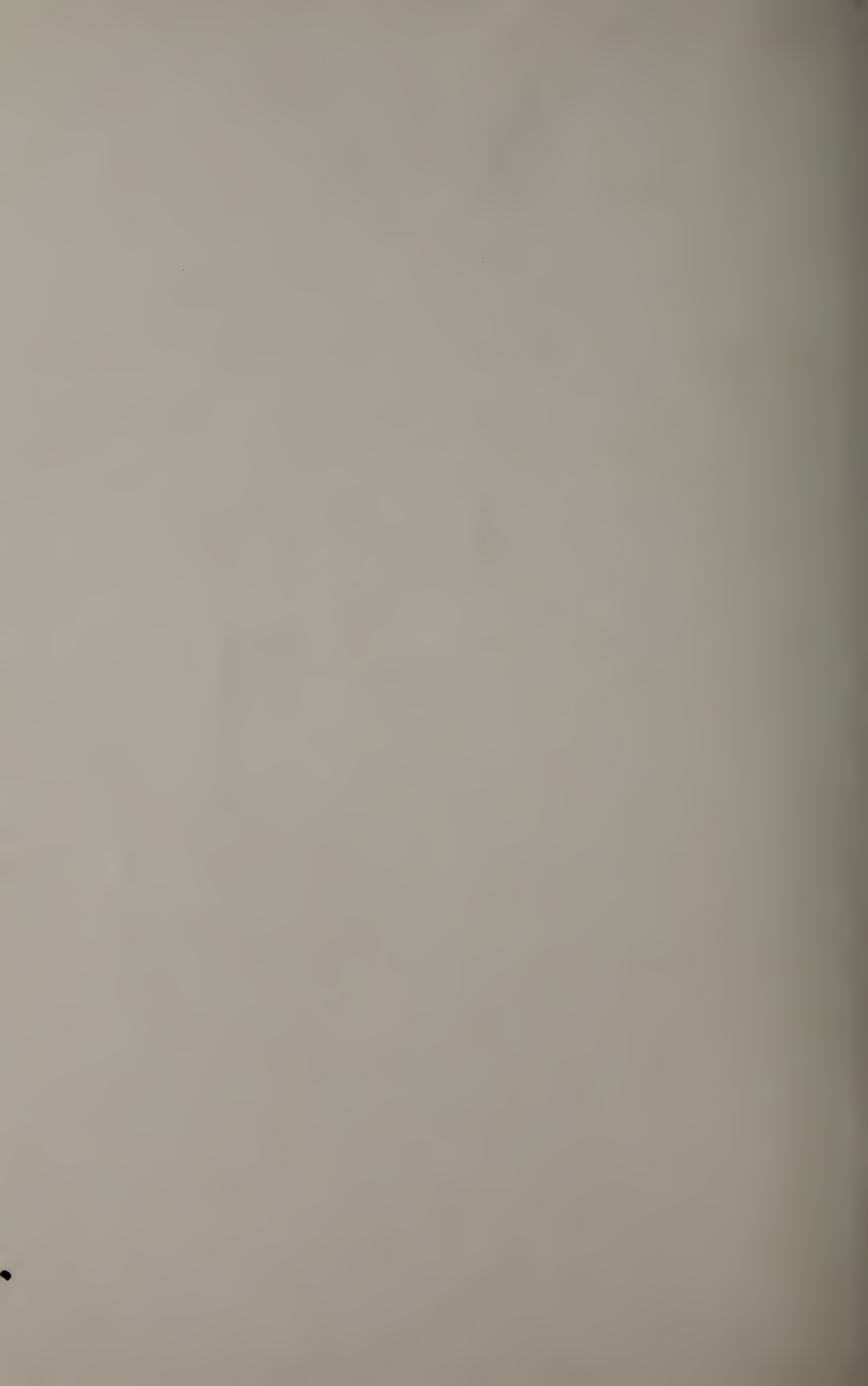


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Theology
Christology
Anthropology

International Theological
Commission

April, 1983



Theology **C**hristology
Anthropology

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The Committee on Doctrine of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops is pleased to offer in English translation the text of the International Theological Commission on Christology. The translation has been made from the Latin text and has been kept as literal as possible. It is the sincere hope of the Committee that this translation will assist further reflection on these issues.

The Committee is grateful to Fr. Michaël Ledwith, member of the Commission, who made available this translation, and to Mr. Russell Shaw for his editorial work.

Rev. Msgr. Richard Malone
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The International Theological Commission

The International Theological Commission whose members are appointed by the Pope to serve for five years was established as an adjunct to the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1969. It was established to provide the Holy See and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the consultative and advisory services of theologians, scriptural and liturgical experts representative of various schools of thought. The President of the Commission is the Prefect of the Congregation, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Monsignor Philippe Delhaye is the executive secretary.

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Introduction

At its plenary session in 1979 the International Theological Commission chose Christology as its theme for consideration; in 1980 it published its conclusions (cf. the Latin text “*Quaestiones selectae de Christologia*,” in the periodical *Gregorianum*, 61, 1980, pp. 609-632, and also several translations into modern languages).

Upon completion of the second five-year period of its work (1974–79), the Commission itself was re-constituted. The majority of the members, especially of those present for the first time, wished to continue the study of the theme of Christology. Although the new Commission had complete liberty to discuss all Christological questions, nevertheless for reasons of prudence and to save energy and time, re-examination of areas covered in the document which had already been published was to be avoided.

The program for the plenary session of 1981 required amplifications and supplementary considerations. In the first place, it was to expound the relationship of Christology to the other ways of talking about God and to faith in the triune God. Having laid this foundation, it would be necessary to determine the complex relationship between Christology and anthropology. In the second place, two questions intimately linked to the foundations of Christology needed particular attention: the pre-existence of Jesus Christ and today’s disputed question about the suffering of God. Both themes exemplify how contemporary problems and classical solutions can clarify and enrich each other in productive dialogue.

From this point of view both Christological documents from the two sessions can be seen as complementing each other so as to form a unity; this judgment, however, is left to the well-disposed reader.



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I. The Foundation and Context of Christology

The context of Christology includes the human desire for and the knowledge man has of God, the revelation of the triune God, and the image of man in contemporary anthropology and in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. If these basic elements are not first treated adequately, Christology itself is placed in danger. Even the effort to elaborate a doctrine of man will as a consequence be rendered obscure. These are the reasons why thought must be given to a new clarification of the setting of all Christology.

A) The Economy of Jesus Christ and the Revelation of God

1. What is the relationship between Christology and the problem of the revelation of God? To avoid all *confusion* and all *separation* of the two aspects of this question, the complementary character of the two approaches to it must be maintained. The first descends from God to Jesus; the other returns from Jesus to God.

1.1 *Confusion* between Christology and theology results if one supposes that the name of God is totally unknown outside of Jesus Christ, and that there exists no other theology than that which arises from the Christian revelation. This does not respect the mystery of man, the creature in whom there wells up a fundamental desire for God, intimated in religions and in philosophical teachings all throughout history. It also neglects the importance of the traces of God in creation (cf. Rom. 1:20). In addition, it denies the economy of the revelation of the unique character of God in the Old Testament, which the Church recognized from the very beginning, as well as

the theocentric attitude of Jesus, who asserted that the God of the Old Law was his own Father. Furthermore, one creates a serious ambiguity in the understanding of the confession "Jesus is the Son of God"—an ambiguity which, in the last analysis, can result in an atheistic Christology.

1.2 A *separation* between Christology and theology supposes the idea that in any part of the body of theology, the notion of God elaborated by philosophical wisdom can take the place of reflection upon revealed faith. It also misunderstands the originality of the revelation given to the people of Israel—revelation embodied in the Christian faith with radical newness—while diminishing the importance of the event of Jesus Christ. Paradoxically, this separation can lead to the opinion that Christological investigation is sufficient of itself and is turned in on itself with no reference to God.

2. It seems that we can apply here—with the appropriate adaptations—the criterion of the Chalcedonian definition: distinction without confusion or separation must be maintained between Christology and the problem of God. Such a distinction exists between the two periods of revelation, which correspond to each other. The first is the universal manifestation of himself which God gave in the primordial creation; the second is the personal revelation which developed throughout the history of salvation, from the time of the old covenant until the coming of Jesus Christ.

3. Thus there exists a complementary interaction between understanding Jesus in light of the idea of God and finding God in Jesus.

3.1 In the first place, the believer cannot recognize in Jesus the full manifestation of God, except in the light of the notion of and the desire of God which lives in the heart of man. Even though it admitted certain errors, this light has had an effect upon the religions of many peoples and upon philosophical studies; it was already visible in the revelation of the one God in the Old Testament; it is always present in men's consciences today, notwithstanding the bitterness of atheism. One finds it in the search for absolute values such as justice or fraternity. This light is fundamentally presupposed in the confession of faith, "Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

3.2 A second observation must be made with humility—not just because Christians' faith and behavior do not live up to the standards of the totally gratuitous revelation which reached its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, but also because the revealed mystery surpasses all theological formulations: the mystery of God, in so far

as it was definitively revealed in Jesus Christ, contains “unfathomable riches” (cf. Eph. 3:8) surpassing and indeed transcending the thoughts and desires of the philosophical and religious mind. By opening a free and ever-widening road to God—who always lies beyond—this mystery guards, confirms and leads to its proper fullness whatever is true in these thoughts and desires. No matter their errors and deviations, it guides them, as they themselves wish, into paths more correct and ample. And from these sources the mystery of faith, which is always open to being understood more profoundly, accepts the intuitions and religious experiences of mankind for integration into itself, so that the catholicity of Christian faith may be more fully realized.

3.3 For Jesus Christ, bringing to completion the revelation made in the whole history of salvation, shows the mystery of God, whose triune life is the source of a most loving communication in himself and to us. This God, already revealed in the Old Testament and definitively announced by Jesus Christ, made himself near to man (cf. Dt. 4:7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 11, 5.4). In many of the non-Christian religions it is rather that man seeks God. But in this revelation it is God who first and from the beginning seeks out man and loves him from the depths of his heart. This discovery, surpassing all previous conceptions of God, and satisfying them beyond all desire, is immanent in the confession of faith, “Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

B) The Relationship between Theocentrism and Christocentrism

1. In the recent history of Western theology (and so leaving medieval theology out of consideration) the question treated so far can be discussed from different perspectives, namely, *theocentrism* and *Christocentrism*. The question these terms pose is whether the proper object of Christology is immediately God or Jesus Christ. We consider this problem by addressing, formally and logically, the relationship between theocentrism and Christocentrism.

1.1 In fact the question rests on a false foundation if the theocentrism which one opposes to Christocentrism is not a Christian theism (that is, revealed and trinitarian) but is in some sense a *natural* theism, which places in doubt either the possibility or the fact of revelation. The question immediately vanishes because, in the first

place, there is lacking in theism a purely *natural* reason which could contradict Christocentrism; in the second place, Christian Theocentrism and Christocentrism are in fact one and the same.

1.2 Christian theism consists properly in the triune God, and he is known uniquely in the revelation to us in Jesus Christ. Thus, on the one hand, knowledge of Jesus Christ leads to a knowledge of the Trinity and attains its plenitude in the knowledge of the Trinity; on the other hand, there is no knowledge of the Triune God except in knowledge of Jesus Christ himself. It follows that there is no distinction between theocentrism and Christocentrism; the two terms denote the same reality.

1.3 Leaving aside less suitable interpretations, Christocentrism properly connotes the Christology of Jesus of Nazareth, which, taken in its own more profound sense, expresses the “singularity” of Jesus Christ. But this singularity of Jesus Christ properly accords with the revelation of the Trinity when it is defined on the one hand by the singular relationship of Jesus himself with the Father and the Holy Spirit, that is, with God; and, in consequence, on the other hand, by the singular condition according to which Jesus exists with and for men.

2. Christian theism does not exclude natural theism, but on the contrary presupposes it in its own way. For Christian theism takes its origin from God revealing himself according to a most free intention of his will; while natural theism pertains intrinsically to human reason, as the First Vatican Council teaches (cf. *DS* 3004, 3026).

3. *Natural theism* is not the same as, and therefore is not to be confused with, either the theism/monotheism of the Old Testament or historical theism, that is, the Theism which non-Christians have professed in various ways in their religions. The monotheism of the Old Testament has its origins in a supernatural revelation, and therefore retains an intrinsic relation to—indeed, demands—the trinitarian revelation. Historical theisms do not arise from a *pure nature* but from a nature subject to sin, objectively redeemed by Jesus Christ and elevated to a supernatural destiny.

C) Christology and the Revelation of the Trinity

1. The economy of Jesus Christ reveals the triune God. Jesus Christ, however, is recognized in his mission only if the unique

presence of God in him is properly understood. For this reason theocentrism and Christocentrism illustrate and need each other. Still, there remains the question of the relationship of Christology to the revelation of the triune God.

1.1 Detect from the New Testament that in the witness of the primitive Church, it was always held with certainty that through the event of Jesus Christ and the event of the gift of the Holy Spirit God had revealed himself to us as he is. In himself he is such as appeared to us: "Philip, he who sees me sees the Father" (Jn. 14:9).

1.2 This, therefore, is the role which the three divine names play in the eternal life of God, according to the economy of salvation and according to the Greek Fathers' understanding of the matter. This is for us the only definitive source of all knowledge of the mystery of the Trinity. The elaboration of the doctrine of the Trinity had its beginnings in the economy of salvation. Again, an eternal and immanent Trinity is of necessity presupposed by an economic Trinity. Theology and catechetics must both take into account this datum of the primitive faith.

2. Therefore a fundamental axiom of modern theology is best put in the following terms: The Trinity which manifests itself in the economy of salvation is an immanent Trinity, and it is this Trinity which gives itself freely and graciously in the economy of salvation.

2.1 Any kind of distinction, then, between Christology and the Trinity is to be avoided in theology and catechetics. The mystery of Jesus Christ belongs to the structure of the Trinity. The mystery of the Trinity is Christological. Such a distinction can take on either a neo-scholastic form or a modern form. It was the practice of neo-scholasticism to segregate the consideration of the Trinity from the whole Christian mystery; nor did it take sufficient account of the Trinity in its understanding of the Incarnation and the deification of man. The Trinity's importance for both the body of the truths of faith and Christian life was repeatedly neglected.

The modern distinction places a veil between men and the eternal Trinity, as if Christian revelation was already inviting man to know the Triune God and participate in his life. As far as the eternal Trinity is concerned, this leads to a certain *agnosticism* which can in no way be accepted. For if God is greater than anything we can think about him, Christian revelation asserts that that *extra* greatness is always of a Trinitarian nature.

2.2 In the same way, anything leading to confusion between the event of Jesus Christ and the Trinity must be avoided. The

Trinity was not simply brought about in the history of salvation by means of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, as though an historical process were necessary for God to emerge as *Trinitarian*. Therefore, the distinction must be maintained between the immanent Trinity, where liberty and necessity are the same thing in the eternal essence of God, and the Trinity of the economy of salvation, where God exercises his liberty absolutely, with no suggestion of his being forced to it.

3. This distinction between the *immanent* Trinity and the *economic* Trinity is intrinsic to their real identity. It is not to be used as justifying new modes of separation, but is to be understood according to the way of affirmation, negation, and eminence. God is beyond all divisions one might attribute to him. In the economy of salvation we see the Eternal Son take on in his own life the *kenotic* event of birth, of human life, and of his death on the cross. This event, in which God reveals himself absolutely and definitively, affects in some way the being proper to God the Father, insofar as he is the kind of God who accomplishes these mysteries and really shares them as belonging to himself, together with the Son and the Holy Spirit. For not alone in the mystery of Jesus Christ does God the Father reveal and communicate himself to us freely and graciously through the Son and in the Holy Spirit; but also, the Father leads a Trinitarian life with the Son and the Holy Spirit in a manner most profound and almost new, according to our way of speaking, insofar as the Father's relationship to the incarnate Son, in the communication of the gift of the Spirit, is the very relationship which constitutes the Trinity. In the intimate life of the Triune God the very potential exists for the realization of these events, which, through the inexplicable freedom of God, take place for us in the history of salvation brought by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

These great events in the life of Jesus clearly make applicable to us and make efficacious in a new way the eternal word of generation, in which the Father says to the Son: "You are my son; this day have I begotten you" (Ps. 2:7; cf. Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5;5:5 and also Lk. 3:22).

D) The Relationship between Christology and Anthropology

1. Modern Christology often is based more upon and developed from an anthropology as a new principle of understanding,

than upon the theology of the Triune God. This methodology has its greatest impact on the field of soteriology. The purpose of the redemption is conceived more as a hominisation than as the deification of man. In this process, the crisis in metaphysics, already evident in the field of philosophy, has had great consequences at the very heart of theology. The disjunctive antithesis between *ontological* considerations and merely *functional* considerations (which some hold are closer to the biblical mind) has serious consequences, which are well known in modern theology. Granted that the relationship between anthropology and Christology has to be worked out anew in terms of their mutual analogies; over and above this, the problem of the deification of man will be treated by itself in a separate section of this text (cf. E).

The announcement of Jesus Christ the Son of God is made under the biblical sign *for us (pro nobis)*. Thus it is necessary to treat the whole of Christology under the aspect of soteriology. For this reason, and more or less correctly and laudably, some modern attempts have been made to work out a *functional* Christology. But, conversely, it is likewise true that *existence for others* means Jesus Christ cannot be separated from his relationship and intimate communion with the Father, and must for that very reason be rooted in his eternal Sonship. The pro-existence of Jesus Christ, in which God communicates himself to man, presupposes pre-existence. Otherwise the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Saviour would be merely a fiction and an illusion, incapable of defending itself against the modern accusation that it is an ideology. To ask whether Christology should be functional or ontological is to pose false alternatives.

2. The anthropological element in Christology can be considered under three aspects in accord with the biblical typology of Adam-Christ (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45-49).

2.1 Just as faith presupposes man to be a subject whom God created free, with the capacity of being open to and responding to God, so Christology needs anthropology. It is for this reason that theology, following the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, acknowledges that a relative autonomy—that is, an autonomy of secondary causation based in a relationship to God the Creator—should be assigned to man and to the world: a just liberty should be conceded to the sciences (cf. *GS* 36, 41, 56; *LG* 36; *AA* 7) and in a positive way theology should make use of the anthropological orientation of modern times. Christian faith ought to demonstrate

its proper character by cultivating and guarding the transcendence of the human person (cf. *GS* 76).

2.2 The Gospel of Jesus Christ not only presupposes man's essence and existence, but brings him to full perfection. This perfection, at least implicitly sought, desired, and hoped for by all men, is transcendent and infinite, and can be found only in God. Man's true hominisation therefore attains its apex in his divinisation, in his friendship and communion with God, by which man is made the temple of God, enjoying the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The adoration and worship of God, especially Eucharistic worship, makes man fully human. Therefore, Jesus Christ, at once God and man, is found to be the eschatological fullness of man, and in him alone is found the "measure of the stature of the fullness of man" (cf. Eph. 4:13). Only in Jesus Christ is man's limitless openness concretely found. It is especially in Jesus Christ that the mystery of man and his exalted vocation are truly shown to us (cf. *GS* 22).

The saving history of the people of the Old Testament serves as a type which justifies man's hope that God does not deceive, and that in new ways this hope will be fulfilled abundantly in the person and work of Christ.

2.3. The identity and perfection of man as they are found in Christ challenge any human absolutism which the sinner chooses for himself. For this reason the preaching of the Gospel cannot be separated from a warning of judgment and a call to conversion. The following of the Cross and communion with the crucified Jesus Christ do not destroy man, but signify and can even bring about the end of many forms of alienation, which result ultimately from the power of sin and the slavery of the law and death. This signifies and confers the freedom to which we have been called through Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 5:1, 13). For this reason it is the Pasch of the Lord, namely, participation in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which shows the true way by which man is brought to perfection.

3. In this triple view of man, which Christology gives, the mystery of God and man is shown to the world as the mystery of love. Under the guidance of the Christian faith one can elaborate a vision which embraces all things. Furthermore, even if this vision critically examines the yearnings of modern men, it also affirms, purges, and improves them.

In ancient philosophy substance in general was at the center of things, but here the center is a *metaphysic of charity*, namely,

the person, whose most perfect act is the act of charity.

Such an interpretation of prophetic and Christological reality is also of fundamental importance in applying the precepts of morality, both personal and social. In these matters the faith ought to presuppose a relatively autonomous ethical standard (cf. Rom. 2:14 ff.), while at the same time judging it critically by the standard of Jesus Christ, so that man's dignity is advanced with justice in human society, while justice is surpassed by Christian love, which ought to be the soul of justice. In this way, the human ethical standard, which is of itself open to very many interpretations, is rendered Christian. Therefore from the Gospel of Jesus Christ one correctly derives the duty to participate in building a *civilization of love* in human history.

E) The Image of God in Man or the Christian Meaning of the *Deification* of Man

1. "The Word of God is made man, that man may become God" (Athanasius, *De inc.* 54,3). This axiom of the soteriology of the Fathers, above all of the Greeks, is denied in our own times for various reasons. Some assert that *deification* is a typically Hellenistic notion of salvation and is conducive to a mentality of flight from the world, together with a denial of human values. In their view deification removes the difference between God and man and leads to a fusion without distinction. They oppose to this patristic axiom another which they maintain is more adapted to our age: "God is made man, so that man may be made more human." Certainly the words *deification*, *theosis*, *theopoiesis*, *homoiosis theo*, etc., of themselves are ambiguous. Therefore the genuine or Christian sense of *deification* in its major aspects must be explained.

2. Certainly Greek philosophy and religion acknowledged some *natural* kinship between the human and the divine mind. The biblical revelation, however, clearly treats of man as a creature, who by contemplation and love moves toward God. It is not man's intellectual capacity but conversion of heart, a new obedience, and moral action which bring man closest to God. This is impossible without God's grace. Man can become what God is only by grace.

3. Stronger arguments arise from Christian preaching. Created in the image and likeness of God, man is called to a sharing of life with God who alone can fulfill the deepest desires of the

human heart. The idea of deification reaches its summit by virtue of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Word assumes our mortal nature so that we can be freed from death and sin and can share in the divine life. Through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit we are sons and even coheirs (cf. Rom. 8:17), we are partakers in the divine nature (2 Pt. 1:4). Deification consists in the very grace which frees us from death of sin and communicates to us the divine life itself. We are sons in the Son.

4. The Christian meaning of our proposition is made much more profound through the mystery of Jesus Christ. Just as the Incarnation of the Word does not change the divine nature, in the same way the divinity of Jesus Christ does not change or dissolve human nature, but rather makes it more itself and perfects it in its original condition of creaturehood. Redemption does not, in a general way, simply convert human nature into something divine, but renews human nature along the lines of the human nature of Jesus Christ.

According to Maximus the Confessor, this idea is further determined through the final experiences of Jesus Christ, namely, his passion and his abandonment by God. The more deeply Jesus Christ participates in human mystery, the more man participates in the divine life.

In this sense deification properly understood can make man perfectly human: deification is the truest and ultimate hominisation of man.

5. This process whereby man is deified does not take place without the grace of Jesus Christ, which comes especially through the sacraments in the Church. The sacraments join us in a most efficacious and visible fashion, and under the symbols of our own fragile life they join us to the divine grace of the Saviour (cf. *LG* 7). More than that, this deification is not communicated to the individual as such but as a member of the Communion of Saints. Moreover, the invitation given by divine grace to the human race takes place in the Holy Spirit. Christians therefore should realize the holiness they have achieved in their way of life (cf. *LG* 39-42). The fullness of deification belongs to the beatific vision of the Triune God which takes the soul into the Communion of Saints.

II. Some Leading Themes in Modern Christology

So far the basis and dimensions of trinitarian and anthropological Christology have been presented. Some other problems of a less general nature should also be examined in the concrete. Among these we have selected two. The first concerns the pre-existence of Jesus Christ, which holds a middle position between Christology and Trinitarian theology. A second question concerns the *changelessness* versus the *suffering* of God. Both questions have prominent places in modern Christological discussion. (A third and further theme concerns the human knowledge and consciousness of Christ: we have not been able to bring this to a satisfactory conclusion yet. We hope that in the future this theme will be the subject of further studies.)

A. The Problem of the Pre-existence of Jesus Christ

1. Since classical Christology could always presuppose trinitarian theology, the pre-existence of Jesus Christ did not present a great problem. But in modern Christological research, where the earthly life of Jesus has been subjected to considerable scrutiny (cf. Quaest. Select. 1. A and B), pre-existence has often been presented as something alien to biblical faith and religion and made to seem rather as something Greek; a form of speculation simply; in fact, a myth which betrays the true human nature of Jesus. It is therefore said that the pre-existence of Jesus Christ is to be understood today not literally but in purely symbolic terms. It is simply a way of speaking of his uniqueness, his irreducible originality, and of the way in which Jesus transcends the world and history. Jesus Christ

had a more than worldly origin. In these modern interpretations the idea of pre-existence seems to have exhausted its purpose and been surpassed.

2. Attempts to claim that the biblical statements about the pre-existence of Jesus Christ arose from mythical, Hellenistic, and gnostic sources do not hold water: today, in fact, relationships are detected with the intertestamental literature (cf. Eth. Enoch. 48: 3, 6; 4 *Ezra* 13) and above all with Old Testament sources, especially in the Wisdom theology (Prv. 8:22 ff., Sir. 24). In addition, much more is made of elements within biblical Christology itself: the unique relationship of Jesus on earth with God the Father ("Abba" on the lips of Jesus); the unique mission of the Son and his glorious resurrection. In the light of this exaltation the origin of Jesus Christ is openly and definitively understood: sitting at the right hand of God in his post-existence (i.e., after his earthly life) implies his pre-existence with God from the beginning before he came into the world. In other words, his eschatological state can be no different from his pre-incarnation state and vice versa. The unique mission of the Son (cf. Mk. 12:1-12) is inseparable from the person of Jesus Christ, who not only had a prophetic role, which was temporal and limited, to play on earth, but also has a co-eternal origin from the Father. The Son of God received everything in eternity from God the Father. In the light of this eschatological-soteriological perspective we must say that Jesus Christ cannot open the way to eternal life for us if he is not himself "eternal." The eschatological message and the eschatological doctrine presuppose a divine pre-existence of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ's origin from the Father is not a conclusion of subsequent reflection but is made clear by his words and the facts about him, namely, that Jesus took it for certain that He had been sent by the Father. Therefore, at least in an indirect fashion one finds manifested the consciousness of Jesus with regard to his eternal existence as Son of the Father, whose task it is to reconcile the whole world to God. (One can see as primary fundamental elements the "I" of Jesus Christ in the Synoptic Gospels, the words "I am" (ego eimi) in the Fourth Gospel, and the "mission" of Jesus in many New Testament writings.)

3. Biblical studies have shown how the original datum has evolved through various stages and in different aspects within the limits of the New Testament as the full meaning of the pre-existence of Jesus becomes clear.

- the eternal election and predestination of Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3-7 10f.; 1 Pt. 1:20);
- the sending of the Son of God into the world and into the flesh (cf. Gal. 4:4; Rom. 8:3 ff.; 1 Tm. 3:16; Jn. 3:16 ff.);
- kenosis*, incarnation, death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross, as steps on the way from the Father, all of which show the soteriological and salvific meaning of the event of Jesus Christ (cf. also Phil. 2:6-11);
- Jesus Christ was already present and active in the history of the people of Israel in a hidden way (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-4; Jn. 1:30; 8:14, 58);
- Jesus Christ, as the intermediary in the creation of the world, now also keeps the world in being. He is head of the body of the Church and the reconciler of all things (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15 ff.; Jn. 1:1-3, 17; Heb. 1:2 ff.). All mediators, or acts of mediation which seemed to have significance for salvation, are taken away or must be understood in a subordinate fashion. Jesus Christ himself has absolute pre-eminence over against all other acts of mediation, and in his work and in his person is God's final action and event;
- Jesus Christ obtains the lordship of the universe and gives redemption to all, a process which is understood as a new creation (cf. Col. 1:15 ff. 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2 ff.; Jn. 1:2);
- in the exaltation of Jesus Christ the process of vanquishing evil powers has begun (cf. Phil. 2:10; Col. 1:16, 20).

4. The post-biblical word *pre-existence* includes many Christological elements. Even if this conception is in fact based on Scripture, at the same time pre-existence is not invoked there in an isolated fashion, and does not constitute the only reason for the statements of the New Testament. We are speaking of a systematic concept which synthesizes many theological meanings. In many statements it rather furnishes a background (l'arriere-plan, Hintergrund) or a presupposition of the reason for the other aims. Therefore, just as we cannot be satisfied with a purely formal use of the term, neither must we use it in an univocal fashion but rather analogically, carefully, and according to the context and the richness of the various doctrinal elements already mentioned. Although it is subject to multiple interpretations, the concept of pre-existence does not signify only an *interpretation* which would in the end be purely subjective,

but in fact the real ontological origin of Jesus Christ, his origin outside of time of which he is also consciously aware, as we have already said. Understood in the biblical sense, pre-existence does not signify only that Christ is co-eternal with God. This expression connotes the whole movement and Christological mystery, beginning from existence with the Father, including the *kenosis* and the Incarnation, the infamous death on the cross, and the glorious exaltation. In the end it attests to the redemption of all men, to the primacy of Christ in the Church, and to universal and cosmic reconciliation. All this is presented in terms of redemptive suffering. Almost all of these formulations of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ are found in hymnic contexts. For this reason they take the form of testimony and praise, born of the Church's experience of the presence of the Lord. This soteriological and doxological character does not exclude a Christological meaning, but it does impose clear limits on those forms of speculation about pre-existence which do not respect the specific character of the term.

5. The concept of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ has acquired greater clarity as Christological reflection has evolved. In certain places the prefix *pre* (e.g. *before all things, before Abraham*) has and keeps a temporal meaning, granted the historical character of Christian salvation; but in the last analysis it signifies absolute and extra-terrestrial primacy over the whole of creation. In the Christological field, in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (cf. *DS* 125), such a pre-existence acquires after the Arian crisis, a definite stamp. The Son of God generated from the Father is not created, but consubstantial with the Father.

In that way the idea of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ is par excellence, as was said above, the point at which Christology and Trinitarian theology meet and come together (1, C and D). Between the Son in the eternal life of God, and the Son in the earthly life of Jesus Christ, there is a most strict correspondence or, better still, a real identity, nourished by the unity and the filial union of Jesus Christ with God the Father. The pre-existence of Jesus Christ should also be understood from the point of view of the history of Jesus Christ and above all from its completion in the event of Easter. From the beginning of Christological reflection, the pre-existence of Jesus Christ, co-eternal with the Father—that is if we consider it as a descending movement and, as it were, from above—was equally understood in relation to the gift of Jesus Christ for the life of the world. Such relationships are rooted in the eternal Sonship

through which Jesus Christ is generated by the Father. This relationship is expressed by the biblical concept of *mission*. The gift of salvation will be valid for us and for all mankind only if it is born in God, namely, in the pre-existing Son of the Father. This shows anew the soteriological character of pre-existence.

B) The Trinitarian Aspect of the Cross of Jesus Christ, or the *Suffering of God*.

For historical or systematic reasons God's immutability or impassibility is often called into question in today's theology, above all in the context of a theology of the Cross. In that way different theological conceptions of the suffering of God have arisen. It is necessary to know how to separate false ideas from elements in accord with the biblical revelation. Since discussion of this problem continues, we limit ourselves to a first approach, which nevertheless seeks to point to a solution to the question.

1. The supporters of this theology assert that their ideas can be found in the Old and New Testaments and in some of the Fathers. But the influence of modern philosophy has certainly had a greater weight, at least in the systematic presentation of this theology.

1.1 Hegel was the first to postulate that for the idea of God to be comprehensive, it has to include "the suffering of the negative," that is, the "hardship of abandonment" ("die Haerte der Gottlosigkeit"). In him there is a fundamental ambiguity: Does God have or not a real need of the world? After Hegel some Protestants and certain Anglicans developed so-called *kenotic* theologies which are *Cross-centered*. According to these the passion of the Son touches the whole of the Trinity in different fashions and manifests above all the suffering of the Father who abandons His Son; "Since he has spared not his own Son but has consigned him for all of us," (Rom. 8:32; cf. Jn. 3:16). It also shows the suffering of the Holy Spirit, who in the passion takes upon himself the "distance" between the Father and the Son.

1.2 According to many of our contemporaries, this Trinitarian suffering is rooted in the very divine essence itself; according to others, it is based on a certain emptying of himself on the part of God the Creator, who in some sense binds himself to human freedom or, in virtue of a pact, freely forces himself to hand over his Son—a fact which they say makes the suffering of the Father more deep

than all the suffering of creation.

In recent years a few Catholic authors have made similar suggestions, maintaining that the principal role of the Crucified consisted in manifesting the suffering of the Father.

2. One could often suppose from the Old Testament, the divine transcendence notwithstanding (cf. Jer. 7:16-19), that God suffers because of the sins of men. Perhaps not all these expressions can be explained as simple anthropomorphisms (see for example Gn. 6:6: "Yahweh repents that he had made man on earth and he sorrows about it in his heart." Dt. 4:25; Ps. 78:41; Is. 7:13; Jer. 12:7; 31:20; Hos. 4:6, 6:4; 11:8 ff.). Rabbinic theology is even stronger in this respect and speaks, for example, of a God who abandons himself to lamentation because of the Covenant which he has made and which constrains him, or because of the destruction of the Temple; and at the same time affirms the weakness of God when faced with the powers of evil (cf. P. Kuhn, *Gottes Trauer und Klage in der rabbinischen Überlieferung*, Leiden, 1978, p. 170 ff., 275 ff.).

In the New Testament, the tears of Jesus (cf. Lk. 19:41), his anger (cf. Mk. 3:5), and the sadness he feels (cf. Mt. 17:7), are themselves also manifestations of a certain way of behavior on God's part. In other places it is stated explicitly that God gets angry (cf. Rom. 1:18; 3:5; 9:22; Jn. 3:36; Rev. 15:1).

3. Without doubt the Fathers underline (against the pagan mythologies) the *apatheia* of God, without denying in this way his compassion for the suffering of the world. For them the term *apatheia* indicates the opposite of *pathos*, a word which means involuntary suffering imposed from the outside or as a consequence of fallen nature. When they admit natural and innocent suffering (like hunger or sleep), they attribute these to Jesus Christ or to God in as much as he feels compassion for human suffering (Origen: *Hom. in Ez.* VI,6; *Comm. in Math.* XVII, 20; *Sel in Ez.* 16; *Comm. in Rom.* VIII, 9; *DePrin.* IV, 4, 4). From time to time they use a dialectical form of expression: God has suffered in Jesus Christ in an impassible fashion because he has done it in virtue of a free choice (Greg. Thaum. *Ad Theopompum* IV-VIII).

According to the Council of Ephesus (cf. the letter of St. Cyril to Nestorius: *COD*, 3,42), the Son makes his own the sufferings inflicted on his human nature (*oikeiosis*). Attempts to reduce this proposition (and others like it in the tradition) to a simple *manner of speaking* do not sufficiently recognize its profound meaning. But

the Christology of the Church does not allow us to affirm formally that Jesus Christ could suffer according to his divine nature (cf. *DS* 16, 166, 196 s., 284, 293 s., 300, 318, 358, 504, 635, 801, 852).

Despite what has just been said, the Fathers cited above clearly affirm the immutability and impassibility of God (e.g., Origen: *Contra Celsum*, IV, 4). Thus they absolutely exclude from the divine essence that mutability and that passivity which would permit a movement from potency to act (cf. Thomas Aquinas, *S. Theol.* 1, q. 9, a.1, c). Finally, the following considerations have been taken into account in the tradition of the faith of the Church to clear up this problem.

4.1 With regard to the immutability of God it must be said that the divine life is inexhaustible and without limit: so much so that God has no need whatever for creatures (cf. *DS* 3002). No human event could gain for him anything new or actuate in him any potentiality whatsoever. God, therefore could not be subject to any change, neither by way of diminution nor by way of progress. "Therefore, since God is not susceptible to change in any of these different ways, it is proper to him to be absolutely immutable" (Thomas Aquinas: *S. Theol.* 1, q. 9, a. 2, c). The same affirmation is found in Sacred Scripture with regard to God the Father "in whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas. 1:17). But this immutability of the living God is not opposed to his supreme liberty; something which the event of the incarnation clearly demonstrates.

4.2 The affirmation of the impassibility of God supposes and implies this way of understanding his immutability, but this is not to be understood as though God remained indifferent to human events. God loves us with the love of friendship, and he wishes to be loved by us in return. When this love is offended, Sacred Scripture speaks of suffering on the part of God. On the other hand, it speaks of his joy when the sinner is converted (Lk. 15:7). "To suffer is a more sane reaction and closer to immortality than complete insensibility" (Augustine: *En. in Ps.* 55, 6). The two aspects need each other. If one or the other is neglected, the concept of God as he reveals himself is not respected.

5. Modern and medieval theology have underlined more the first of these aspects (cf. 4.1). In reality, the Catholic faith today defends the essence and the liberty of God and opposes exaggerated theories (cf. B 1 above). But the other aspect (cf. above 4.2) merits further attention.

5.1 Today man desires and searches for a divinity that will

be omnipotent and certain, but which does not appear indifferent; one, moreover, which is full of compassion for the miseries of man and in that sense *suffers with them*. Christian piety has always rejected the idea of a divinity indifferent to the vicissitudes of creatures. It is even inclined to admit that, just as *compassion* is among the most noble human perfections, it can be said of God that he has a similar compassion without any imperfection and in an eminent degree, namely, the "inclination of commiseration . . . and not the absence of power" (Leo I, *DS* 293). It is maintained that this compassion can co-exist with the eternal happiness itself. The Fathers called this total mercy toward human pain and suffering "the passion of love," a love which in the passion of Jesus Christ has vanquished these sufferings and made them perfect (cf. Greg. Thaum. *Ad Theopompum*; John Paul II, *Encycl. Dives in Misericordia*, n.7; AAS 72, 1980, 119 ff.).

5.2 As far as the question of the *suffering of God* is concerned, there is undoubtedly something worth retaining in the expressions of Holy Scripture and the Fathers, as well as in some recent theologies, even though they require clarification as shown above. This should perhaps also be said with regard to the Trinitarian aspect of the cross of Jesus Christ. The eternal generation of the Son and his role as the immaculate Lamb who would pour out his precious blood are equally eternal and precede the free creation of the world (cf. 1 Pt. 1:19 ff.; Eph. 1:7). In this sense, there is a very close correspondence between the gift of divinity which the Father gives to the Son and the gift by which the Father consigns his Son to the abandonment of the Cross. Since, however, the resurrection is also present in the eternal plan of God, the suffering of "separation" (see B, 1:1) is always overcome by the joy of union; the compassion of the Trinitarian God for the suffering of the Word is properly understood as the work of most perfect love, which is normally a source of joy. As for the Hegelian concept of *negativity*, this is radically excluded from our idea of God.

We have learned that in attempting to reflect on these matters human and theological reasoning encounter some of the greatest of all difficulties (such as *anthropomorphism*). But in a remarkable fashion they also encounter the ineffable mystery of the living God and realize the limits of thought itself.

Conclusion

We neither can deny nor wish to deny that the picture we have presented of our researches is indebted to modern scientific theology. All the same, the reality we have studied, i.e., the living faith of the whole Church in the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ, tends—beyond the frontiers of particular cultures—to achieve an ever-greater universality in the knowledge and love of the mystery of Jesus Christ. As the Apostle Paul made himself “all things to all” (1 Cor. 9:22), we in our turn must insert the evangelical message concerning Jesus Christ more deeply into all the languages and cultural models of different peoples. A task of the greatest difficulty! We can accomplish it if we can remain not only in continuous dialogue with the Holy Scripture, with the faith, and with the magisterium of the Church, but also with the riches of the traditions of all the particular churches and of human experience lived in every culture in which the action and effects of the Holy Spirit can be present (cf. *GS* 44; *AG* 15, 22; Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 64; *AAS* 68, 1976, 54 s.: John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 10; *AAS* 74, 1982, 90 s.). We are encouraged to press toward this goal by recalling the words spoken to the Apostles:

“You shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

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