

The Mystery of Israel and the Church

A four-volume series

The Mystery of Israel and the Church

- Volume 1 Figure and Fulfillment
- Volume 2 Things New and Old
- Volume 3 The Messianic Kingdom of Israel
- Volume 4 The Messiah of Israel

The Mystery of Israel and the Church

Volume 2

Things New and Old

Lawrence Feingold



The Miriam Press

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Dedicated to Mary,
Daughter of Zion,
Mother of the Messiah,
Mother of the Church

“Theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh.”

Romans 9:4–5

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Foreword

The Mystery of Israel and the Church: Things New and Old is the second volume in a series that seeks to present Catholic theology with an eye to the great importance of that mystery. Each volume contains the text of a series of lectures presented by Dr. Feingold, with each chapter corresponding to one lecture.

The various series of lectures, sponsored by the Association of Hebrew Catholics (AHC) at the Cathedral Basilica School in Saint Louis, Missouri, have been ongoing since the fall of 2007. We are very grateful for the wonderful gifts given by our Lord to Dr. Feingold and for his great generosity in sharing his gifts, at no cost, with all who have willing hearts and open minds.

Lawrence Feingold expertly weaves together Sacred Scripture, Magisterial teachings, the Church Fathers, St. Thomas Aquinas, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and many others, along with the teaching that has come from Vatican II. What one especially appreciates about his presentations is his ability to present difficult and abstract material in an intelligible and digestible way. He also presents the story of Israel and her role in salvation history in a magnificent light that enables us to better appreciate all that God has brought to pass through His great fidelity, love, and mercy in fulfilling the promises He made to Israel.

Lawrence Feingold and his wife Marsha, both Hebrew Catholics, entered the Church in 1989. Dr. Feingold studied Philosophy and Theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, earning a doctorate in Systematic Theology in 1999. He spent a year studying Biblical Hebrew and Greek at the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum in Jerusalem in 1995–96. He then taught Philosophy and Theology in the House of Formation of Miles Christi in Argentina. Currently he is Assistant Professor of Theology for the Institute of Pastoral Theology of Ave Maria University. In addition to the AHC lectures, Dr. Feingold is also part of the RCLIA team at the Cathedral Basilica Parish, has taught at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, and finds time one evening a week to host a study session in his home on various aspects of the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas.

In issue 85 of *The Hebrew Catholic*, Dr. Feingold gives his “Account of My Conversion.”¹ As he relates his journey to faith in the Messiah and to His Church, Dr. Feingold writes:

¹<http://www.hebrewcatholic.org/TheHebrewCatholic/85winter-spring2.html>.

So I set out to pray for the first time. I took the train to go to Florence to pray in the Duomo built by Brunelleschi. I was not definitively thinking of Christianity, but nor was I opposed to it. On the way, I was moved to make this prayer: *Teach me to love; teach me to be a light unto others*. I don't know why I prayed like this, but to this day I know of no better prayer.

God so wants us to pray, that if we do so, He pours His grace upon us. After making this prayer, I thought of the words of Psalm 2: "*You are my son; this day I have begotten you.*" Although an atheist, I knew the Bible from studying art history and comparative religion. And in this moment of grace I understood that these words were addressed by God the Father to Jesus Christ His Son, and also to me (and all other human beings) *in Christ* the Son.

Not only did our Lord give Dr. Feingold the gift that enabled him to understand who Jesus Christ was and is, but He answered his initial prayer, giving him the grace *to be a light unto others*, a grace to which Dr. Feingold has so faithfully corresponded.

In the concluding paragraphs of his "Account," Dr. Feingold writes:

Many Jews who come to believe in Christ and the Church He founded feel anguish over what is perceived as a betrayal of the Jewish people. My wife and I never experienced this trial. On the contrary, I discovered a great attraction for things Jewish that I never experienced before. I had never learned Hebrew as a child, but I found great joy in learning it as a Christian, so as to pray the Psalms, for example, in the language of the Chosen People. This sense was clarified and stimulated by reading the book *Jewish Identity* by Fr. Elias Friedman, founder of the Association of Hebrew Catholics, which I came across not long after our entrance into the Catholic Church.

In the first years after our conversion, people often asked me why I "chose" Christianity or the Catholic Church, and not Judaism or Buddhism or Protestantism. The question is framed in the language of religious liberalism, as if religion were a matter of our personal sentiments, personal preferences, personal loyalties or choices. The experience of converts is not that we have chosen anything, but that it is God who has chosen to redeem us through the Incarnation and Passion of the Messiah, which is continued and made present in the Catholic Church, and it is God who called us to enter the ark of salvation. We who have been given the grace to hear, through no merit of our own, have the duty to pray for those who have not yet been given that gift.

If these lectures enable readers to grow in their understanding of the mysteries of God, they will find that they will also grow in their appreciation of the Jewish roots of their faith, in gratitude for all that God has done, and in the love of our Lord, *Yeshua haMashiach*.² May it be so!

Briefly stated, the mission of the Association of Hebrew Catholics is pastoral and educational: to preserve the identity and heritage of Jews within the Church, helping them to serve the Lord, His Church, and all peoples within the mystery of their irrevocable calling. Those who are interested may write to the AHC, 4120 W Pine Blvd., Saint Louis, MO 63108, for more information and a sample issue of our publication, *The Hebrew Catholic*.

Now we invite you to partake of a feast of the Spirit as you encounter the truths of our faith given by Jesus Christ, preserved by the Church, taught by the Magisterium, and here presented by Dr. Lawrence Feingold. May you be blessed.

David Moss, President
Association of Hebrew Catholics

² All of the lectures represented by the chapters of this volume, including question-and-answer sessions after each lecture, can be listened to or downloaded to your computer at no cost from the AHC website at <http://www.hebrewcatholic.org/Studies/MysteryofIsraelChurch/mysteryofisraela.html>.

Preface

This book is the fruit of the second lecture series sponsored by the Association of Hebrew Catholics, entitled “The Mystery of Israel and the Church: Themes of Faith,” and held in the spring of 2008 in the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis. Interest was expressed in bringing these talks to a wider public, without losing their original character as oral presentations.

The first lecture series focused on God’s plan of salvation in the course of human history. The themes examined in this second series are the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity; the redemptive value of suffering; sacrifice, priesthood, and the Eucharist; the Trinity; Holy Matrimony; the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the beatitudes; and the Church. These central themes of the Catholic faith are viewed from the point of view of their development from Judaism to Christianity in order to appreciate both the fundamental continuity between Jewish and Catholic faith, as well as the dimension of transformation and fulfillment in the passage from the Old to the New.

It is hoped that this book may deepen the awareness of Catholics (and others) of the luminous teaching of the Second Vatican Council in *Nostra aetate* 4:

As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham’s stock.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God’s saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ—Abraham’s sons according to faith—are included in the same Patriarch’s call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people’s exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles. . . . God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues—such is the witness of the Apostle. In company with the prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples

will address the Lord in a single voice and “serve him shoulder to shoulder.”

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

I would like to thank the President of the Association of Hebrew Catholics, David Moss, and his wife, Kathleen, for organizing and sponsoring the lecture series which was the origin of these volumes. Special thanks go to Archbishop Burke for welcoming the Association of Hebrew Catholics into the Archdiocese of St. Louis and supporting our work, and to Archbishop Carlson and Bishop Hermann for continuing that support. I also thank our pastor, Msgr. Pins, for his support and for allowing us to use the Cathedral Basilica School for the lecture series. Above all, I would like to thank my wife, Marsha, who is my editor, inspiration, and support, and who spent countless hours improving the text. I also thank everyone else who helped to edit these volumes, and all those who attended the series and contributed with their encouragement and their questions and comments.

I would also like to thank Ave Maria University's Institute for Pastoral Theology. This book and the other volumes in this series have been enriched by my teaching experience with this remarkable program. It is our conviction in the Institute for Pastoral Theology that deeper knowledge of Catholic doctrine, growth in holiness, the life of prayer, and pastoral activity are inseparably united. Greater knowledge of the truths of the faith should help us to love God more faithfully and to lead others to that same truth and love, thereby helping to build up the Church. I pray that a more perfect knowledge of the Catholic faith, including its Jewish roots, may lead the reader to a deeper encounter with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the Triune God glimpsed by these Patriarchs, in whose seed all nations have been blessed (see Gen 22:18).

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations of Sources

- ANF *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
D Denzinger. *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*. Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto, 2002.
DS Denzinger-Schönmetzer. *Enchiridion Symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (1965).
DV Second Vatican Council, Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*.
LG Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*.
PG *Patrologia graeca*. J.P. Migne, editor. Paris, 1857 ff.
PL *Patrologia latina*. J.P. Migne, editor. Paris, 1844 ff.
RM John Paul II, encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, 1987.
SCG St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*.
SD John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Salvifici doloris*, February 11, 1984.
ST *Summa theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas. 2nd ed. Translated by Dominican Fathers of the English Province. London: Burns, Oates, & Washbourne, 1920–1932.

Other Abbreviations

- a. article
ch. chapter
q. question
n. paragraph number

CHAPTER I

The Virtue of Faith in Biblical Judaism and Catholicism

A common treasure of Judaism and Christianity is the precious gift of faith in God's Revelation. In the first chapter we will focus on the *nature of the act of faith and reasons for belief*. The second treats the *life of faith*, focusing on the faith of Abraham and Mary as models of living by faith. Let us begin by seeking to define the nature of religious faith.

The Nature of Faith

In order to understand supernatural faith, we have to look at the nature of faith in general. Faith is a *firm assent of the mind to things unseen*. It is an act of the mind characterized by firmness, on the one hand, and by an unseen object, on the other. If either one of these two ingredients is lacking, we cannot speak of faith. Another way to say the same thing is to define faith as *the assent of the mind to something as true, not motivated by its intrinsic evidence, but moved rather by a firm impulse of the will, based on the testimony of a witness*.

Why do we make the act of faith? Why would we give firm assent of our minds to an unseen object? What could justify the firmness of our assent, when we cannot see what we are affirming? The answer is that the firmness of our assent is motivated by the *witness* of another who can see or has seen what we affirm, and whom we perceive to be *worthy of trust*. The firm assent of faith is not arbitrary or without reason, but is motivated by the authority of a witness whom one has reason to trust.

We make acts of human faith every day of our lives, and no one could live without doing so continuously. For example, we know the identity of our own parents, especially our father, by human faith. And such faith is frequently a moral duty. We all learn primarily by human faith. We trust in the authority of teachers, books, the media, public opinion, and friends. This is not to say that we cannot also grasp truths in a scientific way, but nevertheless, the truths grasped in such a way are not as numerous as we would like to think. And until we grasp the demonstration, we know what we have been taught by virtue of human faith in our teachers.

Faith in general is an act midway between demonstrative (or scientific) knowledge, and opinion. The essence of faith is that one does *not* directly see with certainty the intrinsic reason or necessary cause for the truth of a given proposition. In this sense, it is like opinion. However, faith differs from opinion in its certitude. *Opinion* is the assent to a proposition *with the fear or doubt* that one perhaps is in error and that one's opinion is false. It is an act *without firmness and certitude*.¹ In the act of faith, however, one sees clearly that the proposition merits firm assent on account of the authority of those who teach it, even though not on account of its own intrinsic evidence. Thus it is held as *certain*. Opinion or fully deliberate doubt cannot coexist with faith, for they are mutually exclusive. A religious opinion—which admits a fully deliberate fear or doubt that we are in error—is not an act of religious faith.

Supernatural Faith

Divine or supernatural faith is distinguished from human faith on account of the authority of the witness in whom we believe. If the authority of the witness is divine, our faith is divine or supernatural. In other words, faith is supernatural when it rests on the testimony of the Word of God.

Supernatural faith is a supernatural virtue by which we believe firmly in the truths that God has revealed to us. It is the firm adhesion of our spirit, moved by divine grace, to the truths revealed to us by God, based on the veracity of God, "who can neither be deceived nor deceive."² For this reason, divine faith has a certainty greater than that of all other certainties, even that of the first principles of reason, because it rests directly on the omniscience of God. While our reason can know some truths with metaphysical certainty, nevertheless, it is also weak and fallible, as evidenced by the gross errors of many schools of philosophy. God, on the contrary, is the Truth itself and the source of all truth. Thus it is eminently reasonable to submit one's own judgment to the judgment of God. In fact, this is the most reasonable thing a man can do, and it is utterly unreasonable to refuse to do so in order to jealously guard the autonomy of our weak reason.

Human faith can certainly err, just as human reason can err, but divine faith cannot be subject to error any more than God can err (because divine faith is such only insofar as it is belief in what has actually been revealed by God Himself). When a Christian or an Orthodox Jew believes something false, it is not because of his supernatural faith, but rather because of human faith in some heresy or

¹ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 4.

² Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, ch. 3, DS 3008 (D 1789).

false interpretation, which is mistaken for the divine revelation. He has believed something out of negligence or ignorance that he ought not to have believed.

When ought we to believe? *We ought to believe when the witness who vouches for a certain truth is known to be trustworthy.* We certainly ought not to believe everything that is told to us by others, but only when there are reasons for thinking that the witness is worthy of trust.

The same thing applies to the Jewish and Catholic faith. This faith concerns things unseen: God, heaven, His plan of salvation in history, the coming of the Messiah, grace, our adoption as God's children, the Incarnation, etc. Why should we believe in these unseen objects? The only morally compelling reason to embrace faith in an unseen object is the trustworthiness of the witness. Who is the witness who vouches for these unseen objects? The witness can be none other than God Himself. The firmness of our faith and the moral obligation of believing comes ultimately from the fact that our faith is based on the witness of God, Creator of heaven and earth, who can neither deceive us nor be deceived.

In other words, we do not believe in revealed truths because we *see* that they are reasonable, but rather because we *hear* them as the Word of God. This is expressed in the great text of Deuteronomy 6:4-5: "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*"

Israel was not told to *see* for themselves, but to *hear* the Word of Revelation. The same is true in the New Testament. St. Paul says (Rom 10:17): "*So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.*"

The Word of God, of course, is supremely reasonable, for God is the Logos, but the recipient of Revelation does not yet see God. Thus we cannot initially see the full reasonability of revealed truths, and we believe them on the authority of God who speaks.

The great difficulty, however, is to determine *where God has spoken.* Reason must first grasp the reasonableness of belief in His existence as the First Cause of the world. And as Creator of all created goodness, He must be supremely good. Once God's existence and goodness is grasped, it is not hard to show that He is worthy of supreme trust, if He deigns to speak to mankind.

But how do I know that God has actually revealed Himself to men, and that this Revelation is contained first in the faith of Israel, and then reaches its fullness in the Catholic faith? For God's Revelation does not come to us directly, but through the witness of others who transmit His word, beginning with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Isaiah, and

the other prophets, all of whose words are transmitted to us by the witness of the Jewish people and their inspired Scriptures. We also base our faith on the testimony that reaches us through the New Testament: that of John the Baptist, Mary, and Joseph, culminating in Jesus, whose deeds and words are transmitted to us and guaranteed by the Apostles.

But how do we know that these are true witnesses of God's Revelation? How do we pass from human faith in Moses and the Apostles, for example, to divine faith in God speaking through Moses and the Apostles?

Recognition of the trustworthiness of those who claim to speak on behalf of God is the work of reason, aided by God's grace. It would be irrational to believe such witnesses if reason could not show that God Himself has spoken through them. Reason is indispensable in this task.

Motives of Credibility

How do we evaluate the trustworthiness of the witnesses to God's Revelation? In order to believe in a divine testimony it is certainly not necessary that God appear to us directly. God ordinarily speaks to us through intermediaries, such as the prophets and Apostles, who are entrusted with a divine mission of being mediators and instruments of God's Revelation. However, when God speaks through intermediaries, it must be possible to recognize that they truly have a divine commission. Otherwise it would be extremely imprudent to believe, for we could be deceived by any charlatan or honestly deluded person into believing all kinds of absurdities, which indeed we can observe all around us in the multiplication of religious beliefs and sects (New Age, etc.). Therefore, prophets and apostles must come equipped with divine credentials. These divine credentials are *motives of credibility* that allow us to make the transition from human faith in the word of a prophet, to divine faith in God who speaks through the prophet.

Motives of credibility are supernatural signs that show the action of God by transcending the power of all natural causes. We generally call such signs miraculous: signs of God's intervention above the natural order of things. The motives of credibility are principally three: miracles, prophecies, and the witness of the People of God in the Old and New Covenants: Israel and the Church.³

³ See CCC 156: "Thus the miracles of Christ and the saints, prophecies, the Church's growth and holiness, and her fruitfulness and stability 'are the most certain signs of divine Revelation, adapted to the intelligence of all'; they are 'motives of credibility' (*motiva credibilitatis*), which show that the assent of faith is 'by no means a blind impulse of the mind.'" See Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, ch. 3, DS 3009, 3013 (D 1790, 1794).

The Witness of Miracles

Let us begin with miracles. When God revealed Himself to Moses, He attracted his attention by an evident miracle: a burning bush that was not consumed. When God then asked him to be His messenger to Pharaoh and the elders of Israel, Moses in turn asked for a miraculous sign by which his divine commission would be recognized:

Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'" The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod." And he said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it. But the Lord said to Moses, "Put out your hand, and take it by the tail"—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand—"that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."⁴

This witness of miracles was continually manifested by Moses in the succession of the ten plagues, in the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, in the column of fire and cloud that led the people, in the manna by which they were fed in the wilderness, in the water brought out from the rock by the rod of Moses, in the divine fire on Mt. Sinai, in the tablets of the Law written by the finger of God, in the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River, in the falling of the walls of Jericho, etc. Every step of the way of the Chosen People was marked by this witness of a power that could only come from God. Moses repeatedly reminds the Chosen People of these motives of credibility—the prodigious miracles by which God took them out of Egypt with a "mighty hand" and "outstretched arm."⁵

When, centuries later, the Chosen People had fallen largely into the worship of Baal, Elijah used the same method. He challenged the prophets of Baal to demonstrate the truth of their religion by having fire descend from heaven to consume a sacrificial offering. Of course, they were unable to do this. Elijah then prepared an altar for sacrifice, doused it with water, and fire came down from heaven at his invocation to show that the worship of the God of Israel is the true religion:

And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,

⁴ Ex 4:1–5.

⁵ See Deut 7:8. In Deut 29:1–5, before telling the Israelites of the punishments that would come upon them for infidelity, Moses calls to mind all the prodigies they witnessed.

let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that thou, O Lord, art God, and that thou hast turned their hearts back." Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God."⁶

The same witness of miracles is constantly given by Christ as proof that He is who He claims to be. When messengers came from John the Baptist in prison, asking Jesus if He was the one that Israel was awaiting, Jesus replied solely with the witness of His miracles (Mt 11:4-5): "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." Or again, He said to the people in Jerusalem on the feast of Chanukah (Jn 10:25, 37-38):

The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me. . . . If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.

All of His great teachings were preceded by miracles to show the truth of what He said. For example, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes preceded His teaching on the Bread of Life in the synagogue in Capernaum. The raising of Lazarus shortly preceded His Paschal mystery, which was then confirmed by the miracle of the Resurrection, witnessed by the Apostles and more than five hundred of the disciples, as St. Paul tells us. The birth of the Church was confirmed by the miracle of Pentecost and the cures worked by the Apostles.

With regard to the witness of miracles, there is a perfect harmony between the Old and the New Testament, and indeed with the entire life of the Church in which miracles continue to exist in every age.

The Witness of Prophecy

Another fundamental witness of God's Revelation is that it is accompanied by prophecy.⁷ Since God alone is omniscient, seeing the entire course of human history in His eternal present, God alone can

⁶ 1 Kings 18:36-39.

⁷ For a fuller treatment of the mission of the prophet, see chapter 8 below. Here we are only concerned with one aspect of prophecy: foretelling future events.

foretell future events with certainty. If a prophet does so, it is a sign that God is speaking through him.

Moses speaks of this witness of prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:21–22:

And if you say in your heart, “How may we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?”—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously.

It was through this witness of prophecy that the true prophets were distinguished from the false ones in ancient Israel. The true prophets were those whose prophecies were fulfilled in their proper time. The foretelling of the Babylonian captivity (and the earlier deportation of the ten northern tribes) was a great test for the truth of a prophet. For example, the prophet Jeremiah foretold the Babylonian captivity with precision, for which he had to suffer greatly at the hands of the rulers, lured on by false prophets. He even foretold the length of time that they would remain in Babylon: roughly seventy years. Isaiah also foretold the Exile and the return, even mentioning the name of the Persian king who would allow them to return to the Holy Land and rebuild the Temple: Cyrus (Is 45:1–5). The prophet Daniel made precise prophecies about the succession of Persian kings, followed by the conquest of Alexander, and the tribulations under Antiochus in the Maccabean period (Dan 11).

Unfortunately, not a few Biblical exegetes do not believe that all of these are true prophecies, supposing that they were written down after the events that they foretell (*vaticinium ex eventu*). I do not agree with such doubts, for such pseudo-prophecies written after the event would not have been accepted as true prophecies and accorded such veneration as the Word of God. However, there is one case in which the supposition of *vaticinium ex eventu* is absolutely impossible: the coming of the Messiah, for it is certain that the entirety of the Old Testament was written before the birth of Christ.

Hundreds of prophecies of the Messiah can be found in the Old Testament, spanning 2,000 years. Thus the greatest motive of credibility for the Old Testament is its prophecies of Christ, and the great motive of credibility in Christ is that His coming was foretold in so many marvelous ways. Again we see that the Old and New Testament witness forms an indestructible harmony, such that each reinforces the other.

The Witness of the People of God

With regard to the witness of the miracles recorded in the Bible, many people object that they did not witness those miracles personally.

However, we do see those miracles today *indirectly* through their effect in forming the People of God in the Old and New Testament: the synagogue and the Church. For the miracles of the Exodus and Mt. Sinai formed the very existence of the Jewish people, and in a sense have conserved their existence until today, in the most trying of circumstances, in which it seems that God is silent. Jews see the continued existence of the Jewish people and faith through so many centuries and in the midst of so many calamities, including that of a two-thousand year exile from their homeland, as a great sign of credibility in the truth of the Mosaic Revelation that formed that faith. A contemporary Jewish theologian, Michael Wyschogrod, states: "Above all, it seems to be an indestructible people. While all the peoples of the ancient world have long disappeared, the Jewish people continues to live and has lived for two thousand years without a homeland, dispersed over most of the globe."⁸ If those events of the Exodus did not truly occur, how can we explain the continuity of the faith of the Jewish people, and their continued vitality through so many centuries until today? They have maintained the same faith for well over three millennial

In the same way, the miracles of Christ, His Resurrection, the miracle of Pentecost, and the miracles worked by the Apostles formed the Church and gave her a force of expansion in the most adverse circumstances of tremendous persecution for the first three centuries of her life.

Furthermore, in the New Covenant, the Church is a motive of credibility insofar as she appears with four marks that show a supernatural origin. We profess these four marks in the Creed: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The universal spread and continuity of the Catholic Church, which professes the same faith and exhibits the same sacramental form of government based on apostolic succession through twenty centuries is a kind of miracle visible to all generations, including our own. Both Israel and the Church are great motives of credibility for those who have eyes to see.

The Sanctity of God's Revelation as a Motive of Credibility

A fourth motive of credibility consists in the supernatural sanctity, nobility, and wisdom of God's Revelation. If God speaks to mankind, this Revelation should be a supernatural wisdom above the wisdom of the world, but not in conflict with the voice of conscience that likewise comes from God. On the contrary, Revelation ought to be in perfect

⁸ Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: Judaism as Corporeal Election* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), 10.

harmony with the secret dictates of conscience and the aspirations of the human heart.

This motive of credibility is frequent in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 4:5–8, Moses says to the people:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them; for that will be your *wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples*, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?⁹

The truth of God’s Revelation in the Old Testament is witnessed to by the human conscience, which finds the moral law announced in the Ten Commandments to be also that written upon the human heart.¹⁰

The supernatural wisdom of Revelation is also beautifully revealed in the theophany of the burning bush. We have seen that Moses asked for miracles to serve as motives of credibility for his mission. However, before asking for miracles, he first asks for the *name of God* to tell the elders of Israel, so that they might believe that God is speaking through him:

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.’”¹¹

The Hebrew word that is translated in our modern bibles as “Lord” is the sacred Tetragrammaton: namely, the four consonants YHWH (יהוה). This was translated first into Greek (in the Septuagint translation) in the third century BC as “He who is.”¹² Because of the sacredness of

⁹ See also Ps 147:19–20.

¹⁰ See Rom 2:15; CCC 2070–71.

¹¹ Ex 3:13–15.

¹² The verb “is” here could also be translated into the future, or simply indicate eternal being, for the verb form is imperfect (continuous). Pope Benedict XVI’s

this name, observant Jews did not pronounce it, so that the name would not be profaned, or sound like just another name of God used by the peoples of the world. Instead, the title “Adonai,” which means “Lord,”¹³ was said in place of the Tetragrammaton.

It is surely extraordinary that God has revealed His name to Moses and the Jewish people of around 1400 BC in such a way that it coincides with the culmination of metaphysical insight about the nature of God: that God’s very essence is *TO BE*—*BEING* in all its fullness. God is *He who is: Being* by essence, whereas all other things *receive* being, or *have* being in limited ways through participation from God.¹⁴ God revealed Himself as the Lord of Being. He can give being to all other things because He is all perfection of being, and He has dominion over all finite and created being (being by participation) as its Lord and infinite Source.

In the same way, the clear revelation of the oneness of God, and our resulting duty to love Him with all our heart, mind, and soul, is a marvelous sign of the supernatural wisdom of the Revelation to Israel. All devout Jews recite the text of Deuteronomy 6:4–5 morning and evening: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

Human philosophy can understand that God is one, and it seems that Plato and Aristotle came to this insight. Nevertheless, that this should have been so clearly proclaimed almost a thousand years earlier, in the midst of a world utterly dominated by polytheism and in a people without any philosophical culture, is surely miraculous and a sign of a divine Revelation. This argument does not work with regard to Islam, for this teaching in the Qur’an is derivative from the Bible, and came at least eighteen centuries after it was revealed to Moses.

Like the ethos of the Old Testament, the moral and religious teaching of Jesus—as we find it in the Sermon on the Mount, for

Regensburg Lecture of Sept. 12, 2006, has an interesting commentary on the translation of the divine name: “Today we know that the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced at Alexandria—the Septuagint—is more than a simple (and in that sense really less than satisfactory) translation of the Hebrew text: it is an independent textual witness and a distinct and important step in the history of revelation, one which brought about this encounter [between Biblical faith and Greek thought] in a way that was decisive for the birth and spread of Christianity.”

¹³ *Adonai* was translated into Greek as *Kyrios*, and into Latin as *Dominus*.

¹⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas comments on this in *SCG* I, ch. 22, n. 10: “Moses was taught this sublime truth by the Lord. . . . God showed that his proper name is *HE WHO IS*. All names are given to signify the nature or essence of something. Therefore it follows that the divine Being Itself is His very essence or nature.”

example—comes to us with the same divine claim to absolute authority, and the same nobility that touches the depths of the human conscience.

A corollary to this motive of credibility is that no supposedly revealed doctrine that is manifestly contrary to the dictates of conscience and natural reason can possibly be God's true Revelation. A religion that proclaims the use of violence in the establishment of religion or the licitness of polygamy is by that very fact shown not to be from God.¹⁵

Benedict XVI was very brave to speak about this in his well-known Regensburg lecture, when he cited the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus (1391), who said: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." Benedict goes on to comment:

The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. "God," he says, "is not pleased by blood—and not acting reasonably (*σὺν λόγῳ*) is contrary to God's nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats. . . . To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death."¹⁶

Although more difficult to verify objectively than the other three principal motives of credibility, this reason for belief based on the sanctity of the teaching is no less important in practice. However, it cannot stand alone, for the human mind could easily be mistaken in its judgment of the supernatural wisdom and holiness of doctrine, which is immeasurably above its own level. Thus it is important that all four of these motives of credibility always go together: miracles, prophecy, the witness of the Church (People of God), and the supernatural wisdom and holiness of the doctrine revealed.¹⁷

¹⁵ It is one thing for polygamy to be tolerated for a time in a certain society, as was the case in the early history of Israel, and quite another thing for it to be formally approved as licit and good, as is the case in Mormonism and Islam.

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, Regensburg Lecture of Sept. 12, 2006.

¹⁷ For a good exposition of the motives of credibility, see, among others, Bl. Pius IX, encyclical *Qui pluribus* (*On Faith and Reason*, 1846), DS 2779–80 (D 1638–39): "But how many wonderful and shining proofs are ready at hand to convince the human reason in the clearest way that the religion of Christ is divine and that 'the whole principle of our doctrines has taken root from the Lord of the heavens

Without Motives of Credibility, Religious Faith Is Imprudent

St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of the motives of credibility for supernatural faith in a very striking passage from his *Summa contra gentiles*, written, among other reasons, to aid Catholic missionaries in dialogue with Muslims:

The divine Wisdom, which knows all things perfectly, willed to reveal to men His secrets, and manifested His presence and the truth of the doctrine with clear signs or witnesses. To confirm these truths which exceed our natural power of knowledge, miracles have been performed which exceed the entire power of nature. These works include the miraculous cure of illnesses, the resurrection of the dead . . . , the inspiration of human minds such that ignorant and simple people, full of the Holy Spirit, gain in an instant the highest wisdom and eloquence [Pentecost]. . . . Seeing these signs and through the efficacy of this proof, an innumerable multitude, not only of simple folk, but also of the most cultivated men, ran to the Catholic faith, not through the violence of arms nor through the promise of carnal delights, but, what is more amazing, in the midst of great torments. And this in a religion in which we are taught to believe truths above the grasp of the human mind, and which put a brake on the desires of the flesh,

above'; therefore nothing exists more definite, more settled or more holy than our faith, which rests on the strongest foundations. This faith, which teaches for life and points towards salvation, which casts out all vices and is the fruitful mother and nurse of the virtues, has been established by the birth, life, death, resurrection, wisdom, wonders and prophecies of Christ Jesus, its divine author and perfectior! Shining forth in all directions with the light of teaching from on high and enriched with the treasures of heavenly wealth, this faith grew famed and notable by the foretellings of so many prophets, the lustre of so many miracles, the steadfastness of so many martyrs, and the glory of so many saints! It made known the saving laws of Christ and, gaining in strength daily even when it was most cruelly persecuted, it made its way over the whole world by land and sea, from the sun's rising to its setting, under the single standard of the Cross! The deceit of idols was cast down and the mist of errors was scattered. By the defeat of all kinds of enemies, this faith enlightened with divine knowledge all peoples, races and nations, no matter how barbarous and savage, or how different in character, morals, laws and ways of life. It brought them under the sweet yoke of Christ Himself by proclaiming peace and good tidings to all men!

"Now, surely all these events shine with such divine wisdom and power that anyone who considers them will easily understand that the Christian faith is the work of God. Human reason knows clearly from these striking and certain proofs that God is the author of this faith; therefore it is unable to advance further but should offer all obedience to this faith, casting aside completely every problem and hesitation. Human reason is convinced that it is God who has given everything the faith proposes to men for belief and behavior."

and in which are esteemed everything that the world despises. It is the greatest of miracles and a manifest proof of divine inspiration that the human mind assents to these truths, only desiring spiritual goods and scorning the goods that can be seen. And that this did not happen by chance but rather through the divine design is manifested by the fact that God predicted that this would occur through the prophets.¹⁸

For St. Thomas, the universality and continuity of the Church is the most important miracle of all, after the Resurrection of Christ. Although God worked many miracles through the Apostles and disciples before the expansion of the Church, today these prodigies are not so necessary, because all can see the Church which continues through the centuries as a perpetual miracle. St. Thomas says:

This admirable conversion of the world to the Christian faith is a certain indication of the past prodigies, which need not be repeated again, since they can be seen in their very effect. It would be the most amazing of miracles if the world were induced to believe in such arduous truths, to live by such a difficult law and to hope for things so elevated without any miraculous sign at all. However, God does not cease from realizing miracles even in our own day through his saints in confirmation of the faith.¹⁹

Examples of contemporary miracles include the healings at Lourdes; the miracle of the sun at Fatima on October 13, 1917, witnessed by some 70,000 people; and those required for the beatification and canonization of saints.

What signs can be alleged by the followers of the Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Mormons, or the Buddhists, or the Muslims? Or, for that matter, what signs were alleged by the Protestants to justify their separation from the Church in the 1520's?

With regard to the Muslims, St. Thomas says:

They did not present supernatural prodigies, the only adequate witness of divine inspiration. . . . On the contrary, they affirmed that they were sent by the power of the sword, a sign that is not lacking to bandits and tyrants. . . . No divine oracle of the prophets before him gave witness to him. . . . Thus, those who believe in his word, believe imprudently.²⁰

¹⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *SCG* I, ch. 6, n. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, n. 4.

Naturally, the lack of sufficient motives of credibility does not mean that Muslims or members of other religions do not believe *sincerely*, for of course they do. St. Thomas simply means to say that their belief does not have the same *objective basis* as does Judaism and Catholicism, and thus it does not *objectively* merit the assent of faith, for it lacks the divine signs that the true religion ought to have.

Muhammad did not claim to work miracles such as those worked by Moses, the prophets, Christ, and the Apostles. Nor did he claim that his coming and mission were foretold by any prophets before his time. The principal motives of credibility for Islam are said to be the literary beauty of the Qur'an, and the triumphant expansion of Islam. However, the literary beauty of a book does not guarantee that God is its author, for Dante, Homer, Shakespeare, and many others, have written works of sovereign beauty. In contrast to the Old and New Testaments, the Qur'an does not contain new revelation about the nature of God or His mysteries that could show the necessity of a supernatural intervention of God.

Nor does the expansion of Islam argue for an exclusively divine cause, for it spread in the wake of the conquests of the armies of the followers of Muhammad. Furthermore, it promises carnal delights in the afterlife which unconverted minds are all too eager to believe.

The meek and gentle St. Francis of Sales—who converted some seventy-two thousand Calvinists back to the Catholic faith at the end of the sixteenth century—made a similar point with regard to the Protestant Reformation. He rebuked the Calvinists of his region (Le Chablais, near Geneva) for having believed their ministers (Luther, Zwingli, Calvin) who opposed the Catholic Church and changed doctrine without their mission being supported by prophecies or miracles:

Your ministers have not been prophesied as preachers of the word of God, nor the time of their coming, nor a single one of their actions. They have made a revolution in the Church much greater and bolder than Our Lord made in the synagogue; for they have taken all away, only putting back certain shadows: but testimonies to this effect have they none. . . . Whence will they show me that the Church was ever to receive another form, or a like reformation to the one which our Lord made?²¹

Instead of such objective signs of divine origin—prophecies and miracles—Protestantism generally justifies its extraordinary mission

²¹ St. Francis de Sales, *The Catholic Controversy* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1989), part 1, ch. 4, p. 27.

from God on two grounds: its success, and the interior witness of the Holy Spirit inspiring the reformers in their interpretation of the Gospel. However, the success of the Reformation in spreading and persevering does not provide an argument like the Catholic argument of the continuity, unity, and universality of the Catholic Church. The result of the Protestant Reformation was rather the *multiplication* of churches and sects *divided one from another in doctrine*, numbering somewhere in the range of ten to thirty thousand. Fragmentation and division is not a miraculous sign, but the natural tendency of human institutions left to themselves (especially when governed by the principle of the private interpretation of Scripture and dogma). The effects of Protestantism as such in no way necessitate a divine cause. What is miraculous is rather the internal unity of the Catholic Faith and the Catholic Church in communion with the Roman Pontiff through twenty centuries, surviving great crises and historical vicissitudes, and yet always preserving the same faith. The Protestant world does not have the first note of the Catholic Church: that it is *one*. Why did the Catholic Church not go the way of the Protestant denominations? What maintains its unity, its catholicity, its apostolicity? The answer is evident: it is the rock of Peter on which the Church is founded, the Papacy. Catholics see this as a sure sign of the divine origin of the Church.²²

The second criterion generally used by Protestants—the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—has the grave drawback of being purely subjective and incapable of objective verification, which opens the door to all kinds of abuses and illusions, as the history of the division of the Protestant sects demonstrates.

The Danger of Fideism

Many people today give far too little importance to the objective motives of credibility, thinking that religious faith is principally an

²² See Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, ch. 3, DS 3012–13 (D 1793–94): “Moreover, in order that we may satisfactorily perform the duty of embracing the true faith and of continuously persevering in it, God, through His only-begotten Son, has instituted the Church, and provided it with clear signs of His institution, so that it can be recognized by all as the guardian and teacher of the revealed word. For, to the Catholic Church alone belong all those many and marvelous things which have been divinely arranged for the evident credibility of the Christian faith. But, even the Church itself by itself, because of its marvelous propagation, its exceptional holiness, and inexhaustible fruitfulness in all good works; because of its catholic unity and invincible stability, is a very great and perpetual motive of credibility, and an incontestable witness of its own divine mission.” For a more detailed treatment of this theme, see the third volume in this series, *The Mystery of Israel and the Church: The Messianic Kingdom*, chapter 5.

internal and individual matter, based on one's personal "religious sense" or sentiment. In part, this kind of attitude has grown in our society by the influence of certain Protestant ideas. In general, Protestantism, followed by Modernist Catholics,²³ fell into the error of *fideism*, which is an *indifference to the external and objective arguments of the credibility of Revelation*. Fideists say that the act of faith is simply a leap in the darkness, which would lose its merit if it were to be rationally justified.

This is neither the Catholic nor the Jewish position. We are not to believe principally because of an internal *sentiment*, or because we feel an *attraction* to it, or feel *inspired* to do so, or even simply because it seems reasonable or noble. All of these reasons are insufficient (although they are not unimportant). We ought to believe only when a supposed revelation comes with divine signs that clearly show the presence of the Holy Spirit: (a) prophecies, (b) miracles, (c) the authority of a Church (or of a People of God, as in Biblical Israel) which shows the marks of divine origin in its remarkable unity, universality, and continuity (apostolic succession), as well as in (d) the sanctity of her doctrine and of her saints. It is a grave error of Modernism, unfortunately widespread among the Catholic faithful, to base our religious beliefs primarily on internal sentiment, and not on these external objective signs.

Only the external signs of credibility are capable of creating a moral certainty of the fact of Revelation, which rationally motivates our supernatural assent of faith. This moral certainty is not the privilege of experts and theologians, but should be possessed by all Catholics who know the rudiments of their faith.

The Interior Aid of the Grace of the Holy Spirit in the Act of Faith

Coupled with the external signs of Revelation, God also aids us interiorly through His grace. These two causes must always go together: motives of credibility and interior grace. Without the divine impulse of actual grace, it is impossible to make the act of supernatural faith, precisely because it is supernatural. (This is true both under the Old and the New Covenant.) There are many testimonies to this effect in the New Testament. For example, Jesus says: "No one can come to me [in faith] unless it is granted him by the Father" (Jn 6:65). When Peter makes his confession of faith in Christ as the Messiah, Son of the living God, Jesus says: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 16:17). St. Paul teaches the same in 1 Corinthians 12:3: "No one can say Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy

²³ Modernism was a movement condemned by St. Pius X in 1907 in his encyclical, *Pascendi dominici gregis*, and by the Decree *Lamentabili* of the Holy Office.

Spirit." In Ephesians 2:8, he writes: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God."

This necessity of the aid of grace for the act of faith has been infallibly defined by the Church against the Semi-Pelagian heresy,²⁴ and was restated by the First Vatican Council:

Now, although the assent of faith is by no means a blind movement of the mind, yet no one can accept the gospel preaching in the way that is necessary for achieving salvation without the inspiration and illumination of the Holy Spirit, who gives to all facility in accepting and believing the truth.²⁵

Reason is insufficient (although indispensable), and divine grace is necessary to make the act of faith, because the fruit of faith is supernatural. Faith enables us to participate in the mind and truth of God beyond the power of reason. A supernatural cause is necessary to produce a supernatural result. The human mind cannot properly assent to supernatural truth (with purity of intention) without the supernatural aid of God, who gently and invisibly inclines our will to it. We, of course, can resist and block this gentle aid, but we cannot believe without it.

For example, it can happen that if a man investigates the motives of credibility, he may see—with greater or lesser clarity—that he ought to believe, but nevertheless, he holds back and refuses to investigate further because of the great sacrifices he knows that he will have to make for the sake of embracing the faith. Such a man has failed to cooperate with the grace of God. And doubtless there are many sacrifices, for faith teaches us that we must take on the yoke of the Law of Christ and submit our reason to the teaching of the Church, and persecutions of all sorts are never lacking in any age. In reality, these sacrifices are glorious, but the prospective convert does not *see* this, and thus he needs to cooperate with the grace of God in order to believe. However, this grace will never be wanting to those who sincerely seek the truth about God without prejudice and are willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of that truth.

²⁴ Pelagianism refers to the heresy that claimed that a man could merit the grace of justification and subsequent sanctification by his good works alone. Semi-Pelagianism restricted that by contending that man could merit the beginning of salvation and faith, but that grace was necessary for sanctification and salvation. For the condemnation of Semi-Pelagianism, see the Second Synod of Orange, DS 376, 399 (D 189, 200b), reconfirmed at the Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, canon 3, DS 1553 (D 813).

²⁵ Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, ch. 3, DS 3010 (D 1791).

Converts speak of this grace of faith as the gift of inner certainty which comes after a long period of searching and doubt. This is the gift of God which we receive above all through prayer.

This author received this certitude of the divinity of Christ, our divine filiation, and the truth of Christianity, after praying for the first time in his life at twenty-nine years of age.

Paul Waldmann, a Hebrew Catholic, recounted that he received this gift of faith while shaving. After months of discussions and doubt he knew simply that Christ was God, not as an emotional experience but as an intellectual certitude, which brought, of course, an experience of great peace and joy. He wrote:

I heard no voice, I saw no vision. A thought came into my mind. It came very calmly, very slowly and very precisely. It was as if someone placed the words before me, phrase by phrase. It said, "Of course, Christ is God. How could you ever doubt it?" In the very same instant my suspicions, my fears, my hatred of things Catholic were gone, and in their place was the unthinkable belief that Christ is God. And with it came immense peace of soul.²⁶

He experienced the gift of faith through a powerful impulse of actual grace.

The Dogmatic Principle

Faith is a fundamental way by which man can give himself to God, freely submitting his intellect and will to God who reveals Himself. The Second Vatican Council has defined faith as follows: "The obedience of faith' (Rom 16:26; see Rom 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) is to be given to God who reveals, an *obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God*, offering 'the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,'²⁷ and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him."²⁸

However, the self-giving included in the act of faith implies that we truly submit our minds to what God reveals, precisely because God has revealed it, and not because it seems reasonable to us, or because we prefer it. The Israelites at the foot of Mt. Sinai were not asked to pick among the commandments of God, but to embrace His integral Revelation that came to them through the mediation of Moses. In the course of centuries, their descendants were likewise called to embrace the entire Revelation of God that continued to come to them through

²⁶ Quoted in Arthur Klyber, *The One Who Is to Come*, ed. Matthew McDonald (New Hope, KY: Remnant of Israel, 2000), 52.

²⁷ See Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, ch. 3, DS 3008 (D 1789).

²⁸ Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* 5.

the mediation of the written and the oral Torah, through the prophets and the other sacred writings. Similarly today, the Catholic is called to embrace the entire deposit of faith that comes to us through the mediation of Christ, the Apostles, and the Church founded on the Apostles and the apostolic Tradition.

In both Judaism and Catholicism, Revelation is made known in an authoritative way through two complementary channels: inspired Scripture and authoritative oral Tradition, which the Jews call the "oral Torah." Without an authoritative oral Tradition, it would be impossible to know which books are inspired and what their authentic interpretation is.²⁹ Catholics have been given an additional gift to preserve and authentically interpret both Scripture and Tradition: the Magisterium of the Church.³⁰

The submission of the mind inherent in the act of faith is completely irreconcilable with a "pick and choose" mentality. "Cafeteria Catholicism" or cafeteria Judaism, like the principle of private judgment of Scripture, make impossible the complete gift of the mind to God that is implied in the act of supernatural faith.

The orthodox Jewish view of faith coincides with the Catholic view in that both hold that the virtue of faith requires assent to revealed truths held to be infallible. The great medieval rabbi Moses Maimonides codified the central articles of the Jewish faith in the twelfth century:

1. God is the Creator.
2. God is one.
3. God is Spirit.
4. He is the First and the Last.
5. God alone may be worshipped.
6. All the words of the prophets are true.
7. Moses is the father of all the prophets.
8. The Torah is from heaven.
9. The Torah will not be abrogated.
10. The Creator knows all thoughts and deeds of men.
11. The Creator rewards the good in the world to come and punishes the wicked.

²⁹ The consequences of the rejection of Tradition as a source of Revelation can be seen in the Protestant world, in which the loss of Tradition as an authoritative source of interpretation of Scripture has led to the formation of tens of thousands of separated ecclesial communities.

³⁰ See Vatican II, *Dei Verbum* 10: "It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are *so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others*, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."

12. The Messiah will surely come; and we must wait for Him no matter how long He delays.

13. The dead will rise at the time set by God.

No one can be a true Jew if he does not profess these articles as true. Whoever denies even one of these articles is a heretic.³¹

It is interesting to compare these articles of faith with the Apostle's Creed and other Creeds of the Church (such as the Nicene Creed). The act of supernatural faith requires articles of faith or dogmas to which we are obliged to consent because of God's authority. Cardinal Newman has spoken of this requirement as the "dogmatic principle." Revealed religion presents itself to mankind as requiring assent to dogmas of faith simply because God has revealed them.

Card. Newman formulated the dogmatic principle in his great work, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, which he wrote in the process of his conversion to Catholicism:

That there is a truth then; that there is one truth; that religious error is in itself of an immoral nature; that its maintainers, unless involuntarily such, are guilty in maintaining it; that it is to be dreaded; that the search for truth is not the gratification of curiosity; that its attainment has nothing of the excitement of a discovery; that the mind is below truth, not above it, and is bound, not to descant upon it, but to venerate it; that truth and falsehood are set before us for the trial of our hearts; that our choice is an awful giving forth of lots on which salvation or rejection is inscribed; that "before all things it is necessary to hold the Catholic faith;" that "he that would be saved must thus think," and not otherwise; that, "if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding, if thou seeketh her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasure, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God,"—this is the dogmatical principle, which has strength.³²

The dogmatic principle has strength because it is the necessary foundation of divine faith, which is the response of man, aided by the gift of divine grace, to God who reveals Himself. It enables us to build our lives on the rock of truth without vacillation or doubt. The dogmatic principle enabled the prophets to give witness to the truth of God; it enabled David and others to write the Psalms; it enabled the

³¹ These principles are set forth at greater length in Maimonides' commentary on *Sanhedrin*, chapter 10. See *Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishnah: Tractate Sanhedrin*, trans. Fred Rosner (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1981), 151–57.

³² John Henry Card. Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 357.

Jewish people to maintain their identity in exile and in the “silence of God”; it enabled the Middle Ages to build the cathedrals; it enabled the Scholastics, like St. Thomas Aquinas, to write their *Summas*; it enabled the great mystics like St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross to make their spiritual ascent of Mount Carmel; and in our time it enabled Bl. Mother Teresa of Calcutta to found the Missionaries of Charity to work with the poorest of the poor.

The notion of private judgment (or cafeteria Catholicism), on the contrary, is weakness, because it makes the assent of divine faith *impossible*. Divine faith is the supernatural submission of our intellect to God, the divine Teacher. And this total submission—which is in truth a liberation because it frees us from falsehood and sin—is impossible if we retain the right and prerogative of private judgment. We will always be tempted to base our belief on our own limited personal experience and abilities, or on the current social fashions, or on what flatters the tendencies of our sensual nature, or on what is easier because of spiritual sloth and our fallen state. Private judgment proclaims that our own views are the final word on how Revelation is to be interpreted, and thus, practically speaking, we are never forced to transcend them and give ourselves over to God in an act of surrender. The necessity of obeying the Church instead of our own opinions as the final authority on the interpretation of Revelation enables us to truly make the *gift of our minds to God*, so that the truth may set us free from slavery to our own hidden passions, which can easily influence us without our realizing it.

CHAPTER 2

The Faith of Abraham and Mary

Faith Requires Conversion

In the previous chapter we looked at the nature of the act of faith and the reasons for belief. Now we shall look at the spiritual dimension of the life of faith, and two great models of faith: Abraham and Mary.

A brief and enigmatic definition of faith is given in the Letter to the Hebrews, 11:1: "Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that are not seen." We can believe only in what is not directly seen, and belief provides a certainty and assurance about such things, despite their being unseen.

It is of the essence of faith that its object not be seen in any way. First and foremost, the object of faith is not seen by the eyes or senses. God cannot be seen because He is Spirit and not a body. But in a still deeper way, the object of faith is not *seen* by the reasoning power of man. The things of faith are ultimately mysteries that transcend the capacity of human reason.

It is true that we can demonstrate God's existence and some of His attributes through reason alone. Nevertheless, *who* God is remains unknown and unseen even by philosophy's loftiest heights. Reason does not enable us to *see God in His personal reality*, and so the things of God are things *hoped for and not seen*, about which there can be faith.

Joseph Ratzinger has written about the intrinsic difficulty of the act of faith, due to its unseen character, in his *Introduction to Christianity*:

[Faith] signifies the deliberate view that what cannot be seen, what can in no wise move into the field of vision, is not unreal; that, on the contrary, *what cannot be seen in fact represents true reality, the element that supports and makes possible all the rest of reality*. And it signifies the view that this element that makes reality as a whole possible is also what grants man a truly human existence. . . .

Such an attitude is certainly to be attained only by what the language of the Bible calls "*turning back*," "*con-version*." Man's natural inclination draws him to the visible, to what he can take in his hand and hold as his own. . . . He must *turn around* to recognize how blind he is if he trusts only what he sees with his eyes. Without this change of direction, without this resistance to the

natural inclination, there can be no belief. Indeed belief *is* the conversion in which man discovers that he is following an illusion if he devotes himself only to the tangible. This is at the same time the fundamental reason why belief is not demonstrable: it is an *about-turn*; only he who turns about is receptive to it; and because our inclination does not cease to point us in another direction, it remains a turn that is new every day; only in a lifelong conversion can we become aware of what it means to say "I believe."

From this we can see that it is not just today, in the specific conditions of our modern situation, that belief or faith is problematical, indeed almost something that seems impossible, but that it has always meant a leap, a somewhat less obvious and less easily recognizable one perhaps, across an infinite gulf, a leap, namely, out of the tangible world that presses on man from every side. Belief has always had something of an adventurous break or leap about it, because in every age it represents the *risky enterprise of accepting as truly real and fundamental what plainly cannot be seen*.¹

The gift of supernatural faith requires a fundamental conversion of the whole person, in which a turn is made from the primacy of this sensible world to the primacy of the unseen God and the beautiful demands of His love. This conversion requires a certain kind of death to self to live for God. The great models of this conversion of faith from the visible to the invisible mystery hidden in God are Abraham and Mary.

"Without Faith It Is Impossible to Please God" (Heb 11:6)

After defining faith, the Letter to the Hebrews (11:6) goes on to say that faith is necessary to be pleasing to God and enter into relationship with Him: "Without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

Let us look more closely at why it is impossible to please God without faith. First of all, faith makes us docile to the teaching and guidance of God. The supernatural grace of faith makes it possible for man to receive God's Revelation of Himself. That Revelation would be to no purpose, nor would it attain any fruit, if man did not firmly believe it. Divine faith is the virtue by which we first accept God's supernatural gift of Truth—and of Himself—to mankind. Jesus presents God's Revelation as a seed that is sown in the soil of souls (Mt 13:3–8).

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 50–52 (my emphasis).

However, not every soil provides the conditions for growth of the seed. The first condition is the virtue of faith by which the divine seed is recognized as Truth, the Truth that ought to direct our life. Only by faith can we say to God: "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105). Only through faith can we accept God's word as Torah—a life-giving Law of love.

Secondly, faith enables man to enter into relation and conversation with God, who speaks to man in His Revelation. Thus divine faith is always personal—directed to the Person of God who speaks. Without the virtue of faith, our understanding of God—if we accept His existence at all—will never have a personal and intimate character.

Third, faith enables a man to freely submit his intellect and will to God, and thus to give himself to God in this fundamental way. The Second Vatican Council has defined faith as follows: "The obedience of faith" (Rom 16:26; see Rom 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5–6) is to be given to God who reveals, an *obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God*, offering 'the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,'² and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him."³

Faith thus makes possible a unity of minds, and is the beginning of a union of hearts, between man and God (and, by consequence, among all who share that faith). By means of faith, we can receive what is in God's mind, and thus enter into friendship with Him. All friendship is based on a sharing of convictions, a sharing of life, and a mutual self-giving, and the act of faith makes possible a friendship between God and man based on these things. For faith accepts God's gift of His Word to man, and the obedience of faith is a gift of self from man back to God. Without faith there can be no true friendship between God and man, just as there can be no human friendship where there is no human faith in one another's word.

In summary, faith makes possible friendship between God and man. Without faith there could be no such friendship! Through faith, the patriarchs Enoch and Noah were said to "walk with God" (Gen 5:22, 24 and Gen 6:9).

The theological virtue of faith is always portrayed in the Bible as the beginning of a particular kind of life: the life of faith. The prophet Habakkuk gives a classical expression to this idea with the phrase: "The just man lives by his faith" (Hab 2:4). This key text is quoted three times in the New Testament: in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38–39. Let us look at this life of faith in Abraham and Mary.

² See Vatican I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, ch. 3, DS 3008 (D 1789).

³ *Dei Verbum* 5.

The Faith of Abraham

Abraham is a very great model of living by faith, and of the friendship with God established by faith. By his faith, Abraham let God lead him to the Promised Land. His obedience of faith made it possible for him to be a servant of God, to serve Him through fulfilling the word made known in Revelation and accepted in faith. By virtue of Abraham's faith in God's promise, that promise was permitted to enter the world: the promise that all nations would be blessed in his seed.

Through faith, Abraham held what is unseen above what is seen. Through faith he gave witness to the primacy of the divine promise over the promises of this world. Through faith he gave witness to God's fidelity despite the fact that the promise went against all appearances. When Abram was 75 (and his barren wife Sarah was 66), he was promised that in his seed all nations would be blessed (Gen 12:1-4). Yet they had to wait some 25 years for the realization of that promise. When he was 99 and Sarah was 90, the promise was reiterated (Gen 17:15-21):

And God said to Abraham, ". . . I will bless her [Sarah], and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live in thy sight!" God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year."

It should be noted that although Abraham's faith was heroic in the extreme, it was not without imperfection, for Abraham, like Sarah, laughed at God's plan, and he tried to bring about God's promise in a human way, through Hagar, Sarah's handmaid. The result was the line of Ishmael, from whom it is traditionally held that the Arab people, and Muhammad, are descended.⁴ However, we must not be hard on Abraham, for he was 86 when Ishmael was born (and Sarah was 77); ten years had passed and the promise had not yet been realized.

⁴ See Gen 25:12-18.

Through faith, Abraham gave glory to God by allowing Him to direct his feet, without knowing where he was going. Each one of us is called to this kind of faith in God's plan. We often ask God to reveal to us His full plan in advance so that we can know where we are going. Normally God does not grant such a prayer so that we will have the merit of walking by faith. This enables us to give to God the gift of a surrender of what is generally most precious to us: our complete self-determination.

Finally, the faith of Abraham revealed in the sacrifice of Isaac shows how faith is an oblation and sacrifice to God. In faith, God's word is preferred to the testimony of all others, just as God must be loved above all others. We can better appreciate the magnitude of the trial of faith involved in the sacrifice of Isaac if we reflect on how long Abraham had to wait for Isaac's birth after God's promise, the greatness of the miracle of that birth, and the promise that all nations would be blessed through him.

The faith of Abraham is beautifully described in chapter 11 of the Letter to the Hebrews:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. . . . These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence he did receive him back and this was a symbol.⁵

⁵ Heb 11:8-19.

The Letter to the Hebrews thus says that Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac because his faith in the divine promise—that all nations would be blessed in Isaac—was so strong that he believed God capable of raising him from the dead. In virtue of this faith, God repeated the promise of the blessing of all nations in Abraham's seed:

I swear by myself, says the Lord, since you have done this and have not withheld your only son, I will indeed bless you, and will surely multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, as the sands on the seashore. . . . In your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed me.⁶

The Faith of Mary, Daughter of Zion

The Faith of Abraham and Mary

There is a beautiful parallel between the faith of Abraham and Mary. John Paul II has brought this out in his great encyclical on Mary, *Redemptoris Mater* (RM).⁷ In the rest of this chapter we shall follow this encyclical, which is especially eloquent in answering Protestant objections to Mary's importance in salvation history.

Through his heroic faith, Abraham is the father of those who come to believe in the God who through Abraham revealed Himself to mankind. Through her faith in the message of the angel Gabriel, Mary has become not only the Mother of God, but also the universal mother of all those who believe in her Son and are called into His Church. Just as Scripture praises the faith of Abraham, so Mary's faith is singled out for praise in the inspired words of St. Elizabeth at the Visitation: "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45).

In RM 14, John Paul II brings out this parallel:

Abraham's faith constitutes the beginning of the Old Covenant; Mary's faith at the Annunciation inaugurates the New Covenant. Just as Abraham "in hope believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations" (cf. Rom 4:18), so Mary, at the Annunciation, having professed her virginity ("How shall this be, since I have no husband?") believed that through the power of the Most High, by the power of the Holy Spirit, she would become the Mother of God's Son. . . . Mary's "obedience of faith" during the

⁶ Gen 22:16–18. Confraternity of Christian Doctrine translation, (New York, Benziger Bros., 1958).

⁷ John Paul II, encyclical *Redemptoris Mater: On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church*, March 25, 1987.

whole of her pilgrimage will show surprising similarities to the faith of Abraham. . . . To believe means "to abandon oneself" to the truth of the word of the living God, knowing and humbly recognizing "how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways" (Rom 11:33). Mary, who by the eternal will of the Most High stands, one may say, at the very center of those "inscrutable ways" and "unsearchable judgments" of God, conforms herself to them in the dim light of faith, accepting fully and with a ready heart everything that is decreed in the divine plan.

Abraham's faith inaugurated the Old Covenant. It was proven above all in two respects: in his faith that in his seed all peoples would be blessed, and the faith to sacrifice that son from whom the promise was to descend. Mary likewise showed her faith above all in the promise at the Annunciation, and through her readiness to sacrifice that Son in whom all hopes centered.

With regard to this second aspect of Mary's faith, a crucial moment is the prophecy of Simeon, which was "like a second Annunciation to Mary" (RM 16):

While this announcement on the one hand confirms her faith in the accomplishment of the divine promises of salvation, . . . it also reveals to her that she will have to live her obedience of faith in suffering, at the side of the suffering Savior, and that her motherhood will be mysterious and sorrowful.

In discussing Mary's faith in RM 13, John Paul II begins with the definition of faith given in *Dei Verbum* 5: "The obedience of faith' must be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man entrusts his whole self freely to God." Mary's fullness of faith was a response of complete self-giving to God, made possible by her fullness of grace:

Indeed, at the Annunciation Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the "full submission of intellect and will," manifesting "the obedience of faith" to him who spoke to her through his messenger. She responded, therefore, with all her human and feminine "I," and this response of faith included both perfect cooperation with "the grace of God that precedes and assists" and perfect openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, who "constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts" [DI' 5].

Mary's response to the angel in the Annunciation—"Let it be done unto me according to your word"—was a response of faith, hope, and charity, by which she consented to participate in the Incarnation. As *Lumen gentium* 56 states, "The Father of mercies willed that the consent of the predestined Mother should precede the Incarnation." John Paul II develops this theme:

This *fiat* of Mary—"let it be to me"—was decisive, on the human level, for the accomplishment of the divine mystery. There is a complete harmony with the words of the Son, who, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, says to the Father as he comes into the world: "Sacrifices and offering you have not desired, but *a body you have prepared for me*. . . . Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb 10:5-7). The mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished when Mary uttered her *fiat*: "Let it be to me according to your word," which made possible, as far as it depended upon her in the divine plan, the granting of her Son's desire.

Mary uttered this *fiat in faith*. In faith she entrusted herself to God without reserve and "devoted herself totally as the handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son" (LG 56). And as the Fathers of the Church teach—she conceived this Son in her mind before she conceived him in her womb: precisely in faith!⁸

Before God entered into human history, He asked for mankind's consent. A first remote consent was given by Abraham in his faith in the promise of the blessing of all nations in his seed. A second decisive and proximate consent was given by Mary to God through the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation, through her faith in the most seemingly improbable message that a human ear could ever hear: that she would become the virginal mother of the Son of God.

St. Bernard has a beautiful homily on Mary's consent at the Annunciation, in which he imagines the holy souls of the Old Testament in the bosom of Abraham waiting in suspense for Mary's consent:

You have heard, O Virgin, that you will conceive and bear a son; you have heard that it will not be by man but by the Holy Spirit. The angel awaits an answer; it is time for him to return to God who sent him. We too are waiting, O Lady, for your word of compassion; the sentence of condemnation weighs heavily upon us. . . . Tearful Adam with his sorrowing family begs this of you, O loving Virgin, in their exile from Paradise. Abraham begs it, David begs it. All the other holy patriarchs, your ancestors, ask it of you, as they dwell in the country of the shadow of death. This is what the whole earth waits for, prostrate at your feet. It is right in doing so, for on your word depends comfort for the wretched, ransom for the captive, freedom for the condemned, indeed, salvation for all the sons of Adam, the whole of your race. Answer quickly, O Virgin. . . . Answer with a word, receive the Word of God. Speak your own word, conceive the divine Word. Breathe a passing word,

⁸ RM 13 (italics original).

embrace the eternal Word. . . . Though modest silence is pleasing, dutiful speech is now more necessary. Open your heart to faith, O blessed Virgin, your lips to praise, your womb to the Creator. See, the desired of all nations is at your door, knocking to enter. If he should pass by because of your delay, in sorrow you would begin to seek him afresh, the One whom your soul loves. Arise, hasten, open. Arise in faith, hasten in devotion, open in praise and thanksgiving. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," she says, "be it done to me according to your word."⁹

Mary as the New Eve: Mary's Faith Redeems Eve's Disobedience

Mary's obedience of faith to the angel, mirroring Abraham's faith, is also the diametrical opposite of Eve's unbelief, by which the immense cycle of sin entered human history. Thus the Fathers of the Church view Mary as the new Eve, as Christ is the new Adam. St. Irenaeus, bishop, martyr, and a disciple of a disciple of the Apostles, develops this theme:

In accordance with this design, Mary the Virgin is found obedient, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). But Eve was disobedient; for she did not obey when as yet she was a virgin. And even as she, having indeed a husband, Adam, but being nevertheless as yet a virgin . . . having become disobedient, was made the cause of death, both to herself and to the entire human race; so also did Mary, having a man betrothed [to her], and being nevertheless a virgin, by yielding obedience, become the cause of salvation, both to herself and the whole human race. . . . And thus also it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith.¹⁰

To pursue the analogy, just as the original sin was the work not of Adam alone, but of the virgin Eve and Adam together, so it is fitting that the redemption of original sin likewise be worked not by the new Adam (Christ) alone, but rather by the new Adam together with the new Eve: Mary. Just as Eve collaborated with Adam in our fall, so the new Eve collaborates with Christ in our rise. The original Eve collaborated in the fall through disobedience to God and disbelief in His word. This is set right by the collaboration of Mary in perfect obedience and faith, expressed in her *fiat*: "Let it be done unto me according to your word."

⁹ St. Bernard, Homily 4 "In Praise of the Virgin Mother," nn. 8–9, in *Sancti Bernardi Opera* (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1966), 4:53–54. This text is used in the Roman Breviary, Office of Readings on December 20, fourth week of Advent.

¹⁰ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.22.4, ANF 1:455.

And as Adam is the head of humanity according to the flesh, Eve is his partner in this, being the “mother of all the living.” Likewise, Christ the new Adam is the new head of humanity which He recapitulates, and Mary is the new Eve, the mother of all those who receive the new life of faith in Christ.

Mary's Faith and the Hidden Life

After the mysteries of the Annunciation and the Nativity, Mary lived by faith during the thirty years of her Son's hidden life. John Paul II speaks of this in RM 17:

During the years of Jesus' hidden life in the house at Nazareth, Mary's life too is “hid with Christ in God” (cf. Col. 3:3) through faith. For faith is contact with the mystery of God. Every day Mary is in constant contact with the ineffable mystery of God made man, a mystery that surpasses everything revealed in the Old Covenant. From the moment of the Annunciation, the mind of the Virgin-Mother has been initiated into the radical “newness” of God's self-revelation and has been made aware of the mystery. She is the first of those “little ones” of whom Jesus will say one day: “Father, . . . you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes” (Mt 11:25). . . . However, it is not difficult to see in that beginning a particular heaviness of heart, linked with a sort of “night of faith”—to use the words of St. John of the Cross—a kind of “veil” through which one has to draw near to the Invisible One and to live in intimacy with the mystery.

Mary's life of faith can be seen in the fact that St. Luke twice mentions that Mary pondered the mysteries of her Son in her heart (Lk 2:19; 2:51): “Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.” A lively faith is not content to simply receive God's Revelation in a passive way. The person who lives by faith *keeps* God's living Word and ponders it continually in his heart. This interior reception of and meditation on God's Word makes the Word maximally fruitful. In this way Mary is the most perfect model of living faith, allowing the Word to grow continually in her heart.

Mary's Faith at the Foot of the Cross

We have said that faith always involves obscurity, the “conviction of things *not seen*” (Heb 11:1). The obscurity of Mary's faith, present throughout the hidden life of her Son in which no sign of His messianic mission was seen, culminated during His Passion. John Paul II speaks of this sorrowful dimension of Mary's faith in RM 18–19:

At that moment [of the Annunciation] she had also heard the words: "He will be great . . . and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1:32-33).

And now, standing at the foot of the Cross, Mary is the witness, humanly speaking, of the complete negation of these words. On that wood of the Cross her Son hangs in agony as one condemned. . . . How great, how heroic then is the obedience of faith shown by Mary in the face of God's "unsearchable judgments"! How completely she "abandons herself to God" without reserve, "offering the full assent of the intellect and the will" to him whose "ways are inscrutable" (cf. Rom 11:33)! . . .

Through this faith Mary is perfectly united with Christ in his self-emptying. For "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men": precisely on Golgotha "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (cf. Phil. 2:5-8). At the foot of the Cross Mary shares through faith in the shocking mystery of this self-emptying. This is perhaps the deepest "kenosis" of faith in human history.

In His Passion, Christ endured the most extreme self-emptying conceivable on the level of being and action, as God crucified. However, Christ did not undergo the trial of faith in His Passion, for He had the beatific vision and so He did not live by faith, as we do, but by sight, as the Revealer of the Father.

However, while she did not undergo the physical kenosis of her Son in her body, Mary did undergo the greatest self-emptying of faith at the foot of the Cross. Indeed, it was a far greater trial than that of Abraham, precisely because her victim was accepted and immolated in every way.

Just as Abraham's faith shown in the sacrifice of his son merited a blessing on his seed and in his seed on all nations (Gen 22:16-18), so Mary's faith during the immolation of her Son merited a still more universal blessing of faith. Her faith, according to the language of the Fathers of the Church, undid the knot tied by the disobedience of Eve.¹¹

In summarizing this section on the faith of Mary in RM 19, John Paul II says:

¹¹ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.22.4, ANF 1:455: "The knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith." This text is quoted in Vatican II, LG 56.

In the expression "Blessed is she who believed," we can therefore rightly find a kind of "key" which unlocks for us the innermost reality of Mary, whom the angel hailed as "full of grace." If as "full of grace" she has been eternally present in the mystery of Christ, through faith she became a sharer in that mystery in every extension of her earthly journey.

Mary's Spiritual Motherhood

In RM 20–24, John Paul II turns to consider Mary's spiritual motherhood. He introduces the theme by considering several texts that seem at first sight to belittle that motherhood. In Luke 11:27–28 we read: "A woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!' But he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'" A similar statement is found in Luke 8:20–21: "And he was told, 'Your mother and your brethren are standing outside, desiring to see you.' But he said to them, 'My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it.'"

John Paul II explains that these texts point to the distinction between physical and spiritual maternity (and fraternity), and they apply above all to Mary as the exemplar of all those who "hear the word of God and keep it," by pondering the divine Word in her heart so as to make it spiritually fruitful:

He [Jesus] wishes to divert attention from motherhood understood only as a fleshly bond, in order to direct it towards those mysterious bonds of the spirit which develop from hearing and keeping God's word. . . . "Motherhood," too, in the dimension of the Kingdom of God and in the radius of the fatherhood of God himself, takes on another meaning. . . . Is Jesus thereby distancing himself from his mother according to the flesh? Does he perhaps wish to leave her in the hidden obscurity which she herself has chosen? If this seems to be the case from the tone of those words, one must nevertheless note that the new and different motherhood which Jesus speaks of to his disciples refers precisely to Mary in a very special way. Is not Mary the first of "those who hear the word of God and do it"? And therefore does not the blessing uttered by Jesus in response to the woman in the crowd refer primarily to her? Without any doubt, Mary is worthy of blessing by the very fact that she became the mother of Jesus according to the flesh . . . , but also and especially because already at the Annunciation she accepted the word of God, because she believed it, because she was obedient to God, and because she "kept" the word and

"pondered it in her heart" (cf. Lk. 1:38, 45; 2:19, 51) and by means of her whole life accomplished it.¹²

Indeed, Mary's physical fecundity in bearing the Word of God was caused by her first having accepted the Word of God in a supreme act of faith:

If through faith Mary became the bearer of the Son given to her by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit, while preserving her virginity intact, in that same faith she discovered and accepted the other dimension of motherhood revealed by Jesus during his messianic mission. One can say that this dimension of motherhood belonged to Mary from the beginning, that is to say from the moment of the conception and birth of her Son. From that time she was "the one who believed." But as the messianic mission of her Son grew clearer to her eyes and spirit, she herself as a mother became ever more open to that new dimension of motherhood which was to constitute her "part" beside her Son.¹³

John Paul II speaks of her as the "*first disciple of her Son*, the first to whom he seemed to say: 'Follow me,' even before he addressed this call to the Apostles or to anyone else" (RM 20).

Mary's Maternal Mediation at the Wedding Feast at Cana

Another Marian text in which we see the greatness of Mary's faith is the wedding feast in Cana, in the second chapter of John. John Paul II analyzes this text in RM 21. It contains a great difficulty concerning the intimate relationship between Jesus and Mary, for Jesus responds to His mother with the seemingly harsh words: "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (Jn 2:4). Nevertheless, precisely this episode reveals the spiritual maternity of Mary and its fecundity through her maternal mediation (intercession) and her fullness of faith. Mary is in no way discouraged by Jesus' words. On the contrary, she has no doubt whatever that Jesus will hear her and work a miracle, thus initiating His public ministry. She says to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). John Paul II writes:

The description of the Cana event outlines what is actually manifested as a new kind of motherhood according to the spirit and not just according to the flesh, that is to say *Mary's solicitude for human beings*, her coming to them in the wide variety of their wants and needs. At Cana in Galilee there is shown only one concrete aspect of human need, apparently a small one of little importance

¹² RM 20.

¹³ RM 20.

("They have no wine"). But it has a symbolic value: this coming to the aid of human needs means, at the same time, bringing those needs within the radius of Christ's messianic mission and salvific power. Thus there is a mediation: Mary places herself between her Son and mankind in the reality of their wants, needs and sufferings. *She puts herself "in the middle," that is to say she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother.* She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she "has the right" to do so. Her mediation is thus in the nature of intercession: Mary "intercedes" for mankind. And that is not all. As a mother she also *wishes the messianic power of her Son to be manifested. . . .*

Another essential element of Mary's maternal task is found in her words to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you." The Mother of Christ presents herself as the *spokeswoman of her Son's will*, pointing out those things which must be done so that the salvific power of the Messiah may be manifested. At Cana, thanks to the intercession of Mary and the obedience of the servants, Jesus begins "his hour."¹⁴

It can be seen from this episode that Mary's maternal mediation is entirely oriented towards her Son. She intercedes with her Son in our favor by presenting our needs, and she intercedes with us in her Son's favor, pleading with us to do everything He tells us. Therefore, it is clear that Mary's maternal mediation is in no way opposed to the unique mediation of Christ between mankind and the Father. On the contrary, Mary's maternal mediation is entirely in service of Christ's infinitely higher mediation. This theme is obviously important in ecumenical dialogue with the Protestants, who traditionally reject Mary's mediation as injurious to that of Christ. John Paul II counters this Protestant idea in RM 22: "It is precisely in this sense that the episode at Cana in Galilee offers us a sort of first announcement of Mary's mediation, wholly oriented towards Christ and tending to the revelation of his salvific power." And since Mary is the Mother of God, it follows that Mary's mediation in our favor is supremely maternal. It is also a mediation based on the fullness of faith, so as to lead us to greater faith.

Mary's Supreme Maternal Mediation at the Foot of the Cross

Mary's maternal mediation, together with her life of faith, reaches its culmination at the foot of the Cross, as seen in John 19:25-27:

¹⁴ RM 21 (italics original).

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother: "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

John Paul II comments on this in RM 23:

Undoubtedly, we find here an expression of the Son's particular solicitude for his Mother, whom he is leaving in such great sorrow. And yet the "testament of Christ's Cross" says more. . . . The Mother of Christ, who stands at the very center of this mystery—a mystery which embraces each individual and all humanity—is given as mother to every single individual and all mankind. The man at the foot of the Cross is John, "the disciple whom he loved." But it is not he alone. Following tradition, the Council does not hesitate to call Mary "the Mother of Christ and mother of mankind" (LG 54).

In RM 24, John Paul II remarks that in John 19:26, Christ once again addresses Mary as "woman" rather than "mother." As before, her physical maternity is put in the shadow so as to reveal her universal spiritual maternity, as well as to connect her with the proto-Gospel of Genesis 3:15, according to which "the seed of the woman . . . will crush the head of the serpent":

The words uttered by Jesus from the Cross signify that *the motherhood* of her who bore Christ finds a "new" continuation *in the Church and through the Church*, symbolized and represented by John. In this way . . . *the Holy Mother of God*, through the Church remains in that mystery as "*the woman*" spoken of by the Book of Genesis (3:15) at the beginning and by the Apocalypse (12:1) at the end of the history of salvation. In accordance with the eternal plan of Providence, Mary's divine motherhood is to be poured out upon the Church.¹⁵

In Revelation 12:1, we read: "And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. And being with child, she cried out in her travail and was in the anguish of delivery." Who is this woman and who is the child with whom she is in travail? The woman represents both Mary and the Church. But who is the child? Indeed, Mary was spared the pains of childbirth in her delivery of Jesus at Bethlehem. She was not in travail with Jesus. The Fathers and Doctors

¹⁵ RM 24 (italics original).

of the Church, as well as the Magisterium,¹⁶ tell us that the child with whom Mary is in travail in Revelation 12 is Christ's Mystical Body: all of us. And we cause her great travail in her maternal mediation, because of our resistance to God's grace, and because of our sins.

Mary therefore stands at the beginning and at the end of the Bible as the "woman" who is in perfect enmity with the serpent (the devil) and who gives birth to salvation—in Christ, her Son the Redeemer, and in all of the redeemed members of His Mystical Body.

It is no surely no accident that Mary was present in the upper room at Pentecost, interceding for the birth of the Church through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. John Paul II writes:

In the redemptive economy of grace, brought about through the action of the Holy Spirit, there is a unique correspondence between the moment of the Incarnation of the Word and the moment of the birth of the Church. The person who links these two moments is Mary: *Mary at Nazareth and Mary in the Upper Room at Jerusalem*. In both cases her discreet yet essential presence indicates the path of "birth from the Holy Spirit." Thus she who is present in the mystery of Christ as Mother becomes—by the will of the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit—present in the mystery of the Church. In the Church too she continues to be a *maternal presence*, as is shown by the words spoken from the Cross: "Woman, behold your son!"; "Behold, your mother."¹⁷

Since Mary is the Mother of the Redeemer, she must also be Mother of His Mystical Body whom He came to redeem. And thus her maternal mediation must continue in the life of the Church. This mediation is ordered to fostering an ever more living faith in all His members: "Do whatever He tells you." This is Mary's last testament, and the last testament of her Son on the Cross was: "Behold, your mother."

Living faith is fruitful and gives supernatural life. The greater the faith, the greater the supernatural life to which it gives birth. As faith

¹⁶ See St. Pius X, encyclical on the Immaculate Conception *Ad diem illum laetissimum* 24 (1904): "Everyone knows that this woman signified the Virgin Mary, the stainless one who brought forth our Head. The Apostle continues: 'And, being with child, she cried travailling in birth, and was in pain to be delivered' (Rev 12:2). John therefore saw the Most Holy Mother of God already in eternal happiness, yet travailling in a mysterious childbirth. What birth was it? Surely it was the birth of us who, still in exile, are yet to be generated to the perfect charity of God, and to eternal happiness. And the birth pains show the love and desire with which the Virgin from heaven above watches over us, and strives with unwearying prayer to bring about the fulfillment of the number of the elect."

¹⁷ RM 24 (italics original).

made Abraham our father in faith, so Mary's faith made it possible for her to be the Mother of God and the mother of all in the order of grace, our mother in the faith of Abraham brought to its fullness.

CHAPTER 3

The Virtue of Hope in Biblical Judaism and Catholicism

The Nature of Hope

Pope Benedict XVI has directed the attention of Catholics to the theological virtue of hope in his second encyclical, *Spe salvi* (*Saved through Hope*), of November 2007. Let us look now at the virtue of hope in Judaism and Catholicism, following the inspiration of that encyclical. Jews and Christians are united in a common hope. We both await the world to come (*olam ha-ba*), the resurrection of the body, the Last Judgment, and the beatific vision (the vision of God). Nevertheless, the fullness of Revelation in Christ illuminates and transforms the hope of Judaism, and defends it against worldly deformations.

Like faith and charity, hope is a theological virtue. A theological virtue is one whose object is God Himself. The virtue of faith has God as its object as the First Truth, to whom we must conform our minds and give the obedience of faith. The virtue of hope is directed to God as the source and content of our beatitude (perfect happiness), to be attained through God's grace. Charity is directed to God as He whom we love above all things for His own sake.

Hope thus is directed to God as the giver of eternal life, and the very content of eternal life. For union with God seen "face to face" is the essence of eternal life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1817 defines hope as "the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit." Hope aims at union with God, through God's aid.

Contrary to the virtue of hope are two opposing vices: despair and presumption. Despair gives up on achieving beatitude altogether. Its motto is "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Very often despair is camouflaged under the appearance of gaiety and pleasure-seeking. Presumption does not give up on beatitude, but thinks to achieve it in one's own way and not in God's way: without God's grace or without repentance.

The Relationship between Faith, Hope, and Charity

Faith, hope, and charity are intimately related, for hope grows out of faith, and charity grows out of faith and hope. We can only have hope in God if we first believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him (see Heb 11:6). No one can hope in God who does not believe in His Word and His fidelity.

Similarly, no one can love God without first believing in Him and in His Goodness, which is manifested above all in the promise that He gives us of perfect happiness with Him in heaven, for which we hope.

Jewish theology also speaks of this relation between faith (*emunal*) and hope (*bittabon*), seeing faith as the tree and hope (or trust) as its fruit.¹ The fruit cannot exist without the tree, whereas the tree can still exist without its fruit, although in sterility. Nevertheless, the tree is ordered to the production of fruit; faith is ordered to hope, which, in turn, is ordered to charity.

The Existential Importance of Hope

The virtue of hope is absolutely essential for life. This is a truth that Benedict has wished to emphasize greatly in his second encyclical, *Spe salvi*. In the introduction, he writes:

Hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey. . . . Here too we see as a distinguishing mark of Christians the fact that they have a future: it is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness. Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well. . . . The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life.²

When the Gospel was first proclaimed in the ancient world, it was announced and perceived as a message of radical hope in a world marked by pervasive despair. St. Paul speaks of the new Christians at Ephesus as previously having been "without hope and without God in

¹ See Louis Jacobs, *Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 149, who cites Jacob Ibn Shesheth, *Sefer Ha-Emunab We-Ha-Bittabon* [*Book on Faith and Trust*], ed. B. Chavel, in *Kithbbe H-Ramban*, 2:341-448.

² Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi* 1-2.

the world" (Eph 2:12).³ The state of mankind today is very much like that of the pagan world when the Gospel was first proclaimed. St. Paul contrasts life "according to Christ" with life under the dominion of the "elemental spirits of the universe" (Col 2:8). Polytheistic religion was essentially a cult of these elemental spirits or powers. The modern age, by abandoning faith in the living God, is in a significant sense submitting itself again to these powers. Even though man would like to think that he can dominate the laws of nature, the fact remains that he too is under those laws. If there is no God of love who is the author of natural laws, then man is ultimately a prisoner of impersonal elemental forces.

Jewish and Christian faith, on the other hand, set us free from this impersonal dominion, for God has revealed Himself as a personal God: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As Benedict writes:

It is not the elemental spirits of the universe, the laws of matter, which ultimately govern the world and mankind, but a personal God governs the stars, that is, the universe; it is not the laws of matter and of evolution that have the final say, but reason, will, love—a Person. And if we know this Person and he knows us, then truly the inexorable power of material elements no longer has the last word; we are not slaves of the universe and of its laws, we are free.⁴

The very center of both the Revelation to Israel and the Gospel is a message of hope: the promise of eternal life sharing in the beatitude of God Himself. The very word Gospel means "good tidings."

The promise of eternal life corresponds to the aspiration of the human heart, which naturally desires unlimited goodness and love. No finite thing can fill this aspiration. We naturally seek to be immersed in beauty, but no finite beauty satisfies. We naturally seek to love and be loved, but again, no finite love will fulfill us. We naturally desire to understand the ultimate reason and meaning of all things, but no finite understanding will satisfy. We naturally seek justice, and ardently desire

³ See Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, 2: "Paul reminds the Ephesians that before their encounter with Christ they were 'without hope and without God in the world' (Eph 2:12). Of course he knew they had had gods, he knew they had had a religion, but their gods had proved questionable, and no hope emerged from their contradictory myths. Notwithstanding their gods, they were 'without God' and consequently found themselves in a dark world, facing a dark future. *In nihil ab nihilo quam cito recidimus* (How quickly we fall back from nothing to nothing): so says an epitaph of that period. In this phrase we see in no uncertain terms the point Paul was making. In the same vein he says to the Thessalonians: you must not 'grieve as others do who have no hope' (1 Thess 4:13)."

⁴ *Spe salvi* 5.

to see it established, but no finite and temporary justice will do. If this most basic aspiration were universally impossible, human life would be absurd.

This unlimited aspiration of the human heart is beautifully expressed by Plato in the *Symposium*, in which the priestess Diotima speaks to Socrates about the vision of *Beauty in itself*. She arouses the desire to see God by leading her listeners to ascend from physical to moral beauty until they arrive at the very Idea of Beauty:

"And if, my dear Socrates," Diotima went on, "man's life is ever worth the living, it is when he has attained this vision of the very soul of beauty. And once you have seen it, you will never be seduced again by the charm of gold, of dress. . . . But if it were given to man to gaze on beauty's very self—unsullied, unalloyed, and freed from the mortal taint that haunts the frailer loveliness of flesh and blood—if, I say, it were given to man to see the heavenly beauty face to face, would you call his," she asked me, "an unenviable life, whose eyes had been opened to the vision, and who had gazed upon it in true contemplation until it had become his own forever?"⁵

Perfect happiness, therefore, can only lie in knowing and loving infinite Goodness, Beauty, Truth, and Love, which is God. In fact, eternal life goes beyond this, to include a *sharing* in the infinite and eternal life of God.

It is equally clear that this perfect happiness can never be accomplished in this life, if only because the very temporary nature of this life precludes a perfect happiness, which must include a stable possession of the complete good.

However, the human mind naturally understands that a perfect happiness must be the fruit of having lived well, having lived in such a way that happiness is somehow due. The knowledge that we have moral responsibility shows us that final happiness or unhappiness will be the recompense of the way we have lived our lives.

It should be no surprise, therefore, that all religions in all cultures have the promise of blessedness after this life, for those who have lived well. However, the promise of a blessed afterlife, or heaven, is not presented in the same way by all religions, nor with the same credibility. Very often, as in Islam, the promise of the afterlife is presented principally as a garden of earthly and carnal delights.⁶

⁵ *Symposium* 211d-e, trans. M. Joyce, in *Plato: Collected Dialogues*, ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 563.

⁶ See the *Qur'an*, Surah 52:17-20: "They shall recline on couches ranged in rows. To dark-eyed houris (virgins) we shall wed them."

Only the modern world has sought to banish all promise of an afterlife, turning the virtue of hope exclusively to the temporal dimension. The greatest and most terrible example of this has been Marxism. However, Western secularized society has also sought, although in different ways, to restrict hope to the things of this world.

The result, in both forms, is a growing despair, as it becomes more and more evident that the promise of a future utopia on earth will never be realized. Even if we can dominate nature, we cannot dominate free will itself. And in the hands of an evil will, greater technological power means greater dominion of man over man and over justice. Putting our hope in man's justice alone ultimately means abandoning all hope. Benedict XVI has stated this beautifully in *Spe salvi* 27:

In this sense it is true that anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life (cf. Eph 2:12). Man's great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God—God who has loved us and who continues to love us “to the end,” until all “is accomplished” (cf. Jn 13:1 and 19:30).

Hope in the Old Testament

It is against this backdrop of despair, modern and ancient, that we should appreciate the great gift of hope given by God through His Revelation to Israel and to the Church. Let us begin with the hope of Israel.

It is not uncommon to hear people say that Judaism does not put emphasis on the world to come. This is certainly true of a great many secular Jews today and of Reform Judaism in general. It was also true of the sect of Sadducees at the time of Jesus, of which Caiaphas and his family were members. However, Orthodox Judaism, like Christianity, does have a firm belief in the Last Things: it holds that when the Messiah comes there will be a Messianic age in which Israel will be restored, followed by the Resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment, and the world to come (*olam ba-ba*), bringing fullness of joy in the presence of God.⁷

Nevertheless, the incentive for fidelity to the covenant given in the books of Moses was essentially (although not entirely, as we shall see) hope in temporal prosperity and the temporal blessings of God. This is not because temporal blessings are to be the principal object of the hope of Israel, but simply because God, as an infinitely wise teacher, used a progressive pedagogy in revealing Himself to Israel. He began with what

⁷ See Ps 16:11.

is most tangible—temporal blessings and rewards—to gradually lead the people to aspire for invisible eternal and heavenly blessings.

Nevertheless, even though the Old Testament is relatively muted with regard to the promise of eternal life, it is not completely silent in this matter, for those who have ears to hear! Faith in the Last Things and the resurrection of the dead is implicit in Israel's faith in God's omnipotence, fidelity, and providence. God cannot abandon Israel, nor her faithful souls. God cannot allow injustice and suffering to have the last word. This is impossible. Furthermore, Israel's faith in God's saving power leads to the hope that God will not abandon them to the ultimate defeat of a death from which there is no return. For example, the faith expressed in Psalm 18:2–6 is utterly incompatible with a lack of hope in the Resurrection:

The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies. The cords of death encompassed me, the torrents of perdition assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me, the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

Could the God who is Israel's impregnable rock and fortress, the horn of our salvation, allow all Israel to be utterly defeated by death and corruption?

The aspiration to see God, although veiled in comparison with the New Testament, is present in various parts of the Old Testament. Moses asks God to show him His glory, which is the essential element in the beatitude of heaven: the clear vision of God's glory face to face:

Moses said, "I pray thee, show me thy glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live." And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen."⁸

In this text, the aspiration of Moses—and by extension, of Israel—to see God could not yet be satisfied. It is impossible to see God in the

⁸ Ex 33:18–23.

beatific vision during the course of this earthly life. In addition, even for those who died in the time of the Old Testament, the full unveiling of the promise to see God was not possible. We know that the just souls of the Old Testament could not immediately enter into the vision of God (even after their time in Purgatory) until Christ had paid the price for all sin on Calvary. The souls of the just had to wait in the "bosom of Abraham," also called the "limbo of the just," until the moment of the Redemption of mankind.

The Psalms also witness to the aspiration for the vision of God and the Resurrection. This can be seen, for example, in Psalm 17:15: "As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with beholding thy form." To "behold God's form" indicates the vision of God. In Psalm 11:7, the aspiration for the vision of God is united with the reality of the Last Judgment: "For the Lord is righteous, he loves righteous deeds; *the upright shall behold his face.*"

The prophet Isaiah gives a more explicit promise of the Resurrection and Judgment in Isaiah 26:19–21:

Thy dead shall live, their bodies shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For thy dew is a dew of light, and on the land of the shades thou wilt let it fall. Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath is past. For behold, the Lord is coming forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed upon her, and will no more cover her slain.¹⁰

Belief in the Resurrection, heaven, and hell, is explicitly taught in Daniel 12:2–3:

Many¹¹ of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Finally, in the second century BC, the faith of Israel in the Resurrection is beautifully and gloriously manifested in 2 Maccabees 7, in the episode of the seven brothers who were tortured to death before their mother's eyes. The second brother to be martyred said at his last

⁹ See also Ps 23:6; Ps 27:8–10; and Ps 16:9–11, which prophesies Christ's Resurrection.

¹⁰ See also Is 25:7–9. Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones (Ezek 37) coming to life also has an eschatological dimension.

¹¹ "Many" in Biblical language often can mean "all": a great multitude.

breath: "You dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws" (2 Mac 7:9). The third one, before his tongue and hands were cut off, said: "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again" (2 Mac 7:11). The fourth one said likewise: "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!" (2 Mac 7:14). The seventh brother said: "For our brothers after enduring a brief suffering have drunk of everflowing life under God's covenant; but you, by the judgment of God, will receive just punishment for your arrogance" (2 Mac 7:36). The mother, for her part, exhorted her sons to constancy, saying that the Creator of the world "will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws" (2 Mac 7:23).

Jewish belief in the Resurrection is also clearly attested to in the New Testament. This belief was held by the Pharisees and the generality of Jews, but was denied by the sect of the Sadducees. For this reason the synoptic Gospels narrate the episode of the Sadducees who came to Christ with a complicated case of a woman married to seven husbands in order to ridicule the Resurrection. To whom will she be married in heaven? We know Christ's response: He first corrects their excessively carnal understanding of heaven and the Resurrection, and then goes on to show how the Pentateuch (the only part of the Bible accepted by the Sadducees) also shows the Resurrection of the dead: "And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He is not God of the dead, but of the living" (Mt 22:31-32).

Jesus shows that the very fact of God's personal revelation to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is sufficient to ground our hope in the Resurrection of the dead, because God revealed Himself to Abraham to establish an enduring relationship with him and his descendants, and with all who share his faith. To show the firmness of that relationship, God established a covenant of fidelity with the Chosen People. That relationship cannot end at death, for God is eternally faithful to what He has begun. When God speaks of Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in His revelation to Moses (Ex 3), and when He inspires Israel and the Church to address Him this way, He is saying that He is faithful to them, and this must mean *forever*. His fidelity will not allow

Him to abandon them to extinction, or to the shadowy existence of "Sheol" forever.¹²

Another testimony to the Jewish belief in the Resurrection of the dead is given in Acts 23:8–10. Paul was accused by the leaders of Israel and brought to a tribunal. When he saw that the tribunal was composed of Sadducees, who denied the Resurrection, and Pharisees, who affirmed it, he saw an opportunity to divide his judges by emphasizing that he was on trial for the sake of his faith in the Resurrection. As he expected, a dissension broke out:

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamor arose; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the barracks.

Hope in the World to Come as Seen in Jewish Prayer

The *Jewish Prayer Book (Siddur)* has many references to hope in the world to come. For example, in the holy prayer of the "*Amidah*" (which means standing, for the prayer is said while standing) the second blessing concerns the Resurrection of the dead:

Lord who are mighty for all eternity, Thou revivest the dead. Thou art great in saving power. . . . With great love Thou revivest the dead . . . keeping faith with those who sleep in the dust. Who is like Thee, Lord of power! Who can be compared with Thee, King who sends death and gives life, and causes His saving power to flourish! Thou wilt keep faith in reviving the dead. Blessed art Thou, Lord who revives the dead.

In Maimonides' Thirteen Articles of faith there are three that concern the Last Things:

11. The Creator rewards the good and punishes the wicked.
12. The Messiah will surely come; and we must wait for Him no matter how long He delays.
13. The dead will rise at the time set by God.

Maimonides also says that "resurrection of the dead is one of the fundamental principles in the Torah of our master Moses. There is

¹² "Sheol" is the early Jewish notion of the land of the dead, before Christ's Resurrection and the opening of the gates of heaven. See below, p. 102.

neither Jewish faith nor any attachment to the Jewish faith for an individual who does not believe in this.”¹³

The Hope of the Patriarchs according to Hebrews 11

The Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11, has a magnificent description of the faith and hope of the Old Testament patriarchs and saints, which led them often to glorious martyrdom:

For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy.¹⁴

Glorious are the faith and hope that led the saints of the Old Testament to despise what was visible and prefer martyrdom to infidelity to God. We see a perfect continuity between the faith and hope of the Jewish martyrs of the Maccabean period, and that of the early Christian martyrs, who were their heirs. Nevertheless, the Letter to the Hebrews tells us that the faith and hope of Israel were incomplete, for “God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:40). Israel’s hope is fulfilled by the Gospel, for Israel’s hope centered on the Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom he was to institute, which is the Catholic Church.

Hope in the New Testament

Let us now look briefly at the deepened understanding of hope in the New Testament. In His Sermon on the Mount, Christ begins the teaching of the Gospel by proclaiming the virtue of hope through the beatitudes: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Mt 5:3). The proclamation of the kingdom of heaven is the very opening of Christ’s preaching.¹⁵

¹³ Introduction to *Perek Helek*.

¹⁴ Heb 11:32–38.

¹⁵ See also Mk 1:15.

What was veiled in the revelation of the Old Testament is fully revealed right from the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Philosophers have a saying: What is first in intention is the last in execution. Heaven is the last thing—the end of the road—but it must be first in our intention and aspiration.

The beatitudes turn normal human aspiration upside down by presenting spiritual realities as the content of true beatitude and as our final end, for the sake of which everything else should be sought. We are not promised a kingdom on earth, but the kingdom of heaven for which poverty is no obstacle but a boon. We are promised stable possession of the "land" as an inheritance: the land of the kingdom of God. We are promised full consolation, full mercy, full satiation of our desire for justice and holiness; above all we are promised the vision of God and that we will be made sons of God the Father.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1820 speaks of the virtue of hope in the revelation of Christ:

Christian hope unfolds from the beginning of Jesus' preaching in the proclamation of the *beatitudes*. The beatitudes raise our hope toward heaven as the new Promised Land; they trace the path that leads through the trials that await the disciples of Jesus. But through the merits of Jesus Christ and of his Passion, God keeps us in the "hope that does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5). Hope is the "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul . . . that enters . . . where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf" (Heb 6:19–20). Hope is also a weapon that protects us in the struggle of salvation: "Let us . . . put on the breastplate of faith and charity, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thess 5:8). It affords us joy even under trial: "Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation" (Rom 12:12). Hope is expressed and nourished in prayer, especially in the Our Father, the summary of everything that hope leads us to desire.

At the heart of the Gospel—the Good News brought by God Incarnate—there is the promise of a supernatural happiness that man would never dare to hope for or even imagine. Every human person naturally desires happiness, complete fulfillment of his natural inclinations and faculties, a fullness of being, truth, and love. Nevertheless, the human desire for happiness has been far outstripped by the reality of the Gospel, which promises the vision of God face to face.

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, St. Paul writes: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then *face to face*. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood." And in 1 John 3:2 it is written: "We know, that, when He appears, we shall be like to Him,

because *we shall see Him as He is*." And Our Lord Himself promises, in the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall *see God*" (Mt 5:8).¹⁶

In the words of St. Augustine, God "will be the goal of our longings; and we shall see him for ever; we shall love him without satiety; we shall praise him without wearying. This will be the duty, the delight, the activity of all."¹⁷ The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* 362 states that eternal happiness is "the vision of God in eternal life in which we are fully 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pt 1:4), of the glory of Christ and of the joy of the Trinitarian life."

The Catholic faith teaches us that man has been gratuitously elevated by God and ordered to a supernatural end, the beatific vision, which "surpasses human capabilities,"¹⁸ and which, in the words of St. Thomas, "exceeds the intellect and the will of man; for as the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 2:9: '*Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, it has not come up into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love Him.*'"¹⁹

Since the perfect happiness for which we hope goes beyond anything that we experience in this life, it will always remain unknown to our experience and transcend anything we can imagine. For this reason "we do not know what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom 8:26).

In *Spe salvi* 12, Benedict speaks of how we should understand the promise of eternal life:

To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality—this we can only attempt. It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time—the before and after—no longer exists. We can only attempt to grasp the idea that such a moment is life in the full sense, a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy. This is how Jesus expresses it in Saint John's Gospel: "I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16:22). We must think along these lines if we want to understand the object of Christian hope, to understand what it is that our faith, our being with Christ, leads us to expect.

¹⁶ See also Titus 2:13 and Jn 17:3: "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

¹⁷ Augustine, *City of God* 22.30, trans. H. Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 1088.

¹⁸ *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* 362.

¹⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 5, a. 5, sed contra.

Hope and the Last Judgment

The Last Judgment is often thought of as an object of terror and it may seem like the exact opposite of an object of hope. Nevertheless, Benedict points out that the Last Judgment is indeed an object of hope, for it corresponds to a basic and ineradicable human aspiration: the desire to see full and perfect justice accomplished and realized forever. In the Last Judgment we hope for

an "undoing" of past suffering, a reparation that sets things aright. For this reason, faith in the Last Judgment is first and foremost hope—the need for which was made abundantly clear in the upheavals of recent centuries. I am convinced that the question of justice constitutes the essential argument, or in any case the strongest argument, in favour of faith in eternal life. The purely individual need for a fulfilment that is denied to us in this life, for an everlasting love that we await, is certainly an important motive for believing that man was made for eternity; but only in connection with the impossibility that the injustice of history should be the final word does the necessity for Christ's return and for new life become fully convincing.²⁰

Continuity of Jewish and Christian Hope

It should be apparent by now that Jewish and Christian hope are in deep and fundamental continuity. This rests on the underlying continuity of the faith of Biblical Judaism and Catholicism. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1819 speaks of continuity with regard to the hope of Abraham. Just as Abraham is our father in faith, so he is our father in hope as well, for we have come to share in the hope of Abraham:

Christian hope takes up and fulfills the hope of the chosen people which has its origin and model in the *hope of Abraham*, who was blessed abundantly by the promises of God fulfilled in Isaac, and who was purified by the test of the sacrifice. "Hoping against hope, he believed, and thus became the father of many nations."

²⁰ *Spe salvi* 43. This line of thought continues in no. 44: "To protest against God in the name of justice is not helpful. A world without God is a world without hope (cf. Eph 2:12). Only God can create justice. And faith gives us the certainty that he does so. The image of the Last Judgment is not primarily an image of terror, but an image of hope; for us it may even be the decisive image of hope. Is it not also a frightening image? I would say: it is an image that evokes responsibility, an image, therefore, of that fear of which Saint Hilary spoke when he said that all our fear has its place in love. God is justice and creates justice. This is our consolation and our hope. And in his justice there is also grace. This we know by turning our gaze to the crucified and risen Christ."

Christian hope makes explicit and firm what was hidden and implicit, but truly present, in the hope of Israel: eternal life. The hope of Israel ultimately centers on eternal life, which includes the vision of God, the resurrection of the body, and the Last Judgment, in which all justice is definitively established in the grace of God, and the divine Goodness and Love are vindicated before all peoples and all of history.

That hope is greatly strengthened by faith in Christ who has already redeemed mankind on the Cross. If God became man and died for us on the Cross so as to bring us to heaven, how can we give in to despair? St. Paul gives great expression to this in Romans 8:31–39:

If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Furthermore, the hope for ultimate justice is given far greater confidence by faith in Christ. The Last Judgment shall reveal the Cross of Christ and His Sacred Heart as the center of all of history.²¹

At the same time, Christian hope preserves the hope of Israel from its constant besetting danger: the temptation to see in the Messianic promise a hope that is merely of this world. This temptation appears in the Gospels as well. So many of Jesus' contemporaries were seeking a Messiah who was merely for this world—who would restore sovereignty to Israel and remove the Roman dominion, and extend the sovereignty of Israel at least to the dimensions of the Solomonic empire. The Messiah had a greater mission than that, for He came to destroy the power of sin and death. We know that the Apostles themselves were thinking in temporal terms even up to the time of Christ's Ascension, for at that moment they asked Him (Acts 1:6): "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

This temptation to transpose the Messianic hope into purely temporal terms has had still greater success, unfortunately, in modern times. The most complete example of this is Marxism. It has also

²¹ See Zech 12:10–11.

infected not a few Catholic theologians who follow the current of Liberation Theology, for which Christian hope centers more on the goal of Marxist revolution of social structures than on the Last Things.²²

Mary, Star of Hope

Benedict ends his encyclical on hope with a chapter on Mary, Star of Hope:

With a hymn composed in the eighth or ninth century, thus for over a thousand years, the Church has greeted Mary, the Mother of God, as "Star of the Sea": *Ave maris stella*. Human life is a journey. Towards what destination? How do we find the way? Life is like a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we watch for the stars that indicate the route. The true stars of our life are the people who have lived good lives. They are lights of hope. Certainly, Jesus Christ is the true light, the sun that has risen above all the shadows of history. But to reach him we also need lights close by—people who shine with his light and so guide us along our way. Who more than Mary could be a star of hope for us? With her "yes" she opened the door of our world to God himself; she became the living Ark of the Covenant, in whom God took flesh, became one of us, and pitched his tent among us (cf. Jn 1:14).²³

Pope Benedict brings out the continuity between the hope of Israel and the hope of the Church in this last chapter invoking the intercession of Mary for all believers. Mary incarnated the hope of Israel:

So we cry to her: Holy Mary, you belonged to the humble and great souls of Israel who, like Simeon, were "looking for the consolation of Israel" (Lk 2:25) and hoping, like Anna, "for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk 2:38). Your life was thoroughly imbued with the sacred scriptures of Israel which spoke of hope, of the promise made to Abraham and his descendants (cf. Lk 1:55). In this way we can appreciate the holy fear that overcame you when the angel of the Lord appeared to you and told you that you would give birth to the One who was the hope of Israel, the One awaited by the world. Through you, through your "yes", the hope of the ages became reality, entering this world and its history. You bowed low before the greatness of this task and gave your consent: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). When you hastened with holy

²² See the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation,"* August 6, 1984.

²³ *Spe salvi* 49.

joy across the mountains of Judea to see your cousin Elizabeth, you became the image of the Church to come, which carries the hope of the world in her womb across the mountains of history. But alongside the joy which, with your Magnificat, you proclaimed in word and song for all the centuries to hear, you also knew the dark sayings of the prophets about the suffering of the servant of God in this world.²⁴

Just as Mary summed up the hope of Israel, so she inaugurated the hope of the Church. In the despair of Calvary, she alone had firm hope; in her heart alone there burned the hope of the Church which we have received:

From the Cross you received a new mission. From the Cross you became a mother in a new way: the mother of all those who believe in your Son Jesus and wish to follow him. The sword of sorrow pierced your heart. Did hope die? Did the world remain definitively without light, and life without purpose? . . . Before the hour of his betrayal he had said to his disciples: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (Jn 14:27). "Do not be afraid, Mary!" In that hour at Nazareth the angel had also said to you: "Of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1:33). Could it have ended before it began? No, at the foot of the Cross, on the strength of Jesus' own word, you became the mother of believers. In this faith, which even in the darkness of Holy Saturday bore the certitude of hope, you made your way towards Easter morning. . . . Thus you remain in the midst of the disciples as their Mother, as the Mother of hope. Holy Mary, Mother of God, our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope, to love with you. Show us the way to his Kingdom! Star of the Sea, shine upon us and guide us on our way!²⁵

²⁴ *Spe salvi* 50.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 4

The Virtue of Charity in Biblical Judaism and Catholicism

In our investigation of God's action in ancient Israel and in the Church, we have observed, on the one hand, a great continuity, but also a deepening and a transformation exceeding all expectations.

For example, there is continuity in the faith of Israel and the Church, but there is a deepening in the fact that God becomes man to speak to Israel and to all men. Likewise, the hope of Israel and the Church is ultimately the same—the vision of God—but this hope is given far greater strength and explicitness through the teaching, Passion, and Resurrection of Christ, who has gone before us into glory. The same pattern emerges with regard to the virtue of charity. The Law, the prophets, and the Gospel all teach the same essential thing about charity, summed up in the double commandment. However, this common teaching is transformed and immeasurably deepened in the light of the Passion of the Messiah, as we shall see.

The Shema, Monotheism, and the Great Commandment of the Love of God

Two of the great glories of Judaism were the revelation of the oneness of God, and the revelation that the fundamental religious duty of men is to love that one God with all one's heart, mind, and soul, and one's neighbor as oneself for God's sake. The revelation of God's oneness and the commandment of love are intimately connected, as we can see from the great text of the *Shema Yisrael*.

Together with the Ten Commandments, one of the most fundamental texts of the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 6:4–5: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." These words are recited morning and evening by devout Jews, and a handwritten form of the text on parchment, called a *mezuzah*, is placed in the doorway of houses. The second paragraph of the *mezuzah* is taken from Deuteronomy 11:13–21, which also commands the love of God:

And if you will obey my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season. . . . You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.

It is not insignificant that the revelation of the oneness of God is put as the foundation of the great commandment to love God with all one's heart, mind, and soul. Only in the recognition of His oneness can God clearly be seen as the absolute and total source of all goodness and being, and the one and only final end, the supreme good, infinite Love, who merits all man's love in return. Only in the recognition of the oneness of God can a man unite all his forces to love and serve Him.

The polytheism of the pagan religions inevitably viewed the gods as powers that could provide for the needs of men. The cult of the gods is ultimately directed to man's own benefit, and not to the love of the gods above all things. I cannot imagine that Zeus and his kin could have been loved with all the heart, mind, and soul of their devotees. For they did not claim to be *the source* of all goodness and being, infinite love, and thus infinitely loveable. Quite the contrary. It follows that polytheism logically makes true charity with regard to God (love of God above all things for His own sake) incomprehensible and impossible. The same thing is true today of New Age religiosity. The worship of cosmic powers and forces is always directed to self, and can never provide the basis for true charity.

Love for Neighbor in the Old Testament

The Old Testament also contains the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, in the great text of Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." The preceding verses (10–18) contain consequences of this great precept, enlarging on the Ten Commandments.¹

¹ In the Talmud, Lev 19 is said to summarize the majority of the precepts of the Torah. See *Leviticus Rabbah* 24: "R. Hiyya taught, 'The majority of the principles of the Torah depend upon [what is stated in this chapter of the Torah].' R. Levi said, 'It is because the Ten Commandments are encompassed within its [teachings].'"

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God. You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord. You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go up and down as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand forth against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord. You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

All of these commandments given in Leviticus 19 are clearly ways of making explicit the general precept of love of neighbor. If we love our neighbor, we are to be merciful to the poor, leaving to them the gleanings of the fields, refraining from slander, paying employees promptly, forgiving those who offend us, bearing no grudge, etc.

The ultimate basis for love of neighbor as oneself is given in the text of creation in Genesis: every man and woman has been created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, if we love and honor God, we must love and honor His image in our neighbor. Thus the love of God and the love of neighbor are intimately connected, since the love of God is ultimately the reason for the love of neighbor.

We know that the Ten Commandments were given in two tablets, and it is traditional to assign to the first tablet the precepts concerning love and reverence for God (the first three commandments), and to the second tablet the commandments concerning love for neighbor (the fourth through tenth commandments). Thus it can clearly be seen that the Ten Commandments all derive from the double commandment of love.

The Double Commandment of Charity Sums Up the Law

The Gospels record for us a conversation between Jesus and the scribes, shortly before His Passion, in which He is asked which is the greatest of the commandments. Jesus responds (Mt 22:37–40):

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

In Mark 12:28-34, we have the same event, with an additional detail. After Jesus answers, the scribe agrees with Him, and Jesus praises him by saying that he is not far from the Kingdom.

The Gospel of Luke 10:25-28 gives another occasion in which Jesus is asked this question, and He turns the question back to the scribe, who answers in the same way as Jesus in Matthew and Mark. However, the scribe then asks who his neighbor is, and Jesus answers with the parable of the good Samaritan.

This dialogue shows us that the recognition of the double commandment of love is a common foundation for Judaism and Christianity; it is not only Jesus who gives the double commandment, but also the scribes and rabbis. For example, the Talmud records the following story about the famous Rabbi Hillel, who lived shortly before Jesus. A heathen asked Rabbi Hillel to teach him the entire Torah while he stood on one foot. He responded: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah while the rest is commentary; go and learn it."² Likewise, the famous rabbi Akiva (c. 50-135AD) said: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself is the encompassing principle of the Torah."³ There is a famous saying from the Talmud: "Whoever destroys the life of one of the sons of Adam . . . it is as if he had destroyed an entire world; and whoever preserves the life of a single human being . . . it is as if he had preserved an entire world."⁴

Later great saints and sages of Judaism also understood the primacy of the commandment of charity. The Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Hasidic movement, made the precept of charity to be the primary task of the pious Jew. His disciple, the Mezritcher Maggid, says that "one must love the perfectly wicked just as the perfectly righteous."⁵

The double commandment is the center and heart of the Torah, that Jesus comes not to abolish, but to fulfill, as He says in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:17).

² Tractate Shabbos 31a.

³ *Genesis Rabbah* 24.

⁴ Mishnah, *Sa'ubedrin* 4:5.

⁵ Quoted in *Sefer HaSichos* 5700, p. 117.

Fear of the Lord and Love of God

It is frequently said that the Old Testament is a religion of fear whereas the New Testament is a religion of love. This is a calumny against Judaism, and ultimately against God.

Both fear of the Lord and love of God are integral parts of true religion. Fear of the Lord is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and is not superseded by Christian Revelation. However, fear of the Lord needs to be properly understood.

The *Zohar* (I, 11b), a medieval text of Jewish mysticism, speaks of three types of fear of God, of which only the third is true:

There is the person who fears the blessed Holy One so that his children may live and not die, or who fears physical or material punishment. Because of this he fears Him constantly, but his awe is not focused on the blessed Holy One. Then there is the person who fears the blessed Holy One because he is afraid of the punishment of the other world and the punishment of Hell. Neither of these is the essential root of awe. The essence of awe is that a person be in awe of his Lord because He is immense and sovereign . . . before whom everything is considered as nothing.⁶

Fear of the Lord, rightly understood, is the reverence and awe that we ought to have for God on account of His total and loving sovereignty over His creation, including ourselves. Fear of the Lord is in no way incompatible with love of God, but is rather intrinsically joined to it. We are to love God above all things precisely because He is the supreme Good (Love) and our supreme Benefactor. For the same reason we should maximally fear offending God, and reverence Him above all. If we do not fear offending God above all things, then we can not say that we love Him above all.

The connection between love and fear of the Lord is nicely explained by one of the early Hasidic masters in *Derech Emet* (*The Way of Truth*): "The love and fear of God . . . have to do with the heart, that a man's heart should be constantly in dread and awe of God and that the love of God should burn always in his heart."⁷

Salvation through Charity

There is a very important corollary of the double commandment of love. Since love is the great commandment summing up the Torah, it is clear that salvation will depend on love. Jesus, for example, says to the scribe who summed up the Law in the double commandment of charity,

⁶ *The Zohar*, trans. Daniel Matt (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004), 1:77–78.

⁷ Quoted in Louis Jacobs, *Hasidic Prayer* (NY: Schocken Books, 1973), 20–21.

"Do this, and you shall live." Salvation depends on carrying out the double precept of love.

It can be seen through the primacy of the commandment of love that man is not saved by faith alone, but through faith, hope, and charity, all together. The doctrine of salvation by faith alone is not Biblical, whereas salvation through charity—which presupposes faith—is constantly repeated in the Old and New Testaments.

A classical example of this is Matthew 25:31–46, in which Jesus describes the criterion of the separation of the elect and the condemned in the Last Judgment. The judgment is not made on the basis of faith alone, but on the basis of fraternal charity, by which the love of God is expressed.

Another text showing salvation through charity is the dialogue of Jesus with the rich young man, who asks Him what he must do to be saved (Mt 19:17–19). Jesus responds in perfect harmony with the Torah by saying: "If you would enter life, keep the commandments." When asked, "Which commandments?" He lists the commandments of the second tablet of the Law, culminating in Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Finally, St. Paul clearly teaches salvation by charity in 1 Corinthians 13: "If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. . . . So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."⁸

Of course, supernatural charity by which we are saved is itself a fruit of faith and a gift of grace, and not a merely natural philanthropy or purely human good work.

The Nature of Charity

To love is (1) to will some *good* (2) *for someone*, either for oneself or for another person. It can be seen that every act of love has two aspects: a *person* to whom a good is willed, and a *good* which is willed for that person. For example, when I love my mother, I will the good for my mother. I want her to be happy. Thus I will happiness, *for her*. Or if I love wine, there is a good (real or merely apparent) that is willed (wine) and a person for whom it is willed, who in this case is myself.

The medieval philosophers, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, spoke of these two aspects or types of love as (1) "love of desire" (concupiscence) and (2) "love of benevolence" (or friendship).⁹ The

⁸ 1 Cor 13:2, 13.

⁹ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 4: "I answer that, as the Philosopher says (*Rhetoric* 2.4), "to love is to wish good to someone." Hence the movement

former is a kind of "need-love," whereas the latter is an "oblative love," leading one to self-donation. In Greek, there are two words that correspond to these two aspects of love: *eros* and *agape*. These two words are at the center of Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical on Christian love.¹⁰

Eros is the same as love of desire. It is love of something or someone that one thinks will be good for someone (oneself or a loved one). The good loved is a means to an end; it is loved for the sake of the happiness it can bring to a person. This can happen both in the sense appetite and in the will. Let us observe right away that this kind of love is not always bad. It can be very good indeed. It all depends on whether the object that one loves in this way is truly good for oneself (or for another). For example, if I love intoxication or revenge, my love is disordered. However, if I love truth, or moral rectitude, or even God Himself for the sake of my own or someone else's happiness, this is a great thing. That is love of desire in the highest level.

Let us look at the other aspect of love. Love of *benevolence*, or *agape*, consists first in loving a person for his own sake, and thus willing the good for him. It is always personal, directed towards the *person* for whom one wills the good. Another way to express this is to say that love of desire is directed to the good as an *object*, and love of benevolence is directed to a personal *subject*, for the sake of whom one wills the good.

Love of friendship is a particular kind of benevolence. It adds the aspect of mutual love. Friendship is a love of benevolence exchanged between two persons, founded on a certain sharing of life together, a sharing of interests and goods. Love of benevolence can be called *oblative* love, in that it seeks to give the good to the person that we love. In its highest form, it is self-donation.

Is our love for other persons primarily a love of desire that is ordered to our own well-being (need-love or *eros*)? Or is it primarily an oblative love directed to the other person (*agape*)? It may start out as need-love or *eros*, as the love of children for their parents, but it is meant to pass beyond this aspect of love to be perfected in *agape*. Nevertheless, both types of love remain present in our mature love for other persons. Only God, who needs nothing, can have an absolutely pure love of benevolence (*agape*).¹¹

of love has a *twofold tendency*: towards the good which a man wishes to someone (to himself or to another) and towards that to which he wishes some good. Accordingly, man has *love of concupiscence* towards the good that he wishes to another, and *love of benevolence* towards him to whom he wishes good."

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, Dec. 25, 2005.

¹¹ Nevertheless, as Benedict XVI mentions in *Deus caritas est* 7, God can be said to have an *eros* for man, his love, and his well-being, but this love is always "totally *agape*," for it is entirely directed to man's good.

Is our love of God *eros* or *agape*, love of desire or love of benevolence? Both aspects must be present. It is natural for us to love God with the love of desire, for we desire to be perfected in happiness through union with God. This corresponds to the theological virtue of *hope*. Hope is love for God as the object of our beatitude.

Nevertheless, the theological virtue of charity corresponds principally to the love of benevolence or *agape*.¹² The writers of the New Testament have manifested this in their terminology with regard to love, for they have consciously chosen to avoid the word "*eros*" (love of desire) and always use the word "*agape*" (love of benevolence) when speaking of the theological virtue of love for God (charity).

In a similar way, the English word "charity" is used to indicate the theological virtue of supernatural love and the acts of fraternal love that flow from it, to distinguish it from other kinds of love.

In common English today, we normally use the word "charity" only in the secondary sense of good works of disinterested love for our neighbor. Nevertheless, we should remember that the principal meaning of the word should be the love for God above all things, which is the theological virtue of charity. "Charity" is our English equivalent of *agape*, and it means a love of friendship with God, and, for His sake, a love of benevolence for the children of God.

This is a teaching that is very profound, although very simple. The love that God commands us to have for Him is a love of *friendship*, a love directed to a Person. It includes rejoicing in the fact that God is who He is, and in His infinite goodness; and it includes the desire to give ourselves to Him and belong to Him entirely in a spousal and filial way.

It is a mutual love. God has loved us first. Furthermore, this involves a sharing of life, although it may seem hard to understand. The life that is shared between God and us is the life of sanctifying grace. By

¹² See Ernest R. Hull, S.J., *Essay on Love* (Bombay: Examiner Press, 1912), p. 15: "Our human love of God can be of either kind. It can take the form of desiring to possess God for ourselves, because he is the greatest treasure we are capable of acquiring. This love of God for our own sake is the love of concupiscence. It is a purely selfish love, and yet no one would think of calling it mean or despicable. Secondly, we can mount higher, and forget ourselves, and love God for his own sake; that is to say, we can congratulate him on his magnificence, and find our happiness in realizing that he is so perfect, and even wish that we could add to his well-being, if such a thing were possible. This is the love of benevolence, and is purely unselfish. It is higher and nobler than the other, but must not be allowed to oust it or supersede it. We ought *also* to love God for our own sake, to desire him for ourselves as a rich possession—because God himself has made us for that end, and we are really doing him a service in striving to attain it."

giving us grace, God has given us a certain sharing in His own inner inter-Trinitarian life.

This love of friendship with God is absolutely incompatible with mortal sin, which means preferring a creaturely satisfaction to God's Law, and thus despising God in comparison with the satisfaction that one desires over God. Thus charity is incompatible with mortal sin, and presupposes that God has changed one's heart and forgiven past mortal sins.

Charity, therefore, must always include contrition for the grave sins that one has committed. Charity, in fact, will include *perfect contrition* for sin, which is sorrow for offending God, not only because one will be punished or go to hell, but principally because it offends God whom one loves above all things. Without contrition for sin, there can be no communion of life with God.

Motives for the Love of God

Since love presupposes knowledge, our love of God is based on knowing who He is and what He has done for us. For this reason, love of God presupposes faith in God. No one can love what he does not know. Faith provides us with the motives for loving God with all our heart, mind, and soul.

If I have a gravely incorrect or insufficient knowledge of God, my love for God will likewise be gravely insufficient. For example, if I believe that God is a collection of warring and adulterous deities, as described in the Greek myths, how can I love God above all things? If I believe that God is a bloodthirsty and vengeful power who delights in the ripped out hearts of young men and women, as in the ancient religion of Canaan or of the Aztecs, how can I love God above all things as He desires? Similarly, if I believe that God is an impersonal force (as in New Age), or if I believe that He sends some men to hell without giving them sufficient grace for salvation, as held by Calvin and Jansenism (and Islam), how can I love Him above all things?

In his first encyclical, Benedict poses the question of how God can *command* us to love Him. How can you command love? Sensible love which is a mere feeling cannot be directly commanded because we do not have perfect dominion over our emotions. Nevertheless, such love can be voluntarily fostered by directing our imagination and memory to what is conducive to stirring up that emotion. Love, however, which is the supreme act of the will or heart responding to the Good, can indeed be commanded, precisely because our wills are free. God can command it of us, and we can command it of ourselves, simply by *willing* to love God *because He is infinitely loveable*, because He is who He is, and because

all of our good comes from Him. It is enough for us truly to *want* to love God in this way, and God will accomplish it in us through His grace.

But above all, love of friendship for God ought to spring up, through the aid of grace, when we consider what God has done for us. *Man is taught to love God precisely because he is made to see that God has loved us first, and love must be paid for with love.*

We see God's love for us in creation and in the natural gifts He has bestowed on us. And this is a true motive for loving God, which is surely sufficient. Hence the great importance of the revelation in Genesis of God as Creator, from whom we have received every good thing.

However, evil, suffering, and sin, which entered the world with the sin of Adam, cloud the mind of man regarding the goodness of creation. Therefore, although creation is still a powerful reason to give thanks to God, ancient Israel was given a second reason for loving God above all things: His gratuitous election of Israel, choosing them from all the nations of the earth, freeing them from the house of bondage, and making them into His people and adopted sons. The events of Exodus, manifesting God's extraordinary and gratuitous care for Israel, are a continual motive for Israel to love God. A beautiful expression of this is given in Deuteronomy 7:6-9:

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

The people of Israel are to love God because He loved them first, as shown in their election to be His people. In Exodus 19:6, He says to them that if they keep His covenant, they will be "a royal priesthood and a holy people."¹³ God's gratuitous love for Israel, by its very nature, must call forth a response of love and fidelity from Israel, by which they are established in friendship with God. This mutuality of love is central

¹³ "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

to the notion of covenant (*b'rit*), which governs the relationship between Israel and God. Because God has loved Israel first and freely elected Israel to enter into relationship with Him, they must correspond to that love through love: loving Him with all their heart, mind, and soul; and their neighbor as themselves, for love of God.

The same motive for love is given to the Church in 1 Peter 2:9-10:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

The Passion of Christ Is the Great Stimulus to Excite Charity

Since the double commandment of love is the supreme commandment and the summit of Judaism, it ought to be the principal task of the Messiah to perfect Israel in the double commandment of charity. A warrior Messiah who restored the national independence of Israel without giving the supreme teaching on the commandment of charity would be no true Messiah, because he would fail to help Israel accomplish its supreme duty.

How would the Messiah perfect Israel in love? It would seem that mere teaching would not be sufficient, for that had already been given with Moses and the prophets. The Messiah would have to teach the commandment of charity above all by a super-eminent example of heroic and sacrificial love; He would have to give Israel the grace to put that love into practice, and blot out the sins separating the people from friendship with God. This ought to have been what Israel was to principally look for in the Messiah.

Jesus of Nazareth accomplished all of these things precisely by dying for us on the Cross. The obligation of loving God is given *infinitely greater force by the Passion of God Himself*, who became man to give Himself up for the redemption of His creatures.¹⁴

And how much more love is awakened in us when we see what it has cost God to re-create His creatures and redeem them from sin. To create man cost God nothing, for He had but to say the word, "*fiat*"

¹⁴ Pascal, in his *Pensées*, section 1, series 16, n. 214 (New York: Penguin Classics, 1966), p. 98, writes: "The sign of the true religion must be that it obliges men to love God." Pascal speaks of reasons of the heart. The reasons of the heart are superabundantly manifested in the Passion of Christ.

("let man exist"). But to re-create man cost Him more than a word: it cost Him all the Blood of Christ.¹⁵

The Passion of Christ was willed by God to satisfy for sin and offer a perfect sacrifice of expiation to God, but also to excite us to charity by offering us a supreme testimony of the love of God for man. St. Thomas Aquinas explains this masterfully in his *Summa of Theology*, part III, q. 46, a. 3. He poses the question whether any means other than the Passion of Christ could have been more efficacious in saving man. Of course the answer is no:

I answer that, among means to an end that one is the more suitable whereby a greater number of things coincide which are helpful to that end. But in this, that man was delivered by Christ's Passion, many other things besides deliverance from sin concur for man's salvation. In the first place, *man knows thereby how much God loves him, and is thereby stirred to love Him in return, and herein lies the perfection of human salvation*; hence the Apostle says (Rom 5:8): "God commends His charity towards us; for when as yet we were sinners . . . Christ died for us."

As Christ told Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). God could simply tell us that He loves us, but as the saying goes, "seeing is believing." We can see graphically the magnitude of God's love for man in the Passion of Christ, for the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Son of God, wished to suffer so much to save His fallen creature. Nothing can be conceived that could more powerfully demonstrate to us God's love for man. This love of God for man ought, in turn, to bring love for God to birth in our hearts, and together with that love, the desire to make it effective in works of charity.

Jesus Himself announced that His Passion would be the great motive that would attract hearts to Himself: "And I, when lifted up from the earth, will attract all things to myself" (Jn 12:32). Thus we can say that the *Cross is the greatest motive for conversion*.

By conversion, we do not mean something that happens only once in the life of a Christian. We can speak of a first conversion to the faith, and a *second conversion* which leads the Catholic into a deeper level of the spiritual life. This second conversion is the great need of our souls. The saying of Christ that His Passion would attract all hearts to Himself applies to both levels of conversion.

¹⁵ The Roman liturgy refers to this in the old offertory prayer from the Mass: "O God, who hast wonderfully framed man's exalted nature, and still more wonderfully restored it."

A beautiful example of the second conversion can be found in the *Life* of St. Teresa of Avila. She had been a Carmelite for many years, but had fallen into lukewarmness, from which she was first awakened by an encounter with the Man of Sorrows. She says:

It happened that, entering the oratory one day, I saw an image which . . . represented Christ sorely wounded; and so conducive was it to devotion that when I looked at it I was deeply moved to see Him thus, so well did it picture what He suffered for us. So great was my distress when I thought how ill I had repaid Him for those wounds that I felt as if my heart were breaking, and I threw myself down beside Him, shedding floods of tears and begging Him to give me strength once for all so that I might not offend Him. . . . And from that time onward I began to improve.¹⁶

How many souls were to profit by St. Teresa's encounter with that image of the suffering Christ! This text shows us the great importance of meditation on the Cross, and the value of realistic artistic renditions of the sufferings of Christ (such as that depicted in the film, *The Passion of the Christ*). Christ wished to suffer so much so that we would be led to love Him more, and to live for Him who died for us. But this effect can only be attained to the extent that we keep that suffering before our mind's eye, not only through reading and prayer, but also in the art displayed in our churches, homes, and Catholic institutions. We must not allow the Passion of Christ to be hidden from public view, banished from the public square, for it is our greatest treasure.

Another great example of the power of the Cross to convert our souls is the meditation before the Crucifix that St. Ignatius puts in *The Spiritual Exercises*. At the end of the First Meditation on Sin, St. Ignatius has us enter into an intimate dialogue with God on the following theme:

Imagine Christ our Lord suspended on the cross before you, and converse with him in a colloquy: How is it that he, although he is the Creator, has come to make himself a human being? How is it that he has passed from eternal life to death here in time, and to die in this way for my sins?

In a similar way, reflect on yourself and ask: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?

¹⁶ Teresa of Avila, *The Life of Teresa of Jesus*, ch. 9 (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1960), 115. Tradition has it that the image was an *Ecce Homo*.

In this way, too, gazing on him in so pitiful a state as he hangs on the cross, speak out whatever comes to your mind.¹⁷

Such a meditation has been the source of so many holy resolutions and works of sanctity through the Christian centuries.

The Psalmist asks, "*What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?*" (Psalm 116:12). The Cross gives infinitely greater force to this demand of the heart: *What shall I render to the Lord for all the blood He shed for me?*

This is beautifully expressed in an anonymous sixteenth-century Spanish sonnet to our Lord on the Cross:

I am not moved to love you, O my God,
That I might hope in promised heaven to dwell;
Nor am I moved by fear of pain in hell
To turn from sin and follow where you trod.
You move me, Lord, broken beneath the rod,
Or stretched out on the cross, as nails compel
Your hand to twitch. It moves me that we sell
To mockery and death, your precious blood.
It is, O Christ, your love which moves me so,
That my love rests not on a promised prize;
Nor holy fear on threat of endless woe;
It is not milk and honey, but the flow
Of blood from blessed wounds before my eyes,
That waters my buried soul and makes it grow.¹⁸

This poet does not mean to say that we ought not to be moved to love of God by the promise of heaven or fear of hell, or through gratitude for His election and gifts, but that the *highest motive* inciting us to the love of God is the Cross of Christ, which shows us the Heart of God, pierced for love of His sinful creatures.

The Passion of Christ and Fraternal Charity

At the same time, the Passion of Christ is also the great motive for love of neighbor, for our neighbor has likewise been redeemed by all the blood of Christ.

In His Passion, the Messiah has manifested charity in all its dimensions, for He shed His blood for the glory of the goodness of

¹⁷ Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George Ganss (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), no. 53, p. 138.

¹⁸ James Socias, ed., *Handbook of Prayers* (Princeton, NJ: Scepter Publishers, 1995), 400. See also St. Francis Xavier, "O God, I Love Thee," trans. Gerard Manley Hopkins, in John Hardon, ed., *Catholic Prayer Book with Meditations* (Bardstown, KY: Eternal Life, 1999), 8-9.

God, for ourselves, and for every human being ever to be born, even the most heinous sinner.

After the Passion of Christ, the great commandment of fraternal love now takes a new form: "This is my commandment, that you love one another *as I have loved you*. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:12–13). What greater model for fraternal charity could be given than the love shown by God made man, as He lay down His life for the salvation of every human being? The Passion of Christ is thus the capstone of the double commandment—the most sublime moral teaching of God—given first to Israel, and through Christ, to the whole world.

CHAPTER 5

The Mystery of Suffering in the Light of the Old and New Testaments

The Problem of Suffering

One of the greatest problems of human existence and religion is obviously the question about human suffering. This is also the greatest objection against the existence of God.

The true religion, revealed by God, would have to give the deepest and most profound explanation for this universal question and experience confronted by every human being who comes into this world. A religion that does not give a satisfactory answer to the question about the meaning of suffering cannot be the true religion.

The revelation of God in Judaism contains the fundamental answers to this question, in seed. Nevertheless, as one should expect, the full answer to this greatest of all problems was only to be given with the Messiah, in the Passion of Jesus Christ. Here again, the relationship between Judaism and Catholicism is one of fundamental continuity, but also a great deepening and fulfillment.

John Paul II has written a great document on the meaning and salvific value of suffering that we shall frequently refer to, an Apostolic Letter called *Salvifici doloris* (SD), of February 11, 1984. It was written in the context of the Holy Year commemorating the 1950th anniversary of our Redemption.

What Is Suffering?

Man experiences pain in two dimensions: (1) exterior or physical and (2) interior or moral. The former comes from our external senses, particularly touch. The latter is a passion or emotion aroused by imagination and memory – especially insofar as they are influenced by our reason reflecting on the injustice we have suffered or committed. Moral suffering is proper to spiritual creatures alone. These two kinds of

suffering reflect the dual dimension of man as a spiritual and bodily creature.¹

We may ask which of these two experiences of pain—moral or physical—is the more intense. John Paul II observes that moral suffering appears in the Bible as the principal form of human suffering. In *SD* 6, he gives a brief list of such experiences:

The danger of death, the death of one's own children and, especially, the death of the firstborn and only son; and then too: the lack of offspring, nostalgia for the homeland, persecution and hostility of the environment, mockery and scorn of the one who suffers, loneliness and abandonment; and again: the remorse of conscience, the difficulty of understanding why the wicked prosper and the just suffer, the unfaithfulness and ingratitude of friends and neighbors; and finally: the misfortunes of one's own nation.

Just as moral evil involves a greater disorder (betrayal, ingratitude, hardness of heart) than any physical evil, so too moral suffering is greater than physical suffering, for it corresponds to a greater evil.² A sign of this primacy of interior pain over physical pain is the fact, observed by St. Thomas, that "one willingly undergoes outward pain in order to avoid inward pain."³ If, however, outward pain is accompanied by inward pain, then pain becomes maximum.

Human suffering is thus by its interior dimension distinguished from suffering in the animal world. Furthermore, this interior dimension always involves the agonizing question about the meaning of suffering. Man, having attained the age of reason, cannot suffer without asking

¹ John Paul II mentions this distinction in his Apostolic Letter on Human Suffering, *Salvifici doloris* 5 (1984): "Suffering is something which is still wider than sickness, more complex and at the same time still more deeply rooted in humanity itself. A certain idea of this problem comes to us from the distinction between physical suffering and moral suffering. This distinction is based upon the double dimension of the human being and indicates the bodily and spiritual element as the immediate or direct subject of suffering. . . . Physical suffering is present when 'the body is hurting' in some way, whereas moral suffering is 'pain of the soul.' . . . The vastness and the many forms of moral suffering are certainly no less in number than the forms of physical suffering. But at the same time, moral suffering seems, as it were, less identified and less reachable by therapy."

² St. Thomas Aquinas has an interesting discussion of this in *ST* I-II, q. 35, a. 7: "Inward pain surpasses outward pain. In like manner also on the part of apprehension: because the apprehension of reason and imagination is of a higher order than the apprehension of the sense of touch. Consequently inward pain is, simply and of itself, more keen than outward pain."

³ *Ibid.* He goes on to say: "And insofar as outward pain is not repugnant to the interior appetite, it becomes in a manner pleasant and agreeable by way of inward joy."

why.⁴ And if he cannot find a satisfactory answer to the question, then the suffering is greatly aggravated.

We have all experienced this in our lives. A suffering which is understood to be a kind of purification or expiation (for oneself or others), is a suffering that becomes bearable, or even welcome. However, a suffering that seems absurd or unjust is greatly heightened by that apparent absurdity or injustice. This question of the meaning of suffering is posed above all in relation to God, and we know that it can sometimes lead to the denial of God, to atheism.

The Book of Job

This question about the meaning of suffering is taken up in the most pointed possible way in the book of Job, where it concerns the suffering of an innocent and righteous man. It is interesting that Job is not an Israelite. He represents the upright man outside the influence of God's revelation. His experience of suffering is heightened by the fact that he is not comforted directly by the hope of Israel, but only by the common patrimony of natural religion present in what is best in human culture.

Job, a just pagan who has led both an upright and prosperous life, was suddenly visited with almost every affliction imaginable. First his 500 yoke of oxen, 500 asses, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, and his servants and herdsmen were stolen or killed. Then another messenger came to tell him of the death of his seven sons and three daughters.⁵

The most interesting thing about this calamity is that it occurred in response to a petition by Satan, during a conversation he had with God. Satan is presented in this discourse as one among the angels (sons of God). Indeed, we know that he is a fallen angel who hates God and his creation, and above all he hates human beings made in God's image. His very name comes from a Hebrew root signifying "adversary." The word "devil" comes from the Greek "*diabolos*," which means one who speaks against: a calumniator or slanderer. Satan speaks against Job, saying that he is upright only for the sake of a temporal reward for his justice.

Job, nevertheless, shows Satan to be a slanderer indeed, for after Satan has inflicted him with the loss of all his children and all his possessions, he says: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and

⁴ See *SD* 9: "It is obvious that pain, especially physical pain, is widespread in the animal world. But only the suffering human being knows that he is suffering and wonders why; and he suffers in a humanly speaking still deeper way if he does not find a satisfactory answer. This is a difficult question, just as is a question closely akin to it, the question of evil. Why does evil exist? Why is there evil in the world? When we put the question in this way, we are always, at least to a certain extent, asking a question about suffering too."

⁵ Job 1:18-19.

naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). However, Satan continues to slander Job to God, saying that if he were to suffer in his flesh, then he would curse God. God defends Job's integrity (2:3), but nevertheless allows Satan to put him to a harsher test, but not with death (Job 2:6-9).

Job experiences the culmination of suffering: he is afflicted in both body and soul, and urged to curse God by his own wife. Friends then come to console him, but they only add to his grief, for they tell him that his suffering was caused simply as a punishment for his hidden sins.

Why did God allow Satan to tempt Job in this most extreme of ways? Let us try to make a general answer as to why God allows suffering in the world, in all its manifold forms.

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

God is omnipotent, and thus He does not have to allow Satan to tempt the sons of men. If He allows evil and temptation, it can only be for the sake of some greater good.⁶ There is no other answer to the problem of evil. However, what is the greater good that could explain God's permission for evil to exist?

In the natural world, physical evil is permitted for the sake of the preservation of the natural order established by God. Matter is corruptible by nature: since it is made of parts, it can be disassembled through the wear of its own functions or the violence of outer forces. (Spiritual beings, on the other hand, such as the soul, angels, and God, cannot be decomposed, because they have no separable parts.) Philosophically speaking, matter is a principle capable of taking on all different kinds of forms, one after another, and this implies the substantial destruction of what went before so as to provide the basis for what will come later. Biologists also speak of a circle of life that begins in the soil, which generates plants, which feed the animals, all of which must return to the soil in order to be food for future generations. New generations would not be able to come into existence without the death and corruption of preceding generations. The carnivore cannot live without killing its prey.

If God had so desired, He could have made a creation in which no mortal creatures existed, and which thus would have had no physical evil. Such a world would have been peopled by angels alone. It would

⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 1: "As Augustine says (*Enchiridion* 11): 'Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.' This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good."

have been possible. However, such a world would have been *lacking in the manifold lower levels of being, beauty, goodness, and truth, which exist in the material creation*, and therefore such a world would have been less rich and less able to manifest externally the glory of God. It would be like a symphony composed entirely of first violins, or like a painting composed entirely of shades of white. It seems that God, not limiting Himself to producing just the highest grade of creatures, wished to show forth a rich variety of grades—from the lowest to the highest—in which His infinite perfection can be imitated or participated in finite ways.

Let us look now at physical evil in the world of men. Since we are rational *animals*, physical suffering is a natural consequence of our bodily nature. Nevertheless, God could have eliminated this physical evil in human society by giving special gifts to men to make them immune from the common lot of the animal kingdom. And it would have been fitting to do so, for men have naturally immortal souls. Philosophy can say no more than this. With the aid of philosophy alone, the existence of evil and pain in the human world remains an enigma.

Original Sin: Pain and Death Are a Punishment for Sin

This enigma is solved, of course, through the Biblical teaching on original sin. This fundamental truth about man is found in the first three chapters of the Bible. Without a correct understanding of this doctrine, it would be impossible to understand either the difficult condition in which man finds himself in this valley of tears, or the necessity of the Incarnation of Christ to redeem fallen man.

It is interesting that most religions of the world have some notion of original sin. This could come from some distant memory, passed down from generation to generation, of the calamity that excluded mankind from the Garden of Eden. It could also come from the speculation of human reason, based on the observation of our condition in the world.

Man finds himself in this world in a paradoxical condition: subject to suffering, death, and discord, but naturally aspiring to eternal life, peace, and the fullness of love. He finds in himself the conflict of two often opposing tendencies: his sensual appetites, on the one hand, and the noble tendencies of his will, on the other. He dimly perceives that he is made in the image and likeness of God, but also perceives himself to be abandoned in this world and separated from the Father, as if he were an orphan. Man finds in himself both an innate greatness and a congenital misery.

The doctrine of original sin sheds great light on this paradox, for it shows that the misery in which man now finds himself is not God's first

intention for us, but is the fruit of the breaking of the original covenant between God and the first father of our entire human species, Adam.

The existence of original sin is a revealed truth and a mystery. However, it is interesting to pose the question of whether reason alone, looking at man's situation in the world, could surmise the truth of original sin. The Second Vatican Council, in *Gaudium et spes* 13, touches on this question, showing how the experience of man's existence in the world confirms the teaching of Revelation concerning original sin: "The call to grandeur and the depths of misery, both of which are a part of human experience, find their ultimate and simultaneous explanation in the light of this revelation."

Bl. John Henry Cardinal Newman, the great nineteenth-century convert, speaks in even stronger terms of original sin as something that could be surmised by reason alone, judging from man's condition in the world and his tragic history. Not only is this Catholic doctrine not an affront to our experience, but it is necessary to reinforce the doctrine of the existence and goodness of God, given our experience of evil! It is the other side of the coin of our being made in the image and likeness of God. If original sin is denied or forgotten, then the goodness and omnipotence of God become difficult to believe:

Starting then with the being of a God . . . , I look out of myself into the world of men, and there I see a sight which fills me with unspeakable distress. The world seems simply to give the lie to that great truth, of which my whole being is so full. . . . The sight of the world is nothing else than the prophet's scroll, full of "lamentations, and mourning, and woe."

To consider the world in its length and breadth . . . that condition of the whole race, so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words, "having no hope and without God in the world"—all this is a vision to dizzy and appall; and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery, which is absolutely beyond human solution.

What shall be said to this heart-piercing, reason-bewondering fact? I can only answer, that either there is no Creator, or this living society of men is in a true sense discarded from His presence. Did I see a boy of good make and mind, with the tokens on him of a refined nature, cast upon the world without provision, unable to say whence he came, his birth-place or his family connexions, I should conclude that there was some mystery connected with his history, and that he was one, of whom, from one cause or other, his parents were ashamed. Thus only should I be able to account for the contrast between the promise and the condition of his being. And so I argue about the world—if there be a God, since there is a God, the human race is implicated in

some terrible aboriginal calamity. It is out of joint with the purposes of its Creator. This is a fact, a fact as true as the fact of its existence; and thus the doctrine of what is theologically called original sin becomes to me almost as certain as that the world exists, and as the existence of God.⁷

The great revelation on the origin of the human race in Genesis 1–3 tells us that God did in fact will to make men *immune from physical evil, as long as they restrained themselves from moral evil*. Immunity from physical evil was insured through the four preternatural gifts given to Adam and Eve together with sanctifying grace. These preternatural gifts were immortality, immunity from suffering, infused knowledge, and freedom from concupiscence.

However, in consequence of Original Sin, these preternatural gifts were withdrawn from the human race, and physical evil entered into human history as a penalty for sin. God simply withdrew His gratuitous gifts of immortality and immunity from suffering, which were by no means due to human nature.

Evil as a Penalty for Sin and a Call to Repentance

Pain itself is a good thing in the natural order, for it shows us the presence of something harmful. Without pain we would not take our hands out of the fire. Pain shows us the presence of an evil that we must flee from, or recover from.

Pain is also good when it is the just punishment for sin, for it gives a means of expiating the evil that has been done, of restoring the order of justice, and of manifesting the consequences of disordered acts. Revelation thus clearly shows us that one of the reasons for human suffering is its function as a penalty for sin.

At the same time, pain serves as a call to repentance after sin. Just as physical pain shows us that we are abusing our body, so the moral pain of remorse shows us that we have abused the moral order (established by God) and the welfare of our own soul. When we violate the laws that govern the moral universe, we suffer greatly, just as we suffer physically when we attempt to violate the law of gravity. This suffering thus serves the great purpose of leading us to seek God and to restore our peace with Him.

Often God allows the interior pains of remorse to be coupled with exterior evils to lead His people to repentance. The Babylonian exile is

⁷ John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua* (London: J M Dent, 1993), 275–76. St. Thomas Aquinas likewise holds that the fact of original sin could be surmised as probable by reason alone, judging from the tragic human condition in this valley of tears. See St. Thomas, *SCG* IV, ch. 52.

the greatest example of this. However, the entire history of Israel shows this pattern. For example, Psalm 107:11–14 describes the repeated pattern of sin, God's punishment, a cry of repentance, and God's merciful delivery:

They had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High. Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor; they fell down, with none to help. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder.

The prophets show the same picture. Through the prophet Hosea, God says to Israel:

I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will rend and go away, I will carry off, and none shall rescue. I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress they seek me, saying, Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.⁸

Why Does God Permit Moral Evil?

Let us look now at the thorniest problem of all. Why does God permit moral evil in men and angels? Why did He permit the original sin in the first place, as well as all the other personal sins that have made history miserable? How does this permission bring forth a greater good?

The most general explanation is that God permits moral evil for the sake of the great good of giving us free will, so that, with the help of grace, we can freely merit the reward of heaven. Everyday human experience shows us that the human will is free, and in consequence, we have moral responsibility for our actions. Many philosophers (and theologians such as Luther and Calvin) have denied the existence of free will, thereby implicitly denying our moral responsibility. God, however, has revealed this fundamental truth in numerous passages of Scripture, such as Sirach 15:14–17:

It was He who created man in the beginning,
and he left him in the power of his own inclination.
If you will, you can keep the commandments,
and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice.

⁸ Hos 5:14–6:2.

He has placed before you fire and water:
 stretch out your hand for whichever you wish.
 Before a man are life and death,
 and whichever he chooses will be given to him.

God Himself is impeccable in His free will, as is His incarnate Son, for He is God. The blessed in heaven, angels and men, are also impeccable, for they are in a state of glory and see God face to face, and thus can never desire to offend Him whom they clearly see to be Goodness Itself. However, God wished to make creatures on a lower level of perfection who are naturally free to do evil as well as good, whose freedom thus serves as the basis of a trial of fidelity. No creature who does not yet see God is naturally impeccable, for the rational creature is naturally endowed with an imperfect freedom, a freedom which can fall away from its own true good, which is God. The angels also were made free to do good or evil in their period of trial, in the first moment of their existence. They were created in grace, but not in glory; they had the hope of seeing God face to face, but not yet the reality, which was to be the reward of their good decision. That is why the devils exist today: God made it possible for them to sin⁹ so that they could freely choose to love Him above all things during a state of trial, and thus merit a reward. As we know, not all so chose.

A further insight into the wisdom of this time of trial is based on the fundamental dichotomy of being: God and His creation. God created the world, a collection of beings fundamentally different and apart from Himself, with the desire that they return to Him through conformity with His will. All creatures lower than man conform to God's will naturally and necessarily, but God did not desire man to return to Him without a real possibility to experience the allure of the created world, and remain apart from Him for love of that world. Freely rising above that allure would be an occasion of merit, of earning the reward of return to God in glorious union with Him.

God could make a creature who, although not impeccable by nature, still never sinned either mortally or venially. Such, we know, is the Blessed Virgin Mary, immaculate from the first moment of her conception. She was able to remain free from sin because of her absolute fullness of grace, given to her to make her a worthy mother of God Incarnate, and because of her perfect free correspondence to the superabundant grace given her.

However, the divine wisdom deemed it wiser not to give the same superabundant level of grace to all rational creatures. All are given the

⁹ See Job 4:18: "Even His angels He charges with error."

graces necessary for salvation, but not all choose freely to correspond to the grace they are given, and so merit an increase of grace.

Sin is never God's fault or God's doing, for it comes about through the voluntary defect of the free will of the creature who freely chooses a lesser good over a higher good in violation of the Law of God, thus offending God. However, God wills to *permit* sin in order to uphold the natural moral order He has created, which includes the *freedom of the human will* that can fall away from goodness through its own fault, if it so chooses.

God Permits Moral Evil for the Sake of Growth in Virtue and Charity and to Demonstrate Fidelity in Trial

Furthermore, the existence of moral evils accidentally creates opportunities for the greater exercise of moral and supernatural virtues. The moral evil of persecution (such as that of Antiochus, Nero, Hitler, Stalin, etc.) provides an opportunity for the martyrs to achieve a level of courage, faith, pardon, perseverance, charity, and merit which otherwise they would not have attained. If no one ever gave us a hard time in any way, where would be the merit of our patience and charity? How could we show to God that we truly love Him above all things, if we had nothing to suffer for His sake? How could we grow in virtue, if our neighbors displayed no moral evils, in which virtue is tested and proven?

The lives of the saints provide innumerable examples of this. If God had not permitted St. Augustine to stray miserably from the faith and from purity for about fifteen years, the world would have been deprived of the supernatural merit of the tears of St. Monica, which won from God the gift of her son's conversion. We can apply the same reasoning to the sufferings of all parents, spouses, or friends for their straying children or loved ones.

If God had not permitted Job's manifold suffering, he could not have shown his extraordinary fidelity in trial. For example, in the midst of his lamentations, Job reveals the profundity of his faith and hope. In Job 19:23-27, he cries out:

Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were graven in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

Faith in the Resurrection and the beatific vision in the midst of unspeakable calamity brings the merit of faith to its greatest glory. And God will not allow Himself to be outdone in generosity.

The trial of Abraham in the sacrifice of Isaac is a paradigm of how fidelity is brought to its culmination in trial. In virtue of his heroic faith and sacrifice, God repeated the promise of the blessing in Abraham's seed: "I swear by myself, says the Lord, since you have done this and have not withheld your only son, . . . in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed me."¹⁰

Other great examples from the Old Testament are the Maccabean martyrs, such as the mother and her seven sons who are tortured to death while professing their faith in God's Judgment and in the Resurrection.

A similar example of the suffering of a just man is given in the book of Tobit. Tobit was faithful to the Law of God in Assyria during a terrible persecution of the Jews there. Because he buried the bodies of the Jews who were killed in Nineveh, he had to flee for his life, although he was soon able to return after the death of the king. Not long after his return, he interrupted his dinner on the feast of Pentecost to bury another victim. Burial by Jewish law makes one ritually unclean, and so he had to sleep outside. That night, the droppings of a sparrow fell on his eyes and he became blind, and his misfortunes increased, culminating with marital problems, after which he prayed to die. At the end of the book, the angel Raphael reveals that the calamity was permitted to test Tobit's fidelity (as well as that of his son Tobias and his future wife, Sarah): "When you did not hesitate to rise and leave your dinner in order to go and lay out the dead, I was sent to test you."¹¹

The book of Wisdom (3:1-8) beautifully expresses the faith of martyrs like the Maccabees:

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and

¹⁰ Gen 22:16-18, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine translation (1958).

¹¹ Tob 12:13. The Douay-Rheims translation, following the Vulgate, offers a different reading: "When thou didst pray with tears, and didst bury the dead, and didst leave thy dinner, and hide the dead by day in thy house, and bury them by night, I offered thy prayer to the Lord. And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee."

like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them forever.

Thus God allows trials and temptations to come upon us so that we can prove our fidelity to Him. When we pray in the Our Father, "lead us not into temptation," we are not to pray that God not send us any trial or temptation—for that would not be good for us—but rather we pray that we may not fall into sin by succumbing to the temptation. Ben Sirach writes: "My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation. . . . For gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation" (Sir 2:1-5).

St. Teresa of Avila remarks that those who give themselves over to the practice of contemplation and the pursuit of sanctity should expect great trials, as she indeed experienced: "Very seldom does God give such great gifts, save to persons who have willingly undergone many trials for him. . . . The trials of contemplatives are great, and so the Lord looks for contemplatives among people who have been tested."¹²

The true end of Creation is the possession of supernatural charity, and so God permits sin and evil so that faith, hope, and charity may be given further impetus and scope. If our neighbor had no spiritual or physical ills, how could we learn in charity to sacrifice ourselves for his welfare and salvation? If no men were robbed on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, or were otherwise in need, the good Samaritan would have no opportunity to show mercy.

The perfection of a work is to be judged by how well it attains the end for which it is made. God made man for a moral purpose: to grow freely in love for God and neighbor and to develop moral character and virtue. For this end, freedom of the will is necessary, as well as the opportunity to develop our character and prove our love through hardships, which at times can be very trying indeed. Nevertheless, we can be certain that God never tries us beyond our strength.

The Bible is full of tremendous examples: Job on the dung heap, the blindness of Tobit, Abraham who was asked to sacrifice his own son, St. Joseph when he saw that Mary was with child, Our Lady at the foot of the Cross, and finally, Jesus on Calvary. In all of these cases, the trial was clearly permitted for a greater good for the one undergoing the trial: to provide an opportunity for greater merit and for the greater manifestation of faith, hope, and charity. (Obviously, the case of Christ

¹² St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, ch. 36, n. 8, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980), 2:181.

is absolutely special, for He did not grow in love through suffering, as the rest of us are called to do, but suffered rather to manifest the fullness of His love and so redeem man.)

The lives of the saints show us that there is no other means more efficacious towards sanctification than the crucible of trials and suffering. St. Paul speaks of this in Romans 5:3–5: “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.”

The necessity of suffering for spiritual growth can be formulated as an axiom: The greater the perfection of charity we hope to achieve, the more we shall have to participate in the Cross. Of course, the nature of the crosses God chooses for us is always totally unexpected.

In his homily on the canonization of Edith Stein, John Paul II said: “Many of our contemporaries would like to silence the Cross. But nothing is more eloquent than the Cross when silenced. The true message of suffering is a lesson of love. Love makes suffering fruitful, and suffering deepens love.”

In summary, suffering in the Old Testament is first understood as a punishment for sin, which is given to restore justice, but also to lead those who suffer to repentance and conversion. In addition, the book of Job shows also that “while it is true that suffering has a meaning as punishment when it is connected with a fault, *it is not true that all suffering is a consequence of a fault and has the nature of a punishment*” (SD 11). Suffering also serves as a test of fidelity, as in the case of Job, Tobit, and Abraham. The heroic virtue that they showed in their prosperity was deepened through their trial. They were faithful despite the *apparent silence of God*. This brings the merit of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, to its culmination. Thus we have three purposes of suffering in the Old Testament: (1) to restore justice through punishment for sin, (2) to lead the sinner to conversion, and (3) to try the just man so as to lead him to a higher level of heroic sanctity. It is this last aspect of God’s permission of suffering that is manifested in the book of Job.

Redemptive Suffering

There is still one crucial element concerning the meaning of suffering that we have not mentioned, which is revealed in the Canticles of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. Suffering can have a redemptive purpose: to expiate not only one’s own sin (as in every punishment), but also the sin of others. The canticles of the suffering servant, and above all Isaiah 53, reveal that this redemptive suffering is the principal task of the Messiah, who will suffer for the salvation of all:

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and his look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows: and we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray . . . and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was offered because it was his own will, and he opened not his mouth: he shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth. He was taken away from distress; . . . he is cut off out of the land of the living: for the wickedness of my people have I struck him. And the Lord was pleased to bruise him in infirmity: if he shall lay down his life for sin, he shall see a long-lived seed, and the will of the Lord shall be prosperous in his hand. Because his soul hath labored, he shall see and be filled: by his knowledge shall this my just servant justify many, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I distribute to him very many, and he shall divide the spoils of the strong, because he hath delivered his soul unto death, and was reputed with the wicked: and he hath borne the sins of many, and hath prayed for the transgressors.¹³

Many great Jewish rabbis, reflecting on the canticles of the Suffering Servant, recognized that the Messiah will suffer immense redemptive suffering. There is a large collection of rabbinic tales concerning the Suffering Messiah, who is pictured in one text as sitting despised at the gates of Rome, binding and unbinding his festering wounds.¹⁴ A medieval Jewish text presents the Messiah as telling God that he accepts protracted suffering for the sake of the redemption of Israel and the world:

Master of the Worlds! With gladness in my soul and with joy in my heart I accept it, so that not a single one of Israel should perish; and not only those who will be alive should be saved in my days, but even the dead who have died from the days of Adam the first man until now. And not only they, but even the stillborn should be saved in my days. . . . This is what I want, this is what I accept.¹⁵

¹³ Is 53:3–12, Douay-Rheims translation.

¹⁴ See Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1979), 104–121.

¹⁵ *Pesiqta Rabbati*, ed. M. Friedman (Vienna, 1880), pp. 161a–b, quoted in Patai, *The Messiah Texts*, 112.

Nevertheless, although the sages of Israel had a glimpse of the mystery of redemptive suffering, the fullness of the revelation of that mystery was reserved for the time of its realization in the Passion of Jesus the Messiah.

The Passion of Christ Fully Reveals the Mystery of Human Suffering

John Paul II loved to quote the great text of *Gaudium et spes* 22: "Only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. In fact, . . . Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear." Christ reveals man to himself by revealing the supernatural mystery that He Himself inserted into human life through His Incarnation. One of the deepest of these mysteries is that of the redemptive value of suffering.

Only the Passion of Christ can reveal to man the full meaning of human suffering. The Gospel of Christ is also a *Gospel of suffering*, in the words of John Paul II.¹⁶ He defines this expression as "the revelation of the salvific power and salvific significance of suffering in Christ's messianic mission and, subsequently, in the mission and vocation of the Church" (SD 25). The Gospel of suffering alone is capable of giving profound meaning, redemptive value, and dignity to the deep mystery of suffering, which marks human life on earth.

In His Passion, the love of Christ that is fully expressed in the most annihilating depth of suffering, overcomes the accumulated weight of all human sin. The charity with which Christ suffers has the power to atone for all human sin, because it is a sacrifice more pleasing to God than all sin together is displeasing.¹⁷

Christ did not simply take our place in a "substitutive" suffering (although this is also true), but accepted the suffering for our sins "*with that love for the Father which overcomes the evil of every sin*" (SD 17).

Because of the infinite love—human and divine—with which it is offered, Christ's suffering is universally redemptive. In His agony in the Garden, John Paul II says that Christ's words "*prove the truth of love through the truth of suffering*" (SD 18).¹⁸

¹⁶ See SD 31.

¹⁷ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 49, a. 4.

¹⁸ See also the last paragraph of SD 18: "Human suffering has reached its culmination in the Passion of Christ. And at the same time it has entered into a completely new dimension and a new order: *it has been linked to love*, to that love of which Christ spoke to Nicodemus, to that love which creates good, drawing it out by means of suffering, just as the supreme good of the Redemption of the world was drawn from the Cross of Christ, and from that Cross constantly takes its

Sharers in the Suffering of the Messiah

Christ suffered on Calvary to communicate the fruit of His suffering—reconciliation with God—to all men who choose to receive it. At the same time, He also communicated to them a share in the redemptive nature of His suffering. Just as each man shares in the redemption won by Christ's suffering, so he is also called to participate in the suffering through which redemption is accomplished. John Paul II writes:

Every man has *his own share in the Redemption*. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ *has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption*. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ. (SD 19)

Above all, Christ has redeemed suffering by making it possible for our suffering to be joined with His for the redemption of the world. We are thus given the tremendous dignity of co-redeemers, of being able to “help” Christ in His work of redeeming the world through charity proved by suffering. We might be tempted to think that this is impossible if it were not clearly taught in Scripture. We find it in St. Paul's letter to the Colossians, 1:24: “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church.”

Was something truly lacking in the immensity of the suffering of Christ and the love with which it was borne? Surely not. Yet St. Paul says that something is somehow lacking, and will be so until the end of time. What is still lacking is our participation in Christ's redemptive suffering.¹⁹ This is a glorious gift that God gives us, although the world looks at it with horror: we can share in the redemptive value of Christ's Passion, if we unite our suffering to His through faith, hope, and charity.

St. Edith Stein explained this beautifully in a letter to a pupil, written ten years before she offered herself as a holocaust in the gas chamber at Auschwitz:

There is a vocation to suffer with Christ and thereby to cooperate in His redemptive work. If we are united to the Lord, we are members of the Mystical Body of Christ; Christ continues to live and to suffer in His members, and the suffering borne in union

beginning. The Cross of Christ has become a source from which flow rivers of living water.”

¹⁹ See CCC 1521.

with Him is His suffering, integrated and made fruitful in His great redemptive work. This is a fundamental idea of all religious life.²¹

The Protestant tradition has generally rejected or failed to understand this crucial aspect of the Christian life, fearing that such a participation by the faithful in redemptive suffering would somehow diminish the glory of Christ's redemption. However, just the opposite is true. Although the merit of Calvary is infinite, Christ has willed for us the dignity of sharing in the merit and love of redemptive suffering. This condescension shows the depths of His love, for He gives us a share in what was most precious to Him, the very reason for His Incarnation. Indeed, it is in this way that suffering itself has been redeemed: by making it *redemptive*.

This doctrine is a direct consequence of the realism of our incorporation in Christ's Body through Baptism. To the degree of our union with Christ through sanctifying grace, everything that belongs to Christ belongs to us as well. If we are truly members of Christ's Body, then we can (and must) share in His redemptive Passion, death, and Resurrection. We cannot add anything to the merit of Christ's Passion, which is infinite and exceeds our measure, but we can add our tribute of sharing in it through love. Christ's Passion is perfect, but a fundamental part of its perfection consists in being *open* to receive our participation, which He does not disdain, for He makes us members of His Body. John Paul II explains:

This evangelical outlook especially highlights the truth *concerning the creative character of suffering*. The sufferings of Christ created the good of the world's redemption. This good in itself is inexhaustible and infinite. No man can add anything to it. But at the same time, in the mystery of the Church as his Body, Christ has in a sense opened his own redemptive suffering to all human suffering. In so far as man becomes a sharer in Christ's sufferings—in any part of the world and at any time in history—to that extent *he in his own way completes* the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world.

Does this mean that the Redemption achieved by Christ is not complete? No. It only means that the Redemption, accomplished through satisfactory love, *remains always open to all love* expressed in *human suffering*. In this dimension—the dimension of love—the Redemption which has already been completely accomplished is, in a certain sense, constantly being accomplished. Christ achieved the Redemption completely and to the very limits but at the same time

²¹ Quoted in Hilda C. Graef, *The Scholar and the Cross: The Life and Work of Edith Stein* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1955), 93.

he did not bring it to a close. In this redemptive suffering, through which the Redemption of the world was accomplished, Christ opened himself from the beginning to every human suffering and constantly does so. Yes, it seems to be part of the very essence of Christ's redemptive suffering that this suffering requires to be unceasingly completed. (SD 24)

Since Christ has elevated human suffering to a participation in His own redemptive suffering in the mystery of the Body of Christ, it follows that redeemed human suffering is *worthy of veneration* as a mystery of redemption. For this reason John Paul II says that suffering is "something good, before which the Church bows down in reverence with all the depth of her faith in the Redemption. She likewise bows down with all the depth of that faith with which she embraces within herself the inexpressible mystery of the Body of Christ" (SD 24).

People often regard severe trials as a sign that God is not blessing their work, apostolate, or spiritual path. In reality it is just the opposite. The saints took their great trials as signs that God was blessing them with the greatest spiritual capital—a share in the Cross of Christ—for their apostolic works and mission in the Church. If such trials are lacking then they fear that God has left them to themselves. This does not mean that they do not suffer deeply from the trials. Quite the contrary! If a trial caused no suffering it would not be a trial. The archetype of all trials is the Passion of Christ, containing unfathomable suffering. However, when the trials come, then contemplative souls use their reason to "come to their rescue." St. Teresa says:

If at first a great affront or trial causes pain, their reason comes to their rescue, before the pain is fully felt, with another consideration as if to raise the banner and almost annihilate the pain by means of joy. This joy comes from their seeing that the Lord has placed in their hands something by which they will gain more graces and perpetual favors from His Majesty than they would in ten years through trials they might wish to undertake on their own. . . . Just as others prize gold and jewels, they prize trials and desire them; they know that these latter are what will make them rich.²¹

For this reason, St. Paul could say: "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14).

²¹ St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection* ch. 36, n. 9, in *Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, 2:181.

Every suffering that God permits us to experience has a providential meaning in God's plan and is a call to share more deeply in the life of Christ. In Romans 8:28–37, St. Paul very profoundly states:

We know that *in everything God works for good* with those who love him. . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Unfortunately, outside of Catholicism this glory of suffering is unknown to the world. I will not say completely unknown, but almost. Jewish mysticism, drawing on Isaiah's canticles of the Suffering Messiah, to which century after century of Jewish exile and pain could be added, has also grasped the redemptive value of the suffering of the just. Nevertheless, this unique insight is waiting to be incorporated into the full doctrine of the Cross of Christ.

Is Jewish Suffering Also Redemptive?

I am sure that some readers have posed the question of whether the immense suffering of Jews also has redemptive value. Are their sufferings also joined to the sufferings of the Messiah? Of course, only God knows the secrets of hearts. Nevertheless, in principle we can say that a Jew, invincibly ignorant that the Messiah has already come, and who still believes and hopes in His coming, is united to Christ through his faith, hope, and charity. His suffering, therefore, will have a redemptive dimension through the merits of the suffering of the Messiah.

Fr. Elias Friedman, founder of the Association of Hebrew Catholics, has written:

Like Jesus, Jewry was a victim; unlike Jesus, it was not pure and innocent. All the same, insofar as it was innocent of the monstrous calumnies of the anti-Semites, object of satanic hatred, of unjust prejudices and violent jealousy, Jewish suffering acquired a quasi-redemptive value, which all innocent suffering merits. . . . As he walked slowly across the stage of history, the Jew took on an uncanny resemblance to Jesus: beaten, spat upon, mocked, derided, bleeding from his judicial scourging, crowned with the thorns of incomprehension, bearing his cross on the way to Golgatha. Jewry ran the gauntlet of the nations.²²

²² Elias Friedman, *Jewish Identity* (New York: The Miriam Press, 1987), 123–24.

With regard to the Holocaust, a Jewish author writes that "the Jews in the ghettos, concentration camps, and extermination camps, in Warsaw and among the partisans and the survivors, made Maimonides' twelfth principle (I believe with full faith in the coming of the Messiah, and, though he tarry, I anticipate him. . .) their universal anthem."²³ It is inconceivable that the colossal suffering of those who profess their faith and hope in the coming of the Messiah (who would redeem the world through suffering), and who love God with all their heart, mind, and soul, would be deprived of a precious participation in the inestimable redemptive value that Christ gave to human pain through His Passion. Indeed, we could say that that suffering—exemplified in the Holocaust—is something, in the words of John Paul II, "*before which the Church bows down in reverence with all the depth of her faith in the Redemption*" (SD 24).

²³ Steven S. Schwarzschild, "On Jewish Eschatology," in *The Human Condition in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (Hoboken: Krav Publishing House, 1986), 173.

CHAPTER 6

Sacrifice and Priesthood in the Old and New Testaments

The priesthood stood at the center of divine worship under the Old Covenant, as commanded in the Law of Moses, and likewise stands at the center of the New Covenant in the Church. The theme of the priesthood shows a fundamental continuity between the Old and the New Testaments, and at the same time, a great transformation through fulfillment. We can say of the priesthood what Jesus said about the entire Torah: He came not to abrogate it, but to fulfill it.

Frequently, however, continuity in this matter is overlooked or dismissed. Protestantism has tended to reject the hierarchical priesthood of the Catholic Church as something opposed to the Gospel and a throwback to the Old Testament. One of the centerpieces of Martin Luther's Reformation was his rejection of the ministerial priesthood in the Church.¹ This objection presupposes that there is a radical opposition between the Old and New Testaments, between Israel and the Church. According to this conception, a fundamental continuity between the Church and Biblical Judaism would be a negative thing.

On the contrary, I would say that the Protestant rejection of the ministerial priesthood—and the resultant lack of continuity with the Old Testament—is a powerful sign that the Protestant conception of the priesthood and of the Church is incorrect, and indeed, heretical. We should expect that something central to the Old Testament would be no less central to the Church, although it is transformed and brought to its fulfillment in the Messianic age, which is the age of the Church.

Cardinal Ratzinger spoke of this in a Lenten retreat that he gave in 1983 for the Pope and Curia:

¹ See Martin Luther, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 36: *Word and Sacrament II*, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 116: "Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian, be assured of this, that we are all equally priests, that is to say, we have the same power in respect to the Word and the sacraments." See also Luther, *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, *Luther's Works*, vol. 44, *The Christian in Society I*, ed. James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 127–30.

Particularly important in this priestly prayer of the Old and New Testaments is, I consider, the fact of the unity between the two Testaments. . . . One of the main reasons for the crisis in the priestly image, both from the point of view of exegesis and of theology, has been the casting off of the Old Testament. The Old Testament came to be seen only in the light of a dialectical opposition between the Law and the Gospel. It was taken for granted that the New Testament ministry would have nothing in common with that of the Old Testament.²

What Is the Priesthood?

The central idea of the priesthood is that the priest serves as a *mediator between God and man*. The letter to the Hebrews (5:1) defines the priest as follows: "For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins." The *priest mediates between man and God in two directions: ascending and descending*. His ascending mediation involves offering gifts and sacrifices for sin on behalf of the people, as well as offering the adoration, thanksgiving, and petitions of the entire people. The central act of this ascending mediation is the offering of sacrifice. The priesthood is thus essentially linked with sacrifice.

This mediation seeks to propitiate God, and thereby to receive gifts from Him which can be distributed to the people. Thus there is also a descending mediation, by which gifts of grace and knowledge are transmitted from God to man through the mediation of the priest.

As we shall see more fully in the following chapter, the Eucharist most perfectly realizes these two forms of mediation: ascending and descending. The priest, acting in the person of Christ, offers the infinite sacrifice of Calvary to God the Father. At the same time, the Eucharist is the greatest sacrament by which grace is given to the faithful through Holy Communion. The descending mediation—the distribution of spiritual gifts—presupposes the ascending mediation by which the perfect sacrifice is offered to God.

Priesthood is not limited to the Old and New Covenant. The natural religions of the world, under the regime of natural law, almost always have some form of priesthood by which specially designated persons offer sacrifice and serve as mediators in the things of God.

We can thus distinguish three fundamental forms of priesthood: (a) under natural law in the natural religions of the world; (b) in the Old

² Joseph Ratzinger, *Journey to Easter: Spiritual Reflections for the Lenten Season* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1987), 176.

Testament; and (c) the priesthood of Christ, as exercised by Christ Himself, and continued in the Catholic Church.

Priesthood and Sacrifice before the Mosaic Law

The Patriarchs were priests under the natural law. After the flood, Noah offers sacrifice, as we see in Genesis 8:20–21:

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done."

Noah here performs the priestly function of mediation between God and man. On behalf of mankind, which has now been reduced to his family, he offers up to God the burnt offerings of animals regarded as "clean" for sacrifice. This sacrifice propitiates God and ensures His favor on the family of Noah and his descendants (which includes all mankind). Thus Noah performs both an ascending and descending mediation.

Abraham likewise served the priestly function of mediation between man and God. The greatest example was his preparation to offer the sacrifice of Isaac, through whom and in whose seed God had designated the promised blessing. As we know, only the interior sacrifice was accepted, without its exterior realization. Here too the ascending mediation of sacrifice was followed by a descending mediation of grace. On account of Abraham's extraordinary fidelity, God renewed His promise to make of Isaac a people as numerous as the sands of the sea, and a blessing for all the nations of the earth (Gen 22:16–18).

Why Is the Offering of Sacrifice Necessary? Priesthood and Sacrifice in Natural Law

Wherever we find human culture, we find the existence of religion, sacrifice, and priesthood. All religions offer some type of sacrifice to God. Even where a religion has become terribly perverted and distorted, as in the Aztec religion, we still find the true belief that it is necessary to offer sacrifice to God on account of sin (as in Heb 5:1), at the hands of priests who have been consecrated or set aside for this purpose. The sacrifice that is offered may not indeed be pleasing to God, but the universality of this religious practice shows at least that reason naturally understands the duty of offering sacrifice. For this reason, theologians

like St. Thomas Aquinas considered the offering of some kind of sacrifice to God to be a precept of the natural law.³

St. Thomas explains it like this. Reason, especially through the experience of our weakness and indigence, naturally grasps the existence of a Supreme Being—God—by whom we are governed, and to whom we turn for aid, wisdom, and mercy. Now reason also naturally grasps the general principle that those who are governed must honor, obey, and be subject to those who govern. Furthermore, man grasps that it is fitting that his subjection be represented in external and sensible signs, for this is proper to human nature.⁴ Social life always involves giving visual and external representation to social relations; why should this be less true with regard to our relationship with God, King of creation? Just as we accord special signs to the majesty of kings and nations, expressing our allegiance to their sovereignty in various ways—as in giving the keys of a city to the conquering monarch, or pledging allegiance to the flag, or in the crowning of a king—so too it is fitting that we represent our interior loyalty, subservience to and dependence on God with exterior symbols, such as the offering of sacrifice. This is precisely the purpose of the cult and the sacrifices offered to God. For example, the Israelites were ordered to offer to God the first fruits of their harvests and flocks as a sign of recognition of God's absolute dominion and bounty. Sacrifice, therefore, can only be offered to God, for He alone has absolute dominion over creation. For this reason, the martyrs preferred death rather than to offer sacrifice to the emperors or false gods.

When sin has been incurred, it is fitting to offer a special *sacrifice of penitence and satisfaction* to *visually represent* the debt that has been incurred,

³ See ST II-II, q. 85, a. 1, sed contra: "At all times and among all nations there has always been the offering of sacrifices. Now that which is observed by all is seemingly natural. Therefore the offering of sacrifices pertains to the natural law."

⁴ Ibid. (corpus): "Natural reason tells man that he is subject to a higher being, on account of the defects which he perceives in himself, and in which he needs help and direction from someone above him: and whatever this superior being may be, it is known to all under the name of God. Now just as in natural things the lower are naturally subject to the higher, so too it is a dictate of natural reason in accordance with man's natural inclination that he should tender submission and honor, according to his mode, to that which is above man. Now the mode befitting to man is that he should employ sensible signs in order to signify anything, because he derives his knowledge from sensible things. Hence it is a dictate of natural reason that man should use certain sensible things, by offering them to God in sign of the subjection and honor due to Him, like those who make certain offerings to their lord in recognition of his authority. Now this is what we mean by a sacrifice, and consequently the offering of sacrifice is of the natural law."

the pardon that is implored, and the satisfaction that is offered. In order to understand this better, we have to examine the notions of justice, sin, and reparation. Justice is the virtue by which we give to each one his due. It is a virtue that seeks to establish order, equality, and due proportion in all things, giving to each one what is his. If this order has been violated, we say that an offense has been made.

Sin is precisely the offense given to God by the willful violation of His Law either in act, word, thought, or omission. Every sin involves preferring some creaturely satisfaction to God and His law. Even when a sin goes directly against one's neighbor, as in King David's sin of adultery and murder, God is the primary offended party. David expresses this by saying "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight" (Ps 51:4).

This offense given is something objective; it does not depend on the subjective "feelings" of God—whether He "feels" hurt. The divine nature is immutable and infinitely blessed and cannot "feel hurt" by any offense whatsoever. Nevertheless, any offense to God causes a tremendous disorder in creation that needs to be repaired.

Justice demands that order (or equality) be reestablished by *reparation*. If something has been stolen, justice demands restitution and compensation for damages suffered. If someone's honor has been damaged by calumny, justice demands reparation to restore the honor that has been sullied. This reparation is something objective, and must be proportionate to the offense that was given. This can be done by offering something of equal or greater value than what was injured by the offense.

The problem with mortal sin is that we absolutely cannot of ourselves offer anything of equal or greater value than the magnitude of the offense against God our Father. No mere man can satisfy for his own sins in strict justice, for the magnitude of the offense in a certain sense is *infinite*. This is because every grave sin ultimately involves a love of self to the point of contempt of God,⁵ which occurs whenever we deliberately violate conscience in grave matter.

Now the gravity of an offense comes from the dignity of the party who is offended. The greater the dignity, the graver is the disorder caused by the offense. For example, if the person offended is a public person such as a king or Pope, then the offense is also against the entire nation or Church. However, in the reparation of the offense, the situation is reversed. The value of the satisfaction comes from the dignity of the person who offers it. Now what could Adam, or any other

⁵ This is how St. Augustine characterizes the city of Satan, which is the form of life opposed to the City of God. See Augustine, *City of God* 14.28.

man do to atone for an offense *against God*? To make matters worse, original sin deprived Adam, Eve, and their descendants of sanctifying grace, through which charity is infused into our hearts, which alone makes our sufferings and good works of value for eternal life. Obviously mankind, left to its own forces, is in a very bad way. The best sacrifice that man can make for sin is the sacrifice of a contrite heart, as we see in Psalm 51:17: "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." Nevertheless, although necessary, the sacrifice of contrition does not make full reparation or satisfaction for sin.

However, even though man by himself is unable to offer anything to atone for sin, we still see that the offering of sacrifice is necessary. Such sacrifices are substitutionary symbols of a *true sacrifice which would make full satisfaction*.

The cultures of mankind have all tended to represent this substitutionary sacrifice by the shedding of the blood of animal victims (and sometimes of that of human victims), in accordance with the words of Hebrews 9:22: "Unless blood is shed, there can be no remission of sins." Archbishop Fulton Sheen gives a good explanation of how pagan peoples came to sense this truth:

It is not hard for anyone who ponders on sin and guilt to recognize that sin is in the blood; and, because life is in the blood, the shedding of blood expresses appropriately the truth that human life is unworthy to stand before the face of God. . . . The shedding of blood, therefore, represented the emptying of sin.⁶

The sacrifices for sin made under the natural law, as by the patriarchs, or under the Law of Moses, were generally of this type: figures or symbols of a true sacrifice, through the shedding of the blood of animal victims. The blood of sacrificial animals cannot make atonement or reestablish justice between God and man. Such sacrifices can only symbolize another true sacrifice and show its necessity. They are but pointers and arrows symbolizing a sacrifice yet to come. As we read in Hebrews 10:1-4:

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. . . . For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.

⁶ Fulton Sheen, *The Priest Is Not His Own* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004),

Nevertheless, although the offering of this blood did not take away sin, at least it *symbolically represented the reparation due to God*, which in itself is a very salutary thing, for it *shows both the reality of sin, and the need for a true Redeemer*, a true Mediator between God and man who will offer a sacrifice capable of removing sin.

The Priesthood in the Old Testament

The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, continued to perform a priestly function similar to that of the patriarchs before them, such as Abel, Seth, and Noah. They built altars and offered sacrifices on them to adore and propitiate God, and they won graces for themselves and their descendants.⁷

The Law of Moses gave a new, divinely sanctioned form to the priesthood. The Mosaic Law put the priesthood and the offering of sacrifice at the heart of the worship of Israel. First this was to be offered in the tent of meeting, and then in the Temple in Jerusalem.

It is easy to miss this reality of priesthood and sacrifice in rabbinical Judaism, because this dimension of Jewish worship has been lost for the past 1,940 years. Since all sacrifice had to be offered in the one Temple in Jerusalem, the destruction of that Temple in the year 70 AD at the hands of the Roman legions under Titus—and the impossibility of rebuilding it—meant the end of the entire sacrificial system of Judaism. The Jews mourn that destruction in an annual fast, *Tisha B'Av* (ninth day of the Jewish month of Av).

With the loss of the offering of sacrifice, the Old Testament priesthood lost its principal function and its reason for existing. Nevertheless, the line of the priesthood has not been lost, and is preserved in those who have the last name Cohen (or derivatives such as Kahn, Cohn, Kogan, Kagan, or Kahanowitz).⁸ Descendants of the priestly line still have the duty of giving the priestly blessing from Numbers 6:24–27: “The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.” The Lord says, “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

⁷ With regard to Abraham, see Gen 15, and above all, Gen 22 recounting the sacrifice of Isaac.

⁸ The name “Cohen” is the direct transliteration of the Hebrew word for “priest” (קֹהֵן). The mere possession of such a last name is not considered sufficient proof, but should be backed by more complete genealogical records. Tombstones of priests were marked with a special sign of hands giving the priestly blessing.

Priests and Levites: The Line of Aaron

The priestly line of the Mosaic Law stems from Aaron, of the tribe of Levi, as prescribed by God in Exodus 28:1: "Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar." As the Letter to the Hebrews (5:4) states, "One does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was." Only the descendants of Aaron could be priests, and the high priest was to be the firstborn of his line.

The entire tribe of Levi also served the Lord under the priests, and was specially consecrated to Him. For this reason the Levites were not given a part of the land of Israel to cultivate, for their portion was the Lord and His service.

The Jewish priesthood thus had three grades: high priest, priests, and Levites, parallel to the three grades of Holy Orders in the Catholic Church: bishop, priests, and deacons.

At first the priests and Levites served at the tabernacle housing the Ark of the Covenant,⁹ and then at the Temple in Jerusalem when it was consecrated by Solomon. During their turn in exercising liturgical functions, priests had to abstain from marital relations and reside apart from their wives.

The Offering of Sacrifice

The Old Testament priests were engaged in both ascending and descending mediation. They offered up sacrifice to God, and brought down blessings and teaching from God to man.¹⁰ Nevertheless, their principal task was offering the various kinds of sacrifice. There was a daily offering, morning and evening, and there were special sacrifices, especially in the principal feasts: Passover, Pentecost, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and the feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth). The principal part of these sacrifices involved the shedding of the blood of domestic animals as a sign of vicarious atonement, as stated in Leviticus 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for

⁹ See Num 1:50–51: "Appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all its furnishings, and over all that belongs to it; they are to carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and they shall tend it, and shall encamp around the tabernacle. When the tabernacle is to be set out, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up. And if any one else comes near, he shall be put to death."

¹⁰ See Deut 33:10: "They shall teach Jacob thy ordinances, and Israel thy law; they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt offering upon thy altar." See also Ezek 44:15, 23.

you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life."

When King Solomon consecrated the first Temple in Jerusalem (2 Chron 7:5), 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep were sacrificed. Every Passover, on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan, tens of thousands of paschal lambs were sacrificed in the court of the Temple at the hands of hundreds of priests, in rapid succession. The blood poured out in such quantity must have made an indelible impression on the mind.

The sacrifice, although less numerous, took the most solemn form on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.¹¹ On this day alone the high priest entered the Holy of Holies behind the veil and prostrated himself before the mercy seat, uttering the most holy name of God, and "not without taking blood" of a bull, ram, and goat, "which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people" (Heb 9:7).

With the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of the offering of sacrifice for the last 1,940 years, it is not surprising that Jewish notions of sin and atonement have weakened. Today, most Jews think of the fundamental notions of sin and atonement as exclusively Christian concepts. Michael Wyschogrod, a prominent scholar of Jewish thought, writes: "Contemporary Jewish folk wisdom has little sympathy for the idea of sin and therefore has relatively little use for the relief of atonement. Any but the most fleeting reference to these ideas sounds strange to many Jewish ears. The accepted teaching is that sin is a Christian preoccupation with which Judaism is not burdened."¹² Wyschogrod argues that this common, although erroneous view, is the result of the massive influence of secularism in the Jewish community, and secondly, the desire of Jews to distance themselves from Christianity. It is likely that a third cause is the loss of liturgical representation of sacrifice for almost twenty centuries after the destruction of the Temple.

The visual spectacle of the great quantities of animal sacrifices, day after day and year after year, must have impressed on the Jewish mind the reality of sin, the need for atonement through reparation and the spilling of the blood of an innocent victim, as well as the inefficacy of the sacrificial blood that was poured out. For if it was efficacious, why did it need to be replaced by new sacrifices day after day? Thus the Temple sacrifices would have reinforced the hope that redemption would be fully and finally accomplished in the Messianic age. Indeed, the ancient rabbis held that the only sacrifice that would continue in the

¹¹ See Lev 16.

¹² Wyschogrod, in *The Human Condition in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn (Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House, 1986), 103.

Messianic age would be the sacrifice of thanksgiving (*Todah*),¹³ which is the meaning of the Greek term, "Eucharist."

The Priesthood of Christ

All priesthood that existed under the natural law in the time of the patriarchs, and under the Law of Moses in the priesthood of Aaron, is totally fulfilled in the priesthood of Christ, the one perfect mediator between God and man.

Here we can pose a question. How can Christ be the high priest of the New Covenant if He was not of the line of Aaron, and in fact never made any cultic offering until the night of the Last Supper? The Letter to the Hebrews (7:14) poses this objection: "For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests." The response is simple. The Messiah's priesthood is distinct from that of Aaron and his sons, in the same way that the Messianic types and figures in the Old Testament are distinct from their realization in the Messiah. For the entire Aaronic priesthood was but a figure of an infinitely more perfect mediator between God and man.

This distinction is expressed by an enigmatic line from Psalm 110. This messianic psalm begins with a reference to the divinity of the Messiah and the exaltation of His humanity in the Ascension: "The Lord says to my lord: 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool'" (Ps 110:1). Then in verse 4, the Messiah is spoken of as priest according to the order of Melchizedek: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.'" ¹⁴ The Letter to the Hebrews shows that the prophecy speaks of the Messiah as eternal high priest, in a new and different way from that of Aaron.

Since the essence of the priest is to serve as a mediator between God and man—offering sacrifice to God and winning favors from God for men—it follows that the perfect priest will be the perfect mediator. And the perfect mediator between God and man can be none other than God made man, who offers Himself as the consummate victim for all the sins of the world, and so merits from God all the graces and gifts to be given to men.

¹³ See *Midrash Rabbah Leviticus* 9.7, in *Midrash Rabbah*, ed. H. Freedman (London: Soncino Press, 1961), 4:114: "In the Time to Come all sacrifices will be annulled, but that of thanksgiving will not be annulled." See also *Perikta* 79a and Emil G. Hirsch, "Sacrifice," in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), 10:622a.

¹⁴ See Heb 5:5-10.

St. Paul, in 1 Timothy 2:5–6, speaks of Christ in this way: “For there is one God, and there is *one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all*, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time.” Christ is high priest precisely in His humanity. In His divinity He is not the mediator, but the one with whom mediation and propitiation needs to be made. In His humanity, however, He is the perfect Mediator, because His human nature is joined to God through the hypostatic union, and is joined to us through sharing and recapitulating our same nature, making Himself one with all men, with all human suffering, and with all sinners in order to make propitiation for sin. The humanity of Christ is thus perfectly situated to mediate between God and mankind.

Christ's Ascending Mediation: the Sacrifice of Calvary and the Eucharist

In virtue of the hypostatic union, by which Christ is at once true and perfect man and true and perfect God, the Messiah was able to offer a sacrifice that was not only a symbol and figure of the homage and propitiation due to God (like all the sacrificial offerings of animals offered under the Law) but a true homage and propitiation of infinite value. Christ's suffering and death on Calvary constitutes the one true sacrifice symbolized by all the bloody animal sacrifices.

Its value comes from the fact, first of all, that it is the holocaust of a Person who has infinite dignity—God the Son, the divine Wisdom who has come to earth, and specifically to Israel, to converse with men¹⁵ and offer Himself for them. Secondly, it has infinite value because the sacrifice of Calvary, unlike the offering of brute animals, was animated by an infinite charity. Christ suffered voluntarily out of absolute love for His Father, to restore His glory that is defaced by sin. He also suffered for love of all mankind, in order to reconcile them to God by offering satisfaction for every sin. Every man can say what was said by St. Paul in Galatians 2:20: the Son of God “loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

Furthermore, in the sacrifice of Calvary, since the Victim offers Himself, victim and priest are one, possessing a divine dignity animated by an infinite charity. The sacrifice of Calvary is capable of offering a true satisfaction for sin by giving to God something more pleasing than all sin was displeasing: the absolute charity with which the infinite dignity of His life was offered (as Priest), in the midst of the most excruciating suffering borne (as Victim) with absolute fidelity and love.

¹⁵ See Baruch 3:36–37, which says that God “found the whole way to knowledge, and gave her to Jacob his servant and to Israel whom he loved. Afterward she [the divine wisdom] appeared upon earth and lived among men.”

Finally, in the sacrifice of Calvary, Christ offered Himself in union with all human suffering, redeeming it, and giving to all human suffering a redemptive sacrificial value, if offered in communion with the suffering of Christ. "For," as we read in Hebrews 4:15, "we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

The Culmination of Christ's Ascending Mediation: the Ascension

Christ's ascending mediation reached its culmination in His Ascension into heaven, where His humanity is seated at the right hand of the Father, perfectly positioned to attain every good gift from the Father of lights, beginning ten days later with the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. This was symbolized in the Law of Moses in the most solemn ritual of the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, in which the high priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year, prostrate, with the blood of goats and bulls.

The Letter to the Hebrews points out the superiority of the priesthood of Christ over that of Aaron: "We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens" (4:14), "one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of majesty in heaven" (8:1). This theme is then further developed in Hebrews 9:11-15, 24:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest . . . he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. . . . For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Christ's Descending Mediation: Grace and Glory

In virtue of this ascending mediation of sacrifice (whose completion is symbolized in the Ascension), the Messiah is able to offer a descending mediation by which favor is bestowed from God to mankind. Here, too, Christ's mediation is perfect. By rendering perfect satisfaction for all sin, by which man is separated from God, Christ merited first of all the power to *forgive all sins*, and so reconcile man with God. Of course,

Christ as God had the power to forgive sins independently of the Passion. However, through the sacrifice of Calvary, Christ merited the forgiveness of sins *in strict justice*, by giving to God—as new Head of the human race—something more pleasing than all sin is displeasing. Thus it is fitting that Christ's words to the Apostles on Easter Sunday are connected with the power to forgive sins (Jn 20:22–23): “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.”

Secondly, Christ's sacrifice has merited all the gifts of grace and glory by which man is reunited to God, sanctified, and brought to the eternal joy of the vision of God face to face. The sacrifice of Calvary merited for mankind *all the graces* bestowed on mankind after the Fall of Adam and Eve. All of the graces given to the patriarchs, such as Abel, Noah, and Abraham, were given in virtue of the merits of Calvary, foreseen by God in His eternal present. Although the Messiah was not yet born, the graces won by His future sacrifice were already active in the world. It was through the grace won by Christ on Calvary that Abraham was called out of Ur and came into the Holy Land and into a covenant with God. It was through the merits of Christ that Moses was given the grace to receive the Law and bring Israel out of the house of bondage. It was through the grace won by Christ that the prophets received the graces given to them, and the faithful souls of Israel lived and died in the grace of God.

One may ask how the graces won on Calvary could have been applied since the beginning of the world. The answer is that the sacrifice was present to God's omniscience from all eternity, as St. Peter states in 1 Peter 1:18–20: “You were ransomed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake.”¹⁶

Christ's Descending Mediation: The Harrowing of Hell

Nevertheless, although the grace won by Christ was active before the birth of Christ, the divine wisdom decreed that the final gift of glory—the vision of God—not be given to the faithful departed of Israel until the moment when the sacrifice of Calvary was finally accomplished. They received grace in their lifetime, but had to wait for glory until the historical moment when the sacrifice was consummated.

For this reason the faithful departed of Israel had to wait in *sheol*, which was an antechamber of heaven, so to speak, but those waiting there were not yet brought face to face with God. Jesus speaks of it as

¹⁶ See Rev 13:8 in the Douay-Rheims translation: “the Lamb, which was *slain from the beginning* of the world.”

the "bosom of Abraham" in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. It is also often spoken of as the "limbo of the just," or the "limbo of the fathers." Limbo refers to the border or threshold, which here is a threshold between heaven and hell.

On Holy Saturday, when Christ's human soul was separated from His body, which lay in the tomb, what did Christ's soul do? The Creed tells us that Christ descended "into hell," or "the underworld." Many are confused about the meaning of this article of the Creed.¹⁷ Christ did not descend to the hell of the damned, but to the souls of the just who were waiting for Him in *sheol*, in the bosom of Abraham.

St. Thomas Aquinas gives a rich explanation of this article in his *Catechesis on the Apostle's Creed*. He states that Christ went to the underworld (*sheol*) first in solidarity with all those who had preceded Him, paying the penalty of Adam.¹⁸ Christ assumed this human reality in order to redeem it.

Secondly, He went there on a mission of charity, for the souls of the just are His intimate friends. He went there to be with those He loved. St. Thomas says:

For He had His friends not only in the world but also in hell, since one is Christ's friend by having charity and in hell there were many who had died in charity and faith in Christ to come, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and other righteous and perfect men. And since Christ had visited His friends in the world and had succored them by His death, He wished to visit His friends who were in hell and succor them by coming to them.¹⁹

Thirdly, He went to hell/*sheol* (Abraham's bosom) to completely overcome the devil, whose kingdom He overthrew on the Cross. In Matthew 12:29, Christ said: "Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then

¹⁷ The original Greek and Latin terms (*katōtata, inferos*) in the Apostle's Creed signify the "underworld." "Hell" in Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium, does not only refer to the state of eternal condemnation of the damned, but has a wider significance, corresponding with the Old Testament term, *sheol*. The word hell, taken in this broad sense, signifies a punishment of the soul after death in which the soul does not yet see God, and thus is deprived of our supernatural final end. *The Catechism of the Council of Trent* (part I, art. 5) states: "The word 'hell' as used here therefore means those invisible dwelling-places in which the souls are detained that have not yet been admitted to the place of heavenly happiness. In this sense the word is frequently used in Scripture."

¹⁸ *The Aquinas Catechism: A Simple Explanation of the Catholic Faith by the Church's Greatest Theologian* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2000), 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

indeed he may plunder his house.” This verse was applied to Christ’s descent to the dead already in the second century in a homily by St. Melito, Bishop of Sardis (died c. 190) who has Jesus say: “I am the one who trampled hell, bound the strong one, and snatched away people and took them up to heaven on high.”²⁰ Christ bound the strong man in dying on the Cross. Now came the time to plunder his house. Hence this mystery is referred to as the *Harrowing of hell*, which means the plundering of the underworld.²¹ St. Thomas says: “For this reason He descended into hell, deprived the devil of his own, bound him, and carried off his spoils.”²²

Christ did not despoil the devil of all that were his, but only those who died in grace and friendship with God. St. Thomas writes:

For just as Christ wished to suffer death that He might deliver the living from death, so did He wish to descend into hell in order to deliver those that were there. . . . For although Christ destroyed death altogether, he did not altogether destroy hell, but took a piece out of it, as it were, in that He did not deliver all who were there, but only those who were free from mortal sin as well as Original Sin.²³

The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* 125 sums up the mystery thus:

With his soul united to his divine Person Jesus went down to the just in hell who were awaiting their Redeemer so they could enter at last into the vision of God. When he had conquered by his death both death and the devil “who has the power of death” (Heb 2:14), he freed the just who looked forward to the Redeemer and opened for them the gates of heaven.

This mystery of the Harrowing of hell has been most beautifully described in an ancient homily for Holy Saturday that is read in the Office of Readings of the Divine Office for Holy Saturday (also included in CCC 635):

Today a great silence reigns on earth, a great silence and a great stillness. A great silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised up all who have slept ever since the world began. . . . He has gone to search for Adam, our first father, as for a lost

²⁰ Melito of Sardis, *On the Pasch* 102, in the Liturgy of Hours, Office of Readings for Holy Saturday.

²¹ To “harrow” means to plunder or pillage.

²² *The Aquinas Catechism*, 48–49.

²³ *Ibid.*, 49.

sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow Adam in his bonds and Eve, captive with him—He who is both their God and the son of Eve.

The Lord goes in to them holding his victorious weapon, his cross. When Adam, the first created man, sees him, he strikes his breast in terror and calls out to all: "My Lord be with you all." And Christ in reply says to Adam: "And with your spirit." And grasping his hand he raises him up, saying: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. I am your God, who for your sake have become your son, who for you and your descendants now speak and command with authority those in prison: Come forth, and those in darkness: Have light, and those who sleep: Rise.

"I command you: Awake, sleeper, I have not made you to be held a prisoner in the underworld. Arise from the dead; I am the life of the dead. Arise, O man, work of my hands, arise, you who were fashioned in my image. Rise, let us go hence. . . . For you, I your God became your son; for you, I the Master took on your form; that of slave; for you, I who am above the heavens came on earth and under the earth; for you, man, I became as a man without help, free among the dead; for you, who left a garden, I was handed over to Jews from a garden and crucified in a garden.

"Look at the spittle on my face, which I received because of you, in order to restore you to that first divine inbreathing at creation. See the blows on my cheeks, which I accepted in order to refashion your distorted form to my own image. See the scourging of my back, which I accepted in order to disperse the load of your sins which was laid upon your back. See my hands nailed to the tree for a good purpose, for you, who stretched out your hand to the tree for an evil one.

"I slept on the cross and a sword pierced my side, for you, who slept in paradise and brought forth Eve from your side. My side healed the pain of your side; my sleep will release you from your sleep in Hades; my sword has checked the sword which was turned against you. But arise, let us go hence. The enemy brought you out of the land of paradise; I will reinstate you, no longer in paradise, but on the throne of heaven. I denied you the tree of life, which was a figure, but now I myself am united to you, I who am life."

This mystery of Christ's descent to the dead is portrayed in many masterpieces of Renaissance art and countless Russian Orthodox icons. Adam, John the Baptist, Moses, David, Abel, and St. Joseph are usually prominently featured.

This mystery of the Harrowing of hell was denied by the Reformation as a fable. Martin Luther, followed by John Calvin,²⁴ gave it a new interpretation, radically changing the sense. He interpreted Christ's descent to hell as a substitutionary punishment, by which *Christ suffered the pains of hell in our place*. In particular he held that Christ suffered the unspeakable spiritual torment of a terrorized conscience before the Just Judge.

This is not the Catholic view! Christ did not go to hell to suffer the pains of hell in our place for the space of time in which His body lay in the tomb! He went rather to empty that part of hell containing the souls of those who died in grace: the just who died with contrition and charity before Christ's Atonement. He went to finish His messianic mission of bringing the Gospel to all men. At that moment He brought it to all those who were awaiting a Savior in the realm of the dead. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 634–35 says this beautifully:

This is the last phase of Jesus' messianic mission, a phase which is condensed in time but vast in its real significance: the spread of Christ's redemptive work to all men of all times and all places, for all who are saved have been made sharers in the redemption. Christ went down into the depths of death so that "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (Jn 5:25). Jesus, "the Author of life," by dying destroyed "him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and [delivered] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage" (Heb 2:14–15). Henceforth the risen Christ holds "the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev 1:18), so that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil 2:10).

Christ's descent to the dead on Holy Saturday is a beautiful element of the most intimate union between Israel, Christ, and the Church. Before He appeared in the glory of His Resurrection to Peter and the Apostles, the Messiah first revealed His glory to the patriarchs and the faithful souls of ancient Israel and brought them into the beatific vision as the true first fruits of His conquest over Satan. They were His intimate friends, whom He would not abandon in *sheol*, in the darkness of exile from the beatific vision. The Harrowing of hell is thus a beautiful mystery from the perspective of Hebrew Catholics.

²⁴ See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book 2, ch. 16, n. 10, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:515–16. Calvin seems to have understood the descent to hell to refer to the agony and abandonment of His soul on Calvary, in which he suffered "in his soul the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man" (*ibid.*, 516).

Christ's Descending Mediation: The Resurrection

Christ's descending mediation reached its culmination in His glorious Resurrection on Easter Sunday. By rising from the dead, Christ gives a pledge of future Resurrection and glory for all His faithful members, for all who adhere to Him in faith, hope, and charity, and die in a state of grace. Christ's Resurrection is inseparably tied to the resurrection of all the just, although, with the exception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, they must wait until the end of the world. As St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming [that is, the second coming] those who belong to Christ," which includes both ancient Israel and the Church (and all who die in a state of grace).

Christ's Descending Mediation: Sacraments

We have said that Christ's descending priestly mediation consists in the communication of gifts of grace and glory. In order to communicate sanctifying grace and an abundance of actual graces to His Church through the merits of His Passion, Christ instituted the seven sacraments of the Church to be the ordinary channels in the outpouring of grace, by which His descending priestly mediation is ordinarily realized. These channels efficaciously and invariably give grace, unless an obstacle is posed to their efficacy, such as lack of faith in those above the age of reason, lack of repentance, or a contrary will.

Baptism simultaneously remits sin and gives an infusion of sanctifying grace, by which we are made friends of God, sons of God, heirs of heaven, and pleasing in His sight. Confirmation strengthens the gift of grace with a further outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Penance restores it if, lamentably, it has been lost. The Eucharist nourishes the life of sanctifying grace and increases it with a greater fervor of charity. The sacrament of Matrimony gives a series of sacramental graces to aid Christian spouses to sanctify the domestic church. Holy Orders, finally, gives to those who receive it, the spiritual power to participate in Christ's priesthood, and the sacramental graces to worthily carry out this most exalted mission.

The Continuation of Christ's Priesthood in the Church

Christ remains the one high priest throughout the Messianic era, which is the time of the Church, which will last until the Second Coming. Nevertheless, He willed to give a participation in His priestly mediation to His Church through the sacrament of Holy Orders. The ordained priest in the Catholic Church does not substitute for Christ, or succeed Him, or replace Him. Rather, he serves as a sacramental *continuation* of

Christ, by which Christ's voice and hands may touch mankind today and throughout all ages and all places. The Catholic priest is ordained to act "in the person of Christ," *in persona Christi*, so that Christ may carry out His ascending and descending priestly mediation through the hands and lips of those who receive Holy Orders.

This ascending priestly mediation centers on the offering of the sacrifice of the Holy Mass, by which the very sacrifice of Calvary is made present on our altars until the end of time. The descending priestly mediation is achieved through the celebration of all seven sacraments of the Church, by which Christ's bride is sanctified and nourished in sanctity, that Christ "might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27).

The priesthood in the Catholic Church remains the priesthood of the Messiah, whose power and efficacy is communicated to unworthy men.

Since we have seen that the priesthood and the offering of sacrifice were such fundamental elements of Biblical Israel, it is fitting that the New Covenant not be without sacrifice and priesthood, but have far more glorious ones. They are more glorious not because of the human merit of those who receive Holy Orders and offer the sacrifice of the Mass, but because of the glory of the priesthood of Jesus the Messiah, the one perfect mediator between God and man, the immolated Lamb of God who has penetrated the heavens and sits at the right hand of the throne of grace, and who is offered in the Eucharistic sacrifice.

CHAPTER 7

The Eucharist: The One Sacrifice of the New Covenant

The Eucharist is the supreme act of the priesthood of Christ, and the one sacrifice of the New Covenant. It is the fulfillment of many elements of the Old Testament, while also infinitely transcending them.

The priest is a mediator between God and man, and mediates in two directions: ascending and descending. The principal aspect of ascending mediation is the offering of sacrifice, while descending mediation principally concerns the imparting of grace through the sacraments.

The Eucharist most perfectly fulfills both of these two complementary functions of mediation. It is, on the one hand, the most perfect sacrifice that can be offered up to God, making present the sacrifice of Calvary on our altars (ascending mediation). At the same time, it is the culmination of the sacraments through which God offers grace to man (descending mediation).

The Eucharist thus has a dual nature: it is at one and the same time a sacrifice and a sacrament. As a sacrifice it ascends from man to God, and as a sacrament of communion it descends from God to man. The aspect of communion presupposes the aspect of sacrifice.

As a sacrifice, it is the *summit* of the worship that the Church gives to God. All the work of preaching, missionary activity, and conversion is ordered towards incorporation in the liturgical life of the Church, which culminates in the Eucharist. As a sacrament, the Eucharist is the principal *source* of the graces received by the whole Church. It makes present the Paschal mystery from which every grace flows, and it is the privileged channel of the distribution of those graces, especially the grace of charity, which is union with God and our neighbor. The Eucharist thus is both the “source and summit” of the life of the Church. It is the *summit to which her life tends and the font from which it emanates*.¹

¹ See Vatican II, *LG* 11: “Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, they [the faithful] offer the divine victim to God, and offer themselves along with it.” See also *Sacrosanctum concilium* 9:

The Eucharist as Sacrifice

Let us first examine the Eucharist as sacrifice, and then as sacrament. All the very numerous bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament were but figures of the one perfect sacrifice—the Passion of Christ.² But if Calvary is the one and only perfect sacrifice which can make perfect reparation for all sin, then why would the Church need any other sacrifice? What could the Eucharist add to the sacrifice of Calvary? Why would the Church continue to offer sacrifice in the Eucharist, if Calvary had already fulfilled all sacrifice? These are good questions, often made by Protestants.

Indeed, the Church can have no other sacrifice than that of Calvary. Hebrews 10:12 states that “when Christ had offered for all time *a single sacrifice for sins*, he sat down at the right hand of God.”

The answer of the faith of the Church is that the *Eucharist is not another sacrifice distinct from Calvary, but the very sacrifice of Calvary, mystically and mysteriously made present on our altars*, in every valid Eucharistic celebration. The Eucharist does not add anything to Calvary, but is mystically and sacramentally identical with it.³

Here we will look at three questions. First, how can we see that the Eucharist is the sacrifice of Calvary from the words of Christ in the New Testament? Secondly, how does theology explain the identity between the Eucharist and the sacrifice of Calvary? Third, why would Christ want to institute the Eucharist as a mystical re-presentation of the sacrifice of Calvary?

The Words of Institution

Let us begin with the first question. How do we know that the Eucharist makes present the sacrifice of Calvary? We know it above all from the words of Christ in the New Testament when He instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper. These words are permeated with sacrificial connotations, which establish an identity between the Eucharist and the sacrifice of Calvary. Christ took bread and said: “*This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me*” (Lk 22:19). The expression “given for you,” implies a sacrifice of expiation. The sacrificial victim is “given” for the people for whom it is offered.

“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.”

² See vol. 1, *The Mystery of Israel and the Church: Figure and Fulfillment*, chapter 7.

³ See CCC 1367: “The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*.” See also John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 12: “The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to that sacrifice nor does it multiply it.”

The same is true of the institution of the chalice. St. Matthew records it as follows: "Drink of it, all of you; for *this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*" (Mt 26:28). It is absolutely clear that this is sacrificial language. The blood of the sacrificial victims is said to be "poured out" at the foot of the altar in order to win God's favor and the forgiveness of sins.⁴

Indeed, Christ's Body was given for us on Calvary, and there His Blood was "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." However, Christ spoke of His Body as given and His Blood as poured out in the Last Supper itself, *before* the sacrifice of Calvary. Thus it is clear that Christ spoke of His Body and Blood in the Eucharist as making present the *same sacrifice* of Calvary that was to be enacted on the following day.

In the Last Supper, the Eucharist anticipated the sacrifice of Calvary, sacramentally pouring out on Holy Thursday evening that same blood that was to be physically poured out the following day. The Mass of the Church makes that same sacrifice of Calvary present again—the Body being given and the Blood poured out sacramentally—in all succeeding days and ages, so that all believers can participate in it, and make it the center of their lives.

St. Paul, in his account of the institution of the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, includes the words: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." The Eucharist sacramentally "proclaims" Christ's sacrificial death, by *re-presenting* it on the altar—the very same Body and Blood that were given and poured out on Calvary. And this sacramental *re-presentation* of His death is to be continued until the Second Coming.

When Christ says that the chalice is His blood, "*poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*," there is an allusion to the prophecy of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:11–12, who shall "*make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities . . . because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many.*"⁵

Christ's blood is poured out in the Eucharist for myriads of souls, an innumerable multitude, for the forgiveness of the sins of the world. The words of Christ in the institution of the Eucharist make it clear that Isaiah 53 is fulfilled in His blood poured out for the many on Calvary, and equally poured out sacramentally in the Last Supper, and in every

⁴ See Ex 29:12; Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 9:9.

⁵ The word "many" here—indicating a great multitude—does not exclude the meaning of "all." Compare Rom 5:12 and 15. See the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Letter on Amending the Translation of "Pro Multis," October 17, 2006.

valid Eucharistic celebration which He commanded to be offered as His living memorial.

The sacramental re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary was not meant to be a one-time event limited to the Last Supper, for Christ commanded His Apostles to "do" what He did "in remembrance of me." The reference to "remembrance" or "memorial" is also a sacrificial term frequently used in the Old Testament. There are sacrifices which are said to be memorials of the great works of God.⁶ The most important reference to "memorial" sacrifice is in the institution of the Passover: "This day shall be for you a memorial (*zikaron*), and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord" (Ex 12:14). The sacrifice of the Passover lamb was a "memorial" of the liberation of Israel from Egypt, so that the foundational event of the history of Israel would be liturgically re-enacted every year and stay ever alive in the minds and hearts of Israel. The Eucharist is likewise a memorial of the event of Good Friday, on which Israel and the entire world was liberated from the dominion of sin and death.

As at the first Passover in Egypt, the blood of the sacrificial lamb was applied to the doorposts and lintels of the houses of the Israelites to save them from the angel of death, so in the Eucharist, the blood of the true Lamb of God is applied, not to doorposts, but applied to our lips and our interior being to save us from the dominion of Satan and communicate the grace of supernatural life.⁷

Furthermore, Christ speaks of the Eucharistic chalice as the cup of "the new covenant in my blood" (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). Here He is making a twofold reference: to the blood of the Old Covenant poured out at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and to the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-33⁸ which speaks of a New Covenant:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God,

⁶ See, among others, Ex 20:24; Lev 2:2 and 24:7, which speaks of a memorial offering of fine flour, oil, and frankincense.

⁷ See St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 3.13-19, trans. Paul Harkins (Westminster, MD: Newman press, 1963), 60-62; included in the Liturgy of the Hours, Office of Readings for Good Friday.

⁸ See also Is 42:6, in which the Suffering Servant is said to be "given to you as a covenant to the people."

and they shall be my people . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Jesus says His Blood poured out on Calvary, and sacramentally poured out in the Eucharist, is the New Covenant, which is superior to that of Sinai because its effects are interior. It has the power to give sanctifying grace, to write the Law of God on our hearts and give us the inner strength to keep it, and it has the power to forgive all sin and iniquity.

The Mosaic Covenant was sealed at the foot of Mt. Sinai with the blood of many oxen. In Exodus 24:5-8, burnt offerings and peace offerings of oxen were offered, and the blood was gathered in basins. Half of the blood was poured out on the altar, and the other half "poured out" or sprinkled on the people after they promised to be faithful to the covenant: "And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (Ex 24:8).

Just as the Old Covenant was sealed with sacrificial blood poured out and sprinkled on the people, so too the New Covenant is sealed with blood. The difference lies in the victim whose blood is poured out. The victim in the New Covenant is not a multitude of irrational beasts, but the Messiah, the Son of God made man, "who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

Transubstantiation

It is clear that Jesus spoke about the Eucharist that He celebrated at the Last Supper and which He commanded to the Apostles to perpetuate in remembrance of Him, as somehow identical with the sacrifice that He consummated the following day in His Passion. In both cases, His Body is given for us all, and His Blood poured out is the Blood of the New Covenant for the forgiveness of sins. How can this be?

The words of Christ have an efficacy to realize what they signify, because He is the Word made flesh, perfect God and perfect man. His words have the same power as the words spoken at the beginning (Gen 1:3): "Let there be light," and there was light." By His word He calmed the Sea of Galilee, changed about 150 gallons of water into wine at the wedding in Cana, and brought forth Lazarus from the tomb after four days. By that same power, He could take bread and wine and transform it into the substance of His Body and Blood, for nothing is impossible for God, who has dominion over the being of all His creatures.

For this reason the Church has always believed that the bread and wine are converted by the prayer of Christ into His true Body and

Blood—as He said—the very same Body and Blood that were poured out the following day on Calvary.

This miraculous conversion of the substance of bread into Christ's Body and the substance of wine into Christ's Blood is referred to in theology as *transubstantiation*, which means the total instantaneous change of one entire substance into another.

Nevertheless, the Eucharistic conversion is miraculous in two ways. Not only are the bread and wine converted instantly and totally into the Body and Blood of Christ, but the appearances of the bread and wine remain suspended, as it were, without any substance in which to inhere.

In order to understand this, it is helpful to make use of a philosophical distinction between *substance* and *accidents*. Philosophers use the word *substance* to signify *what a thing is*—its inner identity—that reality which underlies all its outward appearances or changeable accidents. The word *accidents* refers to its appearances and sensible qualities: size, color, smell, weight, taste, place, etc. The substance has being in itself, whereas the accidents (appearances) have being through the substance.

In the Eucharist, the substance of bread and wine have been converted into Christ, but the sensible appearances (accidents) which formerly modified the bread and wine—size, color, smell, place, nutritional qualities, etc.—remain, as if the substances of bread and wine were still present. How do we know that the substance of bread and wine is no longer present after the words of consecration? Simply by faith in the words of Christ, who, as God, has total dominion over all creatures, and thus can convert bread and wine into Himself if He wishes, while leaving the appearances (accidents) of bread and wine. He leaves the appearances for two reasons: (a) so that we can receive Him sacramentally for spiritual nourishment in a form that we are accustomed to (under the appearances of bread and wine); and (b) so that we can have the merit of faith, believing in a mystery that is unseen.

Early Christian Witnesses of the Real Presence

The Church has always believed in the Real Presence in the Eucharist and in the mysterious substantial conversion (transubstantiation) by which that Real Presence comes about. It is interesting to hear some testimonies of the earliest Fathers of the Church.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of St. John the Apostle, and great martyr who was fed to the beasts in the Roman Coliseum in the time of Trajan (c. 110–116 AD), wrote with great vigor about the Eucharist in letters to various Christian communities on his way to martyrdom. In one letter he says that the Gnostic heretics “abstain from the Eucharist and prayer because they refuse to acknowledge that the Eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which

the Father by his goodness raised up.”⁹ In another letter he writes: “I take no pleasure in corruptible food. . . . I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Christ who is of the seed of David; and for drink I want his blood, which is incorruptible love.”¹⁰

St. Justin Martyr, also martyred in Rome around 165 AD, wrote in his First Apology addressed to the Emperor:

For we do not receive these things as common bread nor common drink; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior having been incarnate by God’s logos took both flesh and blood for our salvation, so also we have been taught that the food eucharistized through the word of prayer that is from Him, from which our blood and flesh are nourished by transformation, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who became incarnate.¹¹

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, bishop of Jerusalem in the fourth century, instructed the newly baptized members of the Church in the mystery of the Eucharist:

In this knowledge, and in the firm conviction that the bread which is seen is not bread, though it is bread to the taste, but the Body of Christ, and that the visible wine is not wine, though taste will have it so, but the Blood of Christ, . . . strengthen your heart, partaking of this Bread as spiritual.¹²

Theological Explanation of the Eucharistic Sacrifice

The Eucharistic sacrifice comes about through the miracle of transubstantiation. Christ willed to leave to His Church the very same sacrifice that He offered His Father on Good Friday, perpetuating it in history. How could He do this? Christ did this by instituting the miracle of transubstantiation, making Himself present in the Eucharist as the

⁹ *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 6, trans. Michael Holmes, in *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 255.

¹⁰ *Letter to the Romans* 7, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 233. See also his *Letter to the Philadelphians* 4, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 239: “Take care, therefore, to participate in one Eucharist (for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup that leads to unity through his blood; there is one altar, just as there is one bishop, together with the council of presbyters and the deacons, my fellow servants), in order that whatever you do, you do in accordance with God.”

¹¹ St. Justin, *First Apology* 66, trans. Leslie Bernard, in *St. Justin Martyr: The First and Second Apologies*, *Ancient Christian Writers* 56 (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 70.

¹² St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Lecture* 4.9, trans. Leo McCauley, in *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem*, vol. 2, *The Fathers of the Church* 64 (Washington DC: Catholic Univ. of America, 1970), 185–86.

divine Victim, the very same Victim that was offered in a bloody manner on Mt. Calvary. Furthermore, by instituting the priesthood at the same moment, He arranged to be continually present as High Priest, offering His own Body and Blood in the sacrifice of the Mass, through the ministerial priests who were to be ordained to act *in His person* sacramentally throughout the ages until His second coming.

Thus the Mass is a liturgical sacrifice which is *no longer a mere external symbol* of the inner sacrifice of the heart of a perfect victim, but the actual oblation for all the sins of the world of the true Victim, Jesus Christ our Lord, present on the altar through the miracle of transubstantiation, offering Himself, through the hands and voice of His ordained ministers, in a perfect act of charity and expiation. Nothing less than the Sacred Heart of Christ Himself, burning with love for man, is present, mystically immolated, and offered in this holy and immaculate sacrifice. However, the Sacred Heart of Christ is offered, not in the horribly cruel and bloody manner of that original Sacrifice, but in an effable unbloody and sacramental fashion, worthy of the heart of God, and which our mind can never fully penetrate. The Council of Trent gave a solemn exposition of this doctrine:

He then, Our Lord and our God, was once and for all to offer Himself by His death on the altar of the cross to God the Father, to accomplish for them an everlasting redemption. But death was not to end His priesthood. And so, at the Last Supper, on the night on which He was betrayed, in order to leave for His beloved spouse, the Church, a sacrifice that was visible, as the nature of man demands, declaring Himself constituted a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech, He offered his body and blood under the species of bread and wine to God the Father and He gave His body and blood under the same species to the apostles to receive, making them priests of the New Testament at that time.

This sacrifice was to *re-present* the bloody sacrifice which He accomplished on the cross once and for all. . . . He ordered the apostles and their successors in the priesthood to offer this sacrifice when He said, "Do this in remembrance of me."¹³

In this text the Council of Trent states that the sacrifice of the Mass "re-presents" the sacrifice of Calvary. This must be taken in an absolutely literal sense. The sacrifice of the Mass makes the sacrifice of Calvary present on our altars. It is not a theatrical "representation" of the sacrifice of Calvary, as if it were a mere commemoration, as in the

¹³ Council of Trent, session 22, ch. 1, DS 1740 (D 938).

Jewish Passover which recalled the events of the first Passover in Egypt, but could not make them literally present again. That is not the sense of "re-presents" in this text. Nor is it another sacrifice different from Calvary. The succession of Masses in the Church on all her altars does not multiply the sacrifices that are offered, as if they were different from Calvary. There is only one sacrifice that is offered day by day: the very sacrifice of Calvary, made present, "re-presented."

St. John Chrysostom put it well: "We always offer the same Lamb, not one today and another tomorrow, but always the same one. For this reason the sacrifice is always only one. . . . Even now we offer that victim who was once offered and who will never be consumed."¹⁴

How is this done? How can the sacrifice of the Mass in all the churches of the world be the same as the sacrifice of the "Suffering Servant," the Lamb of God, on Calvary? The Council of Trent explains: "It is one and the same victim; the same person now offers it by the ministry of His priests, who then offered Himself on the cross, the manner of offering alone being different."¹⁵

The sacrifice of the Mass is identical with Calvary because it contains the same Victim who is mystically immolated, and because it is offered by the same High Priest, Jesus Christ, through the sacramental ministry of His ordained priests who act in His person. Nevertheless, the mode of offering in the Eucharist and on Calvary is distinct. Christ is offered in the Eucharistic sacrifice by a mystical and unbloody immolation, which is realized through the separate conversion of the bread and wine into His Body and Blood. The separate immolation of the Body and Blood sacramentally realizes what Christ physically experienced on Calvary: the separation of His Body and His Blood, which was physically poured out for us.

Pius XII commented on this doctrine in an encyclical from 1947 on the liturgy, *Mediator Dei* 69-70:

The august sacrifice of the altar, then, is no mere empty commemoration of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, but a true and proper act of sacrifice, whereby the High Priest by an unbloody immolation offers Himself a most acceptable victim to the Eternal Father, as He did upon the cross...

The priest is the same, Jesus Christ, whose sacred Person His minister represents. Now the minister, by reason of the sacerdotal consecration which he has received, is made like to the High Priest and possesses the power of performing actions in virtue of Christ's

¹⁴ In *Epistolam ad Hebraeos Homiliae*, Hom. 17.3, PG 63, 131; cited in John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 12.

¹⁵ Council of Trent, session 22, ch. 2, DS 1743 (D 940).

very person. Wherefore in his priestly activity he in a certain manner "lends his tongue, and gives his hand" to Christ.¹⁶ Likewise the victim is the same, namely, our divine Redeemer in His human nature with His true body and blood.

The manner, however, in which Christ is offered is different. On the cross He completely offered Himself and all His sufferings to God, and the immolation of the victim was brought about by the bloody death, which He underwent of His free will. But on the altar, by reason of the glorified state of His human nature, "death shall have no more dominion over Him," and so the shedding of His blood is impossible; still, according to the plan of divine wisdom, the sacrifice of our Redeemer is shown forth in an admirable manner by external signs which are the symbols of His death.

For by the "transubstantiation" of bread into the body of Christ and of wine into His blood, His body and blood are both really present: now the Eucharistic species under which He is present symbolize the actual separation of His body and blood. Thus the commemorative representation of His death, which actually took place on Calvary, is repeated in every sacrifice of the altar, seeing that Jesus Christ is symbolically shown by separate symbols to be in a state of victimhood."

In other words, the separate conversions of the bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood sacramentally or mystically *re-present* the real separation of the blood from the body of Christ in His death on Calvary.

The words of consecration, uttered in the person of Christ, thus are the means of realizing the Eucharistic sacrifice. St. Gregory of Nazianzen likens the words of consecration to a mystical knife used in the sacramental immolation of the Lamb of God. He writes to a fellow priest: "Delay not to pray for me, when you draw down the Word by your word [of consecration], when with a bloodless cutting you sever the Body and Blood of the Lord with the sacrificial knife of His word."¹⁷

Unlike all the other religious rites of the world, including those of the Mosaic Law instituted by God, the seven sacraments instituted by Christ have the power to efficaciously realize what they symbolize. The washing of water in Baptism does not merely represent an interior washing, as the ritual baths of Judaism, but actually effects the cleansing of the soul from sin and the giving of sanctifying grace. Likewise, the Eucharist does not merely symbolize or represent the sacrifice of

¹⁶ Saint John Chrysostom, *In Joann. hom.*, 86:4.

¹⁷ Letter 171 to Amphilochius.

Calvary through the separate consecration of Body and Blood, but efficaciously makes it present on the altar.

The memorial sacrifices of Israel, such as the Passover, could only recall past events by liturgically renewing their memory. The Eucharistic sacrifice alone has the power to make the original event—the sacrifice of the Suffering Servant for the sins of the world—truly present. This is done by making the same victim—with His same interior act of self-immolation—present on the altar through transubstantiation. Benedict XVI has written: “The substantial conversion of bread and wine into his body and blood introduces within creation the principle of a radical change, a sort of ‘nuclear fission,’ to use an image familiar to us today, which penetrates to the heart of all being.”¹⁸

Fittingness of the Eucharistic Sacrifice

Let us now ask why Christ would want to institute the Eucharist as a mystical re-presentation of the sacrifice of Calvary. The answer lies in the needs of human nature, which is not content with purely abstract knowledge.

The Eucharist makes the very sacrifice of our Redemption—the center of all human history and the culmination of the yearning and history of Israel—present in our own lives as well. It is a great gift of faith to know that Christ worked our Redemption two thousand years ago. However, it is part of human nature that we are affected not just by intellectual knowledge of what was done in the past, but also by what we ourselves are able to participate in directly. Mere historical knowledge of events in the distant past remains shadowy for us. We were not present at the sacrifice of Calvary.

The Eucharist takes this weakness and need of human nature into account, suspending, as it were, the natural limitations of space and time. It makes the beloved person of the Messiah and His redemptive sacrifice present to all men in all places and succeeding times, so that each one of us can have living contact and participation in His sacrifice on Calvary, offering with Him His adorable Body and Blood, poured out for us sacramentally and mysteriously, under the appearances of bread and wine, to God the Father. And we can do this every day or week of our lives, in every part of the world where there is a validly ordained priest. Mere human beings cannot make past events present again, after twenty centuries, but God’s omnipotence and wisdom is not bound by human limits.

¹⁸ Benedict XVI, apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* 11.

The Common Priesthood of the Faithful

Christ wanted to give His sacrifice of Calvary to His Church, so that all the faithful could offer it to the Father with Him, at the hands of His ordained priests.

In theological terms, this participation of the faithful in the offering of the sacrifice of Christ is an exercise of their *royal priesthood* deriving from Baptism, and which must be clearly distinguished from the *ministerial priesthood* deriving from the sacrament of Holy Orders, which alone gives the power to consecrate the Eucharist in the person of Christ.

Vatican II, in *Lumen gentium* 10, teaches: "Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ."

The expression, "royal priesthood" (or common priesthood) uses the term "priesthood" in a figurative or analogical sense. The expression comes from Exodus 19:5-6, in which God tells the people of Israel: "If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Even though only the descendants of Aaron were ministerial priests, the entire people of Israel exercised a "royal priesthood" in that they were to offer the interior sacrifice of their heart through obedience to God, through faith, hope, and charity, and through interiorly offering themselves to God with the ritual victims. This text of Exodus 19 is quoted by St. Peter in 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The whole Church is spoken of as having a royal priesthood, because Christ gave His sacrifice to the whole Church to be her dowry and greatest treasure. All the faithful share in Christ's priesthood, in the sense that they are called to offer up the interior holocaust of their hearts in union with the sacrifice of the Sacred Heart of Christ made present on our altars in the holy Mass, and, together with the immaculate Victim, to call down blessings upon men. Pius XII explains the participation of all the faithful in offering the sacrifice of the Mass in *Mediator Dei* 98-99:

In order that the oblation by which the faithful offer the divine Victim in this sacrifice to the heavenly Father may have its full effect, it is necessary that the people add something else, namely, the offering of themselves as a victim. . . . For the Prince of the Apostles wishes us, as living stones built upon Christ, the

cornerstone, to be able as "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2:5). St. Paul the Apostle addresses the following words of exhortation to Christians . . . , "I beseech you therefore, . . . that you present your bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service" (Rom 12:1). . . . With the High Priest and through Him they offer themselves as a spiritual sacrifice, . . . and each one should consecrate himself to the furthering of the divine glory, desiring to become as like as possible to Christ in His most grievous sufferings.

This is the principal meaning of the Second Vatican Council's call that the faithful participate more actively and deeply in the liturgy. I think it is fair to say that this internal participation in the sacrifice of the Mass has not been sufficiently emphasized and taught in recent years.¹⁹ The faithful are to place on the paten and in the chalice an internal and mystical offering of themselves, their hearts, and the trials of their lives, and offer them up to God the Father, together with the offering of the immaculate sacrifice of Christ Himself through the hands of the priest. This beautiful practice of traditional Catholic piety must be continually renewed. It is an offering that we can do throughout our Christian lives. However, we may formalize this sacrifice of our lives by mentally offering ourselves together with Christ in the Offertory and in the Canon of the Mass, especially in the moment of the consecration and elevation; and finally in our own communion.

The Second Vatican Council reiterated this teaching. Speaking of the participation of the faithful, *Lumen gentium* 11 states: "Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine Victim to God, and *offer themselves along with it*."²⁰

Figures of the Eucharistic Sacrifice in Judaism

All the sacrificial rites of the Mosaic Covenant were types or figures, both of the sacrifice of Calvary, and of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The paschal lamb was but a type of the sacrifice of Christ, made present in the Eucharist. The same is true of all the holocausts of Israel, the scapegoat offered on the Day of Atonement, the morning and evening

¹⁹ On the correct understanding of the notion of participation by the faithful, see Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000), 171–77.

²⁰ My italics. See also *Sacrosanctum concilium* 48: "Offering the immaculate victim, not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him, they should learn to offer themselves."

sacrifice, the peace offerings, the communion offerings, the thanksgiving offerings, the memorial offerings, the offerings of wheat, the offering of bread and wine of the priest Melchizedek. All of these were merely figures pointing to the reality truly contained in the Eucharist.

The typology of the Old Testament sacrifices and events is beautifully explained in an ancient homily from the second century by St. Melito of Sardis:

For he who was led away as a lamb and who was sacrificed as a sheep, by himself delivered us from servitude to the world as from the land of Egypt, and released us from bondage to the devil as from the hand of Pharaoh, and sealed our souls by his own spirit and the members of our bodies by his own blood.

This is he who covered death with shame and who plunged the devil into mourning as Moses did Pharaoh. . . . This is he who delivered us from slavery into freedom, from darkness into light, from death into life, from tyranny into an eternal kingdom, and who made us a new priesthood and a chosen people forever.

This is he who is the Passover of our salvation. . . . This is the one who was murdered in Abel, and bound as a sacrifice in Isaac, and exiled in Jacob, and sold in Joseph, and exposed in Moses, and sacrificed in the lamb, and hunted down in David, and dishonored in the prophets. . . .

This is the lamb that was slain. This is the lamb that was silent. This is the one who was born of Mary, that beautiful ewe-lamb. This is the one who was taken from the flock, and was dragged to sacrifice, and was killed in the evening, and was buried at night; the one who was not broken while on the tree, who did not see dissolution while in the earth, who rose up from the dead, and who raised up mankind from the grave below.²¹

Christ in the Eucharist recapitulates the entire history and liturgy of the Chosen People.

The Eucharist as Sacrament

Let us now reflect on the aspect of the Eucharist as a descending mediation: an efficacious means for the distribution of grace. It is very fitting that Christ united sacrifice and sacrament in the Eucharist, for the same sacrament distributes that grace that was won for us by the sacrifice of Calvary, made present throughout the centuries in the Eucharist.

²¹ Homily on the Passover, nos. 65–71, included in the Office of Readings on Holy Thursday.

The descending sacramental mediation of the Eucharist was most clearly explained in John 6, as Jesus was teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. The crowd asked Jesus for a sign similar to the manna in the wilderness: "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'" (Jn 6:31). Jesus responds by saying:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst."²²

Up until now one could think that Jesus was speaking of Himself as the bread of life in a purely figurative and symbolic sense. He then proceeds to rule out such an interpretation:

"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"²³

At this point, if Jesus meant to speak in a purely figurative manner, He would have made that clear. Instead, He emphasizes still more the literal realism of His words: that His very flesh is to be given to us to consume as "living bread":

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me."²⁴

This discourse, taken in itself, could not be completely understood until the institution of the Eucharist in the Last Supper. Only after the

²² Jn 6:32–35.

²³ Jn 6:48–52.

²⁴ Jn 6:53–57.

Last Supper could the Apostles understand that Christ was giving His Body and His Blood to them to be consumed under the Eucharistic species of bread and wine.

Christ Himself wished to be our spiritual nourishment, just as bread is nourishment for our bodies. Instead of giving grace to man in a purely spiritual and invisible way, Christ wished to communicate grace through a sensible sacrament, a physical sign capable of realizing what it symbolizes.

Christ wished to give us a share in His divine life of glory. What better way to accomplish this than to nourish us with His very Body and Blood, thus communicating to us a constant increase in sanctifying grace—as long as we do not reject it through mortal sin. For sanctifying grace is a share in the divine life.

The Eucharist is thus at one and the same time a medicine against sin and misery, a pledge of future glory, and a means of ever greater union with Christ, present in His Body, Blood, soul, and divinity. St. Ignatius Martyr of Antioch referred to the Eucharist as a “medicine of immortality, the antidote we take in order not to die but to live forever in Jesus Christ.”²⁵

Precisely because it is a sacrament of spiritual nourishment, Christ allows the appearances of bread and wine to continue after transubstantiation has been realized, so that we can be spiritually nourished in the divine life, and progressively united to it, in a form compatible with human nature.

The Eucharist thus realizes the constant yearning of all the saints of the Old Testament for intimate union with God. The Psalmist speaks for Israel when he says: “As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” (Ps 42:1–2). Although we cannot yet behold the face of God on this side of death, we can receive Him in the Eucharist under the veils of the Eucharistic species. Likewise, Isaiah (55:1–3) is referring to the Eucharist when he prophesies: “Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price ... and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.” The Psalmist exclaims: “Taste and see that the Lord is good!” (Ps 34:8).

This aspect of the Eucharist was prefigured above all in the manna given in the desert—food descending from heaven to nourish the Chosen People throughout their forty-year pilgrimage in the wilderness. Nevertheless, as Jesus explained, the manna was merely miraculous food

²⁵ St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians* 20, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 199.

for the body and could not give supernatural life to the soul. As the manna gave physical nourishment in the desert, the Eucharist is meant to be our spiritual nourishment throughout the years of our pilgrimage in the desert of this world. The Eucharist is literally bread from heaven in that it is Jesus Christ, who came from the Father into this world in His Incarnation to become our spiritual sustenance. Some fourteen hundred years would have to pass before this most profound meaning of the manna in the desert could be understood.

The Eucharist as Sacrament of Presence

We have seen that the Eucharist is both a perfect sacrifice and the great sacrament of spiritual nourishment. It is also a sacrament of Christ's perpetual presence in this world, where, even though He has ascended to heaven, He still abides under the veils of the appearances of bread and wine in the Eucharist. This means that God is present in every tabernacle where there is a consecrated host, with a greater presence than that which graced the magnificent Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, which was but a figure of Christ's Eucharistic presence.

In the Old Testament, God revealed that He was present in the Temple in a special way to hear the prayers of Israel, by manifesting a certain sensible glory over the ark and the Temple,²⁶ as He had done on Mt. Sinai²⁷ and in the Tent of Meeting when Moses prayed. This overshadowing presence of God is referred to by Jews as the *shekinah*. The word comes from the Hebrew verb *shachan*: "to dwell, abide."

The visible manifestation of God's presence in the *shekinah* was one of the glories of Israel, showing the nearness of God to Israel, through their prayer and worship,²⁸ their faith, hope, and love. As Moses said to Israel: "What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon Him?" (Deut 4:7).

That nearness of God to Israel is superabundantly perfected in the New Covenant, in which God Incarnate—Body, Blood, soul, and divinity—substantially dwells in all the tabernacles of the world, and whose sacrifice, which opened the heavens, is truly re-presented at every

²⁶ See 2 Chron 7:1-2: "When Solomon had ended his prayer [dedicating the Temple], fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house."

²⁷ See Ex 24:16-17: "The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel."

²⁸ See Solomon's prayer in the dedication of the Temple, in 1 Kings 8:27-30.

Holy Mass, celebrated in innumerable places at every hour of the day. Thus the prophecy of Malachi 1:11 is realized in the Eucharist: "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering."

Finally, the Eucharist, as a sacrament of communion, brings God to dwell more intimately and fully in the souls of the faithful. Through the Eucharist, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit come into our souls as our beloved guest to abide forever, as long as we do not cast out the Beloved through mortal sin.

May the ineffable gifts that have been given to us in the mystery of the Eucharist—the perfect offering of Christ to the Father, and the intimate bond of love by which we are united to God and His people—be our daily treasure, the source of profound joy, and the fulfillment of our highest aspirations.

CHAPTER 8

Jesus as the New Moses

The term *messiah*, translated as *Christ* in Greek, means the “Anointed One.” In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with holy oil as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit necessary for their mission. The Messiah thus was understood to be one anointed with the Holy Spirit in a unique way, such that he would be the supreme prophet, priest, and king. In the last two chapters we reflected on Jesus the Messiah as the High Priest of the New Covenant. Here we focus on Jesus as *the Prophet* of the New Covenant, who perfectly reveals the Father and His will. He is thus a prophet like Moses, but yet greater than Moses. Indeed, if He did not have a prophetic authority greater than Moses, His teaching would be blasphemous presumption.

The New Testament brings out this deep parallelism between Moses and Jesus. Jesus’ relation to Moses is a primary question that every Jew who considers Christianity must pose. This relationship between Moses and Jesus, by the way, is one of the major themes of Pope Benedict XVI’s book, *Jesus of Nazareth*.¹

Jesus as the Prophet Foretold by Moses

In John 5:46, Jesus says to the crowd in the Temple: “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” Where did Moses himself speak of Jesus? Although there are various prophecies of the Messiah in the five books of Moses, the most direct Messianic prophecy given by Moses is in Deuteronomy 18:15–19, in which he speaks of the Messiah (although without naming him as such) as a prophet who will be like Moses himself:

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren—him you shall heed—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, “Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die.” And the Lord said

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

to me, "They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him."

This prophecy alludes to the fact that at the foot of Mt. Sinai, the people of Israel were afraid that they would not be able to bear it if God spoke to them directly, and so they begged God to speak to them through the mediation of Moses.² Here Moses is saying that God will do something similar for Israel in the future. He will raise up a new prophet like Moses to act as a mediator between God and men, whom the people will have to believe and obey in the same way.

At the end of the book of Deuteronomy (34:10–12), this prophecy is alluded to indirectly:

And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great and terrible deeds which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel.

This remained true up until the time of Jesus. Israel had many great and marvelous prophets, but none like Moses, who instituted the Mosaic covenant and was the mediator in the giving of the Torah. The great miracles seen in the liberation of Israel from Egypt were the sign of the truth of the Mosaic covenant and the Torah.

Clearly the new Moses in the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15 should be marked by precisely these characteristics: he should know the Lord face to face as Moses did, be the Revealer of God's will as in the giving of the Torah, and do miraculous works through the power of God like those of Moses.

Furthermore, in order to be a new Moses, the messianic prophet like unto Moses would have to mediate a new covenant with the people. We can thus connect the prophecy of Moses with that of Jeremiah in 31:31–34, who speaks of a new covenant in the days of the Messiah:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took

² See Ex 20:18–19: "Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will hear; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.'"

them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt . . . But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The new Moses will be the one to make a new covenant with the people, not like the Old Covenant written on tablets of stone, for the New Covenant will be written on the heart through the giving of grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This prophecy of the Messiah as the new Moses (Deut 18:15–19) was quoted by St. Peter shortly after Pentecost, when Peter and John cured the man born lame in Acts 3:22–23. Peter said to the people: “Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.’” Shortly afterwards, St. Stephen also cited this prophecy in his discourse before he was stoned, in Acts 7:37.

This prophecy was also in the minds of the people when, after the miracle of the multiplication of loaves, they shouted: “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!” (Jn 6:14). It was also alluded to in Christ’s conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. After she realizes that Jesus is a prophet, she says, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will *show us all things*.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he” (Jn 4:25–26).

This prophecy, finally, was perhaps also alluded to by God the Father speaking out of the cloud at the Transfiguration of Jesus (Mk 9:7): “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.”

What Is a Prophet?

When we speak of Moses and Jesus as prophets, it is important to understand this word in the full sense. A prophet is someone who speaks with divine authority, through a fullness of knowledge that does not have a human origin, but comes from divine illumination. The prophet does not simply foretell the future, although this is one of the things that he does. The prophet reveals God’s will and plan for mankind, uncovering His hidden counsels. Although often this regards the future (or also the past, as in Genesis), it is no less directed to the present, so that the people can know the will of God by which they are to order their lives. In this sense, Moses was the great prophet because it was through him that God revealed the Torah to Israel, by which God’s will for Israel was manifested.

But how is a true prophet to be discerned from a false prophet? As seen above (chapter 1), a true prophet must come with divine credentials, so that it is clear that God has indeed spoken through him. These divine credentials consist in doing works that exceed natural human power. In Moses' case, this consisted in working the stupendous miracles that accompanied the liberation from Egypt. Another guarantee of a true prophet is the gift of prophecy: announcing future events before they occur. Moses himself gives this criterion. After speaking of the new Moses who will arise, he says (Deut 18:21–22):

And if you say in your heart, "How may we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?" When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously, you need not be afraid of him.

In other words, a true prophet must be able to show that God is speaking in him by doing works which exceed the possibilities of unaided human power and intelligence. Theologians call these *motives of credibility*.³ Moses superabundantly fulfilled this criterion with all the miracles of the Exodus. The great prophets of Israel likewise often worked miracles. However, their mission was validated above all by prophecies concerning future events, such as the Babylonian exile and the subsequent return from it.

As mentioned above, this criterion was not fulfilled in a comparable way by Muhammad, who neither claimed to work miracles or give prophecies of future events. It was certainly fulfilled by Jesus, however. His miracles surpassed those of all the preceding prophets, such as Elijah. With regard to prophecy, He not only prophesied His death and Resurrection on the third day, but also the imminent complete destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and, more importantly, promised that the Church He was building on the rock of Peter would not be overcome by the gates of hell, and would last until the end of the world. We see this prophecy fulfilled to this day in the reign of the 264th successor of Peter, Pope Benedict XVI, almost two thousand years later.

Jesus as New Lawgiver: the Sermon on the Mount

Let us now look at how Jesus fulfills the prophecy by which He shall be a prophet like Moses. If Jesus is to be a new Moses, He will have to proclaim God's name to Israel and mankind, seal a new covenant, and give a new law, comparable to the Law of Moses, revealing God's fundamental will for mankind. In fact, as we have seen, the prophecy of

³ See above, chapter 1.

Jeremiah says that the New Covenant will be superior to the Old, in that it will be written on the heart rather than on stone.

The theme of Christ as the new Moses is beautifully brought out in the Sermon on the Mount, in which Christ gives the essence of His moral teaching. This sermon has an importance in the New Testament comparable to the event on Mt. Sinai in the Old, and Joseph Ratzinger refers to it as "the new Torah brought by Jesus."⁴

It is not accidental that before the Sermon, Christ spends the entire night in prayer (see Lk 6:12).⁵ In the morning He chooses the Twelve Apostles and then gives the Sermon, in which He speaks with an authority exceeding that of any rabbi. The very way in which the Sermon is given only makes sense if He is in fact the prophet spoken of by Moses—the new Moses.

In Matthew's account of the Sermon, Jesus begins by promising the kingdom of God and the vision of God as the reward of the fundamental moral and spiritual attitudes which characterize the core of the spirit of Israel: poverty of spirit, meekness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peace-making, and fidelity to the point of martyrdom. He then goes on to say that He does not come to abolish the Law and the prophets, but to fulfill them.⁶ On this basis He proceeds to show the full implications of some of the key commandments of the Law. The form of speech that He uses shows that He is speaking with an authority no less than that of Moses: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' *But I say to you* that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council" (Mt 5:21–22). Of course this does not abrogate the fifth commandment, but rather amplifies it and extends its implications.

He does the same with regard to the sixth commandment:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery."
But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.... It was also said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce."
But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife,

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 68.

⁵ Lk 6:12–13: "In these days he went out to the mountain to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles."

⁶ Mt 5:17: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them."

except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.⁷

No rabbi could speak like this. St. Matthew (7:28–29) calls attention to this at the end of the sermon, saying: “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”

Ratzinger comments:

Jesus’ “I” is accorded a status that no teacher of the Law can legitimately allow himself. The crowd feels this—Matthew tells us explicitly that the people “were alarmed” at his way of teaching. He teaches not as the rabbis do, but as one who has “authority.” Obviously, this does not refer to the rhetorical quality of Jesus’ discourses, but rather to the open claim that he himself is on the same exalted level as the Lawgiver—as God. The people’s “alarm” . . . is precisely over the fact that a human being dares to speak with the authority of God. Either he is misappropriating God’s majesty—which would be terrible—or else, and this seems almost inconceivable, he really does stand on the same exalted level as God.⁸

Jacob Neusner, a rabbi and great Jewish scholar, has written an interesting book called *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus*,⁹ in which the rabbi imagines being present at the Sermon on the Mount, and states why he would not have followed Jesus. He writes:

I am troubled not so much by the message, though I might take exception to this or that, as I am by the messenger. The reason is that, in form these statements are jarring. Standing on the mountain, Jesus’ use of language, “You have heard that it was said, . . . but I say to you . . .” contrasts strikingly with Moses’ language at Mount Sinai. Sages, we saw, say things in their own names, but without claiming to improve on the Torah. The prophet, Moses, speaks not in his own name but in God’s name, saying what God has told him to say. Jesus speaks not as a sage nor as a prophet. Moses speaks as God’s prophet, in God’s name, for God’s purpose. So how am I to respond to this “I,” who pointedly contrasts what I have heard with what he says.¹⁰

⁷ Mt 5:27–32.

⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 102–3.

⁹ It is interesting to note that Pope Benedict gives an important place to Rabbi Neusner in *Jesus of Nazareth*.

¹⁰ Jacob Neusner, *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 47.

Neusner imagines himself in dialogue with a master rabbi of ancient Israel about the teaching of Jesus. He compares Jesus' teaching to a text of the Babylonian Talmud, seeking the most fundamental precepts of the Law. The master asks Neusner,

He: "So, is this what the sage, Jesus, had to say?"

I: "Not exactly, but close."

He: "What did he leave out?"

I: "Nothing."

He: "Then what did he add?"

I: "Himself." . . .

He: "Well, why so troubled this evening?"

I: "Because I really believe there is a difference between 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy' and 'If you would be perfect, go, sell all you have and come, follow me.'"

He: "I guess then it really depends on who the 'me' is."¹¹

Neusner has rightly seen that Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount and in His response to the rich young man (Mt 19:21), and in many other places, are a clear profession of His divinity. Only God can legislate in His own name, and say that sanctification consists in following Him. If Jesus is not God, then He would indeed be neither a sage nor a prophet, but a blasphemer. The real question is entirely one of whether Jesus' claim is worthy of faith. For this reason, when asked by the crowds how they could do the works of God, Jesus replies: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (Jn 6:29).

However, although Jesus, unlike Moses, speaks in His own name, He also speaks in the name of His Father, for He proclaims that He and the Father are one (Jn 10:30). This proclamation indeed is the essence of the revelation of the Torah of Jesus. The new Moses is Himself the *living Torah*, precisely because He is the Son of God made man. Hence imitation of Christ is the same as imitation of the will of God, which is precisely the purpose of the Torah. Jesus does not destroy or contradict the Torah by legislating in His own name, but rather shows the heart and soul of the Torah.

For this reason the Sermon on the Mount does not aim at giving detailed precepts with particular punishments and sanctions. It is not intended to be a new legal code replacing the Law of Moses. Rather, it shows the spirit of the Ten Commandments and of the moral law, which lies at the heart of the Torah. That spirit is the spirit of Jesus Himself, perfectly revealed in the beatitudes.

¹¹ Ibid., 108-9.

When Jesus says that He came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it, this is true above all of the moral law, summed up in the Ten Commandments.¹² He came to perfect our understanding of those Commandments and our ability to put them in practice through His grace (sanctifying grace and actual grace).

However, Jesus did not come to give particular judicial precepts as Moses did. Neusner finds this a grave defect in Jesus' teaching. However, it makes perfect sense when one realizes that the Messiah came to teach *all nations* for all times until the end of the world. It is impossible to give a particular judicial legislation that is perfectly suited for all nations and for all times and places. The Torah of Jesus could not include a detailed judicial law. That was left for the civil laws of nations and for the canon law of the Church. Such an arrangement, by the way, was a complete novelty in the world at that time. Ratzinger comments:

A literal application of Israel's social order to the people of all nations would have been tantamount to a denial of the universality of the growing community of God. Paul saw this with perfect clarity.

The Torah of the messiah could not be like that. Nor is it, as the Sermon on the Mount shows—and likewise the whole dialogue with Rabbi Neusner. . . . Concrete juridical and social forms and political arrangements are no longer treated as a sacred law that is fixed *ad litteram* for all times and so for all peoples. The decisive thing is the underlying communion of will with God given by Jesus. It frees men and nations to discover what aspects of political and social order accord with this communion of will and so to work out their own juridical arrangements. The absence of the whole social dimension in Jesus' preaching, which Neusner discerningly critiques from a Jewish perspective, includes, but also conceals, an epoch-making event in world history that has not occurred as such in any other culture: The concrete political and social order is released from the directly sacred realm, from theocratic legislation, and is transferred to the freedom of man, whom Jesus has established in God's will and taught thereby to see the right and the good.¹³

If we compare Christianity with Islam, we immediately see this difference. Muhammad and his disciples gave the Muslim world a law

¹² As seen in vol. 1 of this series, *The Mystery of Israel and the Church: Figure and Fulfillment*, chapter 8, St. Thomas Aquinas divides the Law of Moses into three parts: the moral law, the ceremonial law, and judicial precepts, which served as a kind of civil law for ancient Israel, giving particular sanctions and legal procedures.

¹³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 118.

containing a detailed judicial legislation, called Shariah law (molded by the experience of Arabia in the seventh century).

With regard to the ceremonial law, Christ brought it to its perfect fulfillment by instituting the seven sacraments, which form the center of the liturgy. Nevertheless, the development of that liturgy is left to the Church, in which it can grow and evolve organically over time, analogously with the development of canon law in the Church.

In summary, the new Torah of Christ does not abolish the Torah of Sinai, but strengthens it in two fundamental ways. Christ gives us Himself as the living Torah, as the living example of the beatitudes, which show the heart of the Torah. Secondly, by instituting the sacraments, He gives to His Church the grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit necessary to put the living Torah into practice ever more fully.

Jesus Compared to Moses

A profound comparison between Moses and Jesus as prophets is made in the first three chapters of the Letter to the Hebrews. The Letter begins by comparing God's Revelation in the Old and the New Covenants:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

In the Old Testament, God spoke progressively in different ways through prophets who were intermediaries between man and God. However, in the fullness of time, God has spoken through His divine Son, through whom He created the world. Revelation reaches its fullness when spoken through the mouth of the Son of God made flesh. In Christ, God speaks to man directly without any mediator distinct from Himself, through the human nature He took on in the Incarnation. The very one who spoke the Sermon on the Mount is He who "upholds the universe by his word of power."

This was not the case in the revelation on Mt. Sinai. God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush and on Mt. Sinai through the mediation of angels (the "angel of the Lord"), and then Moses in turn spoke to Israel.¹⁴ In the New Testament, God Himself speaks directly to

¹⁴ See Acts 7:30, 38: "Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. . . . This is he who

man. In other words, the Son of God made man is a better mediator than Moses could possibly be, with all due respect. For Moses was a mere man, although gifted with a revelation and a mission greater than any previously received by man, which he accomplished with exemplary fidelity and humility.

Hebrews 3:1–6 returns to this comparison:

Consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession. He was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in God's house. Yet Jesus has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses as the builder of a house has more honor than the house. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ was faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope.

Moses was a faithful servant of the Lord, faithful in revealing and carrying out God's will regarding the house of Israel. Jesus, however, is not only a faithful servant, but the Son and natural heir to whom the house belongs, as well as its Builder.¹⁵

Moses' Relation with God as the Center of His Mission

Moses' activity as the great prophet of Israel was made possible through the fact that he conversed with God as with a friend. Many texts show this to us. We see it first in Exodus 3–4 in the episode of the burning bush, in which God called Moses to liberate Israel, and revealed His sacred name. We see it more powerfully still in the theophany on Mt. Sinai,¹⁶ in which God spoke to Moses for forty days and nights. After that theophany Moses continued to speak with the Lord in the tent of meeting, as described in Exodus 33:9–11: "When Moses entered the

was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living oracles to give to us." In Acts 7:53, St. Stephen says that the Torah was delivered to Moses through the mediation of angels.

¹⁵ For further development of this theme, see Albert Vanhoye, *Old Testament Priests and the New Priest According to the New Testament*, trans. Bernard Orchard (Petersham, MA: St. Bede's Publications: 1986).

¹⁶ See Ex 24:16–18: "The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. And Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights."

tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. . . . Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."

An example of this conversation is given to us in the next verses of this chapter (Ex 33:13-17). Moses asked God to show him, for the glory of God's name, how he was to lead Israel to the Promised Land, and pleaded for God to accompany them as He had through the pillar of fire and cloud, which God then promised to do:

"Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found favor in thy sight, show me now thy ways, that I may know thee and find favor in thy sight. Consider too that this nation is thy people." And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." And he said to him, "If thy presence will not go with me, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in thy sight, I and thy people? Is it not in thy going with us, so that we are distinct, I and thy people, from all other people that are upon the face of the earth?" And the Lord said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."

We can see from this that Moses did not see the very essence of God. If he did, he would not ask God to reveal His ways to him, for all would have been revealed. Thus the fact that Scripture says that God spoke to Moses "face to face" does not mean that Moses received the beatific vision itself (as do the blessed in heaven). Rather, he received infused prophetic knowledge from God in the intimacy of prayer, mediated by angelic appearances. The expression "face to face" implies a degree of intimacy with God that is extraordinary, and is a figure of Jesus' face-to-face knowledge of the Father. Nevertheless, Moses' vision remained on the level of a certain obscurity characteristic of faith.

This obscurity is symbolized perhaps in the cloud which covered Sinai and the tent of meeting, and is made clear by the fact that Moses, after speaking with God in this way, asked to "see His glory." If Moses had actually seen the beatific vision of God's essence on Mt. Sinai, then he would not have asked to see God's glory, as if it were something that still remained hidden from him. And what does God reply to this most audacious request? He replies that no man can see His glory while continuing to live in this life. Nevertheless, He shows Moses His "back," which seems to consist in knowledge of His mercy. The dialogue is given in Exodus 33:18-23:

Moses said, "I pray thee, show me thy glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be

gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live." And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen."

In other words, Moses did not receive the full vision of God that we hope to receive in heaven, but rather some angelic vision—something intermediate between the hiddenness of God in this life and the fullness of vision in heaven. St. Paul speaks of this kind of prophetic vision in 1 Corinthians 13:9–12, in which he contrasts the enigmatic visions of the prophets with the perfection of the beatific vision that we hope for:

For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.

Moses too saw through a mirror darkly, although his prophecy was far more fundamental for Israel than that of all the later prophets.

Christ's Full Vision of God Enables Him to Reveal the Father

This brings us to the question of Christ's knowledge of the Father. If Jesus is the prophet predicted by Moses who "will be like him," as the Church believes, then He must have received a singular fullness of revelation, likewise speaking to God "face to face," and in a fuller sense. For what need would there be of a new Moses if his prophecy was not to exceed his predecessor? As the sacred name of God was revealed to Moses in the burning bush, so the new Moses must contemplate God's sacred name in a new and deeper way and reveal it to the world.

Joseph Ratzinger addresses this question in *Jesus of Nazareth*:

Although Moses' immediate relation to God makes him the great mediator of Revelation, the mediator of the Covenant, it has its limits. He does not behold God's face, even though he is permitted to enter into the cloud of God's presence and to speak with God as a friend. The promise of a "prophet like me" thus implicitly contains an even greater expectation: that the last prophet, the new Moses, will be granted what was refused to the first one—a real, immediate vision of the face of God, and thus the ability to speak entirely from seeing, not just from looking at God's back. This naturally entails the further expectation that the new Moses will be

the mediator of a greater covenant than the one that Moses was able to bring down from Sinai.¹⁷

How is this borne out in the New Testament? What is the divine name revealed by Jesus to the world? He does not reveal a new name like the Tetragrammaton, but rather He reveals to Israel and to the world that God is Father in a new and unheard-of way.¹⁸ The Son reveals that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This revelation of the Trinity comes from a fullness of revelation, a face-to-face vision greater than that of Moses. The Gospels are full of references to Christ's contemplation of the Father. At the end of the prologue to John's Gospel, after comparing Jesus to Moses, John goes on to say: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (Jn 1:18).

In His nocturnal dialogue with Nicodemus, Christ makes a strong assertion of His vision. After revealing the necessity of Baptism as a birth from above, Nicodemus asks how this can be. Jesus answers with a mysterious rebuke:

Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we *know*, and bear witness to what we have *seen*; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man.¹⁹

The Messiah is able to reveal the new Torah to Israel because He sees the Father, having come forth from the Father. Similarly, in Jn 6:46, Jesus says: "Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has *seen the Father*."²⁰

Matthew (11:25–27) and Luke also record a saying of Jesus referring to His unique fullness of knowledge of the Father. Jesus rejoices in the Holy Spirit and says (Lk 10:21–22):

¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 5–6.

¹⁸ See CCC 240: "Jesus revealed that God is Father in an unheard-of sense: he is Father not only in being Creator; he is eternally Father in relation to his only Son, who is eternally Son only in relation to his Father."

¹⁹ See also Jn 3:32–35: "He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony; he who receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit; the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand."

²⁰ See also Jn 5:19: "Amen, amen, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he *sees* the Father doing."

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

The Son is the great prophet of the New Covenant, for He sees the Father face to face, and thus can reveal Him to “babes,” those who have the humility of faith. Through faith and Baptism, we become sons of God in the Son, who shares His filial knowledge with us and gives us His Spirit, by which “we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom 8:15).

Three Types of Knowledge in Christ’s Human Soul

Did Christ have any other kind of knowledge than that which He knew from the beatific vision? In accordance with the testimony of the Gospels and the apostolic Tradition, St. Thomas Aquinas and other Doctors of the Church find four kinds of knowledge in Christ.

First of all, there is the divine knowledge, the knowledge of the Blessed Trinity, which is omniscient and eternal. Christ had this knowledge in His divine nature. However, what about Christ’s human soul? Was it also omniscient in the same way? The answer is no, for Christ’s human soul was finite and in time.

St. Thomas distinguishes *three kinds of knowledge in Christ’s human soul*. First of all, Christ had *acquired knowledge* through human experience, learning, and reasoning, just as we do, for He was perfect man. This knowledge would have grown through time, as in us. For this reason, Hebrews 5:8 says that “although he was a Son, he *learned* obedience through what he suffered.” It is likewise in this sense that Luke (2:52) says that “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature.”²¹

In addition to this acquired knowledge, Christ also clearly received *infused prophetic knowledge*. God can enlighten our minds directly, infusing knowledge that we didn’t acquire through experience or reasoning. It is in this way that God enlightened the minds of the prophets with His revelation. All the prophets of the Old Testament received infused knowledge. Moses, for example, clearly received infused knowledge of the early history of mankind recounted in Genesis, and of God’s will for the legislation of the Chosen People, etc. Prophecy, by definition, involves the reception of infused knowledge from God. Many saints in the life of the Church have also received infused knowledge. It is well

²¹ See CCC 472.

known that saints like the Curé of Ars and St. Pio of Pietrelcina received infused knowledge of the state of the souls of their penitents.

We know from the Scriptures that Christ could perfectly read the secrets of hearts, and that He knew future events such as His Passion, death, and Resurrection on the third day, and the future destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. His teaching in the Gospels, as in the Sermon on the Mount, clearly shows a knowledge that goes beyond what can be acquired by study. Nor do we have any indication in the Gospels that Christ studied with other rabbis. On the contrary, there is evidence that He did not, for the people of Nazareth and Jerusalem marveled that He spoke as He did without having studied: "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" (Jn 7:15). So clearly it is necessary to think that Christ had all the gifts of infused knowledge, and in the highest degree, such that every gift of supernatural knowledge distributed to other saints and prophets was possessed more perfectly by the human soul of Christ Himself.

Is this all? Did Christ have any knowledge in His human intellect beyond the reach even of infused knowledge? Is there any knowledge beyond infused knowledge? Yes. Infused knowledge arises when God directly puts concepts and judgments into our minds. However, it is not possible to know God as He is, face to face, with this kind of infused knowledge, for God's ineffable essence cannot be perfectly known—face to face—through any created concept or judgment, even the highest and most sublime prophetic insights.

Above all infused knowledge there is the vision of God face to face, the *beatific vision*, in which the Word of God Himself will be the "medium" for our knowledge of God, and thus we shall know Him as He is. There is an infinite gap between the highest infused contemplation of the saints and the vision of God, which will be our essential beatitude in heaven.

Did any saint ever receive the beatific vision during this earthly life? Perhaps St. Paul received this most sublime of all gifts, for in his second letter to the Corinthians (12:2-4) he says: "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows . . . and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter." Whether this refers to the beatific vision is uncertain.

What about Christ? St. Thomas Aquinas, together with all other medieval theologians (and with practically all Scholastic theologians up until the twentieth century), taught that Christ, during His entire earthly life, enjoyed the beatific vision. In this vision, His human intellect knew God and all things—the secrets of hearts and human history—in the Word of God, which is indeed Himself. St. Thomas explains this by a

simple principle. Christ came to give supernatural gifts to men. However, you cannot give what you do not have. The cause must always be greater than or at least equal to the effect produced. Everything that Christ came to give us must first have been received in His own human soul, by which His humanity was perfected to be the perfect Redeemer and Revealer of the Father.²²

Since Christ came to give us sanctifying grace and charity, then He must have first had the perfection of grace and charity in His humanity. Since He came to give us the beatific vision and the fullness of revelation, then He must have first had that fullness of revelation and beatific vision in His own humanity. After all, His humanity was already united with God in a still higher union: the hypostatic union, by which His humanity is assumed by the Person of the Son. It is unreasonable to grant Christ's humanity the hypostatic union with the Word, and deny His intellect the union of the beatific vision of the Word, which is Himself. As St. Paul wrote to the Colossians (2:3), in Christ "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Furthermore, this knowledge was necessary for Christ to be able to know who He was, and to communicate to us the ultimate revelation of God. He spoke of heavenly mysteries not as something dimly grasped in the darkness of faith, but as something clearly known and seen. Christ, as the Gospels present Him, did not have faith, for He had something more: *vision*. This knowledge of the beatific vision is what enables Christ to say that He *knows* the Father, and thus can reveal Him to men as the "author and finisher of our faith."²³ Christ could not have declared the mystery of the Trinity to us as He did if He had not seen it in His human intellect through the beatific vision.

Let us look at some consequences of this doctrine. It follows that Christ did not suddenly discover His mission and identity as He grew up, but had it in a mysterious way from the beginning. It is indeed true that Christ grew in His acquired experiential knowledge from His experience of life. However, clear knowledge of His mission and identity could not come from acquired knowledge, but only from the beatific vision, from *seeing the Word* which is Himself. In fact, we see the twelve-year-old Jesus already with the certainty of that identity, when He says: "Did you not know that I must be in *my Father's* house?" (Lk 2:49).

It also follows that Christ did not have the virtue of faith, for faith is of things *unseen*. The beatific vision is incompatible with faith. Christ, like the blessed in heaven, had vision, which is better than faith and will

²² See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* III, q. 9, a. 2: "It was necessary that the beatific knowledge, which consists in the vision of God, should belong to Christ pre-eminently, since the cause ought always to be more efficacious than the effect."

²³ Heb 12:2, Douay-Rheims translation.

replace it. Christ is the *author* of faith (Heb 12:2), but not a recipient of it, as Moses and the other prophets were.

Furthermore, the beatific vision enabled Christ's human intellect to know in the Word all the members of His Mystical Body throughout the ages. This has great ecclesiological and pastoral significance. Christ, during His earthly life, was bound to each one of us with intimate knowledge and love. St. Paul says in Galatians 2:20: "I live by faith in the Son of God, who *loved me* and gave Himself *for me*." When Christ suffered for us on the Cross, He had St. Paul in mind with immense love. This is no less true of *each one of us*. We could all say the same. Christ loved *me* and gave Himself *for me*. Yet how could He love billions of people still to be born, all at once, while in agony in Gethsemane and on Calvary? Of course this was naturally impossible for the human intellect, but was made possible through the beatific vision. During the Passion, the vision was not so "beatific," so to speak, for He chose to focus on all the sins of the world, all the infidelities to grace, all the betrayals, all the abominations of history, all the horrors of sadism, inhumanity, and ingratitude. Through this vision of the horror of all human sins, Christ experienced the supreme desolation of feeling abandoned by His Father. However, He also saw our conversions, our good will, our prayers, and our love, though at the time of His Passion He chose to miraculously suspend all comfort, in order to experience the depths of suffering.²⁴

Pius XII has explained this doctrine magnificently in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (On the Mystical Body of Christ), written in 1943:

Now the only-begotten Son of God embraced us in His infinite knowledge and undying love even before the world began. And that He might give a visible and exceedingly beautiful expression to this love, He assumed our nature in hypostatic union: hence . . . "in Christ our own flesh loves us." But the knowledge and love of our Divine Redeemer, of which we were the object from the first moment of His Incarnation, exceed all the human intellect can hope to grasp. For hardly was He conceived in the womb of the Mother of God, when He *began to enjoy the beatific vision, and in that vision all the members of His Mystical Body were continually and unceasingly present to Him, and He embraced them with His redeeming love*. O marvelous condescension of divine love for us! O inestimable dispensation of boundless charity. *In the crib, on the Cross, in the unending glory of the Father, Christ has all the members of the Church present before Him and united to Him in a much clearer and more loving*

²⁴ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST III*, q. 46, a. 6 and 8.

manner than that of a mother who clasps her child to her breast, or than that with which a man knows and loves himself.²⁵

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 473–74 teaches the same doctrine:

This truly human knowledge of God's Son expressed the divine life of his person. "The human nature of God's Son, not by itself but by its union with the Word, knew and showed forth in itself everything that pertains to God." Such is first of all the case with the intimate and immediate knowledge that the Son of God made man has of his Father. The Son in his human knowledge also showed the divine penetration he had into the secret thoughts of human hearts.

By its union to the divine wisdom in the person of the Word incarnate, Christ enjoyed in his human knowledge the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans he had come to reveal.²⁶

It is frequently objected to this that Christ Himself said that He did not know the day nor the hour of His Second Coming.²⁷ He certainly did not know it through His acquired experiential knowledge. St. Gregory the Great authoritatively taught that Jesus said He did not know the day of judgment because it did not form part of His prophetic mission to reveal it to the Church, so that she would always remain vigilant in expectation.²⁸ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 474 makes the same point: "What he admitted to not knowing in this area, he elsewhere declared himself not sent to reveal."²⁹

In summary, Christ is indeed the prophet spoken of by Moses who would be like him. However, just as Christ is high priest in a far higher way than Aaron, offering the perfect sacrifice for all the sins of the world, so He is prophet in a far higher way than Moses, setting the seal

²⁵ Pius XII, encyclical *Mystici Corporis* 75 (italics mine).

²⁶ See also CCC 478: "Jesus knew and loved us each and all during his life, his agony, and his Passion and gave himself up for each one of us." This knowledge of each individual human being in Jesus' human soul presupposes that He had the vision of God.

²⁷ Mk 13:32: "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray."

²⁸ Gregory the Great, Epistle 39 to Eulogius, Patriarch of Alexandria, DS 474–75 (D 248): "The omnipotent Son says He does not know the day which He causes not to be known, not because He himself is ignorant of it, but because He does not permit it to be known at all. . . . The Only-begotten having been incarnate, and made perfect man for us, in His human nature indeed did know the day and the hour of judgment, but nevertheless He did not know this *from* His human nature."

²⁹ See Acts 1:7: "He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.'"

on all vision and prophecy,³⁰ and fulfilling—under the veil of faith—all the aspirations of Israel for knowledge of God. Pope Benedict has stated this beautifully:

The promise to Moses is fulfilled superabundantly, in the overflowinglavish way in which God is accustomed to bestow his gifts. The One who has come is more than Moses, more than a prophet. He is the Son. And that is why grace and truth now come to light, not in order to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it.³¹

The yearning of Israel is summed up in the request of Philip after the Last Supper: "Show us the Father and we shall be satisfied."³² Jesus replies: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father." Nevertheless, despite the fullness of Christ's revelation, in this life we see the Father and the Son only in the darkness of faith, and we hope with inexpressible longing for heaven where we shall "see Him as He is."³³

³⁰ See Dan 9:24.

³¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 236.

³² Jn 14:8–9.

³³ 1 Jn 3:2.

CHAPTER 9

The Revelation of the Trinity in the Old and New Testaments

In the last chapter we looked at Jesus as the new Moses, as prophesied by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15, and emphasized the parallel between the missions of Moses and Jesus. Both were sent to mediate a covenant between God and man, to reveal God's will to Israel, and through Israel, to the world. Both had a mission that was based on a unique contemplation of God, described as "face to face." We noted that the contemplation of Jesus exceeded that of Moses, just as the New Covenant transcends the scope of that given through Moses.

We also saw that the prophetic activity of Moses began when he received the revelation of the name of God in the burning bush. Moses went on to reveal to Israel the sanctity of God through the events of the Exodus and through the sanctity of the Mosaic Law. We said that the new Moses, if he is to truly parallel the figure of Moses, would also have to reveal to Israel the secret name of God in a new and higher way. Christ does this, above all, through the revelation of the mystery of the Trinity. Christ revealed to Israel that God is Father, not just in relation to His creation, but in Himself. He is also the Son and the Spirit of Love. Jesus revealed that God has an inner life of His own from all eternity, and that life is one of love and communion between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the end of the Last Supper, Christ prayed: "Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in *thy love for me before the foundation of the world*. O righteous Father, . . . I *made known to them thy name*, and I will make it known" (Jn 17:25-26).

Secondly, Jesus revealed that "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Jesus revealed that not only does God have an inner life of communion, but that communion has stepped into our world with the Incarnation of the Son of God in the womb of a daughter of Zion, the Virgin Mary, through the working of the Holy Spirit. In other words, Jesus revealed the secret name of God by revealing the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation. These mysteries are intimately linked. It is impossible to grasp the meaning of

the Incarnation without having some understanding of the mystery of the Trinity. Christ reveals both mysteries, as well as the sending of the Holy Spirit.

Clearly, for Jews considering Christianity, the most difficult Christian doctrines are those of the Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God.

The Trinity in the Old Testament

We have seen¹ that the calling of Abraham and the formation of the Chosen People were ordered to the Incarnation of the Son of God. Thus the election of Israel was also ordered to the revelation of the Blessed Trinity, and we should expect to find hints of this doctrine in God's self-revelation to Israel.

The Fathers of the Church often affirmed the principle that what is revealed explicitly in the New Testament is present in a veiled manner in the Old. Thus the Trinity and the Incarnation—the central mysteries of the New Covenant—were present in a veiled way in the Old.

We may ask why this is the case. Why did God not reveal the Incarnation and the Trinity in a clear and explicit way from the beginning of God's revelation to Israel through Abraham and Moses? The general answer is that God's communication to mankind is true pedagogy. Every educator knows that you cannot teach everything all at once. Education must be imparted gradually by increments, as the students are formed progressively by each successive instruction.

Philosophers have an axiom: everything received is received according to the capacity of the receiver. A small child has a different capacity of reception from that of a teenager, whose capacity differs from that of a person in his twenties, etc.

God revealed Himself to Israel progressively, as Israel matured through her two-thousand-year history from Abraham to Jesus. That revelation centered on two fundamental elements: monotheism and the Messianic hope, which implicitly contained the revelation of the Trinity. Nevertheless, an explicit revelation of the Trinity from the beginning could have put the revelation of monotheism in jeopardy, tempting Israel to think of the Trinity as three gods. We can see how dangerous the threat of polytheistic belief was, by considering that Israel was the only nation at that point in world history to whom it was given to understand the oneness of God.

As we know, the Old Testament's revelation of God centers on the great message of monotheism, as proclaimed in Deuteronomy 6:4–5: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the

¹ Vol. 1 of this series, *Mystery of Israel and the Church: Figure and Fulfillment*, ch. 1.

Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." God wished this most fundamental message to be firmly consolidated—through a history of two millennia—before enriching Israel with the explicit revelation of the mystery of the Trinity.

Fittingness of the Doctrine of the Trinity

Before we look at texts in the Old and New Testament, it is good to think about the fittingness of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The oneness of God is on a different plane from the mystery of the Trinity, for it can be grasped by reason alone, without the aid of Revelation. If there were more than the one God, then the multiple gods would have to differ in something, as different human beings differ from one another. In order for there to be different gods, one would have to have something that the other lacked. However, God is the First Cause of all things and the Supreme Being. If He lacked something He would not be God. There can only be one Supreme Being. Furthermore, God revealed to Moses that He is *He who is*: the absolute fullness of all being, and the only source of all created being. There can be only one "He who is." A derivative or second tier god is simply not God, but would be a creature.

However, the fact that God is supremely one does not mean that God is one in the sense of being *solitary*. We naturally grasp that oneness is a great good. However, solitariness is not a good thing.

Here we can make use of the general principle that since God is the source of all good and all perfection, it follows that we must attribute to God everything that we know to be good (through our experience) while subtracting from Him all limitation.

In our experience, we grasp that unity or oneness is a perfection. The greater the oneness, the more perfect the individual identity. However, it is not good for a personal being to be solitary, without communion. This truth was experienced by Adam in the Garden of Eden, in his original solitude before the creation of Eve, and we too experience it in our own lives. A personal being is one capable of knowing and loving, and one who only finds his perfection in knowing and loving, which culminates in the sincere gift of self to the beloved. Knowing alone is insufficient, for the operation of knowing the good is ordered towards loving it and giving oneself to it. If a person does not do this, his life is frustrated. John Paul II has expressed this beautifully in *Redemptor hominis* 10:

Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not

experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This . . . is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself."

God, who is pure act, must be infinite love, realized in its highest form. The highest form of love is love of benevolence—willing the good for another in such a way that we give ourselves in some way to the other. Such a love implies a plurality of persons.

If God were a solitary God, without interpersonal communion in His own nature, then two unfitting consequences would follow. First of all, God would be deprived of the possibility of self-giving love in His own inner divine life. It would then follow that God would be dependent on creatures to realize this activity of love. Both possibilities seem incompatible with God's nature.

John Paul II has expressed the fittingness of the doctrine of the Trinity as follows: "It has been said, in a beautiful and profound way, that our God in his deepest mystery is not a solitude, but a family, since he has in himself fatherhood, sonship, and the essence of the family, which is love."²

This insight is part of the Christian tradition. In one of the first medieval Summas we find the following argument for the fittingness of the Trinity:

In the Supreme Good there was supreme beatitude from all eternity. Therefore there was also supreme joy. But nothing is more pleasing and joyful than mutual charity, because "the possession of anything without a partner can never be joyful."³ Therefore mutual charity must have been in the supreme good from all eternity. For where there was supreme beatitude and joyfulness, mutual charity certainly could not have been lacking, without which nothing can be most pleasing, most joyful. But mutual charity cannot exist except among a plurality of persons. Therefore from all eternity there was a plurality of persons in the supreme good or divinity.⁴

Joseph Ratzinger has also made an interesting reflection on this topic in his *Introduction to Christianity*:

Although to us, the nondivine, it (God) is one and single, the one and only divine as opposed to all that is not divine; nevertheless in

² John Paul II, Homily of January 28, 1979, at Puebla.

³ Seneca, Epistle 6 to Lucilius; see also St. Augustine, *The City of God* 15.5.

⁴ William of Auxerre, *Summa aurea Magistri Guillelmi Altissiodorensis*, ed. Jean Ribailier (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1980), 1.3.30 (my translation).

itself it is truly fullness and plurality, so that creaturely unity and plurality are both in the same degree a likeness and a share of the divine. Not only unity is divine; plurality, too, is something primordial and has its inner ground in God himself.... This has a further important consequence. To him who believes in God as tri-une, *the highest unity is not the unity of inflexible monotony*. The model of unity or oneness toward which one should strive is consequently not the indivisibility of the atom, the smallest unity, which cannot be divided up any further; *the authentic acme of unity is the unity created by love. The multi-unity that grows in love is a more radical, truer unity than the unity of the "atom."*⁵

Furthermore, the very revelation of Deuteronomy 6:4–5 is also a sign that God is not *solitary*. For the revelation of the oneness of God is coupled with the revelation of the great commandment of love: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." However, the commandments of God all ultimately involve an imitation of the holiness of God. Since God is holy, Israel is to be holy (Lev 19:2). Since God is infinitely just, Israel must be just in all its dealings. Therefore, if Israel is commanded to love God (and one's neighbor as oneself), this too must be an imitation of God—it must be because God Himself does this first in an infinitely higher way. The supreme double commandment of love must be based on a divine exemplar of Love. This divine love cannot consist solely in God's love for creation, for God existed for all eternity before creating the world, and does not need the world in order for Him to be the perfection of Love.

Revelation of the Mystery of the Trinity

The Trinity in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the mystery of the Holy Trinity was not openly and clearly revealed, but was manifested in a hidden manner. In the wisdom literature (Proverbs, Sirach, and Wisdom), Wisdom is spoken of in such a way as to be distinct in person from the Father, but yet given divine prerogatives (eternal, principle of creation, principle of sanctification). In the book of Proverbs (8:22–31), there is a mysterious passage about the divine *Wisdom*, who speaks as follows:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways,
before he made anything from the beginning.
I was set up from eternity,

⁵ *Introduction to Christianity*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 178–79 (my emphasis).

and of old before the earth was made.
 The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived,
 Neither had the fountains of waters as yet sprung out.
 The mountains with their huge bulk had not as yet been
 established;
 before the hills I was brought forth.
 He had not yet made the earth, nor the rivers, nor the poles of the
 world.
 When he prepared the heavens, I was present;
 when with a certain law and compass he enclosed the depths.
 When he established the sky above, and poised the fountains of
 waters,
 when he compassed the sea with its bounds, and set a law to the
 waters that they should not pass their limits; when he balanced the
 foundations of the earth.
 I was with him forming all things,
 and was delighted every day, playing before him at all times;
 Playing in the world;
 and my delights were to be with the children of men.⁶

God's Wisdom is presented as distinct from the Father, for He delights in the Father and the Father delights in Him. He is distinct, furthermore, by being *begotten*, *conceived*, or *brought forth* from God. Yet, while coming forth from the Father, He shares in all the attributes of the Father, for He is co-eternal with Him. Although the divine Wisdom is not here called the Son of God, this is nevertheless implied by speaking of wisdom as begotten, conceived, and brought forth. This image is further reinforced by speaking of wisdom as "playing in the world," as if He were a child who delights in the work of His Father, especially in man made in God's image.

This revelation of the divine Wisdom as distinct from the Father and yet co-eternal with Him is also present in Sirach 24:5-7: "I came out of the mouth of the most High, the firstborn before all creatures. . . I dwelt in the highest places, and my throne is in a pillar of a cloud."⁷ Here the divine Wisdom is still more clearly identified as the Son of God: God's "firstborn" before all creation.

Wisdom is also spoken of in a similar way in the book of the Wisdom of Solomon. Although, like Sirach, it was not finally included in the Hebrew canon of Scripture, Jews regard it as a venerable and holy book, and it was included by them in the Greek translation of the Old Testament from before the time of Christ. In Wisdom 7:24-30 we read:

⁶ Douay-Rheims version.

⁷ Ibid.

For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a *breath of the power of God*, and a *pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty*; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a *reflection of eternal light*, a *spotless mirror of the working of God*, and an *image of his goodness*. Though she is but one, she *can do all things*, and while remaining in herself, she *renews all things*; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the man who lives with wisdom. For she is *more beautiful than the sun*, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

In this text, the divine Wisdom is portrayed as coming forth from God the Father in various ways. Wisdom comes forth as "a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty." Wisdom is a "reflection of the eternal light" of the Father, a "spotless mirror" of His glory, an "image of His goodness." Yet at the same time Wisdom is the Creator, as the Father is, for it is said that Wisdom is "the fashioner of all things," who also "renews all things." Remaining one, Wisdom causes the multiplicity of creatures and sanctifies the saints and prophets. Like the Father, Wisdom is superior to the light and "more beautiful than the sun," for these are His creations.

If we take these words at their face value, they lead to the conclusion formulated in the Council of Nicaea in the Nicene Creed: the divine Wisdom is "God from God, light from light, true God from true God." For if Wisdom is truly a spotless mirror and a perfect reflection of God the Father, then Wisdom must be God as the Father is God. Otherwise Wisdom would not reflect God perfectly. Wisdom must likewise be Creator as the Father; omnipotent as the Father; eternal as the Father; but nevertheless also eternally begotten from the Father. Indeed, it is said that Wisdom "can do all things," and "renews all things," and thus is omnipotent like the Father.

A very similar depiction of the Son of God is given in the New Testament by St. Paul in the Letter to the Colossians, a depiction which is clearly based on the Wisdom texts of the Old Testament. In Colossians 1:15-17 it is said of the Son that "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, . . . all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

Another very significant text about Wisdom is from the prophet Baruch (3:31–38), who likewise speaks of the divine Wisdom as distinct from the Father:

There is none that is able to know her [Wisdom's] ways, nor that can search out her paths; but he that knoweth all things, knoweth her. . . . He found out all the ways of knowledge, and gave it to Jacob his servant, and to Israel his beloved. Afterwards he [the divine Wisdom] was seen upon earth, and conversed with men.⁸

This seems to further develop the text of Proverbs 8:31 which shows divine Wisdom “playing in the world” and whose “delights were to be with the children of men.” In other words, it seems to be a rather mysterious prophecy of the Incarnation of Christ as the Incarnation of the divine Wisdom, the living Torah who took flesh in order to live and converse with men, revealing the Father's will.

Another text is from the prophet Micah (5:2), who connects the eternal divine Wisdom with the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem: “And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Judah. Out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel; and his going forth is *from the beginning, from the days of eternity.*”⁹ On the basis of this and other texts, the ancient rabbis recognized that the Messiah pre-existed somehow in God from eternity.¹⁰

Another aspect of the Messianic tradition in the prophecies speaks of the Messiah as Son of God. A key text, frequently quoted in the New Testament, is Psalm 2:7: “I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you.’” The reference to “today” is taken by the Christian tradition to indicate a Son begotten, not only of Mary in the “today” of the Annunciation two thousand years ago, but also of the Father from all eternity—God's eternal “today”—“God from God, light from light, true God from true God.” It is of this Son that Psalm 110 speaks: “The Lord says to my lord: Sit at my right hand.”

In this eternal begetting of the divine Wisdom—also spoken of as Word or Son—God is *infinitely glorified*, for He communicates Himself infinitely, and is perfectly comprehended and praised. The Son (divine Wisdom) is not another God, contradicting monotheism, because if God has communicated Himself perfectly and infinitely, then the Begotten is not another god, but the same one God, “one in being with

⁸ Douay-Rheims version.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See Robert Leo Odom, *Israel's Preexistent Messiah* (New York: Israelite Heritage Institute, 1985), 20–23.

the Father.” They share the same Godhead. God’s Wisdom is not another God, although begotten of Him. The Father and the Son differ only in that the Father begets and the Son is begotten.

The Son, receiving the divine being from the Father as His perfect Word and Wisdom, the fruit of God’s infinite knowing of Himself, gives glory to the Father. That glory and love with which the Son loves and glorifies the Father, and vice versa, is itself divine, an impetus of infinite divine love, referred to in the Bible as the Holy Spirit (*ruach ha kodesh*), or the Spirit of God. Spirit here means *impetus, wind, or breath of love*.

Another enigmatic hinting at the Trinity is contained in the very first chapter of the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen 1:1–3). Here we see God the Father, who creates through a Word of power, and who sends forth the Spirit of God over the waters.

Another mysterious hint at a plurality of persons in God is given later in the same chapter, in the creation of man in Genesis 1:26: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’” Normally God speaks of Himself in the singular. Here at this crucial point in the story of creation God presents Himself in the plural. It is not unreasonable to think that this is to show that man—an essentially social creature—is created in the image of a God who Himself is a mysterious communion of Persons.

The Old Testament also speaks frequently of God’s Spirit, or the Holy Spirit. Psalm 104:30 speaks of God’s Spirit as the *giver of life*, saying: “When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.”¹¹ Creation is thus attributed to the Holy Spirit, as to the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is thus clearly identified with God, although coming forth from God.

The prophets receive the Holy Spirit, and speak through it. David, in Psalm 51:11, prays that God not take away the Holy Spirit from him because of his sin: “Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me.”

Revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament

Although hinted at in the Old Testament in many ways, as we have seen, the mystery of the Trinity is only clearly and explicitly revealed in the New Testament. Christ revealed His divinity in forgiving sins, working miracles in His own name, legislating in His own name in the Sermon

¹¹ Confraternity of Christian Doctrine translation (1958), numbered as Ps 103 [104]:30.

on the Mount, and in declarations such as John 10:30: "I and the Father are one"; and John 8:58: "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." Christ thus identifies Himself as the pre-existent divine Son, the divine Word and Wisdom who was with God from the beginning, and is God.

While revealing the mystery of His divinity, Christ also begins to reveal the mystery of the Trinity, for He presents Himself as God, but at the same time as Son to the Father, to whom He addresses Himself in prayer.

Although the Old Testament and the prayers of Israel refer to God as "Father," Christ speaks of God as Father, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 239 states, in "an unheard-of sense: he is Father not only in being Creator; he is eternally Father in relation to his only Son, who is eternally Son only in relation to his Father." Christ proclaims this when He says: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27).

The prologue of the Gospel of John connects Jesus' revelation of Himself as the Son of God with the Old Testament figure of divine Wisdom, for John speaks of Christ as the Word (Logos), which also means rationality and wisdom: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life." The Word is distinct from the person of the Father, but is one God with the Father.

The revelation of the divinity of the Holy Spirit is less prominent in the New Testament, but was clearly revealed at the Last Supper, when Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit. His discourse after the Last Supper shows that the Holy Spirit is distinct from both Himself and the Father, and likewise has the prerogatives of God, for He is another Consoler or Advocate, having the power to reveal and sanctify, being the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:16-17).¹²

The clearest proclamation of the Trinity is in Christ's missionary mandate before His Ascension (Mt 28:19): "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The baptismal formula clearly puts the

¹² See CCC 243: "Before his Passover, Jesus announced the sending of 'another Paraclete' (Advocate), the Holy Spirit. At work since creation, having previously 'spoken through the prophets,' the Spirit will now be with and in the disciples, to teach them and guide them 'into all the truth.' The Holy Spirit is thus revealed as another divine person with Jesus and the Father."

three Persons of the Trinity on the same level as the principle of our sanctification.¹³

Theology's Attempt to Penetrate into the Mystery

The Distinction of the Persons through Distinct Relations of Origin

Let us now reflect on what God has revealed, following the lead of St. Thomas Aquinas and other Doctors of the Church. The great theologians take their point of departure from the names of the divine Persons as revealed in the Old and New Testaments.

The names of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit indicate to us that the distinction between the three divine Persons does not regard their nature or essence, but their *relations of origin*. The Son is distinct from the Father simply in that He is *from* the Father, eternally "begotten" from the Father; "conceived" and "brought forth" (Prov 8:24-25). He is an eternal "reflection of His eternal light" and "spotless mirror" or "image" of His glory (Wis 7:26). As true and perfect Son, He receives from the Father all that the Father is, *except His being Father*. That is, the Son receives the divine being or essence from the Father, but He is distinct from the Father in that the Father gives and the Son receives the divine being. They are alike in everything except their eternal relation of origin: paternity and filiation.

The name of the Holy Spirit likewise indicates a relation of origin, for the term "Spirit" comes from breath or wind, indicating that the Holy Spirit proceeds forth as a spiration or breath from the Father and the Son.

It is clear therefore from Revelation that in God there is a mysterious *generation and procession*. The divine nature is not something static and inert, but infinite life, infinite and eternal begetting, infinite and eternal proceeding. Indeed, the Old Testament frequently speaks of God as the "*living God*" (Ps 42:2). And where there is eternal life there must be eternal vital activity.

Other names given in Revelation show us other aspects of this generation and procession. The Son is also the *Word* and *Wisdom*, and the Holy Spirit is also the *Gift*.

The names *Wisdom* and *Word (Logos)* given to the Son show us that the eternal begetting or generation of the Son has an "intellectual" character: the Son is begotten as the Word and Wisdom of the Father. And the Word, befitting the divine nature, is a perfect Word, which says and is all that the Father is. The Word is the perfect "Image" of the

¹³ See also the Trinitarian formulas in the Epistles of St. Paul: 2 Cor 13:13; 1 Cor 12:4-6; Eph 4:4-6.

Father, and we have seen that "Image" is another name given to the second Person of the Trinity in Wisdom 7:26 and Colossians 1:15.

Secondly, the name *Gift* applied to the Holy Spirit seems to show us that the Spirit proceeds through love, for love manifests itself in the giving of gifts, and ultimately in the giving of oneself as a gift. The Holy Spirit is the personal Gift (or self-giving) of God.

Procession of the Divine Persons

Reflecting on this revelation, theology has discovered a psychological analogy to aid in understanding the procession of the second and third Persons of the Trinity. The best way to seek to understand the revelation of the Trinity is to reflect on our operations of knowing and loving. This analogy was worked out above all by St. Augustine in his work *On the Trinity*, and perfected by St. Thomas in his *Summa of Theology* and other works.

In order to find some analogy in nature to compare with the procession of Persons in the Trinity, we must look not to material nature, for God is pure spirit.¹⁴ Rather, we must look at what is highest in our experience: our own souls, and specifically to our spiritual faculties: the intellect and the will, and their operations. But nevertheless, we must remember that even our spiritual souls fall infinitely short in representing God. Thus we must not push our analogies too far, but remain guided always by Revelation.¹⁵

Spiritual operations are distinct from non-spiritual operations in that the former are immanent and the latter are transitive. A transitive operation is one which has its effect *outside* the agent. An immanent operation is one whose effect or fruit remains *within the agent*. Let us take some examples. When one billiard ball collides with another, it realizes an effect outside of itself in the other billiard ball. When the sun heats or

¹⁴ For example, sometimes water is used as an analogy to understand the Trinity, for water can exist as a solid, liquid or gas. However, this analogy is radically defective when applied to the Trinity, for it implies that the three Persons are three "modes" of existence of God, which is an ancient Trinitarian heresy.

¹⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, in *ST* I, q. 27, a. 1, writes: "As God is above all things, we should understand what is said of God, not according to the mode of the lowest creatures, namely bodies, but from the similitude of the highest creatures, the intellectual substances; while even the analogies derived from these fall short in the representation of divine objects. Procession, therefore, is not to be understood from what it is in bodies, either according to local movement or by way of a cause proceeding forth to its exterior effect, as, for instance, like heat from the agent to the thing made hot. Rather it is to be understood by way of an intelligible emanation, for example, of the intelligible word which proceeds from the speaker, yet remains in him. In that sense the Catholic Faith understands procession as existing in God."

illuminates the earth, it realizes an effect outside of itself. However, when we think a thought, the effect remains *inside* our minds; it remains a part of us, and we are enriched by it. For example, if we consider the nature of something, we form a concept in our minds, which is a mental word, by which we represent to ourselves the nature of the thing outside the mind. This concept is a fruit of the operation of knowing; it remains within us, giving more fullness to our being.

Likewise, when we freely will something, we are morally changed by it, for better or worse, according to the goodness of the object of our will. When we love God above all things and give ourselves to Him, we are morally and thus interiorly enriched by that act. When we love something else more than God and refuse to give ourselves to God, we are morally diminished by that act. Knowing and loving therefore are *immanent* activities, whose fruit remains within the one who knows and loves.

In seeking to understand the Trinity, some heretical theologians failed to consider this distinction between immanent and transitive operations. The result was that they unreflectively sought to understand the Trinity by analogy with transitive actions, rather than immanent ones. This was the case with Arius (author of the Arian heresy at the beginning of the fourth century). He considered the generation of the Son as something beginning within God the Father, but ending outside of Him, a "product" distinct from the Father, such that the Son would be extrinsic to the divine nature, properly speaking, and would not be God.¹⁶ The same would be true of the procession of the Holy Spirit. He thus understood the Father's begetting of the Son like the building of a house or the creation of a sculpture.

If we understand the procession of the divine Persons in the sense of a transitive operation, it is inevitable that we shall end up denying the divinity of the Persons who proceed. However, if we understand it in terms of an immanent operation, this does not follow, for the fruit of an immanent operation remains within. Furthermore, the higher and more perfect the operation, the more perfect is the fruit of the operation. The more perfectly we know, the more perfectly our concept is an image or likeness of the reality that we know. The more perfectly we love, the more perfectly we give ourselves interiorly to the beloved. In the case of God, the fruit of the immanent operation of knowing, which is His Word, and of loving, which is the gift of Himself, are so perfect as to be identical to the source from whence they proceed.¹⁷ Therefore, the

¹⁶ The Jehovah's Witnesses hold this Arian position today, denying the full divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 27, a. 1, ad 2: "Whatever proceeds by way of outward procession is necessarily distinct from the source whence it proceeds,

Word of God which God conceives within Himself as the fruit of His self-knowledge, is such a perfect Word and Image, that it is God, for it is one with the Father. Likewise, the impetus of love or self-gift that God conceives within Himself in loving Himself (the mutual love of the Father and the Son) is such a perfect fruit that it is identical with God. This perfect fruit of love, which is the divine Love, is the Holy Spirit.

On the Generation of the Word and the Procession of the Holy Spirit

The Fathers of the Church note that we speak of the generation of the Son or Word, but not of the Holy Spirit. Instead, in the latter case we speak of procession rather than generation. Why is this?

The notion of generation implies that something proceeds from another by way of *similarity in nature*, for the son shares the nature of the father. How does this apply to what we have said about immanent operations in God? St. Thomas Aquinas points out¹⁸ that in the act of knowing, the concept or interior word proceeds by way of similarity, for the concept is a true likeness of what it represents. When God knows Himself, the inner concept or Word produced by the eternal divine act of self-knowing perfectly represents Himself; so perfectly, in fact, that it is identical in nature to the Knower. This procession therefore merits the name of generation, and its fruit merits the name of Son, as well as "image," "reflection," or "spotless mirror" (see Wis 7:26).

It may be noted here that it is not accidental that our word "concept" is taken from "conception," indicating the profound relationship between biological generation effected by reproduction, and the generation of ideas effected by the immanent operation of knowing. If the fruit of our operation of knowing is not inappropriately called a *concept* or *conception*, it is fitting that the perfect fruit of God's eternal act of self-knowledge is an eternal *conception* that is also called His Son.

The procession of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is not called generation. We can see a reason for this by comparing the operations of knowing and willing. In the act of knowing we form a likeness of the object in ourselves, and thus it is naturally compared to conception or generation. In willing or loving, we are moved by an impulse towards

whereas, whatever proceeds within by an intelligible procession is not necessarily distinct; indeed, the more perfectly it proceeds, the more closely it is one with the source whence it proceeds. For it is clear that the more a thing is understood, the more closely is the intellectual conception joined and united to the intelligent agent; since the intellect by the very act of understanding is made one with the object understood. Thus, as the divine intelligence is the very supreme perfection of God, the divine Word is of necessity perfectly one with the source whence He proceeds, without any kind of diversity."

¹⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 27, a. 2.

the object of our love; the lover is moved towards the beloved, which changes the lover in an interior way. When we love someone, our will does not generate an image of the beloved, but causes an impetus to move toward him, which moves or proceeds as a breath or spirit towards the beloved. Thus it is fitting that the fruit of the procession of love in God is referred to as the Holy *Spirit*, for spirit, in Hebrew (and Greek), means breath, wind, or impulse.¹⁹

The psychological analogy also shows us why there are precisely two processions in God, for the two processions coincide with our two spiritual and immanent operations: knowing and loving.²⁰

Order in the Divine Persons

The psychological analogy with regard to the mystery of the Trinity also is illuminating for grasping the order of the three divine Persons. We have said that the Son proceeds by way of the intellectual operation, whereas the Holy Spirit proceeds by way of love. Now in our own soul, knowing is prior to willing, for we cannot will or love what we do not know. In God, there is no temporal priority, for the three Persons are co-eternal. Nevertheless, the procession of the Holy Spirit logically presupposes the generation of the Word. Hence the order: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The fact that the operation of willing logically presupposes the operation of knowing also shows that the Son is involved in the procession of the Holy Spirit. The Son proceeds from the Father alone, but the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son together.

¹⁹ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 27, a. 4: "The procession of love in God ought not to be called generation. In evidence whereof we must consider that the intellect and the will differ in this respect, that the intellect is made actual by the object understood residing according to its own likeness in the intellect; whereas the will is made actual, not by any similitude of the object willed within it, but by its having a certain inclination to the thing willed. Thus the procession of the intellect is by way of similitude, and is called generation, because every generator begets its own like; whereas the procession of the will is not by way of similitude, but rather by way of impulse and movement towards an object. So what proceeds in God by way of love, does not proceed as begotten, or as son, but proceeds rather as spirit; which name expresses a certain vital movement and impulse, accordingly as anyone is described as moved or impelled by love to perform an action."

²⁰ St. Thomas explains this in *ST I*, q. 27, a. 5: "The divine processions can be derived only from the actions which remain within the agent. In a nature which is intellectual, and in the divine nature these actions are two, the acts of intelligence and of will. . . . It follows that no other procession is possible in God but the procession of the Word, and of Love."

Relations in God

The fact that there are two processions in God and that God exists in three Persons does not detract from the divine simplicity. The divine nature is utterly simple, and precisely because of its simplicity, the divine nature is possessed in its simplicity and unity equally by the three divine Persons. Once we know by Revelation that there is a plurality of Persons in God, the divine simplicity shows us that the three divine Persons are "consubstantial" (one in being or substance): identical in the simplicity of the divine nature. Procession in God would detract from the divine simplicity and unity only if the fruit of the procession were not identical with the source of the procession, as in human procreation and production.

Thus the plurality of Persons in God comes from two divine processions: generation through knowing, and "spiration" through love. These two processions create distinct relations with regard to eternal origin in God, between the source and fruit of these processions.

The Father is related to the other two Persons as the One who is the eternal source of the other Persons, while not being from another. The Son is related to the Father as being eternally begotten from Him as His Word, and He is related to the Holy Spirit as eternally breathing Him forth together with the Father in love. The Holy Spirit is related to the Father and the Son as eternally proceeding from them as the eternal fruit of their mutual love.

The 11th Council of Toledo states: "In the relational names of the Persons, the Father is related to the Son, the Son to the Father, and the Holy Spirit to both. While they are called three Persons in view of their relations, we believe in one nature or substance."²¹ The Fourth Lateran Council defined that everything in God is one where there is no opposition of relationship, since "distinction lies in the persons and unity in the nature."²²

Persons in God

We refer to the three subsisting relations in God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as three Persons. What is a *person*? As a simple approach, we may begin by differentiating the notions of person and nature (or essence) by distinguishing the questions to which they respond. *Nature* or essence responds to the question: *what* is it? *Person* responds to the question: *who* is it? Nature or essence refers to the intrinsic principle that makes something what it is. *Person* refers to an individual who has an intellectual or spiritual nature or essence.

²¹ 11th Council of Toledo (675), DS 528:15 (D 278).

²² IV Lateran Council (1215), DS 804 (D 432).

A person, according to the classical definition, is a complete and distinct (subsisting) individual of an intellectual or spiritual nature, an individual endowed with rationality or intellect. A person is one in himself, but distinct from all others, and thus is incommunicable and unique. A nature can be shared by many subjects, but a person is a unique subject who cannot be shared or "communicated" to another.

"Person" is a name that indicates a special perfection of individuality, which consists in *self-dominion*, being a master of one's own actions, making oneself distinct through one's own operation. Persons are those who are capable of acting of themselves and determining themselves, and thus they are capable of giving themselves to others and of entering into communion.

In other words, "person" is a term indicating a special dignity, the dignity of being able to act for oneself and of being an end in oneself. Every human being is equally a person by nature, and God is pre-eminently *Personal* (so much so that He is a communion of Persons!).

Why do we speak of three Persons in the Trinity? The answer is that "person" signifies a distinct and incommunicable individual of an intellectual nature, capable of entering into communion with others. In God there are three distinct relations, which all subsist as God and enter into mutual communion. These three thus fulfill the notion of persons as distinct and incommunicable in an intellectual nature. The Father is not the Son, who is not the Holy Spirit, but the three are one God.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 252 summarizes the philosophical terminology used with regard to the Trinity:

The Church uses (I) the term "substance" (rendered also at times by "essence" or "nature") to designate the divine being in its unity, (II) the term "person" or "hypostasis" to designate the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the real distinction among them, and (III) the term "relation" to designate the fact that their distinction lies in the relationship of each to the others.

The fact that God is both one and three at the same time is not a contradiction, for God is *one and three in different ways*. God is one in the divine nature, but three in Person.

Spiritual and Pastoral Implications of the Great Mystery of the Trinity

It is sometimes said that the mystery of the Trinity has little or no impact on the spiritual and moral lives of Catholics. It is something that we know to be true from our catechism, but which stays there and fails to be of relevance to our lives, even our life of prayer. This is certainly

true among nominal Catholics. However, the dogma of the Trinity ought to have the profoundest implications for our lives.

First of all, the doctrine of the Trinity reveals to us that God is not just a *personal* God, but an inexpressible *communion of Persons*, whose distinction proceeds by infinite knowledge and love, and who are ineffably united by those same operations. This is God's intrinsic and essential glory and beatitude, celebrated and participated in by the celestial liturgy of the blessed in heaven.

This shows us that *what lies at the heart of all reality and all being is love, in the highest form of interpersonal communion and total self-giving*. For the Father gives Himself entirely to the Son, who gives Himself back in return; and in this mutual love the Holy Spirit proceeds as the Uncreated Gift.

This truth should mark our understanding of every aspect of Catholic faith and morals, and of human life and human affairs. We are created in the image of God who is the Trinity, and thus we are created to imitate the sublime interpersonal communion of His Trinitarian life.

John Paul II was constantly seeking to put the doctrine of the Trinity and its implications for human life at the center of the attention of Catholics. He clearly saw this as the foundation of pastoral theology and practice. His first three encyclicals were on the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, and he called for three years of preparation for the Jubilee of 2000, each dedicated to one of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity. More concretely, this focus lay at the center of all his teaching on the human person and the family.²³

This revelation of the Trinity gives new force to the commandment of love given in Deuteronomy 6:4-5: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." We are to love God with all our heart, and our neighbor as our self, because God Himself is eternal love, an eternal communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The blessedness of heaven will consist in entering into that ineffable communion as *sons of the Father in the Son*, through the eternal self-giving of the Holy Spirit.

²³ This theme is developed below in chapter 10.

CHAPTER 10

Matrimony and the Family in the Old and New Testaments

Since the family is the foundation of society, it is reasonable to expect that the sanctification of man brought by the true religion will also involve, as a fundamental element, the sanctification of marriage and family life.

As in the case of the other topics that we have examined, we shall see that there is a deep continuity between the teachings of Judaism and Catholicism with regard to Matrimony and the family. The Biblical revelation that man is created in the image of God has extremely profound implications for this matter. However, the coming of the Messiah and His Paschal mystery bring that revelation to its fullness, and make possible a greater outpouring of grace to sanctify family life and restore the model given in Eden.

The Old Testament on Marriage

The Mosaic revelation to Israel concerning the family is found in four principal contexts in the Old Testament: (a) the original Matrimony in Eden between Adam and Eve as recounted in Genesis 2; (b) the precepts of the Torah (written and oral) regulating and sanctifying marriage; (c) the examples of families given throughout the Old Testament; and (d) the use of the image of marriage to symbolize God's relation to Israel.

In all of these respects, the revelation to Israel on the sanctity of marriage far surpasses that of other cultures and natural religions of the world.

The Creation of Adam and Eve

It is highly significant that the institution of marriage is narrated in the Bible within the account of creation itself. Marriage is not something accidental to man, or determined by human convention or caprice; it is not a human invention or merely a social institution. It springs from God's very act of creating man in His image, *as male and female*.

Man Created in God's Image as Male and Female

The creation of man is given great solemnity in Genesis 1:26–28. The other animals are said to be created “each according to his kind,” whereas man is created *in God's image*.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.”

At the conclusion of the sixth day in which man was created, God saw His work to be “very good” (Gen 1:31).

Jewish tradition recognizes in this text the first commandment of the Torah given to mankind: “Be fruitful and multiply.” We see that God's kingly work in creation culminates in the creation of man, who is called to be a participant in the goodness of God's creative work. This participation takes two fundamental forms: the procreation and education of children, and human work directed to subduing the earth.

The fact that man is made in God's image is thus intimately tied to this capacity to be a *partner in God's creative and kingly activity*. Human sexuality and reproduction are not to be governed by instinct as in the animals. On the contrary, marriage and family life must be transformed by the fact of our being made “in His image” as conscious participants in God's creative work. Human sexuality must never be reduced to a purely biological category, for it is intimately affected by man's being *in the image of God*; it has been endowed with a profound spiritual vocation.

This fact that we are in the image of God also with respect to marriage and family life seems to be emphasized in the text of Genesis 1:27, which connects man being made in the image of God with the distinction of gender: “So God created man *in his own image*, in the *image of God* he created him; *male and female* he created them.”

Adam's Original Solitude and the Creation of Eve

To gain further insight into this theme, however, we need to turn to the second account of creation in the second chapter of Genesis. In this second account, the creation of Adam precedes that of Eve. Adam is created alone. To remedy his solitude, God creates the animals and brings them to Adam to be named.

The naming of the animals is connected in the Biblical text with an awareness of man's original solitude. For Adam did not recognize a companion for himself in the brute animals: “The man gave names to all

cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the man there was *not found a helper fit for him*" (Gen 2:20). Adam finds himself in an existential solitude that is "not good" for him, as God Himself states (Gen 2:18): "It is not good that the man should be alone." Without another human person to love, Adam's nature was frustrated. This original solitude reveals an awareness on man's part that he *transcends the rest of the material creation*, although through his body he is part of it.

It is interesting that this Biblical text shows us that our first knowledge is of the natures of material things outside of ourselves and below us. On the basis of this first objective knowledge, man can then *reflect* on his own self and arrive at self-consciousness. This first self-consciousness in Adam showed him that he was *alone*, a subject lacking a personal companion in the material world of which he was the guardian. This awareness of solitude, given emphasis through repetition, shows us that Adam could not help but desire and hope for the formation of *interpersonal human communion*.

This brings us to the creation of Eve, in which Adam discovers a "helper like to himself." The Biblical text (Gen 2:23) reveals to us the great value of this discovery through the exultant language of Adam: "This at last is *bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."¹

Adam's exultation shows that in Eve he found not only another person, but also a dimension essential to his personal being, without which he was radically incomplete, unable to achieve his end and find happiness. In the words of John Paul II: "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him."²

The detail that Eve was created out of Adam's rib is mysterious, with several implications. First, Eve's origin from Adam's rib reveals to us woman's equality of origin and destiny, and her equal fundamental human dignity with the man from whom she was drawn.³ It also reveals the intimacy and reciprocity into which man and woman are called. She

¹ See John Paul II, General Audience of Nov. 7, 1979, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 8:4, p. 161: "Joy for the other human being, for the second 'I,' dominates in the words the man (male) speaks on seeing the woman (female)."

² John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis* 10.

³ See John Paul II, General Audience of Nov. 7, 1979, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 8:4, p. 160: "Considering the archaic, metaphorical, and figurative way of expressing the thought, we can establish that what is meant is the homogeneity of the whole being of both; this homogeneity regards above all the body, the somatic structure."

was taken from Adam's side and in the vocation of marriage she is called to *remain at his side*, and he at hers. She is called to complement and aid him, and he her. Finally, this detail finds its full significance only when read as a figure for the *re-creation* of man through the blood and water that flowed from the opened side of the crucified Christ, the new Adam. From this outpouring of water and blood, which represents the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, the Church, Christ's bride, was born and built up.

The exultation of Adam at the creation of Eve shows us another fundamental property of the person: the *ability to respond to the beauty of another person*. Adam's joy in the creation of Eve is principally motivated by the opening of interpersonal communion and the release from solitude. However, it is clear that the physical beauty of Adam's spouse played a significant role in his perception of the attraction of that communion. This can be seen in the very words used to express his joy: "*This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.*" The beauty of the person, created in God's image, is transmitted through the perception of the body and expressed in those terms.

Beauty has the vocation of attracting us to truth and goodness. The *goodness* of the human person created in the image and likeness of God is reflected in the *beauty* of the person, which is at once a beauty both spiritual and bodily. Beauty, like love itself, serves as a ladder to elevate the mind towards higher splendors which surpass the level of the senses.

It is in this sense that John Paul II has spoken of the "sacramentality" of the human body in the original creation, before it was obscured by the Fall. The beauty of the human body expresses the beauty of the person (called to love and be loved) in a form accessible to the senses, making it present in the physical world.⁴

The Spouses Become "One Flesh"

After Adam's exultation over the creation of Eve, the Biblical text adds the extremely important comment: "Therefore a man leaves his

⁴ John Paul II, General Audience of Feb. 20, 1980, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 19:4, p. 203: "Thus, in this dimension, a primordial sacrament is constituted, understood as a *sign that efficaciously transmits in the visible world the invisible mystery hidden in God from eternity*. And this is the mystery of Truth and Love, the mystery of divine life, in which man really participates. In the history of man, it is original innocence that begins this participation and is also the source of original happiness. The sacrament, as a visible sign, is constituted with man, inasmuch as he is a 'body,' through his 'visible' masculinity and femininity. The body . . . is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it."

father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become *one flesh*" (Gen 2:24). In this reference to "cleaving"⁵ to each other, and the "one flesh" created by marriage, the unitive dimension of marriage is perfectly and concisely manifested. The union of the spouses is to be a "maximal friendship"⁶ and symbol of the union that is to exist between God and man. The conjugal act itself is a kind of sacred sign of this spiritual union between the spouses in "one flesh." At the same time, the conjugal act is ordered toward the procreation of offspring, which are the fruit of the union of the parents' flesh and which also need the continuance of that parental union in order to be fittingly loved, raised, and educated.

The institution of marriage by God in Genesis 2 thus includes the fundamental elements that should govern marriage throughout human history. Marriage is to be exclusive and indissoluble between one man and one woman, initiating an intimate communion of life consisting in mutual self-giving and service, and ordered to the procreation of children.⁷

These characteristics of marriage come from the fact that it is a properly *human* institution, in accord with the fact that man is a person, whose procreation must transcend that of the animals and take on a character proper to *persons created in the image of God*, who give themselves to each other in a total and properly human way, with fidelity and irrevocability. In the words of the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et spes* 48): "As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them."

⁵ It is interesting that the same verb, "cleave" (*davak*), is used to speak of "cleaving" to the word and commandments of God (Ps 119:31) and to cleaving to God Himself (Deut 11:22).

⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas describes marriage in this way in *SCG* III, ch. 123, n. 6.

⁷ These characteristics of marriage are beautifully set forth in *Gaudium et spes* 48: "The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one. For the good of the spouses and their offspring, as well as of society, the existence of the sacred bond no longer depends on human decisions alone. . . . By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown. Thus a man and a woman, who by their compact of conjugal love 'are no longer two, but one flesh' (Mt 19:3 ff), render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions. Through this union they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day."

The very nature of man intrinsically orients him to this covenant of life and love as he reaches maturity. In the words of John Paul II, man is naturally a *spousal creature*. Even if he does not marry, the natural orientation to marriage is written into his nature as it has come from the Creator. This natural spousal orientation involves a call to espouse another person irrevocably for life. As we shall see below, this call can be realized in the state of marriage, or in the celibate life in which the spousal gift of self is given directly to God.

In summary, human sexuality provides the biological foundation for the properly human impulse to seek interpersonal communion through forming a family, the most basic cell of society. Human sexuality profoundly inclines a man and a woman to seek their complement in each other, and to join together in a common project of life. Man is created in such a way that he is not self-sufficient, but naturally seeks a "helper," a complement, a person with whom he can enter into a mutual relationship of love and most intimate collaboration, in order to generate and educate other persons.

Marriage and the Fall

It could seem that the Biblical image of marriage as presented in Genesis 2:24 is excessively idealized. Indeed, marriage (like the obligation of human work) was instituted in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall. This means that Adam and Eve received special gifts to sanctify marriage which were lost when they were expelled from the Garden. Primary among these were the gifts of sanctifying grace and charity (symbolized by the friendship with which they walked with God in the Garden), and what theologians refer to as the preternatural gift of integrity—the gift given to Adam and Eve by which their passions and emotions were perfectly subordinated to and in harmony with their reason. Spouses in God's original plan (before the Fall) would not have been troubled and tempted by unruly passions. Genesis 2:25 shows this to us in symbolic language: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." After the Fall, on the other hand, Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness and covered themselves. This shame is brought about by an awareness of the passion of lust by which mankind is tempted, because of the loss of the gift of *original integrity*.⁸

The loss of the preternatural gifts after the Fall did not change the institution of marriage, or its intrinsic goodness, sanctity, procreative purpose, and unifying power. It remains "very good" as before, and ordered toward participating in God's creative activity and in His

⁸ See CCC 377; John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, 234–63.

attributes of fruitfulness and love. However, because of the introduction of unruly passions, marriage after the Fall has become exceedingly vulnerable and fragile. Human history is a constant witness to the assaults of lust⁹ and other forms of selfishness against the sanctity of marriage, the nucleus of society.

The original plan of marriage becomes marred by polygamy and divorce, adultery, immodesty, and promiscuity, and the lack of respect for children as the sacred fruit of marriage. Nevertheless, the human body, as male and female, conserves its *spousal meaning* that stems from creation; it is a perennial sign of the "great sacrament" of marriage (cf. Eph 5:32), of the truth revealed in the beginning in Genesis 2:23–24.

The Mosaic Law on Marriage and the Family

Given both the great fragility and importance of marriage for human society, it is logical that the Law of Moses place great importance on marriage. The sanctity of marriage and the family in the Old Covenant is protected, first of all, by the fourth, sixth, and ninth commandments, which command respect for one's parents and prohibit adultery and the coveting of one's neighbor's wife. This obviously belongs to natural law, because it is something everyone knows in conscience.

The institution of marriage and the family is further strengthened by great emphasis on the good of children as the fruit of marriage. As we have seen, having children is regarded as the first precept in the Torah: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen 1:28). This command, given to the human race as a whole, has special beauty from the fact that man is enabled to participate in God's creative work.

The sixth and ninth commandments are strengthened by a series of particular precepts concerning modesty in dress and conduct, aiming at prohibiting not only unchaste behavior, but also occasions of sin. They are of great importance in Orthodox Jewish society in maintaining the sanctity of the family.

The Mosaic Law also includes a precept of ritual purity—not part of the natural law¹⁰—prohibiting sexual relations during the woman's menstrual period and for a week thereafter, after which the woman takes

⁹ See 1 Jn 2:16.

¹⁰ This precept belongs to what theologians refer to as the "ceremonial law." The precepts of the Mosaic Law can be divided into three general types: (a) the natural moral law, (b) the ceremonial law, and (c) judicial precepts. The natural moral law centers on the Ten Commandments; the ceremonial law concerns liturgy, prayer, and ritual purity; and the judicial precepts give particular laws, punishments, and legal procedures. All three of these aspects of the Mosaic Law are found in its legislation on marriage. For this distinction, see the first volume in this series, *The Mystery of Israel and the Church: Figure and Fulfillment*, chapter 8.

a ritual bath restoring her to a state of ritual purity. This subject is regulated by the laws of "family purity." Since in effect sexual relations are thus only permitted during the woman's fertile time, it would follow that families would have more children.

Imperfect Elements of the Old Testament Law on Marriage: Polygamy and Divorce

The beautiful treatment of marriage in the Old Testament is nevertheless still imperfect from the perspective of natural law. Although the entire presentation of marriage is clearly in favor of a monogamous and indissoluble marriage, the twin evils of polygamy and divorce are permitted, as Jesus says, because of the "hardness of hearts." These practices were not peculiar to Israel, but were endemic in the ancient world.

In Israel, the practice of polygamy was limited to the wealthy and powerful—such as the patriarchs and kings—and became progressively less common as time went on.

Divorce in Israel was relatively easy for the husband to obtain: he had to give his wife a writ of divorce. Deuteronomy 24:1 speaks of this practice: "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house. . ."

The school of Shammai gave a stricter interpretation of the motive of divorce (spoken of in Deut 24:1 as "indecency"), allowing it only in the case of marital infidelity. The school of Hillel, however, gave a broader interpretation, admitting lesser faults, and prevailed as the dominant practice.¹¹

Nevertheless, the prophets clearly showed the practice of divorce as a negative phenomenon. The prophet Malachi chastised the practice of divorce among the generation who had returned to Israel after the Babylonian exile. They had complained that God was not answering their prayers, and the prophet said to them (Mal 2:14–16):

You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife

¹¹ This broad view of divorce is witnessed in Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 4.8.23, in *Complete Works*, trans. W. Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1978), 99: "He that desires to be divorced from his wife *for any cause whatsoever* (and many such causes happen among men), let him in writing give assurance that he will never use her as his wife anymore; for by this means she may be at liberty to marry another husband."

by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. "For I hate divorce," says the Lord the God of Israel.

Marriage as a Symbol of God's Love of His People

The sanctity of marriage and its properly monogamous and indissoluble character come out above all in the fact that marriage is the preferred image to show God's relationship with Israel. In Hosea 2:19–20, God says to Israel: "And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord."

Ezekiel 16 presents Israel as an adulterous wife, espoused to God who yet remains faithful:

I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you, and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with leather, I swathed you in fine linen and covered you with silk. . . . You grew exceedingly beautiful, and came to regal estate. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor which I had bestowed upon you, says the Lord God. But you trusted in your beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown, and lavished your harlotries on any passer-by. . . . Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! . . . Yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord God.¹²

The everlasting covenant alluded to in Ezekiel 16:60–63 is inaugurated by Christ who wins the forgiveness of sins through His Passion, thus cleansing a renewed Israel to be His pure and immaculate Bride.

¹² Ezek 16:8–15, 32, 60–63.

The Teaching of Christ and the Church on Marriage

The Indissolubility and Exclusiveness of Marriage

Christ Returns to the Beginning

Christ spoke of marriage on two principal occasions: in the Sermon on the Mount, and in response to a question by the Pharisees on the subject of divorce. His purpose was to restore marriage to the original condition of indissolubility and monogamy, prohibiting remarriage after divorce.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:31–32), Jesus says: "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." The same teaching was reiterated when Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees (Mt 19:3–9):

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman, commits adultery."

The exception given in these two texts for the case of "unchastity" should not be interpreted to mean that Christ meant to allow divorce and subsequent remarriage for the innocent party in the case of marital infidelity. The Christian Tradition has taken these words to mean that a permanent separation can be granted on account of marital infidelity.¹³ However, the partners cannot remarry while their spouses remain alive.¹⁴

John Paul II has taken this text for the subject of numerous discourses in his Wednesday Audiences, published under the title: *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. He especially

¹³ See the *Code of Canon Law*, canon 1152.

¹⁴ See, for example, St. Augustine, *Adulterous Marriages* 1.9.9.

emphasizes the fact that Christ answers the question by returning to the original plan of God as revealed in the first two chapters of Genesis. In his brief response, Christ refers twice to the "beginning,"¹⁵ and it is clear that He means to restore marriage to the full glory and sanctity of God's original plan.

This restoration of marriage implies at least three things. On the one hand, there is the elimination of polygamy and divorce, which are opposed to the full and mutual self-giving of the marital friendship. Secondly, Christ, the Word Incarnate, is the perfect example of the Bridegroom and of all the virtues that should come into play in marriage. (How can this be, if He never married? The answer is that Christ is the Bridegroom of the Church, as we shall see below.) Third, Christ restores marriage to original sanctity by being the source of grace—sanctifying grace and actual grace—by which spouses are enabled to overcome the fragility which threatens the institution of marriage after the Fall.

The Fittingness of the Indissolubility of Marriage

Let us begin with Christ's establishment of the indissolubility of marriage. The necessarily irrevocable nature of marriage is most clearly seen in the words of Christ to the Pharisees: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mt 19:6). The call to form an indissoluble marriage is rooted in the very creation of man in the image of God. Men and women are capable of and called to mutual, total, and fruitful self-donation in the manner proper to persons who are to be loved for their own sake, in adversity as well as prosperity, because they are persons.

The exclusive and irrevocable (indissoluble) character of marriage is rooted in man's personal nature for three reasons. First, only an exclusive and indissoluble marriage makes possible the beauty of *conjugal love*, which involves a *full* gift of self to another person, a gift in which nothing is held back, not even one's future. The human person, through his dignity of being created in the image and likeness of God, is intrinsically lovable (however unlovable he may make himself appear through sin) and worthy of such a total gift. If divorce and remarriage (or still worse, polygamy!) remain as possibilities, then the mutual gift of self of the spouses is not total, for one reserves the right to terminate that gift in the future.

This love must also be fully human, which means that it must respect the nature of man, which is both spiritual and bodily. This

¹⁵ See John Paul II, General Audience of Sept. 5, 1979, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 1:1-4, pp. 131-33.

anthropological principle has great consequences for marriage and sexual morality. Since sexuality is not something merely bodily and biological, but an aspect of a spiritual person, it must never be stripped of or separated from its personal and spiritual dimension. The sexual acts of bodily self-giving must go together with a spiritual act of self-giving to the other person. However, the self-giving proper to a spiritual person must be independent of circumstances of time and utility, for the person is worthy of love for his own sake.

Secondly, only an exclusive and indissoluble marriage gives a proper home to the new human persons conceived as a fruit of conjugal love, in which they will be educated in an environment of mutual and self-giving love involving sacrificial service.

Finally, the natural exclusivity and indissolubility of marriage is also an "image and likeness" of the fidelity and indissolubility of God's love for His people. Only an exclusive and faithful marriage is capable of providing a sacramental witness to God's love for His people, which is total and irrevocable.

In other words, marriage must be exclusive and irrevocable for two reasons: because of the intrinsic requirements of its two primary ends of procreation and conjugal union, and also to serve as a sign and sacrament of God's love for man.¹⁶

Christ's restoration of marriage to the beginning is at the same time a restoration of marriage to the full requirements of natural law and the common good of society.

Marriage Is a Sacrament of the New Covenant

Christ sanctified marriage not only through His explicit teaching on the indissolubility of marriage, but also by His acts. It was not accidental that He chose a wedding for the beginning of His public ministry. More importantly still, He sanctified marriage by establishing a new dimension to His spousal relationship with Israel by becoming man. In the Incarnation, the Son of God came as the Bridegroom of Israel, who was to be His Bride. This continues the revelation of the Old Testament concerning marriage as a sign of God's love for His People. Because Christ is the Bridegroom of the People of God, He sanctifies marriage above all by raising it to the level of a sacrament: a sacred sign of His

¹⁶ See John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* 20: "Being rooted in the personal and total self-giving of the couple, and being required by the good of the children, the indissolubility of marriage finds its ultimate truth in the plan that God has manifested in His revelation: He wills and He communicates the indissolubility of marriage as a fruit, a sign and a requirement of the absolutely faithful love that God has for man and that the Lord Jesus has for the Church."

love for the Church. The sacramental nature of Christian marriage is explained by St. Paul in Ephesians 5:25-32:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

By taking on human nature in the Incarnation, Christ "left" His Father, coming down from heaven to become one flesh with His Church, His Bride, whom He loved to the end (Jn 13:1), to the shedding of all His blood. In so doing, He has become the perfect exemplar of human marriage, and His spousal love for the Church is sacramentally represented in the marriage of Christians who are joined to His life through Baptism.

The fact that Christian Matrimony has been raised to the dignity of a sacrament means that the grace signified by the sacrament is actually given to the spouses who receive it with the proper dispositions. Each of the seven sacraments instituted by Christ has this power of efficaciously communicating the grace that it signifies.

As we have seen, human marriage is a sacred sign of the love of Christ for His Church, for whom He shed all His blood. This means that the sacrament of Matrimony must communicate to the spouses the grace enabling them to love their spouse and children after the pattern of Christ, to the point of heroic self-sacrifice.

This sacramental grace involves two dimensions. On the one hand, worthy reception of the sacrament of Matrimony gives an increase of sanctifying grace, from which charity flows. The sacrament also gives the spouses a title, as it were, to a whole series of actual graces which aid them in the particular circumstances of married life to correspond with the demands of spousal, maternal, and paternal love. Of course, they are capable of rejecting these graces, but to the extent that spouses do cooperate with them, they can be assured that still more graces will be forthcoming to help them progressively in the difficulties and temptations of married life. In this way, the vocation of Matrimony is a beautiful path to continual conversion and sanctification.

The Teaching of *Humanae vitae*: The Inseparability of the Unitive and Procreative Meaning of the Conjugal Act

It is impossible to speak of marriage today without mentioning the controversial topic of contraception. Although the New Testament does not directly address this question, it is part of the Tradition of the Church from the beginning, and has recently been taught by Paul VI in *Humanae vitae* and by John Paul II in numerous documents.

The teaching of *Humanae vitae* is in deep harmony with the general teaching on marriage that we have seen in the Old and New Covenants. We have seen that God willed to give us a participation in His kingly act of *creation of the human person*: pro-creation. This participation is in itself astounding, and was not given to the angels.

It is fitting that our human participation in this extremely noble aspect of God's kingly office be governed by a law preserving right order and sacredness in the act. First and foremost, the act ordered to this participation must be treated with reverence as sacred. It must be guarded from profanation that would order it merely to pleasure or some other selfish end, rather than to participation in God's kingly office—or at least to openness to such participation. Second, it must involve a union adequate to the education and rearing of the person engendered. Third, the act must be the fruit of a fully human love capable of representing the divine love which lies behind His creative act of bringing human persons into being.

God has willed this love to involve the institution of marriage, formed by the complementarity of two partners joined irrevocably in a joint mission of maternity and paternity. He has designed this marital mission to be fruitful, as an image or sacramental representation of the fruitfulness of His own love.

God's fruitful love in creation is an image of His ineffably fruitful inter-Trinitarian love from which proceeds the Holy Spirit. He wills our participation in His creative office to likewise "sacramentally" represent the inter-Trinitarian fruitful love of Father and Son from which the Holy Spirit proceeds.

This "sacramental" participation requires complementarity and total gift of self such that it is intrinsically open to the bringing forth of another person. The exclusion of openness to God's creative act in the sexual act would denature that act so that in no way could it represent God's creative love.

Extra-marital sex denatures the sexual act by denying its unitive aspect, making it incapable of representing God's faithful love. Such a union would also be unable to cooperate properly with God in the

carrying out of His kingly office of creation, since the parents would not be able to provide a stable home together.

Thus we see how sins against the sixth commandment profane the sexual act, violating its "sacramental" purpose in the divine plan. The various kinds of sexual sins go against the charity due to God, to the potential offspring, and to the partner in the act. Only by maintaining and never disrupting the bond between the unitive and procreative dimensions of the conjugal act is the act capable of representing the divine love.

If the procreative dimension is deliberately excluded, then the unitive purpose is thwarted in two ways. John Paul II has concentrated on the fact that the unitive end is thwarted because there is not a complete self-giving between the spouses; they are not giving the gift of their potential maternity and paternity to each other.¹⁷

Another way of looking at this is to say that the unitive end is being thwarted because the spouses are positively excluding participation with the Creator in that act, and that participation forms the foundation for their deeply intimate union arising from a shared mission that involves fruitful love. Thus an exclusion of the participation of the Creator denatures their union in several ways: it profanes the act by removing openness to His participating in it through creation; it profanes the partners by removing God's participation; it removes the reverence shown by the spouses to each other in virtue of openness to that participation; it has the capacity of installing egotism instead of God's presence.

In this matter we find a deep harmony between the teaching of the Church and Orthodox Judaism. Although rabbinical law does not completely ban contraception, it is only permitted in rare cases after consultation with rabbinical authorities.¹⁸

In both cases, the opposition to contraception is based on a deep appreciation of the sanctity of the marital act and the fact that it involves a partnership with a Third Party—God—to whom we cannot deliberately close the door.

Marriage and Celibacy

I would like to close with a reflection on marriage and celibacy. Jews often misunderstand the Christian teaching on marriage, thinking that

¹⁷ See John Paul II, apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio* 32 (1981).

¹⁸ The major exception to this is when pregnancy could be hazardous to the health of the mother. For a detailed overview of the authorities of the rabbinical tradition, see David M. Feldman: *Birth Control in Jewish Law* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998).

Christian doctrine has a more negative view of it than Judaism.¹⁹ It is frequently said that the practice of Christian celibacy and consecrated virginity is a manifestation of this negative view.

In reality, the Catholic Church has always defended the sanctity of marriage against various dualist heresies that portrayed the body as the source of all evil, and marriage as an evil institution precisely because it is ordered to procreation. This was the case of the heresy of Gnosticism that attacked the Church in its first centuries, followed by Manichaeism in the fourth century, which the young St. Augustine adhered to for a decade. Although extirpated for a while, it reappeared in France in the thirteenth century in the form of the Albigensian heresy. The Inquisition was formed precisely to combat that heresy because it threatened the very basis of civil society.²⁰ Marriage was evil for these heretics precisely because it resulted in new physical life, whereas suicide was condoned because it ended such life. Homosexuality was preferred to heterosexuality, because it did not result in new physical life. They regarded the Old Testament, including the Ten Commandments, as the work of the devil.

It is not hard to see our current culture of death as a new form of Manichaeism/Albigensianism. The Church has responded to this new threat to the family, as in the past, by repeatedly defending the sanctity of God's plan for marriage. John Paul II has been a heroic witness in this regard.

It is important to see that the Catholic appreciation for consecrated virginity in no way implies a loss of esteem for the goodness of marriage. On the contrary, consecrated virginity is seen to be objectively an even more excellent state because it too is a spousal relationship—a state of being betrothed to God Himself, by responding to His call. Just as marriage is intrinsically ordered to the development of maternity and paternity, so too celibacy or virginity for the sake of the Kingdom is ordered to the full development of spiritual maternity and paternity.

It is not accidental that Christ explained the vocation of consecrated virginity in the context of His defense of the indissolubility of marriage according to the sanctity of God's original plan. After hearing Christ's answer to the Pharisees forbidding divorce, the Apostles were amazed, and said:

¹⁹ This negative view has a foundation in Gnosticism, classical Protestant thought, and Jansenism, but not in authentic Catholic teaching.

²⁰ See, for example, Edward Peters, *Inquisition* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989); Albert C. Shannon, *The Medieval Inquisition*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991); William Thomas Walsh, *Characters of the Inquisition* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1987).

"If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry." But he said to them, "Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it" (Mt 19:10–12).

The Second Vatican Council (*Lumen gentium* 42) explains the state of consecrated virginity as

a precious gift of divine grace given by the Father to certain souls, whereby they may devote themselves to God alone the more easily, due to an undivided heart.²¹ This perfect continency, out of desire for the kingdom of heaven, has always been held in particular honor in the Church. The reason for this was and is that perfect continency for the love of God is an incentive to charity, and is certainly a particular source of spiritual fecundity in the world.

Those who embrace celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God seek to deepen their spousal relation with God, and so gain a further extension of the fruitfulness of spiritual maternity or paternity. In other words, the excellence of consecrated celibacy in no way denigrates marriage, which celibates take as the model for spousal self-donation, while anticipating heaven in which God shall be "all in all," for each one of us.

Matrimony and the Resurrection

Christ alludes to this heavenly state when He answers the question of the Sadducees about marriage in the Resurrection, by stating that "those who are accounted worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Lk 20:35). Human marriage will not continue as an institution in the Resurrection. It is interesting to reflect on this revealed truth. Why will marriage no longer be a fitting state for man in his eschatological perfection? Are not the "sons of the Resurrection" still made for interpersonal communion? Do not their bodies retain their spousal meaning?

The answer, of course, is that man's eschatological beatitude can only consist in the perfect spousal union with the one Beloved. In the Resurrection, God will be seen face to face, and so it will not be necessary to represent the divine through sacred signs. The sacraments represent and veil the divine in the time of faith of this earthly life. In human marriage, the conjugal love of the spouses characterized by the

²¹ See 1 Cor 7:32–34.

marks of fidelity, exclusivity, indissolubility until death, and openness to life, is a sacred sign of the spousal love of God for His Bride. In the Resurrection, this spousal love of God will be experienced directly without the mediation of the sacred sign.

The sons and daughters of the Resurrection will eternally celebrate the nuptials of the Lamb with His entire mystical Body. This is beautifully expressed in Revelation 21:1-3:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them."

However, if the institution of marriage will not be present in the Resurrection, does this mean that the eschatological dimension of interpersonal communion in heaven is exclusively realized between the soul and God, without interpersonal communion on the human level? Assuredly not, for Catholic doctrine, like Judaism, professes belief in the *communion of saints*. Since the nuptials of the Lamb are realized with the entire Mystical Body of Christ, it follows that all the members of the new and heavenly Jerusalem will be united among themselves with the closest bond of interpersonal communion, as a result of their union with God, their Bridegroom.²²

²² See John Paul II, General Audience of Dec. 16, 1981, in *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 68:4, p. 396: "The concentration of knowledge and love on God himself in the Trinitarian communion of Persons can find a beatifying response in those who will become sharers in the 'other world' only *through realizing reciprocal communion commensurate with created persons*. And for this reason we profess faith in the 'communion of saints' (*communio sanctorum*) and profess it in organic connection with faith in the 'resurrection of the body.'... We should think of the reality of the 'other world' in the categories of the rediscovery of a new, perfect subjectivity of each person and at the same time of the *rediscovery of a new, perfect intersubjectivity of all*."

CHAPTER II

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Beatitudes

The communication of the Spirit of the Lord to men is spoken of throughout the Old Testament,¹ as well as the New. In this chapter we will examine the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Isaiah 11:2–3, and their connection with the first seven beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

Throughout the Bible,² it can be seen that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were promised and given as a fundamental part of man's sanctification. Orthodox Jews speak of them and prize them,³ as do Christians, and thus they are an element of continuity between the Old and the New Covenants. Here too, however, we see a deepening in Revelation through the Messiah, as He *incarnates* the gifts, as it were. At the same time, the Messiah institutes a stable and ordinary means of communicating the gifts through the sacraments of the New Covenant.

The Messiah Is to Be Anointed with the Holy Spirit and His Gifts

In Isaiah 11:1–3, there is a beautiful Messianic prophecy in which the Messiah is portrayed as being filled with the "Spirit of the Lord," which "shall rest upon Him." The text then goes on to mention seven gifts, spoken of as "spirits," which flow from or are contained in the Spirit of the Lord:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the

¹ See the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Holy Spirit," vol. 6 (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), 447–50. Important Old Testament texts on the communication of the Holy Spirit include Gen 1:2; 41:38; Num 11:17; 24:2; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 2 Sam 23:2; Ps 51:11; 104:30; Ezek 2:2; 11:5; 37:1; Joel 2:28–29; Zech 7:12; Sir 39:6.

² See also Ex 31:3 which speaks of the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the artist Bezalel who was to design the tent of meeting, the ark of the covenant, and the mercy seat: "And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge."

³ The name *Chabad* of the Lubavitcher Hasidim comes from the first three of these gifts: *chochma*, *binah*, *daat* (wisdom, understanding, and knowledge).

spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness. And he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.⁴

The term "Messiah" (*Mashiach*) means "anointed one." Kings, priests, and prophets in Israel were anointed with holy oil as a sacred sign of a higher anointing—that by God Himself. The anointing with holy oil was a sign of an anointing with the Holy Spirit and His gifts. For example, when Samuel anointed Saul king of Israel (1 Sam 10:6), he said to him: "The spirit of the Lord will come mightily upon you, and you shall prophesy with them [the prophets] and be turned into another man." Even more significant is the anointing of David (1 Sam 16:13), who is both forefather and figure of the Messiah: "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward."

It follows that the "Anointed One" par excellence—the Messiah (*Mashiach*)—would be the one anointed with the fullness of kingship and the accompanying fullness of the Holy Spirit and His seven gifts, which rest upon Him and abide. The messianic prophecies of Isaiah show us this anointing in various ways. One of the most important of these texts, as we have seen, is Isaiah 11:1–3. Another is Isaiah 61:1–3, which Jesus applied to Himself in the synagogue in Nazareth (see Lk 4:17–19):

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, . . . to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness.

The two texts clearly go together and complete each other. In both cases, the Spirit of the Lord rests and abides on the figure of one "anointed" by the Lord. Another related text is the first "canticle of the Suffering Servant," Isaiah 42:1–3: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; *I have put my Spirit upon him*, he will bring forth justice to the nations. . . . A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench."

In each text, the Spirit of the Lord is manifested in a way that shows us a *spiritual portrait of what the Messiah should be*: filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and engaged in a mission that Jesus Himself delineated most

⁴ Douay-Rheims version.

perfectly in the beatitudes that open the Sermon on the Mount. It is no accident that Jesus proclaimed His mission in the synagogue in Nazareth using Isaiah 61. He clearly thought that the best way for the people to rightly grasp His messianic identity—on the basis of the Old Testament prophecies—was through this image of the Messiah being filled with the Spirit of the Lord. The Spirit rests upon him, fills him with His gifts, and leads him to proclaim the good news to the poor in spirit, to comfort the afflicted and those who mourn, to energize those who thirst for righteousness, and to fortify those faint in spirit with a “mantle of praise.” The action of the Spirit of the Lord on the Anointed One in Isaiah 61 is beautifully summarized in the beatitudes which open the Sermon on the Mount. Thus it is not unreasonable to look for a correspondence and harmony between the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11, the beatitudes proclaimed in Matthew 5, and the figure of the Messiah on whom the Spirit of the Lord and His gifts should rest.

The Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11:2–3 is the origin of the well-known Christian enumeration of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. These gifts are also highly revered in Jewish spirituality.

The Hebrew text actually seems to mention only six gifts, repeating the last gift of fear of the Lord twice. However, the Greek Septuagint translation from the third century BC gives seven gifts. Where the Hebrew text gives fear of the Lord twice, the Septuagint translates “piety and fear of the Lord.”

Why did the translators of the Septuagint do this? It is not certain, but there is reason to think that it was done to fill out the symbolic number seven representing fullness, and harmonize with other texts of the prophets which speak of “seven spirits” and seven “eyes” of the Lord.⁵ Indeed, the seven spirits of the Lord, or seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, were an element of Tradition before Christ.

St. Jerome’s famous Latin translation, the Vulgate, although generally translated directly from the Hebrew, here uncharacteristically follows the Septuagint. The reason for this is undoubtedly that the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit had already deeply entered the Christian spiritual life.⁶

⁵ The seven “eyes” of the Lord are spoken of in Zech 4:10: “These seven are the eyes of the lord, which range through the whole earth.” The book of Revelation establishes a connection of the seven eyes with “seven spirits” of the Lord; see Rev 3:1; 4:5; and especially Rev 5:6: “I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”

⁶ The Septuagint translation frequently shows a development of doctrine within the life of Israel, in that the Septuagint translation reflects the state of Jewish

The Nature of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and why do we need them? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1830, following St. Thomas Aquinas and other Doctors of the Church, defines the gifts of the Holy Spirit as "*permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit.*"

In order to act in harmony with God's will, we need to know His will through faith and reason, and we need habits of right acting called virtues: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. In evaluating sanctity in a process of canonization, the Church examines the candidate for heroic virtue. However, heroic virtue, although necessary, is not enough. Perhaps we can see this best by looking at the Messiah. The Messianic prophecies do not just portray the Messiah as someone filled with virtue: prudence, temperance, justice, etc. This would be too little. The prophecies portray him rather as filled with the Holy Spirit and His gifts in an abiding way.

The supernatural virtues enable man to act in accordance with right reason illuminated by faith, and not to be led astray by passions which cloud his reason. Such virtues are necessary for salvation, but they are not enough. Why not?

In our experience of the Christian life, it not infrequently happens that reason illuminated by faith is insufficient to make us clearly see what we should do in the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves. This can be because we do not have time for a long deliberation, or simply because we do not know God's particular plan for us unless He reveals it to us through the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the realization of God's will for us often requires a special fortitude beyond what we normally have, and thus we need to be docile to be moved by the hand of the Spirit.

Likewise when we pray, we need to be moved by God directly (with the gifts of piety and wisdom) so as to praise God in a more worthy manner, and to request what is truly good for us. For this reason, St. Paul (Rom 8:26-27) says that

the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And He who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

understanding in the third and second centuries BC. Thus it is a very important witness of the Jewish living Tradition. It is also possible that the Septuagint and the Vulgate were based on Hebrew textual traditions different from that of the Masoretic text, with a potentially equal claim to authenticity.

God's Providence has a plan that includes all the details of our lives and our interactions with others. He knows what is best for us in all the circumstances of our lives, and we do not. Thus it is clear that reason alone, even illuminated by faith, is very often insufficient to guide and move us. In order to be able to fulfill the plans of God's Providence and realize our sanctification and that of others, we have to be docile not only to our own reason, which virtue produces in us, but also to the secret promptings of the Spirit of God. *This docility is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and enables us to be moved by the Holy Spirit.* The greater the docility, the greater the conformity to God's movement and direction, which is the essence of sanctity.

It is fitting that the text of Isaiah 11:2-3 speaks of the gifts precisely as "spirits." Spirit in Hebrew also means breath or wind. Thus it gives the idea of an impetus or impulse. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit thus render us docile to be moved by the "wind" or impulse of the Holy Spirit. Jesus alludes to this in His nocturnal discussion with Nicodemus in which He explains Baptism and its effects. The principal effect of Baptism is to communicate supernatural life and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Jesus explains this as follows (Jn 3:8): "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."

In other words, Baptism, by which the gifts of the Holy Spirit are first communicated, renders the baptized capable of receiving the movement of a hidden wind or impulse—the Holy Spirit—which they hear but whose direction, path, and origin is unknown, because it is above the human mind.

In the Old Testament, the prophets and sacred writers of the books of Scripture were said to be moved and inspired by the Holy Spirit, which spoke through them and in them, and to which they were docile in communicating God's word.

This docility to the movement of the divine wind or Spirit is necessary, however, not only for prophets and sacred writers, but for *all the faithful*. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are necessary for salvation because the goal of the Christian life is supernatural and supremely arduous. Jesus tells us that "the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life" (Mt 7:14), and thus it is fitting and necessary that the impetus and hidden direction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit be given to the faithful to guide them in the treacherous paths of this life.⁷ In

⁷ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 2: "In matters directed to the supernatural end, to which man's reason moves him, according as it is, in a manner, and imperfectly, informed by the theological virtues, the motion of reason does not suffice, unless it receive in addition the prompting or motion of the Holy Spirit,

order to be made docile to God's guidance and inspirations we need special perfections of the soul, given to us by God together with sanctifying grace.

At the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, the difference between the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the seven principal virtues was much debated. St. Thomas gave the definitive solution by distinguishing them as two different types of docility. The virtues render us habitually docile to right reason, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit render us habitually docile to being moved by the promptings of the Holy Spirit, which are above reason.

St. Thomas Aquinas contrasts the virtues and the gifts of the Spirit by comparing them with two different ways to travel by boat. If we do not wish simply to drift aimlessly, we can move ourselves by the labor of rowing. This is like acting through the power of virtue. However, we can get to our destination more quickly, easily, and securely if we use the power of the wind by setting up sails to catch it. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are like the sails of a sailboat that enable it to be led by the wind. The gifts thus make us docile to the inspirations of grace.⁸ Note that the

according to Rom 8:14, 17: "Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are sons of God . . . and if sons, heirs also": and Psalm 143:10: "Thy good Spirit shall lead me into the right land," because, to wit, none can receive the inheritance of that land of the Blessed, except he be moved and led thither by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in order to accomplish this end, it is necessary for man to have the gift of the Holy Spirit."

⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1: "In order to differentiate the gifts from the virtues, we must be guided by the way in which Scripture expresses itself, for we find there that the term employed is 'spirit' rather than 'gift.' For thus it is written (Isaiah 11:2-3): 'The spirit . . . of wisdom and of understanding . . . shall rest upon him,' etc.: from which words we are clearly given to understand that these seven are there set down as being in us by Divine inspiration. Now inspiration denotes motion from without. For it must be noted that in man there is a twofold principle of movement, one within him, viz. the reason; the other extrinsic to him, that is, God. . . . Now it is evident that whatever is moved must be proportionate to its mover: and the perfection of the mobile as such, consists in a disposition whereby it is disposed to be well moved by its mover. Hence the more exalted the mover, the more perfect must be the disposition whereby the mobile is made proportionate to its mover: thus we see that a disciple needs a more perfect disposition in order to receive a higher teaching from his master. Now it is manifest that human virtues perfect man according as it is natural for him to be moved by his reason in his interior and exterior actions. Consequently man needs yet higher perfections, whereby to be disposed to be moved by God. These perfections are called gifts, not only because they are infused by God, but also because by them man is disposed to become amenable to the Divine inspiration, according to Isaiah 50:5: 'The Lord. . . hath opened my ear, and I do not resist; I have not gone back.' Even the Philosopher says in the chapter 'On Good Fortune' (*Ethica endemica* 7.8) that for those who are moved by Divine instinct, there is no need to take counsel according to human

gifts are not the inspirations themselves, but stable infused habits of docility to those inspirations.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are present in all those who are in a state of grace, and they grow in our soul together with the increase of sanctifying grace and the supernatural virtues. Their activity becomes more marked as sanctifying grace increases. In an encyclical on the Holy Spirit, Leo XIII explained that without the gifts of the Spirit,

there is no beginning of a good life, no progress, no arriving at eternal salvation. And since these words and admonitions are uttered in the soul in an exceedingly secret manner, they are sometimes aptly compared in Holy Writ to the breathing of a coming breeze, and the Angelic Doctor likens them to the movements of the heart which are wholly hidden in the living body. . . . The just man, that is to say he who lives the life of divine grace, and acts by the fitting virtues . . . has need of those seven gifts which are properly attributed to the Holy Spirit. By means of them the soul is furnished and strengthened so as to obey more easily and promptly His voice and impulse. Wherefore these gifts are of such efficacy that they lead the just man to the highest degree of sanctity.⁹

Of course, man can resist the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, refusing docility to His secret promptings. St. Stephen, in the discourse which incited his stoning, accused his listeners as well as their forefathers of resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). In its most serious form, this resistance is referred to by Jesus as "blasphemy against the Spirit" (Mt 12:32). This refers to a hardening of the heart against the impulse of grace that would lead to contrition, conversion, faith, confidence in God, etc.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Beatitudes

A parallel can be drawn between the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the beatitudes. St. Augustine, in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, makes a connection between the seven beatitudes listed in Matthew 5:3-9 and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit given in Isaiah 11:2 (according to the Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate translations).

reason, but only to follow their inner promptings, since they are moved by a principle higher than human reason. This then is what some say, that the gifts perfect man for acts which are higher than acts of virtue."

⁹ Leo XIII, encyclical *Divinum illud munus* 9 (my italics).

After St. Augustine, this has become a common theme in Patristic, medieval, and modern interpretations of the gifts.¹⁰

The gifts of the Spirit are the means and impetus within us to achieve the beatitudes. Indeed, the beatitudes are heroic ideals which cannot be achieved unless one is moved to them by God Himself. Thus the loftiness of the beatitudes can only be put in practice through habitual docility to the impulses of the Holy Spirit, given by the seven gifts. Pope Leo XIII stated that "by means of these gifts the soul is excited and encouraged to seek after and attain the evangelical beatitudes, which, like the flowers that come forth in the spring time, are the signs and harbingers of eternal beatitude."¹¹

The order of enumeration differs, however. Isaiah gives the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in descending order, beginning with wisdom, the highest and most perfect, and ending with the fear of the Lord, which is said to be the "beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10; Ps 111:10). Man's sanctification begins with the spirit of the fear of the Lord, and culminates with the spirit of wisdom. Jesus gives the beatitudes in ascending order, beginning with humility (poverty in spirit) which corresponds to the fear of the Lord, and culminating with the beatitude of the peacemakers who embody the spirit of wisdom.¹²

The Gift of Fear of the Lord

Let us go through the gifts of the Holy Spirit in ascending order (as in the beatitudes). Fear of the Lord is a very frequent notion in the Old and New Testaments. Often misunderstood, it does not mean terror of God, but rather *awe and reverence before the divine majesty*. In the Old Testament it is frequently equated with faith and obedience to the

¹⁰ See, for example, Ambroise Gardeil, O.P., *The Holy Spirit in Christian Life* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book, 1954); Robert Edward Brennan, O.P., *The Seven Horns of the Lamb: A Study of the Gifts Based on Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1966); Bernard Kelly, C.S.Sp., *The Seven Gifts* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1942).

¹¹ Leo XIII, *Divinum illud munus* 9.

¹² See St. Augustine, *Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount* 1.4.11, trans. Denis Kavanagh (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1951), 27-28: "It seems to me, therefore, that the sevenfold operation of the Holy Spirit, of which Isaiah speaks, coincides with these stages and maxims. However, the order is different. In Isaiah, the enumeration begins from the higher, while here it begins from the lower; in the former, it starts from wisdom and ends at the fear of God. But 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' Therefore, if we ascend step by step, as it were, while we enumerate, the first grade is the fear of God; the second is piety; the third is knowledge; the fourth is fortitude; the fifth is counsel; the sixth is understanding; the seventh is wisdom."

Torah.¹³ In Deuteronomy 6:13, God commands Israel through Moses: "You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him, and swear by his name."

To fear the Lord means to recognize that God is God, and we are His creatures, over whom He has complete dominion in love. We are His and not our own because He made us out of nothing and provided us with everything that we are and have. Furthermore, fear of the Lord means horror at the thought of offending God through rejection of His loving dominion—which is the essence of sin.

Although reason can recognize this, the tendency of human pride leads us constantly in practice to forget this most fundamental truth. Human pride likes to make us think of ourselves as autonomous and independent, beholden to none and a law unto ourselves. For this reason we need the constant impetus of the Holy Spirit to recognize God's loving dominion and authority in the concrete circumstances of life. It is not enough to know and recognize this truth with our reason; we need to be pushed to sense it and taste it, especially in moments of temptation. It is obvious that nothing could be more fundamental to our lives than this gift. All other gifts build on this one, without which one cannot long remain in a state of grace. For this reason, the Old Testament insists again and again on the fear of the Lord.

It is not infrequently said that the Old Testament focuses on fear of God, whereas the New Testament centers on love, as if this were the principal distinction between the two covenants. This is false, and a calumny against Judaism, and also Christianity, for fear and love of the Lord go intimately together. Indeed, no one has spoken more forcefully about fear of the Lord than Jesus: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt 10:28).¹⁴ It is not death that we are to fear, but the Lord's judgments. The gift of fear of the Lord brings us to fear the one true evil: offending God through sin, and separating ourselves from Him. The gift of fear is motivated by love of the Lord and increases as charity increases, for the more we love God, the more we fear separating ourselves from Him through sin.

The principal effect of this gift is a sense of sin—a recognition that there is a moral law whose author is God, and that we are under this law

¹³ See, among many others, Gen 22:12; Ex 18:21; Deut 4:10; 5:29; 6:2; 6:13; Lev 19:14; 1 Sam 12:14; Jos 24:14: "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness."

¹⁴ See also the parallel text, Lk 12:4–5. Jesus seems to be recalling Is 8:12–13: "Do not call conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the Lord of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear."

for we are His creatures. John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation of 1984 on the sacrament of Penance, analyzes the eclipse of conscience and of the sense of sin that has become widespread in contemporary society. He defines the sense of sin as a "fine sensitivity and an acute perception of the seeds of death contained in sin, as well as a sensitivity ... for identifying them in the thousand guises under which sin shows itself."¹⁵

The sense of sin can never be completely eliminated, for it comes from conscience, which in turn springs from our natural knowledge of first moral principles that are grasped by every person at the age of reason: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love God above all things. Give to each person what is his. These principles cannot be eliminated from the human mind, and they form the natural basis for the judgment of conscience.

Nevertheless, although the sense of sin cannot be entirely lost, it can certainly become obscured through a habit of sin and a lack of belief in the existence of God. The progressive weakening of the sense of sin is the gravest thing that can happen to an individual or a society, for conscience is the inner sanctuary of man in which he hears the voice of God.¹⁶ Pius XI famously said that "the sin of the century is the loss of the sense of sin."¹⁷

The original sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden involved a loss of the fear of the Lord. The temptation to eat the apple was precisely a temptation to be morally autonomous and determine good and evil for themselves, repudiating God's loving dominion. Clearly this was a sin of spiritual pride.

The gift of fear of the Lord is thus associated with the virtue of humility and the beatitude of the poor in spirit. St. Augustine writes: "The fear of God coincides with the humble, of whom it is here said: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' That is to say: Blessed are those who are not puffed up, not proud—those to whom the Apostle says: 'Be not high-minded, but fear.' That is, be not exalted."¹⁸ The humility given by the gift of the fear of the Lord is above all that of recognizing God as the source of the moral law, and of every good gift.

The greatest example of fear of the Lord in the Old Testament, it seems to me, is given in the canticles of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. The just man has a fear of the Lord not only for his own sins, but for those of his neighbor, and ultimately of humanity. This is carried to the

¹⁵ John Paul II, encyclical *Reconciliatio et poenitentia* 18.

¹⁶ See *Gaudium et spes* 16.

¹⁷ Quoted by John Paul II in *Reconciliatio et poenitentia* 18.

¹⁸ *Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount* 1.4.11.

end by the Suffering Servant who is bruised for our sins, and on whom the Lord has laid "the iniquity of us all" (Is 53:6).

Here too we find the greatest example of the beatitude of poverty in spirit. For the sake of fear of the Lord, the Suffering Servant embraced all poverty, dying "without a place to lay his head," without clothing, without a grave of his own.

The Gift of Piety

Piety is an offshoot of the fear of the Lord, involving a filial sense of oneself as a child of God, recognizing God's dominion as that of a father.¹⁹ It thus tempers awe and reverence with a sweetness and love proper to a son. The essence of this gift is beautifully described by St. Paul in Romans 8:14–17:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

Again, this is not merely something to be intellectually recognized through faith, but must become part of the inner man, the atmosphere of the interior life. Piety in this sense is not merely an external devotion, but something far deeper, which can only be the gift of the Spirit.

Jesus, of course, is the great model of the gift of piety. The Gospels constantly record His filial sense, His prayer to God as His Father. In fact, His invocation of the Father was so characteristic that St. Paul and the Gospels frequently leave it in the original Aramaic: "Abba." In the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk 14:36).

The gift of piety for the Christian is to enter into the filial sense of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Son, and thus the gift of the Spirit serves to reinforce in us the sense of our divine filiation.

This gift has been traditionally connected to the beatitude of the meek: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5).²⁰ What is the connection? The gift of piety, by reinforcing our filial sense

¹⁹ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* II-II, q. 121, a. 1: "And since it belongs properly to piety to pay honor and reverence to one's father, it follows that piety, whereby, at the Holy Spirit's instigation, we pay worship and honor to God as our Father, is a gift of the Holy Spirit."

²⁰ See Ps 37:11: "But the meek shall possess the land."

of being children of God, leads us to see more clearly that if we are sons of God, we are brothers of one another. The gift of piety helps us to reverence authority as coming from the Father, and to recognize our brethren as sons of that same Father.

In the Old Testament, Moses was singled out as the meekest of all men,²¹ who, because of His reverence for God, was not puffed up through the height of his revelation. Yet Christ in His Passion gives a still greater example of the beatitude of the meek. As in the canticle of the Suffering Servant, He shut His mouth and allowed Himself to be sent to the slaughter for the sins of His brethren and for the glory of His Father's name. To Pilate, who was amazed that He was silent and did not defend Himself, Jesus said: "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above" (Jn 19:11). The entire narration of the Passion from the washing of the feet to the giving up of His spirit is a continual prodigy of meekness, rendered more astounding by the dignity of His person as the Messiah and Son of God. Thus Jesus could say of Himself: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29).

The Gift of Knowledge

Four of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are intellectual gifts: wisdom, understanding, counsel, and knowledge. How do they differ? According to the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, knowledge has to do with created and temporal realities, as opposed to understanding and wisdom, which are concerned with the higher truths of faith and with God.²² Yet how would knowledge of created realities be a gift of the Holy Spirit? Obviously we are not speaking here of the sciences which are acquired by human effort. This knowledge is principally a right judgment of the vanity of temporal things, understanding that they are not a final end in themselves.²³ Hence the refrain of the book of Ecclesiastes (Qohelet) 1:2: "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." Solomon is the great exemplar in the Old Testament of the gift of knowledge. Jesus, nevertheless, shows its fuller dimensions: "For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world but forfeit his soul?" (Mk 8:36).

Another primary focus of the gift of knowledge is one's own misery and weakness, particular defects, and habitual inclinations to sin. Someone might object that we do not need a special gift of the Holy Spirit to see this, for it should be very obvious. However, experience

²¹ See Num 12:3: "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth."

²² See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* II-II, q. 8, a. 6.

²³ See, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* II-II, q. 9, a. 4.

shows that nothing is more difficult and more resisted than such knowledge. If God does not aid us with His secret promptings in prayer, it is very difficult for us to know our weaknesses and strengths, our failings and dangers.

Nevertheless, there is also a positive side to the gift of knowledge, for it also aids us to see all temporal things as vestiges or footprints of God, directing us to praise their Creator. St. Francis of Assisi's love of nature is a beautiful example of the positive side of this gift. Likewise, it recognizes that each person is a work of God, both on the natural and supernatural level.

The gift of knowledge is connected with the beatitude of those who mourn. This is because this gift shows us the vanity of the world and our own failings, and reminds us that in this world we are not yet in possession of our true home and happiness.

Seeing the vanity of the world and our own weakness also leads us to avoid placing confidence in ourselves or other creatures, and rather to put our confidence in God. Thus, paradoxically, the beatitude of mourning over our exile engenders the sweet virtue of hope for heaven, by which this exile is transformed and redeemed.

The Gift of Fortitude

Lest knowledge of the obstacles of the world, the difficulty of the narrow way, and our own weakness overwhelm us, the gift of fortitude is necessary to give us strength.

Fortitude or courage is a virtue by which unreasonable fear is restrained and the right balance is attained between excessive fear and audacity. However, the virtue of courage is not necessarily sufficient in the supernatural enterprise of salvation and sanctity. There are times when we need a fortitude that is beyond the dictates of human reason, made possible only by the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, Gideon is a great example of this kind of fortitude: he was commanded by the Lord to lead his army of only three hundred men against the huge army of the Philistines (Judg 7). Other great examples were David in his combat against Goliath, and the prophet Elijah challenging the 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). Ultimately, fortitude in the spiritual battle is more difficult than in military combat. The martyrs are the greatest examples, whose extraordinary fortitude is seen in the book of Maccabees and in the history of the Church.

The greatest exemplar of fortitude in the Bible, of course, is Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and throughout His Passion. He submitted knowingly and willingly to drink the chalice of suffering to the dregs.

This gift is associated with the beatitude of those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Mt 5:6). This hunger and thirst was spoken of by St. Teresa of Avila as a “determined determination” to do the will of God and walk in the way of prayer in quest of sanctity, come what may. She writes:

Those who want to journey on this road and continue until they reach the end, which is to drink from this water of life, . . . must have a *great and very resolute determination to persevere until reaching the end, come what may*, happen what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises, whether they arrive or whether they die on the road, or even if they don't have courage for the trials that are met, or if the whole world collapses.²⁴

It is not insignificant that among Jesus' last words were the cry: “I thirst!” followed by “It is finished.” Fortitude is shown by carrying the thirst for the accomplishment of God's will to the end.

The Gift of Counsel

Determined determination, however, is not enough to lead us to sanctity. In addition to fortitude, knowledge, piety, and reverence, we also need the gift of counsel. This gift enlightens our mind to see the particular course we need to take in the particular circumstances of each day. How shall I *channel* my hunger and thirst for righteousness? Counsel is distinguished from the other intellectual gifts in that it is practical and has to do with deliberation and the virtue of prudence.

For example, a young person wishes to serve God wholeheartedly and is determined to do so. Nevertheless, before he or she goes forward, the gift of counsel is necessary to grasp the particular vocation that God desires for him or her. Alternatively, the hunger and thirst for righteousness can take the form of a holy desire to do works of mercy. However, without the gift of counsel, it is often impossible to know how best to help a person or community in the long run, leaving us perplexed as to the best way to exercise charity. In cases like this we need the gift of counsel to make us docile to God's promptings, showing the way to the fulfillment of God's plan, which He knows perfectly, and we are ignorant of.

The same thing goes for holy desires to spread the faith. Desire and determination are not enough. One must be docile to the Spirit to see where God is opening the path. A beautiful example is given in St. Paul's missionary journeys in Acts 16:6–10, in which the Spirit led Paul

²⁴ St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, ch. 21, n. 2, in *Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, 2:117.

and his companions to Greece for the first time. A more modern example is the media apostolate of Mother Angelica. She could never have done what she did without an extraordinary gift of counsel.

Part of the gift of counsel is the humility to seek advice from others in spiritual direction, and to give counsel to those who seek it. The Jewish and Christian tradition both emphasize the benefits of seeking spiritual direction from qualified directors. A principal responsibility of a rabbi²⁵—as of a priest or religious—is to be a spiritual father for those entrusted to his spiritual care.

The gift of counsel is thus intimately related to the beatitude of the merciful: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7). The gift of counsel enables the saints to direct their works of mercy in accordance with God’s hidden plan. Through this gift the saints pick means which seem like utter folly to those who are worldly-wise. The greatest example of the gift of counsel is the docility that led Christ to embrace His Passion and Cross as the means to save the world.

The Gift of Understanding

Whereas the gift of counsel is concerned with action, the gift of understanding is directed to penetration of the truths of faith. The prophets in the Old Testament—from Moses to John the Baptist—were the great exemplars of this gift. In the New Testament, St. Paul speaks of his gift of understanding of the mystery of Christ (Eph 3:4), which he shared with the other Apostles. Jesus, of course, as the new Moses, has the absolute fullness of this gift. Already when He was twelve, “all who heard him were amazed at his understanding” (Lk 2:47).

This gift is not just necessary for prophets, however, but for all the faithful. In Colossians 1:9, St. Paul prays that the faithful may be filled with “all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him.”

In matters of faith, when a subtle new heresy is introduced, the saints—together with the simple faithful—are immediately aware of its heretical nature by the gift of understanding, which gives them greater penetration into the mysteries of faith by way of “connaturality.” The saints and those more advanced in the spiritual life gain a “Catholic nose” to sniff out what departs from Catholic truth. At the same time, this gift enables the saints to reach a state of mystical prayer in which it is given to them to subtly penetrate and “taste” the mysteries of faith.

This gift is connected with the beatitude of the pure of heart: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). Purity of

²⁵ A recent example is the Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, famed for his spiritual counsel.

heart is a prerequisite for the gift of understanding, for it takes away the excessively carnal imagination that is the greatest obstacle to the gift of penetrating divine things. Although the vision of God is reserved for heavenly beatitude, a certain beginning of it is given by the gift of understanding, which is the closest we can come in this life to seeing God.²⁶

The Gift of Wisdom

The greatest of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is the spirit of wisdom. The general notion of wisdom refers to the ability to judge and order all things rightly. For Aristotle, the wise man is he who habitually judges all things in the light of first principles, and ultimately in the light of God.

The Christian tradition reveals that there are three levels of wisdom. Natural wisdom is an ability, stemming from philosophical study, to judge all things in the light of God. This is the wisdom of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. The second level of wisdom is a capacity to judge all things in the light of God through the supernatural light of *faith*. This is the wisdom of theologians, acquired through study of revealed truth. Still higher is the wisdom that is a gift of the Holy Spirit, which is not the product of learning or natural intelligence, but rather the fruit of the fullness of charity consisting in friendship with God. Friendship produces an intimate knowledge of the mind of the friend by a certain connaturality, in that the friend becomes another self. This gives us a "taste" of God, a quasi-experiential knowledge of Him. The gift of wisdom enables one to judge all things in the light of God, discerning what is pleasing and displeasing to Him through the intuition born of intimate friendship.²⁷

Abraham and Moses were exemplars of wisdom, not only because of their knowledge of the truth God revealed to them, but first and foremost on account of their intimate friendship with God, walking and conversing with Him as a friend. This friendship enabled them to judge all things in the light of God's glory.

The ideal wisdom is to combine all three kinds of wisdom: philosophical, theological, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Philosophical and theological wisdom can be had in part by a soul in mortal sin, but the gift of the Holy Spirit is only possessed by those in a state of grace, and grows together with sanctity and charity. St. Thomas Aquinas is a brilliant example of the combination of the three levels.

If wisdom is the ability to judge all things in the light of God, this must have a special application to the great problem of suffering. No

²⁶ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q. 8, a. 7.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, q. 45, a. 2.

one could be truly wise without having a supernatural understanding of the depths of human suffering and iniquity.

Here we see how the gift of wisdom is transformed and brought to its culmination by the Incarnation and Passion of Christ. After the Incarnation, wisdom is the ability to see all things in the light of the revelation of the Messiah, and especially His Paschal mystery. To judge all things in the light of God and in accordance with the mind of Christ means to judge all things in the light of the Cross of Christ by which the world is redeemed. True wisdom thus discerns an opportunity for redemption in all evil and suffering. The gift of wisdom enables its recipients to see a participation of the Cross of Christ in every human suffering.

St. Paul manifests the deep connection between the gift of wisdom and the Cross of Christ in 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:2. Christ crucified is the culmination of the wisdom of God, but it is a wisdom hidden from the world and the worldly:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the *wisdom of God*. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For . . . God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. . . . When I came to you, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Above all, the gift of wisdom infuses its recipients with love for the Cross. Through this gift, St. Paul wrote: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

This gift of wisdom is connected with the beatitude of the peacemakers: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9). The gift of wisdom—seeing all things in the light of God—enables one to order all things rightly, and thus to make peace and reconciliation. And the greatest reconciliation is that between man and God.

In the Old Testament, Abraham and Moses are great models of this beatitude through their intercession for the forgiveness of sinners. When

told of the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham pleads to God for the sake of the few just men that live among the sinners.²⁸ Moses likewise had the audacity to plead with God for his people when they abandoned God for the worship of the golden calf:

O Lord, why does thy wrath burn hot against thy people, whom thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, "With evil intent did he bring them forth, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?" Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants. . . . And if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.²⁹

St. Paul makes a similar prayer for the reconciliation of his people in Romans 9:2–3: "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race."

Peace between man and God is ultimately established by the Cross of the Messiah, and so Jesus incarnates this beatitude. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2 Cor 5:18–20):

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

All the members of the Church are called to participate in the Messiah's mission of making peace between man and God, and secondarily between men, by sharing in the redemptive value of His Cross. This also shows the true nature of peace spoken of in this beatitude. Peace and charity are attained through the Cross—through self-abnegation and redemptive suffering through love.

Let us conclude with the text of Isaiah 11:2–3 with which we began, which prophesies that the Messiah, the shoot of Jesse (father of David) would be he on whom the Spirit of the Lord would rest in an abiding way, in "the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness." Jesus incarnates these gifts to the highest degree, revealing the heights and depths of docility to the Holy Spirit to which we are called.

²⁸ Gen 18:23–32.

²⁹ Ex 32:11–13, 32.

CHAPTER 12

Jewish and Christian Pentecost

Pentecost is one of the great feasts both of the Christian and Jewish calendar (although the calendars no longer coincide). Both the Old and the New Covenant celebrate the final stage of their birth on Pentecost. Christian Pentecost celebrates the fulfillment of the work begun in the Paschal mystery, just as for ancient Israel, Pentecost celebrated the fulfillment of the work begun in the Exodus and Passover.

Although it is true to say that Israel was born on the first Passover, it is still more true to say that it was born through the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, fifty days after Passover. In the Jewish liturgical year, the season of Passover goes from the first day of Passover to Pentecost, in which it was solemnly concluded.¹ Likewise in the Church, the season of Easter extends for these fifty days. What was begun on Passover/Easter, is concluded in Pentecost.

Jewish Pentecost (*Shavuot*)

The name "Pentecost" comes from the Greek word for "fiftieth." This feast was referred to by Greek-speaking Jews as "the fiftieth day."² The reason for the name is given in Leviticus 23:15-16: "And you shall count from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; *seven full weeks* shall they be, counting *fifty days* to the morrow after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a cereal offering of new grain to the Lord."

This text is ambiguous about the day in which the counting of fifty days was to begin, and there were different ways of reckoning it among Jewish sects. The practice of the Sadducees was to count from the Sabbath during the Passover, in which case Pentecost would always occur on a Sunday, as in the Christian practice. The Pharisees, followed by rabbinical Judaism, counted fifty days from the Passover, according

¹ Hence it was called "conclusion of the Passover" (*Atzeret shel Pesah*) in the Talmud. See the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Pentecost," vol. 6 (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), 592.

² In Hebrew: *Hag Hanishim Yom*.

to which Pentecost always falls on the sixth day of the Jewish month of Sivan.

This feast is known by Jews as *Shavuot*, Hebrew for "weeks," referring to the seven weeks after the Passover. It is referred to in this way in Exodus 34:22–23: "You shall observe the feast of weeks, the first fruits of the wheat harvest. . . . Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel."³ Pentecost (*Shavuot*) was one of the three feasts of pilgrimage (*shalosh regalim*)—together with Passover and the autumn Feast of Booths (*Sukkot*)—in which all adult male Israelites had to present themselves before the Lord in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Shavuot, like Sukkot, had a dual significance: agricultural and historical. On the one hand, it commemorated and gave thanks for the grain harvest—beginning with barley and ending with wheat—that was reaped between Passover and Pentecost. In this regard, the purpose of the feast was to offer the first fruits of the harvest before the Lord in the Temple. As a celebration of the harvest, the Israelites were to "rejoice before the Lord" (Deut 16:11), share the fruits of the harvest with the poor and needy, and offer sacrifice.

However, the Israelites were not just to give thanks for material sustenance, but more principally for their spiritual sustenance. Thus Pentecost is also a memorial of the great historical event of the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, fifty days after the Passover. Hence this feast is also called the *Festival of the Giving of the Law*,⁴ and the feast of the "Revelation" of the Torah.

The agricultural aspect is no longer observed, because it was tied to the Temple in Jerusalem in which the first fruits were offered and sacrifice performed. Today the feast focuses solely on commemorating the gift of the Torah.

A traditional Jewish practice was to hold a nocturnal vigil on the eve of the festival, in which the Pentateuch or excerpts from all the books of

³ See also Deut 16:10–11: "Then you shall keep the feast of weeks to the Lord your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the Lord your God blesses you; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, your manservant and your maidservant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place which the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell there."

⁴ In Hebrew, *Zeman Mattan Toratenu* (Time of the Giving of Our Torah).

the Old Testament were read.⁵ Readings for the feast include the Ten Commandments.

The period between Passover and Pentecost (Shavuot) was marked by a ritual counting of the days, called "Counting the Omer" (*sefirat ha'omer*). "Omer" refers to the offering of a measure ("omer") of barley in the Temple on the second day of Passover. Every evening between the second night of Passover and the eve of Shavuot, a special blessing was prayed followed by the count of the days between Passover and Pentecost.⁶ The purpose of this was to increase anticipation and spiritual preparation for the celebration of the gift of the giving of the Law.⁷

Christian Pentecost

Let us now look at the first Christian Pentecost, fifty days after the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. The same marvelous parallel that connects the old and the new Passover (Easter) is no less present between the old and the new Pentecost.

Just as the Jewish Pentecost celebrated the completion of the birth of Israel, begun in Passover but concluded on Shavuot with the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai fifty days later, so too the Christian Pentecost celebrates the birth of the Church, which began on Calvary and Easter Sunday, but was brought to full completion fifty days later on Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples.

Liturgically, the fifty days from Easter to Pentecost are all considered as Easter, the season of great joy. As we have seen, the Jews had to count the days and weeks from Passover until Pentecost in anticipation of the great gift of the Torah. Likewise, Christians should spiritually count the days from Easter until Pentecost, in anticipation of the great gift of the outpouring of the Spirit. Christ Himself promised this outpouring before His Ascension, telling His disciples that after He returned to the Father they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, which they were to await in expectation and prayer. On the day of His Ascension, He "charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait

⁵ This is known as *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* (Preparation for the Eve of Pentecost). A second vigil was held to read from the Psalms, for it was thought that David died on Pentecost. See *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Pentecost," vol. 6, p. 594.

⁶ "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to count the Omer." Then the Omer-count is stated in days and weeks.

⁷ See the website, Judaism 101: "The counting is intended to remind us of the link between Passover, which commemorates the Exodus, and Shavu'ot, which commemorates the giving of the Torah. It reminds us that the redemption from slavery was not complete until we received the Torah." Available online at <http://www.jewfaq.org/holidayb.htm>.

for the promise of the Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 1:4-5).⁸

They then asked Him if He was about to "restore the kingdom to Israel." Jesus said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8).

The question about the restoration of Israel and Christ's response is very interesting. On the one hand, this shows that the Apostles and other disciples were still confused about the nature of the Church and the Messianic kingdom. Jesus does not directly answer their question or contradict their conception. Rather, He speaks of Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit. What does this have to do with the "restoration of the kingdom of Israel" or the Messianic kingdom? Everything. The Messianic kingdom of Israel was indeed to be restored, but not in the form of a renewed kingdom of David and Solomon as Jews expected, and continue to expect. On the contrary, the Messianic kingdom was to be inaugurated precisely through the sacramental gift of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Christ's Ascension and the Giving of the Holy Spirit

The realization of Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit had to be preceded first by Jesus' Ascension into heaven. As He told His Apostles at the Last Supper, "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (Jn 16:7). In the divine plan, Jesus first had to ascend into heaven and be seated at the right hand of the Father before He would send the fullness of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Why did Christ first have to ascend into heaven and physically leave His Apostles before sending them the Spirit? There is an important parallel with Moses and the giving of the Law. Before the two tablets of the Law (written by the finger of God) were given to Israel, Moses had to ascend Mt. Sinai and speak there with the Lord for forty days. So it was fitting that the giving of the new Law—the outpouring of the Holy Spirit—had to be preceded by the *ascent of the new Moses*. However, the ascent of Jesus was far higher than that of Moses. He did not ascend a physical mountain, from which to obtain from God the tablets of the Law, but rather He ascended into the heights of heaven itself—indeed,

⁸ See also Lk 24:49: "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high."

"far above all the heavens" (Eph 4:10)—to sit at the right hand of God. From there He could obtain a better gift for men: the Spirit who would write the Law on the hearts of men, and anoint mankind with spiritual gifts that are to build up the Church.

This connection between the Ascension of Jesus and His sending of the Spirit with His gifts is stated in a beautiful but difficult passage of St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, in which he quotes Psalm 68:18, interpreting it with regard to Christ's Ascension: "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men" (Eph 4:8). Paul then continues: "In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things" (Eph 4:9-10). The "captives" taken up on high mentioned in Psalm 68:18 are interpreted by St. Paul to refer to the souls of the just waiting in the bosom of Abraham to be released by the Messiah when He descended to the dead. For this reason, Paul speaks of Christ's descent into the underworld before speaking of His Ascension. For when Christ ascended into heaven He took with Him the triumphant and exultant spoils of the underworld that He had liberated when His soul descended into *sheol* after dying on Calvary. The captives included Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all the just up to John the Baptist and St. Joseph.

However, Christ ascended into heaven not only to release "captives" of death and bring them with Him into heaven, but also to send supernatural gifts to men here on earth in the Church. St. Paul identifies the nature of these "gifts" mentioned by the Psalmist as the various graces and charisms that build up the Body of Christ:

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.⁹

Here we see that the gifts of the Spirit obtained for His disciples by Christ in His Ascension and sent to earth beginning on Pentecost, were spiritual gifts for the building up of the Church and for the sanctification of her members. The ultimate purpose of all the gifts of the Spirit is indicated by St. Paul at the end: that the life of the Messiah may be brought to maturity in us, that we may attain "the stature of the fullness of Christ."

⁹ Eph 4:11-13.

In order to do this, special charisms are given to certain members of the Church in order to build up the whole. Through the gift of the Spirit, the Apostles are given the grace to found and lead the Church, others are given the gift of prophecy, and others are given the charism to be evangelists, pastors, and teachers, in the service of building up the life of Christ in each member of the Church, and for building up the whole social Body of Christ, which is the Church.

In other words, Christ ascended above the heavens to send the Spirit, so that the Spirit could enable Christ to live in His disciples and in His Body, the Church, until the end of time. For this reason, before ascending into heaven, Jesus promised that He would be with us "always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). In the age of the Church, Christ's humanity is continually made present in an invisible way through the sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit and His graces and charisms are communicated, so as to make Christ present and living in us.

After Moses ascended Mt. Sinai to receive God's revelation, he himself returned with the tablets of the Law, the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God. After the new Moses—Jesus—ascends into heaven, He does not return Himself in the flesh (until the Second Coming), but sends the living divine Law—the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:17)—who makes Jesus present in the Church and in souls in a truly living but invisible way, writing the living Law in our hearts with the finger of God.

The Law Written on the Heart by the Spirit

This gift had been foretold by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who speak of a new Covenant and a new Law that was to be written not on tablets of stone, but in the hearts of men by the gift of the Spirit.

In Ezekiel 36:24–27 there is a magnificent messianic prophecy:

For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle *clean water* upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And *I will put my spirit within you*, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.

Two spiritual gifts are promised: the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit. The first part of the prophecy concerns the forgiveness of sins to be accomplished through Baptism, for God says that He will pour clean water on us, by which we will be cleansed from sin. The

second part concerns the gift of the Spirit. The effect is to take away hardness of heart, symbolized in the heart of stone, and to give a heart of flesh, a heart made new, which has the power to enable the recipients "to walk in the law of the Lord." The messianic gift of the Spirit does not replace the Torah, but rather *plants it within*. This is the purpose of the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost and in Confirmation.

In the light of the reference to Baptism and Confirmation (Pentecost), the opening line of the prophecy concerning the ingathering "into your own land" should be taken in an ecclesiological sense. The messianic ingathering will be an ingathering into the Church through the portals of Baptism and Confirmation!

A similar prophecy is given in Jeremiah 31:31–33, introducing the crucial notion of a "new covenant":

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: *I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

The New Covenant centers on the giving of the Holy Spirit, to renew the heart and write the Torah upon it. The new Law of the New Covenant is thus described as the interiorization of the Torah through the Spirit.

St. Paul speaks of the faithful in Corinth using this image of the Spirit written on their hearts: "You show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:3).

The Miracle of Pentecost

The giving of the Holy Spirit on the first Christian Pentecost, ten days after the Ascension, is related in Acts 2:1–4:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and

resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Why was the communication of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost accompanied by the sound of wind? First of all, the word "spirit" also means "wind" in Hebrew. Furthermore, we have seen in the previous chapter that it was used to designate a divine impulse or movement in the faithful by which they are directed by the impetus of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Himself made this connection when speaking with Nicodemus about the communication of the Spirit in Baptism: "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:8). Several passages of the Old Testament also show this connection. We see it above all in the theophany of Exodus. Another well-known text is that of 1 Kings 19:12 in which the prophet Elijah hears the Lord passing in the small voice of the wind. Again we see the connection in Ezekiel 3:12: "Then the Spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of the Lord arose from its place [the Temple], I heard behind me the sound of a great earthquake."

The tongues of fire at Pentecost were also associated with the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit gives light and the fire of love. The rabbinical tradition frequently makes this connection.¹⁰ The connection of flames and the fire of the Holy Spirit was also very prominent on Mt. Sinai in the giving of the Law, in the first Jewish Pentecost, described in Exodus 24:16-17: "The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel."

The cloud covering the mountain represents the mystical communication of the Holy Spirit, and the flames represent the fire of charity commanded in the holiness of the Law, which is summed up in the double commandment of charity.

The same elements are present over the Apostles in the form of rushing wind and tongues of fire. The fact that the flames appeared as "*tongues* of fire" is also significant. The Apostles were given the gift of tongues of fire to communicate the Gospel through preaching, so as to excite the fire of charity in the hearts of their listeners. The first fruits of this preaching were 3,000 souls.

¹⁰ See the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Holy Spirit," vol. 6 (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1964), 448.

The Speaking in Tongues

Acts 2:5–11 tells us:

There were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."

The Apostles' speaking in tongues on Pentecost was a prophetic allusion to the universality of the Church, which is the ark of salvation for the whole human race and thus speaks all tongues and is understood by all. The event of Pentecost was thus the antitype of Babel with its confusion and "pluralism" of tongues that created divisions among men. The speaking in tongues on Pentecost was understood by all and created unity, and was itself a sign of the catholic unity that the Church is called to be. The confusion of tongues at Babel was caused by the attempt of men to create a social edifice to rival God, to make a "name for themselves" without God (see Gen 11:4). The catholic unity first revealed on Pentecost pointed to a social edifice founded by God: the Messianic Kingdom of God, whose coming Jesus had preached from the beginning of His ministry.

Although the plurality of tongues that began at Babel continues, and will doubtless continue until the end of time, in the Church the original harmony is recomposed in the unity of faith. Although materially there continue to be many languages, they are united in proclaiming the same Creed. Thus St. Paul exhorts all to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all." The variety of the gifts and charisms of the Holy Spirit is ordered to strengthening the unity of the Body, composed of complementary members.

The speaking in tongues at Pentecost thus perfectly represents the catholic unity that marks the Church. It is a unity that is not monolithic, but composed of a great variety of complementary members, each of whom serves the others. It is to be made up of Jews and Gentiles, and

of all the nations on earth, speaking all its tongues, but united in faith, hope, and charity, which create the unity of the Church.

St. Augustine has a beautiful commentary on the significance of the miracle of tongues at Pentecost:

The Holy Spirit continues to allow us to speak in tongues. At the time of the Apostles, the Church was not yet spread through all the earth, and Christ did not yet have members in each nation who could speak its respective language. That is why, as a sign of what would soon need to happen, each of the Apostles, by himself, spoke all languages; but *now already, the total Body of Christ speaks nearly all languages*. May the Church grow still more, that she might speak all languages. . . . I speak all languages. I am in the Body of Christ, in the Church of Christ. If the Body of Christ speaks all languages, all are mine; Greek, Syrian, Hebrew, all languages are mine, for the unity of all peoples is mine.¹¹

If St. Augustine could say around the year 400 that the Church already “speaks nearly all languages,” how much more that is true today! I wonder if there is a language on earth in which the Bible is not translated and catechesis given.

An ancient liturgical text of the Church says: “The diversity of tongues is no longer an obstacle to the building of the Church, but rather reinforces its unity.”¹² This is the miracle of Catholic universality, in which the plethora of tongues builds up the unity of the Church.

Since the Church is the Bride of Christ, it would be unfitting if the Bride were restricted to one “corner” of the world, wherever it might be, for then it would seem that God’s providence had not been able to realize a wedding with all of mankind.

Prophecy of Joel

After the miracle of the Apostles speaking in tongues, some of the passersby mocked them, saying they were drunk with new wine. They were indeed drunk, but with a spiritual rather than a physical inebriation. Spiritual inebriation or ecstatic spiritual joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

At this point St. Peter stood to make his first apostolic discourse to the people in Jerusalem. He began by citing the prophecy of Joel 2:28–29 concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Messianic times:

¹¹ St. Augustine, Commentary on Psalm 147, n. 19, quoted in Charles Journet, *The Theology of the Church*, trans. Victor Szcurek (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 347.

¹² *Sacramentarium Veronense*, ed. L.C. Mohlberg (Rome, 1956), n. 217. These texts date from the sixth century.

And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. . . . And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. ¹³

In conformity with the prophetic text, the rabbinic tradition affirms that the Holy Spirit will be "poured out equally upon Jews and pagans, men and women, freemen and slaves."¹⁴

God had never withheld the gifts of the Holy Spirit from mankind. The Old Testament frequently speaks of the Holy Spirit and His gifts of prophecy, given to the prophets from Elijah to John the Baptist, and also to kings such as Saul and David. In the New Testament, we see the Spirit given to Elizabeth and Zachariah, Simeon, and the prophetess Anna.

What is new about the messianic outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost? There are three principal novelties. First, the Spirit is given for the building up of the Church as the anti-Babel, the new Ark of Noah, which is intended to be a "sign and instrument . . . of communion with God and of unity among all men."¹⁵ Thus the Church is to be universal, extending beyond the borders of Israel and into the whole world. This first occurred when the centurion Cornelius and his household received the gift of the Holy Spirit at the hands of St. Peter in Acts 10, and then on a broader scale in Antioch as narrated in Acts 11.

Secondly, the outpouring of the Spirit, according to this text, is no longer to be considered an extraordinary event given to a few privileged souls, but is to be given to all "your sons and daughters," young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, slaves and free. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon *all* the disciples who were praying together in the cenacle, and not only upon the Apostles. In fact, the disciples praying in the cenacle on Pentecost (who numbered about 120)¹⁶ comprised the universal Church at that moment of her birth. St. Luke clearly states that "all" received the gift of the Spirit.

Third, the means established for this universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit is *sacramental*: realized through a sensible sign that is efficacious in transmitting grace. This sacramental means of giving the

¹³ Acts 2:13-21.

¹⁴ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, "Holy Spirit," vol. 6, p. 449, citing Tanna debe Eliyahu, ed. Friedmann.

¹⁵ Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, LG 1.

¹⁶ See Acts 1:15.

Holy Spirit is intimately tied to the universality of the gift. All can receive the Holy Spirit because there is an ordinary channel established for giving it. And the only precondition for receiving the sacramental gift of grace through the Spirit is faith and contrition for sin.

Pentecost and the Sacrament of Confirmation

The Holy Spirit is first given in Baptism, but a fuller outpouring is given in the sacrament of Confirmation. On Pentecost, God Himself anointed the faithful with the Holy Spirit and His gifts. However, the miracle of Pentecost was to be perpetuated in the Church through the sacrament of Confirmation.

Confirmation is a sacrament of spiritual maturity, completing what is begun in Baptism. In Baptism one is born in the supernatural life of grace. This life is destined to grow. Confirmation provides a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit to cause growth in spiritual maturity and a deeper insertion into the life of Christ in the Church.¹⁷ Its effect is to strengthen the spiritual life with the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, making its recipients into "soldiers of Christ."

After Pentecost, we see the miracle repeated through the laying on of the hands of the Apostles.¹⁸ In Acts 8, the people of Samaria received the Word through the deacon Philip (not the Apostle) and were baptized. When the Apostles "heard that Samaria had received the word of God," they sent Peter and John to them "who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:15–17). The miracle of Pentecost was thus reproduced in Samaria.

The deacon Philip baptized, but was not able to give the Holy Spirit in Confirmation because he was only a deacon, and the ordinary minister of Confirmation is a bishop, who is endowed with the fullness of Holy Orders. For this reason two of the Apostles (of whom the bishops are successors) went to Samaria to confirm the neophytes and thus confer the fuller gift of the Holy Spirit.

One of the Samaritans, Simon Magus (the magician), was so impressed with this sacramental and infallible means of giving grace,

¹⁷ See Vatican II, *LG* 11: "By the sacrament of Confirmation they are more perfectly bound to the Church and are endowed with the special strength of the Holy Spirit."

¹⁸ See the CCC 1288: "The imposition of hands is rightly recognized by the Catholic tradition as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church."

that he offered money to the Apostles to be given the power to confer the Spirit. From this incident we get the word "simony," which refers to the attempt to *buy* sacramental power: buying a share in the episcopal power of the Apostles.

We see the sacrament of Confirmation again in Acts 19:2-7. When St. Paul arrived in Ephesus, he found some disciples there and asked them if they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit when they were initiated into the faith. They replied that they did not even know of the existence of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul then asked them: "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, 'Into John's baptism.' . . . On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all."

First St. Paul baptized the disciples and then afterwards he laid his hands upon them. Although the sacrament is not named, this clearly refers to the sacrament of Confirmation, as in Acts 8. The effect is the same as on Pentecost: the Holy Spirit came upon them, they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1289 clarifies, "Very early, the better to signify the gift of the Holy Spirit, an anointing with perfumed oil (chrism) was added to the laying on of hands. This anointing highlights the name 'Christian,' which means 'anointed' and derives from that of Christ himself whom God 'anointed with the Holy Spirit.'"

In his first Letter, St. John speaks of the Christian faithful as having received an "anointing": "You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all know" (1 Jn 2:20). It seems that he is referring to the anointing with the Holy Spirit received in Confirmation, by which the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are poured out—wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

The spiritual effects given by the sacrament of Confirmation are beautifully illustrated by the transformation of the Apostles on Pentecost, especially with regard to their newfound courage and ability to speak. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1302, the "effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost."

The Three Ages and Conversions in the Spiritual Life

Pentecost completed the conversion of the Apostles and brought them to the highest stage of the spiritual life. Like our physical and intellectual life, the spiritual life is subject to growth and development, and is said to have three stages: it begins with the purgative state of beginners, advances to the illuminative state of those who are progressing, and

culminates in the unitive state of those who are advanced. The state of beginners is referred to as purgative because the major emphasis in this state lies in actively combating vices and disordered tendencies. It is a stage of uprooting sin and combat against it. The illuminative stage is marked by progress in supernatural virtue under the guidance of faith, and by the beginning of infused prayer. The unitive stage is that of sanctity, consisting in the blossoming of charity, infused contemplation, the fullness of the action of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The entrance into each of these stages of the spiritual life will be marked by a "conversion." We often tend to think of conversion as a one-time event by which we come to accept the Catholic faith, or begin to take it seriously. The Gospels however show us the necessity of multiple conversions. In fact, they show us that Peter and the Apostles experienced three principal conversions, one for each stage of the Christian life.¹⁹

Their first conversion occurred when Jesus called them to follow Him and leave everything else behind at the beginning of their discipleship (Mt 4:18–22). The Gospels, however, show us that they still had numerous imperfections, such as concern over who was greatest (Lk 9:46; Mk 9:34), spiritual ambition (Mt 20:21), presumption in their own abilities (Lk 22:32), harsh zeal (Lk 9:54), etc. Even at the Last Supper a dispute arose among them as to who was the greatest (Lk 22:24), prompting the lesson of the washing of the feet. The fact that all the Apostles except John abandoned Christ during His Passion showed their need for further conversion, which came precisely through the experience of the Cross and the Resurrection. This second conversion made them into witnesses of the Resurrection and profoundly changed them, as we see most clearly in the cases of Peter and Thomas.

Peter's second conversion is foretold in Luke 22:31–34:

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again [converted], strengthen your brethren." And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." He said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you three times deny that you know me."

It is reasonable to think that Peter's conversion occurred when the Lord looked at him after his betrayal, as narrated in Luke 22:61.

¹⁹ This is beautifully explained by Garrigou-Lagrange in *The Three Conversions in the Spiritual Life* (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2002).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to this second conversion in 1427–28:

Christ's call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians. This *second conversion* is an uninterrupted task for the whole Church who, "clasping sinners to her bosom, [is] at once holy and always in need of purification, [and] follows constantly the path of penance and renewal." This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a "contrite heart," drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first. St. Peter's conversion after he had denied his master three times bears witness to this. Jesus' look of infinite mercy drew tears of repentance from Peter and, after the Lord's resurrection, a threefold affirmation of love for him.

However, even at the day of the Ascension, the Apostles were still insufficiently clear about their mission, thinking still in terms of a temporal kingdom in Israel, for they asked: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

The third conversion came on the day of Pentecost, when they were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and all of His gifts, and could then take their place as pillars of the Church. Through the experience of Pentecost, they gained a supernatural fortitude or boldness, a supernatural wisdom to understand the mysteries of God, and a supernatural docility to God's inspirations. Their contemplation was translated immediately into fearless preaching and conversion.

Peter, who fifty days before had trembled at the word of a maidservant, now, with breathtaking boldness, preaches repentance for the crucifixion of Christ to the very men who were partially responsible:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. . . . Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.²⁰

Some days later, he preaches with the same audacity after the miracle of the cure of the lame man:

²⁰ Acts 2:22–24, 38.

But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. . . . I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out.²¹

The supernatural fortitude of the Apostles is shown in the fact that after Pentecost they rejoice in suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ (Acts 5:41). Above all, however, their supernatural transformation is evident from the ardor of their love for Christ, which they communicated to the early Christian community. Acts 2:44–47 gives eloquent witness:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

This glorious spiritual transformation that we witness in the Apostles and disciples after Pentecost is the exemplar of the spiritual effects that are given by the sacrament of Confirmation throughout the life of the Church. Some may ask: Why are not all sanctified by Confirmation as the disciples were on Pentecost? The sacraments open the door to the outpouring of God's graces, but the faithful must *continually cooperate* with the work of God through progressive conversion. The graces given in germ in Baptism and Confirmation need to be progressively unfolded and unleashed in our lives as we seek to advance through the three stages of the spiritual life towards holiness.

Pentecost and the First Fruits

Christian Pentecost corresponds mystically not only to the giving of the Law, but also to that other aspect of the Jewish Pentecost regarding the celebration of the first fruits of the wheat harvest of the land of Israel. These material first fruits of the harvest are a figure of the spiritual first fruits of the apostolic preaching: the grace of repentance and conversion that produced a harvest of three thousand adult converts. Acts 2:37–41 recounts the event:

²¹ Acts 3:13–19.

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." . . . So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

These three thousand baptized souls were the first fruits of the preaching of the Apostles. The flock of the Church thus increased from 120 to 3,120—a twenty-five-fold increase. Still more important were the spiritual first fruits: the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the disciples. Thus the first fruits of the Church offered to God on her first Pentecost were fruits of grace and apostolate.

At Pentecost, the universal Church was fully born, and present with all her elements: sanctity, fortitude, charity, joy in the Holy Spirit, the super-abundant engendering of new members, and the promise of a Church that speaks all languages. What was begun in the Annunciation and Nativity of Jesus was brought to completion on Pentecost, just as what was begun through the calling of Abraham was later brought to its first fullness in the Jewish Pentecost on Mt. Sinai through the giving of the Law.

Through the sacraments, the Church is kept ever young as on that day of Pentecost. For our part, however, we must dispose ourselves through holy desires to receive the full grace that is waiting to be outpoured. Let us pray for an ever fuller outpouring of the Spirit, that the prophetic expectation of Israel may be brought to completion.

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