Second proceeding from the First by way of generation. But between Father and Son (or between Thinker and Thought) there is Love. Here we must proceed with the greatest care. In our human experience the term of an act of thinking is a thought, something that remains within the being of the thinker; and it is this thought and not the act of thinking which we conceive as the Second Person. Can we say that love likewise produces a "term" within the lover? Saint Thomas tells us that we can. Though love tends towards a being outside itself, yet the act of loving arouses a state of warmth in the soul by which the being that is loved is present to the affections. This state is not the act of loving, but is produced in the soul by the act of loving, is what we have called a "term" of the act. And so it is in the love with which God loves Himself – that is, with which the Father loves the Son and the Son the Father. The "term" of that act-of love (like the earlier term of the act of thinking) is subsistent, is a Person – the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost.

On this matter of the "procession" (see the footnote) of the Holy Ghost as breathed forth by God in an act of love, we cannot claim revelation. It is Saint Augustine's magnificent contribution to the theology of that which we do know by revelation – that the Holy Ghost is the Third Person of the Trinity, co-eternal and co-equal with the Father and the Son.

(Footnote: The act by which the Holy Ghost subsists is not "generation" – this we know by revelation, God the Son is "the only begotten of the Father." The Holy Ghost, says the Athanasian Creed is "from the Father and the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding." What is the difference between the generation of the Son and the "spiration" or breathing forth of the Holy Ghost? Many answers are suggested. Saint Thomas finds the difference in this: an act of the intellect has as its precise object the production of a term in the likeness of the thing conceived,

and likeness is an essential of son-ship: whereas though the Holy Ghost is in fact like in nature to the Father and Son, yet likeness is not the primary object of an act of the will.)

I have said that God acts upon creatures in His Unity, rather than in His Trinity. Yet we have His own warrant for associating certain of these actions with one or other of the Three Persons. The Father we say creates, the Son redeems, the Holy Ghost sanctifies. The principle of this "appropriation" is quite clear: the external operations of God can be particularly attributed to one Divine Person rather than another if they are especially bound up with the Relation of that Person within the Godhead; that is the Persons may be spoken of as having relations to mankind similar to their relations within the Godhead. Thus, because the Son is brought forth by an act of the Divine Intellect, the works of wisdom are especially attributed to Him. Because the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Divine Will, the works of Holiness are attributed to Him (since holiness is of the will as wisdom is of the intellect) and so also are God's gifts to men (since the Holy Ghost is Love, and gifts are the expression of love). The operation of the Holy Ghost within the Mystical Body will be treated later.

In thus setting down some of the elements of what God has revealed to us of His own innermost life, it is clear that the mystery remains, but it is mystery in the sense indicated earlier in this chapter – the reconciliation remains invisible to us, but it is rather the invisibility that comes from too much light than from sheer darkness. Thus, it is an invitation to the mind. Already, the mind is freed by it from the awful weight of God conceived as solitary in infinity, with no adequate object of His infinite love. And new richness comes into our contemplation of human nature: thus human fatherhood is an immeasurably greater thing as a shadow of the Divine Fatherhood than it could ever be in its own right: the human soul is only the more like to God for its faculties of intellect and will, since in God Thought and Love not only exist, but 'subsist' as Persons: and the Unity of the Church takes on a new immensity when Christ proposes as its model the Unity of the Triune God.

[The full text of A Map of Life, from which this booklet is taken (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8,) can be found on line at: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/SPIRIT/MAPLIF.TXT>

It is considered one of Frank Sheed's best books. A Map of Life is also regarded as one of the best and most popular short summaries of the Catholic faith ever written. Focusing on the major truths of our existence and purpose in life, Sheed draws on God's revelation to show what the divine master plan is for us and how each part of the plan is related.

Beginning with "The Problem of Life's Purpose" and "The Problem of Life's Laws", he covers such important parts of the map of life as "The Creation and the Fall", "The Incarnation", "The Mystical Body", "The Trinity", "Law and Sin", "The Supernatural Life", and "Heaven, Purgatory, Hell".]
