Theological Anthropology

Abbreviations

CCC: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000)

CGW: P. O'Callaghan, *Children of God in the World. An Introduction to Theological Anthropology* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2016)

DH: *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. Denzinger and Hünermann (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2012)

FR: John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998)

GS: Vatican Council II, Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (1965)

JDJ: *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, cosigned by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000)

LG: Vatican Council II, Constitution *Lumen gentium* (1965)

LS: Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015)

PL: *Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina* (ed. J.-P. Migne)

S.Th.: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*

WA: *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke: Schriften*

Methodological Issues

1. Is there such a thing as a Christian Anthropology? (CGW 1-10)

1. Theological anthropology

This text will attempt to explain the principal elements of what is called 'theological anthropology.' But what does this signify? Would it not be enough to speak of anthropology, pure and simple? Of course anthropology can be considered from many angles: paleontological, ethnological, psychological, philosophical, biological, etc. But in this case we are considering anthropology from the standpoint of theology, that is *how God sees humans*. Of course the divine perspective on human life is not just one more among many, for the simple reason that *God created man and woman*, and he created besides them *in his own image and likeness*. Thus it makes all the sense in the world to attempt to understand humans from the standpoint of the One who thought about them, who made them, who blessed them to care for the earth, to be fruitful and multiply, to be united with him on earth and live in communion with him forever. To remove the theological questions from our understanding of the human being would be profoundly reductive.

Obviously if there is no God or gods, then anthropology such as it is would take on a totally different profile, in which humans, like tiny specks lost in a vast universe, attempt to live out their lives not knowing where they came from, how to act or where they are going to.

The first part of the course in six chapters (§§ 1-6) will deal with methodological or introductory issues. The second, longest, part, in 20 chapters (§§ 7-26) will look into the dynamics of divine life in those who believe in God, what is called the life of grace in the soul, what St Paul called 'divine filiation' and 'new creation,' and the Oriental Church Fathers 'divinization.' That God would communicate his life to us gratuitously helps us understand at a wider level that *life itself is a gift*, a gift of a creator God who has loved us into existence. Understanding the life of humans as a gift of God, the third part of the course, in 14 chapters (§§ 27-40), will present a series of anthropological issues that are normally dealt with in a philosophical or scientific context, such as the union of body and soul, human freedom, temporality and historicity, the social and individual aspects of human life, human activity in the world (work), and finally the notion of the human *person*. It should be clear that revelation received through faith on no account eliminates the findings of philosophy or science. Quite the contrary: it confirms, unifies and invigorates them.

Indeed it helps us understand the fundamental *unity of anthropology*, and brings us to ask questions of a rational and empirical kind we might never have asked had God not revealed his design and dreams for humanity. We shall see that, throughout the history of Christian thought, both philosophy and science *have developed* in the light and under the impulse of theology.

The course, what I call a précis of theological anthropology, is based on the content of a more extensive manual published in 2016 by the Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., and entitled *Children of God in the World. An Introduction to Theological Anthropology* (abbrev. CGW). The latter text, apart from providing a more detailed account of many issues, contains an extensive historical presentation of the doctrine of grace, as well as detailed bibliographical adjuncts in the footnotes.

2. Some distinctive elements of Biblical ethics and anthropology

Jonathan Sacks, for many years the UK chief rabbi, gave a memorable inaugural lecture at King's College, London, in 2014. In it he pointed out seven distinctive anthropological features of Judeo-Christian faith and tradition, clearly present in Scripture, with powerful, world-changing ethical ramifications. All of them have both challenged and left their mark on the culture of the societies they were present in. His point of reference is principally the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, but of course the same positions are to be found substantially in the New. He mentions the following ones.

First of all, the *dignity* of every human being, each one of which is "made in the image and likeness of God" (Gn 1:26f.). See §§ 7-8. The Egyptians applied the notion of 'image of God' only of royalty, but the Bible to each man and woman. In a single move Biblical religion eliminates elitism and establishes equality. Each human being is called a "person." This provides the basis for a powerful ethical and anthropological message.

Second, special emphasis is placed on human *freedom* and choice, and therefore on personal responsibility, conscience and the possibility of being punished and rewarded for one's own deeds.

In the *third* place, the sanctity of *human life*, which should be respected and cared for at every stage, again because humans are made in the image of God. Murder is considered illicit: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image" (Gn 9:6). Respect for life from beginning to natural end is central to Biblical belief.

Fourth, a culture of *righteousness and guilt* as distinct from one of honor and shame. The former, linked to hearing and accusation, is typical of the Bible and is rooted in the person's relationship to God, Sacks tells us. The latter is common in societies where people are seen to behave well or badly, thus earning honor or shame before the community. Conscience before God is of little importance. For the former the moral act is right or wrong, whereas for the latter the person is good or bad. For the former, repentance, rehabilitation and forgiveness are possible. For the latter people are exalted or condemned perpetually. The sociologist Ruth Benedict in a 1946 work *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* describes North American culture as a "guilt culture" and Japanese culture as a "shame culture." "It is an extremely significant point," Sacks observes, "that the Hebrew Bible introduced a guilt culture to a world that only knew shame cultures, because guilt cultures make a distinction, and shame cultures do not, between the sinner and the sin. What is wrong is the act, not the person."

In the *fifth* place the significance of *marriage* as the fundamental matrix of society. There is a close bond in the Bible between monotheism and monogamy, between fidelity to one's spouse and fidelity to God. God's blessings are meant to be handed on from one generation to the next through marriage and family. Human fertility and happiness depend on the solidity of the institution. It is the fundamental living cell of society.

Sixth, Sacks mentions the *covenantal character* of society, rooted in the covenant God established with his people. This is lived out in terms of human solidarity, of a common belongingness. And as a result, citizens are seen to have collective responsibility for the workings of society; society is a moral and not just a political achievement; and the fate of society will depend on how it treats other members, especially its most vulnerable ones.

Lastly, *seventh*, all human power, all political authority, is subject to the transcendent authority of the Divine. In practical terms this means there are moral limits to the exercise of power, and right is sovereign over might. Despotism and totalitarianism have no place in societies inspired by the Bible.

After listing these major "contributions," Sacks comments: "Those are the seven features that I think make Biblical ethics different from any other ethical system. It is the only ethical system in which love and forgiveness are at the heart of the moral life." Yet he adds somewhat ominously: "It seems to me that all seven of those beliefs are currently at risk."

3. An anthropology at risk

The first element of anthropology (human dignity) is put at risk, according to Sacks, by some strains of evolutionary biology which question the distinctive quality of humans with respect to animals or other life-forms. The second (freedom) is threatened by scientific theories that hold human life is entirely determined by physical, biological and psychological factors (§ 30, 2). Third, the holiness of life is under threat by a widespread culture of abortion and euthanasia and other forms of maltreatment of our fellow human beings. Fourth, a culture of justice and guilt is being replaced in many cases by one of honor and shame, especially with the frequent phenomenon of trial by public shaming; people's good name is wantonly destroyed in the public media, the only commandment being "thou shalt not be found out." And once the person has been shamed in public, their relationships are ultimately ruined, their lives come to an end. In "shame cultures" suicide is frequent and gradually becomes socially acceptable, as "the only way out."

Fifth, Sacks observes, the institution of marriage and family is tottering in many parts of the world. In some places as many as half of children are born out of wedlock, and half of all marriages end in divorce. And all this gives rise to a generalized increase in poverty, particularly among children. Sixth, a sense of solidarity is absent throughout the world. Society is like a hotel where each one can do what they like in their own room as long as they pay (their taxes) and do not disturb their neighbors: the situation of others is of no concern to them. In respect of the seventh and last contribution, that all power should be subject to the divine, it has become all too easy to move from saying 'I have a right to do such and such,' to 'I am right to do such and such.' Whatever is not forbidden by civil law is considered to be morally acceptable and therefore reasonable. Morality has become fused with the observation of public law. Specifically, Sacks warns that in many ways we may not be respecting the moral limits of power: "If we no longer make a distinction between law and morality, if we rely entirely on the market economy, on laws and on regulatory bodies, we will have the kind of economic malfunctioning that we have today with greater and greater inequalities and economic behavior that should be unacceptable."

Of course Christians and Jews alike would be honest enough to admit that the seven distinctive elements arising from Scripture and described by

Sacks, never predominated completely in any country, or culture, or period of history. That is to say, faith never challenged culture to a degree that changed lived culture completely, and still less, irreversibly. Believers one and all ignore their deeply rooted sinfulness at their peril. Culture possesses an inertia that does not change overnight. Yet faith, inspired by Scripture, has left a powerful mark on culture and anthropology, just as previous culture(s) have influenced the process of the assimilation of faith. But we may ask the question: how does a faith-vision come to influence culture in the first place and give rise to a renewed anthropology? How does the revelation and the power of divine life in humans bring about a new anthropology?

4. How revelation and faith inform anthropology and culture

We have seen that the anthropology that shapes the Western world, in its many and varied elements, has been formed, or modulated, or shaped by Christian and Jewish faith. In that sense modern culture and anthropology cannot be considered a neutral presupposition before which Christian faith attempts to situate itself. It is common to say nowadays that just as Christians dialogued with Greek philosophers to understand themselves and evangelize successfully, so also theology today should dialogue with modern philosophy in order to communicate the Gospel to contemporary society. However, this proposal is problematic from many standpoints, for modern philosophy has its own history, deeply linked with Judaism and Christianity.

The theologian Karl Rahner in his work *Gnade als Freiheit* (Freiburg, 1968, 32f.) had the following interesting observation to make: “The apparently secularized *ethos* of our times, which speaks (and, hopefully, not only speaks) of freedom, of the dignity of man, of his responsibility, of love of neighbor… is it not all the result of Christianity? It is, indeed, a legitimate son, but a son that has escaped from home and wrecks its own patrimony far from his father’s home.” This is the point: Christianity dialogues with the modern world because it is called to evangelize… but the modern world is in many ways a child of Christianity, a child that has left home, a child that stands in need of reconciliation. Of course Christianity cannot allow itself be challenged by its own children on the same plane. Rather, in order to clarify its relationship with modern anthropology and culture, Christianity will have to seek out a family reconciliation.

We shall examine the dynamic of the process of faith informing anthropology in the coming chapter.

2. A genetic narrative of the rise and fall of Christian anthropology (CGW 48-62)

Let us return for the moment to the affirmation just made, that modern culture, in its anthropological and ethical content and transmission, has been shaped to an important degree by Biblical faith, that is by the human reception of divine revelation, both by Jews and by Christians. A genetic narrative may be applied to account for this, in eight stages.

1. A genetic narrative of Christian anthropology

First, *Christian revelation received by faith has made the discovery of a series of fundamental truths about God and man philosophically possible*. In the last chapter we mentioned several of them. Among these truths, John Paul II's 1998 encyclical *Fides et ratio* (abbrev. FR) specifically adds: "the problem of evil and suffering, the personal nature of God and the question of the meaning of life or, more directly, the radical metaphysical question, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'" The same document speaks of our knowledge of sin and evil, "a knowledge which is peculiar to faith." "The notion of the person as a spiritual being is another of faith's specific contributions: the Christian proclamation of human dignity, equality and freedom has undoubtedly influenced modern philosophical thought" (FR 76). Besides these, some other fundamental truths may usefully be mentioned.

One is the contribution made by Christian revelation to our appreciation of the profound union between the material and the spiritual in man, body and soul, created by God and destined to final resurrection (§ 28, 3). Another is the value of human subjectivity, developed especially by Augustine, Bernard and others, and sifted in the vast melting pot of Christian prayer. Then we can mention the centrality and value of human freedom and conscience (§ 31, 2), and the weight given to time and history (§ 32). And last, the special contribution made to philosophy and anthropology by the application of the Trinitarian notion of 'person' to the individual human being, who is no longer considered as a simple exemplar of the human species, but as an irreplaceable, immortal person (§ 40).

In the second place, *Christian revelation received in faith does not possess a monopoly over the anthropology-forming process*. Jerusalem, Athens and Rome all played a crucial part. Philippe Nemo in his work *Qu'est-ce que l'occident?* (Paris 2004) has explained that the cultural morphogenesis of

the West involved five elements which he situates: in Athens, with the invention of the city, freedom before the law, science and philosophy; in Rome, with the invention of law, private property, the person and humanism; in Judaism and Christianity, whose substantial contribution lies mainly in the area of ethics and eschatology, leading to the public presence and acceptance of mercy, benevolence and social progress (as Tom Holland explains in his 2019 work *Dominion*); in the papal revolution of the XI and XII centuries (the so-called Gregorian reform) which provided a public synthesis of the three: Greek thought, Roman law, Christian faith, and founded the notion of 'Christendom'; lastly, in the advent of liberal democracy, firstly in Holland, England, USA and France, and subsequently in other parts of the world.

As Rémi Brague points out in *Cristianesimo e cultura in Europa* (ed. R. Buttiglione, Forlì 1992), what is significant in this process is the fact that the respective contributions of the different stages were not absorbed/eliminated but rather assimilated by Christian faith, giving rise to the pluralist cultural phenomenon necessary for a religion—Christianity—that aspired to universality. This is what he calls "cultural secondariness." The Christian West, he says, is secondary with respect to its living origin which is Sacred Scripture, Greek thought and Roman law, because it did not absorb or eliminate them, but maintained with them a living relationship. In that sense, Brague argues that Western Christianity is the only civilization that has remained perennially dependent on its living origin, the Word of God. The same may be said of the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments: just as the New did not absorb or eliminate the Old, neither did Christian civilization eliminate any part of Scripture, but just deepened in its interpretation. Second-century Gnostics such as Marcion, however, did attempt to substitute, absorb and eliminate the Old Testament by means of the New for deeply theological reasons: the God of mercy of the New Testament would set aside and obliterate the God of justice of the Old. This position was stalwartly opposed by Irenaeus of Lyons in his work *Adversus Haereses*, who for this very reason should be considered, Brague suggests, not only a Father of the Church, but also a "Father of Europe."

Third, *modern humanism finds its roots in a Christian theological context typical of the early Middle Ages*. During the XIX century the historian Jacob Burckhardt did suggest that the humanism typical of the modern period is rooted in the Renaissance, that is in the late Middle Ages, an

epoch that attempted to combine Christian and pagan values. From the aesthetic and technological standpoint he was right in many ways. But as regards more fundamental issues, for example those which refer to the dignity of the human person as an individual, this hypothesis has been definitively superseded by a wide variety of recent studies that situate the discovery of human interiority and individuality well before the Renaissance period, towards the beginning of the Middle Ages (or perhaps earlier) and under the direct sway of Christian reflection and spirituality.

In the fourth place, *on the basis of its material fidelity to Christian faith and on its own merits, the modern period should be considered, from many points of view, a highly positive phenomenon*. The fruits of civilization and well-being we presently enjoy may be seen by all, and are at the disposal of many, if not most. Speaking at Regensburg (12.9.2006), Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that "a critique of modern reason from within has nothing to do with putting the clock back to the time before the Enlightenment and rejecting the insights of the modern age. The positive aspects of modernity are to be acknowledged unreservedly: we are all grateful for the marvelous possibilities that it has opened up for mankind and for the progress in humanity that has been granted to us." John Paul II in *Fides et ratio* 5 had the same thing to say: "Modern philosophy clearly has the great merit of focusing attention upon man." And elsewhere he observes: "even in the philosophical thinking of those who helped drive faith and reason further apart there are found at times precious and seminal insights which, if pursued and developed with mind and heart rightly tuned, can lead to the discovery of truth's way. Such insights are found, for instance, in penetrating analyses of perception and experience, of the imaginary and the unconscious, of personhood and intersubjectivity, of freedom and values, of time and history. The theme of death as well can become for all thinkers an incisive appeal to seek within themselves the true meaning of their own life" (FR 48).

Fifth, it is frequent among modern philosophers to admit that *Christian revelation, life and theology has contributed to the growth and consolidation of modern anthropology*, with its affirmation of the value of the individual person, of subjectivity, of the body, of freedom, of equality, of autonomy, of history, etc. Many of the same authors, however, take it that the full consolidation of these values will depend on a definitive emancipation from Christian faith and from the Church. To use a

terminology familiar to Freud and Lacan, their conviction is that the son will not reach maturity until he has superseded his father once and for all, that is, until and unless he abandons house and home. In different ways this thesis is held by Rousseau, Hegel, Kant, John Stuart Mill and others. The latter in his essay *The Utility of Religion* (in *Three Essays on Religion*, London, 1874, 97f.) writes: "I grant that some of the precepts of Christ as exhibited by the Gospels—rising above the Paulism which is the foundation of ordinary Christianity—carry some kinds of moral goodness to a greater height than had ever been attained before, though much even of what is supposed to be peculiar to them is equaled in the *Meditations* of Marcus Antoninus [the Roman emperor, †180 AD], which we have no ground for believing to have been in any way indebted to Christianity. But this benefit, whatever it amounts to, has been gained. Mankind have entered into the possession of it. *It has become the property of humanity*, and cannot now be lost by anything short of a return to primeval barbarism."

Likewise Hans Blumenberg in his 1966 work *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* admits the influence of Christian faith in the development of modern anthropology, but explains that we need to take a further, definitive step, that of burying once and for all the Christian doctrine of grace. In effect, man under divine grace will never acquire perfect autonomy and freedom, because he will always remain under the dominion of God, or of the Church. And this must be overcome. Grace and freedom simply do not go together. For man to be fully and finally free, faith and grace must go into permanent retirement.

In the sixth place, in spite of what we have just said, *many Christian authors are of the opinion that without the living sap of Christian revelation springing from the action of the Holy Spirit of Christ in the world and received by faith, anthropological categories and advancements dearly won over the centuries will eventually decay and die*. Among them may be found Dostoevskij, Bernanos, Maritain, Löwith, Pannenberg, Pera, Guardini and T. S. Eliot. All of them are aware of what might be called the "cultural inertia of ideas" that are rooted in Christian reflection over the centuries. But they also recognize that the admirable monuments of Christian and philosophical reflection (manifestations of culture) cannot remain standing forever without the driving, purifying, renewing, uplifting power of lived Christian faith.

Romano Guardini in a 1950 essay, significantly entitled *The End of the Modern World* (Wilmington 1998, 98f.) said: “when man fails to ground his personal perfection in divine Revelation, he still retains an awareness of the individual as a rounded, dignified and creative human being. He can have no consciousness, however, of the real person who is the absolute ground of each man, an absolute ground superior to every psychological or cultural advantage or achievement. The knowledge of what it means to be a person is inextricably bound up with the faith of Christianity. An affirmation and cultivation of the personal can endure for a time perhaps after faith has been extinguished, but gradually they too will be lost.”

However, and this is the seventh point, *anthropological truths that Christian faith brings to life are, or pretend to be, universal, natural truths, rooted in rational human nature, that belong to all persons without exception*. They are not purely “truths of faith” in the strict sense of the word, as are the mystery of the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, the action of the sacraments, etc. But if they are ‘natural’ truths, why can they not be discovered and developed by the philosopher simply with the aid of human reason? Perhaps faith might give an initial impulse, but that should be enough; after that reason should be able to take over. In effect, John Paul II recognizes that the genesis of anthropological convictions is not a simple affair: “Revelation clearly proposes certain truths which might never have been discovered by reason unaided, although they are not of themselves inaccessible to reason” (FR 76).

In *Fides and ratio* he mentions two things we can contribute to faith. On the one hand, faith purifies reason of a fallen humanity, and liberates it from presumption and pride. As Benedict XVI said in the Collège des Bernardins in Paris (*Discourse* 12.9.2008), “the humility of reason is always needed, man’s humility, which responds to God’s humility.” On the other hand, faith provides the conviction that God, who loves the world he created, *loves reason*, and wants humans to react knowingly and lovingly to his gifts. For this reason Christians are convinced that there is a powerful confluence between the two. Briefly put, we may say that faith through trust opens reason out to the extraordinary amplitude of reality, indeed to the divine itself; whereas reason in turn is meant to assimilate the nutrition faith provides it with. In that sense faith, a “pure” faith that excludes reason, provides no substantial enrichment for humans, because it is not digested

and does not form thought; yet reason and culture alone without faith remain isolated, malnourished, diminished and alone.

Benedict XVI in an Audience (7.6.2008) spoke on repeated occasions of "the great rationality" that is the fruit of faith, and of the need to "amplify the horizons of reason." In effect, humans think—at least they should think—with their whole being and along with others, and not merely as isolated individuals capable of analyzing the world in computational and mathematical terms. Humans think at the same time as they love. In fact love is what gives wings to reason, challenges it, making it resourceful and creative. Hannah Arendt in her famous work *The Human Condition* explains that the response to the question *what is man?* is provided by reason, whereas to the question *who is man?*, the response can only come from love (§ 22). Only the one who *thinks as they love* will be in a position to discover the human person in all his or her richness and individuality. This epistemology is basic to Christian anthropology.

Pope Benedict in his 2009 encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (30) speaks suggestively of "a love rich in intelligence, and an intelligence full of love." Pure intellect, should it exist, would be abstractive, generalizing, conceptualizing… simply incapable of reaching the individual, the person. This incapacity is of little import if only material objects are involved, because each one of them is no more than a simple exemplar of the species. Things change entirely when we attempt to know (and to love) the individual exemplar of the human species, that is the person, ineffable and irreplaceable in his or her individuality and openness to other persons. Perhaps this is the greatest paradox of Christian anthropology: the person can only be discovered in love and by love, only in relation to the individual who relates to the Creator and to all other humans and creatures. And faith is what opens up to us this vast range of real relationships, both visible and invisible. Without faith, reason would just not take off, it would never go near realizing its full potential.

The issue is an important one: truth about man and his dignity is a deeply rational and natural truth, but it involves a rationality that is simply *not at our disposal*, but is rather a *shared rationality*, because it comes to us from another, from beyond, from other things, and in ultimate terms from the Creator of the universe, supreme Rationality, God's own Word (§ 6).

And now to eighth and final stage of this genetic narrative. *What modernity has lost is not so much cognition but recognition*, not so much

knowledge but acknowledgement, not so much conquest but thanksgiving. Modern philosophy to a greater or lesser degree has retained and developed a rich and ample view of humanity and the cosmos, emphasizing the value of the individual, of human subjectivity, of freedom, equality, autonomy, history, and all that derives from these: human rights, democracy, social freedoms, etc. In that sense modernity is Christian and Christianity is distinctly modern. Perhaps it would be more precise to say that Christians are modern *materially* but not *formally*, in that they focus their anthropological convictions differently from one who does not take revelation into account. They gladly recognize the living source of their wisdom, while the moderns are are not prepared to do so easily. They thank as they think (*denken is danken*, Heidegger said). They look upon the world as a gift, whereas moderns and post-Christians consider it rather as a *conquest*.

It is indeed a question of *recognition*. Charles Taylor in his work *A Secular Age* (Cambridge 2007), on secularity and secularization, has reached the conclusion that modernity suffers substantially from what he calls an "eclipse of worship," because in reasoning things out humans have stopped recognizing God as the source of all good and intelligibility. Thus they have stopped thanking God, they no longer recognize the world they live in as a gift, they no longer adore or thank, they no longer live 'eucharistic' lives.

2. Conclusion

From what we have seen, a dialogue between equals—modern culture on the one hand, Christian faith on the other—just cannot work satisfactorily. Before such a dialogue can take place, a kind of family reconciliation needs to be undertaken, one that recognizes two things. *First*, faith can and indeed should rummage generously and creatively in the vast storehouse of human thought, wisdom and culture, both old and new, for elements and instruments most suitable for carrying out its essential mission of touching the mind and heart of all humans in God's name. And *second*, that Christian faith has in the past impulsed, enriched and catalyzed human thought processes, and is still in a position to do so. And it will do this through a rediscovery of the ultimate givenness of the created world, and at heart because the divine project is a *project of grace*. We shall consider the question in the coming chapter.

3. The central role of Divine Grace (CGW 6-10; 157-73)

1. Sisyphus and Pelagius

People speak a lot nowadays of humanity's search for meaning and self-realization. Yet a lot of the time they are not sure what they are looking for, what way to direct their lives. Neither are they sure what means they can count on. Many seem to live out anew the Greek myth of Sisyphus, who was punished for his crimes by having to push a heavy stone out of the underworld up to the top of a hill. When he was about to reach the peak, the boulder slipped and rolled back down again into Hades. Sisyphus returned, started pushing the stone up again, and began his painful pilgrimage anew. But the stone fell back down a second time, and then again and again, for all eternity… Likewise we humans are drawn by the mountain peak, we seek out the divine summit. But we don't find it. Something irresistible within us urges us to do so again and again, but the lure of the spirit, the face of God, remains frustratingly hidden. We live in a state of permanent disappointment. Our desires for the infinite and definitive fool and frustrate us. Understandably many or even most of us eventually just give up, sitting on the hard stone, and angrily proclaim themselves atheists by trying to convince others that the God they they cannot stop searching for does not actually exist… Yet the mountain, caressed by the clouds, beckons from afar…

In the human quest for meaning and salvation as depicted by the myth of Sisyphus, there is something deeply mistaken and inadequate: God is considered as someone who is far and distant, and at heart has little interest in the lot of humans. As the prophet Elijah said of the god Baal, "perhaps he is sleeping, perhaps on a journey" (1 Kgs 18:27). For Christian revelation however the very opposite is the case: *God is the one who searches for human beings*, placing them joyfully on his shoulders as the shepherd does with the tired, wounded, and needy sheep (Lk 15:5). Too often we focus our lives as if we could save ourselves, by *self*-help. As Christian believers perhaps we are not sufficiently convinced of *God's search for humanity*, for human beings one by one, that paternal and persevering effort on God's part to create humans, to call them, to save them, to love them, to spend eternity with them.

Hans Urs von Balthasar provides the following reflection on Scripture:

> The fact that God never reveals himself in response to the cry of humans, to their desire to experience God, is very significant. God

> presents himself to Abraham with a completely unexpected promise, to Moses with a task that he had never foreseen, undesired and even stubbornly rejected… to Isaiah who after contemplating God's glory exclaims: "Woe to me, for I am lost!" (Is 6:5), also on account of a painful and unpleasant mission (*Communio*, Italian ed., n. 30, 1976, 5f.)

Pope Benedict XVI, speaking of Augustine, puts it in brief terms: "it is not we who possess the Truth after having sought it, but the Truth that seeks us out and possesses us" (*Audience*, 14.11.2012).

In a way, this should not surprise us: we are convinced God is our Father, and parents look after their children. They are simply incapable of abandoning them… because they are *their own children*, their own flesh and blood. Human beings are always sons and daughters of someone, but in the first place, they are sons and daughters of God (Mt 23:9). Pope Francis speaks of a certain moment of his adolescence when he discovered that God had thought about him, sought him out and called him, taking the initiative well before he even realized it. "From that moment onwards for me God is the One who is 'ahead' of us," he said. "You are looking for him but he is the one to find you first. You wish to meet him, but he is the one who comes to find you" (Rubin and Ambrogetti, *El Papa Francisco*, Barcelona 2013, 43). *God is the One who is "ahead" of us*: God moves first; we are invited to respond. Pope Francis in the apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* ("the joy of the Gospel"), n. 112, citing Benedict XVI, confirms this principle:

> "It is important to know that the first word, the true initiative, the true activity comes from God and only by inserting ourselves into the divine initiative, only begging for this divine initiative, shall we too be able to become—with him and in him—evangelizers." This principle of the primacy of grace must be a beacon which constantly illuminates our reflections on evangelization.

It is said that around the year ad 380 a British monk arrived in Rome. The Church of Peter had put down deep roots in the capital of the Empire, though a certain moral and spiritual decadence prevailed. Christian faith did not leave the mark on believers and on society it had done in earlier centuries. Christians dominated the world, but a worldly spirit reigned in many of them. Martyrdom seemed to be a thing of the past. And Pelagius—that was the name of the monk—spent his best energies attempting to renew

Christian life. To convert Romans in a hurry was never an easy task. Nonetheless the dynamism and drive of Pelagius left a definite mark on the Christendom he found in Rome and the empire of the end of the IV century.

Pelagius urged Christians to strive might and main to live a holy life, and in doing so, to take full responsibility for their faults and sins. They should avoid the bad example of Adam and follow the beautiful and noble example of Christ. The problem with his position, as St. Augustine saw it, was that it made Christ simply superfluous as the divine Savior of humanity. If all Christ gives us is good example and beautiful teaching, then his divinity is but ornamental and unnecessary. The bishop of Hippo, who was a contemporary of Pelagius, realized that humans stand in need of grace not just as they would a vitamin supplement in order to overcome moral weakness. At a deeper level, God's grace was needed so that human action as such could become truly pleasing to God.

Augustine visited Rome about the same time as Pelagius arrived. In all probability he encountered an abundance of beggars, of the poor, the abandoned. In his work *Against Adimantus* (24), he speaks of the "Roman beggars called 'one day vagabonds.'" They managed to get enough food for the day, shared what was left over with other beggars, and threw the rest into the Tiber River. The following day would look after itself. For whatever reason, a deep conviction consolidated in the heart of Augustine to which he gave expression in *Sermon* 83:2, where we read: *omnes, quando oramus, mendici Dei sumus*: 'all of us, when we pray, when we place ourselves before our Creator, are but poor beggars, totally dependent, incapable of doing anything for ourselves.' In other words, we are completely needful of God's grace and aid.

What opinion did Pelagius have of the Roman beggars? We don't know. Perhaps he thought they should work a bit more to earn their living, taking more responsibility for their faults and negligences… And maybe he was right to some extent. But not completely so. He had only grasped a part of the Christian picture, and not the most important part. Because God is a Father, and with a heart full of tenderness and mercy he sent his only Son to save humanity from the desolation of sin and its consequences. Only beggars really know how to ask and to thank from the bottom of their heart. From the beggar's humility and gratitude perhaps we all have something to learn. Because that is what we are before God.

2. How Relevant is Grace?

Many people think “grace” is a meaningless category in Christian life. Meaningless, or perhaps just secondary. What Christians contribute to the world they live in is—or should be—vision, understanding, wisdom, law, zeal, energy, work, change, progress, focus… So perhaps we should allow “grace” occupy an aesthetical role, as something that denotes beauty, gentleness, elegance, courtesy, among others. Real anthropology is about power and influence and development, we are told (this might be seen as a masculine approach), whereas “grace” would be required to take the sharp edges off the corners (the feminine side). “Grace is beauty in movement,” the philosopher Lessing said in his work *Laokoon* or *The Limitations of Poetry*. And ‘Grace’ is a girl’s name.

But this is not the case. Grace, the personal presence of God in the depths of the human spirit, *is* the power of God in the world. Christianity’s major contribution to the world is not vision, or influence, or power, *but God’s grace*… although many other things derive from grace and give it full expression. Several reasons may be given for this diffuse marginalization of a category that is present in the heart of the Gospel and is absolutely central to Christian faith and life.

In the *first* place, “grace” is set aside perhaps because modern individualism leads us to attempt to resolve life’s problems without the help of others, and especially without the help of God. Better to have recourse to psychotherapy, yoga, coaching, transcendental meditation, or drugs… or even better still, feverish work, activism, results, success. To open oneself to God’s grace would seem to be just a waste of time, a kind of complacent passivity. Humans don’t want to depend on any divinity… besides, who knows what God really intends to do with their lives?! Neither do they wish to depend on other people who in one way or another symbolize God’s grace and make it present: the Church, religious ministers, friends, family…

The *second* difficulty in understanding the role of grace is connected to the first: people tend to be skeptical about anything that involves gifts and giving. We are suspicious when presents are expected and given and taken. We ask ourselves: why is this person giving me this or that present? What are they looking for? Does he want to bring me under his direct influence? Does she want to control or manipulate me? For this reason, we resist becoming too dependent on others… we want to be independent, autonomous, conditioned by nothing and nobody. *Timeo Danaos et dona*

ferentes, Virgil writes in the *Aeneid II*, 49: “I fear the Greeks, even when they’re bringing gifts. In fact I fear them especially when they do so.”

There’s a *third* reason why we struggle to accepting the existence of God’s grace and open ourselves up to it. It is strange really, because grace in real terms is the most precious gift imaginable, the pearl for which it is worthwhile selling everything (Mt 13:46). It is the danger of *familiarity*, the excessive familiarity with a God that centuries of Christianity has forged: a combination of easy forgiveness, of tender love, of paternal affection and mercy, of unconfined compassion, maybe of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “cheap grace.” The result of this is that people may end up thinking of God with little sense of respect, and consider “grace” and mercy as a mere symbol that covers up the sharp edges of Christian praxis. They take it that divine threats and declarations, frequent throughout the Bible, are just empty words. God is spoken of lightly, perhaps too lightly, as an old friend, a benevolent grandfather, who does anything we ask him to do. This is a caricature of God, of course, a God who is attractive to nobody.

The Hebrew Scriptures provide quite a different picture, for God is not to be played around with. God is the all-powerful Creator of everything and everybody, he is the mighty One, the Lord of the armies. Only the chosen few, Moses among them, could speak to God face to face. But they did so trembling, barefooted (Ex 3:5), while the people beheld the scene from afar, amazed that a simple human being, fashioned out of the earth like themselves, could have a direct, intimate, personal relationship with the Lord of heavens and earth, “face to face, as a man talks with his own friend” (Gn 33:11).

Yet the fact is that God in sending his Son wanted to extend this closeness and intimacy to all humans… In seeing the Son we can see the Father (Jn 14:8). God has wanted to lower himself, to place himself at our level. He did so in the Old Testament with the few. But in the New Testament, God has lowered himself for the many by sending his only Son, who, in effect, “emptied himself” of his divinity, as Paul tells us in the Letter to the Philippians (2:7), showing himself capable of “sympathizing with our weaknesses, as one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

But a God who lowers himself out of love for humanity is not a weak God, but a powerful God, one who places his omnipotence at the service of his goodness, of love for the weak creature, made of flesh and blood. Only

the strong can allow themselves to appear as weak. Whereas the weak have no choice but to appear as strong. As Benedict XVI said,

> God's thought is different from our own… God's ways are different from ours (cf. Is 55:8)… His omnipotence is also different… His omnipotence is not expressed in violence, it is not expressed in the destruction of every adverse power as we might like; rather it is expressed in love, in mercy, in forgiveness, in accepting our freedom and in the tireless call for conversion of heart, in an attitude only seemingly weak—God seems weak if we think of Jesus Christ who prays, who lets himself be killed. This apparently weak attitude consists of patience, meekness and love, it shows that this is the real way to be powerful! This is God's power! And this power will win! (*Audience*, 30.1.2013).

Jesus said to his disciples: "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:14). Because in real terms, in spite of the appearances, God in giving himself does not really "lower" himself, but rather, while respecting nature, lifts up human beings, elevating them, promising them they "will be gods" (Ps 82:6). That is, God "divinizes" humanity, as the Eastern Fathers said, making them truly divine, through grace, making them his own children, though adopted. This is the miracle of grace, without which humans simply cannot dialogue with God, pray, or, for that matter, find meaning to life. By grace alone can humans become, as the Jewish philosopher Abraham Heschel defined them, "beings that pray" (*Man's Quest for God*, New York 1954, 101).

4. Situating anthropology between science, philosophy and theology (I) (CGW 13-25)

The next two chapters will deal with the place theological anthropology is situated with respect to the findings of philosophy and science.

1. Anthropology and anthropologies

The classical Greek term to designate the human being is *anthrōpos*. Thus the discipline of "anthropology." It is used to designate humans in general, in impersonal terms, and is not a semantically rich term. The word "anthropology" appeared for the first time in the XVI century, in reference to physiological, psychological, biological and ethical aspects of life. According to the Oxford English Dictionary it refers to human societies and cultures, to zoology, evolution and ecology, elements we have in common with animals. It provides a description of the human species. Also it is associated with paleontology (the study of animal and plant fossils) and ethnology (the study of different peoples and races). The term "cultural anthropology" emerged in the XVIII century. Although philosophy has dedicated its best efforts to study the reality and dynamics of human life from time immemorial, the term "philosophical anthropology" is quite recent, probably used for the first time by Max Scheler in 1928. Other XX century philosophers dedicated notable attention to anthropology: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Sartre, Marcel, Lévi-Strauss, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Buber, Lévinas, etc. The term "theological anthropology" (or "supernatural anthropology") emerged throughout the XIX century, usually referred to the doctrine of grace.

2. Situating man between reality and aspiration

Humans commonly perceive a discrepancy between what they are and what they aspire to be. They recognize their potentialities and desires, but struggle to bring them to fruition. Without such a discrepancy life would be meaningless of course. From the point of view of the study of anthropology we have in hand, we recognize the need to know both the present situation, that is concrete and finite, of humans, and the ultimate identity to which humans aspire, their ideal existence. Human nature is defined, paradoxically, through something that is not itself, through a structure of anticipation, a reality that is open to the absolute, while remaining a "natural" being.

We come to know ourselves in two ways: from within our own experience and tangible resources (through philosophical and scientific analysis, observation, introspection), and on the basis of what we receive from other people and traditions (faith/religion, myth, poetic imagination, cultural traditions etc.). So we may ask: how do we come to know the ideal existence we aspire to? One possibility is that we get to know about our unrealized ideal exclusively *from* other people (family, friends, society, traditions, religious faith). They live off and communicate an ideal, a vision not yet achieved. In that sense Charles Taylor said in *A Secular Age* (157) that "we are always socially embedded."

But we can still ask: why does this ideal draw us on? Why should we make it our own instead of rejecting or recalibrating it? Why does it often find an acute resonance within us? What moves us so powerfully to imitate others? Or to compare ourselves obsessively with them? Oscar Wilde famously quipped that "most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation." Likewise Rousseau in *The Social Contract* exhorts his readers to throw off the dead weight of social expectancies and live as individuals according to their own nature and lights and personal inclinations. Because perhaps the ideal they aspire to is mistaken and destructive.

So we can see that the ideal we aspire to does not depend exclusively on what others hand on to us, but also finds its roots in a germinal reality present within humans themselves, their interiority, their spiritual constitution, the 'divine' that is within them, perhaps we may call it their "soul." In the Gospel Jesus taught that our lives are not determined by what goes into us (Mk 7:18-23). Rather, "What comes out of a man is what defiles a man… from within, out of the heart of man" (Mk 7:20f.). Goethe put it as follows in *Faust*: "What you inherit from your father must first be earned before it is yours."

Three observations may be made on the foregoing reflection.

First, the driving force behind anthropology, behind human life indeed, is to be found in the discrepancy, the non-identity between two elements: the present, finite, concrete situation that we perceive directly, and the ideal toward which we aspire, an ideal that is considered both future and possible, though not clearly or fully known. This brings us to think and reflect, though we are aware of the limits of our thoughts; and it brings us to act, though we are conscious of our hesitation and reluctance.

Second, we come to know our present, finite, concrete situation principally through science and phenomenology. Whereas philosophy and religion concentrate preferably on the human subject and on the ideal we aspire to. Both are valid paths to self-knowledge, both are true, they interact with one another, but the paths to knowing and understanding them are different. A materialistic thought system, such as Stoicism, will consider the concrete and present, known, situation of humans as more real and fundamental, whereas the second, the ideal aspired to, is considered unreachable or illusory, and thus marginalized. A more spiritualistic philosophy, such as Platonism, is centered rather on the ideal, the world of ideas, and thus tends to neglect the concrete, actual, temporal, bodily situation of humans.

The third observation is that a Christian is not in a position to resolve the tension between the two, between the concrete and the ideal, with the simplistic ease of a Stoic or a Platonist. It is not possible to choose between concreteness and idealism, between matter and spirit, between the now and the then, for all these different elements have been created by the one God. They go to make up the human composite. Thus *a priori* there can be no contradiction between the two orders. The anthropology developed by a Christian believer will necessarily be an *integral anthropology*, that includes every single aspect of the human being.

In this chapter and the next we shall continue the above reflection by considering three fundamental questions: (1) what is the human being?; (2) who is the human being?; and (3) why do we do anthropology?

3. What is the human being?

Anthropology considers principally *human nature,* what human beings are, what they have in common with one another. All sciences contribute in different ways to this knowledge. They show us what humans are, what is their common nature, how they act, how they normally behave. Science besides attempts to identify the average, the common, the norm. Some sciences, such as medicine and psychiatry, deal with the exception, but always with the intention of bringing the exceptions back under the umbrella of normality. Besides, it is true that sciences recognize the *plasticity* of nature, but it goes on to study the *nature* of plasticity. Scientific study provides us with the *what* of things. The resultant commonality of nature makes it possible to *communicate* this knowledge easily. Christian faith confirms this approach without difficulty, recognizing that God has

placed a common intelligibility in things that the mind can discover, and that cannot enter into contradiction with divine revelation.

But does scientific investigation have the last word? Is there nothing more to say about humanity than what we hear from the sciences? Charles Dickens in his novel *Hard Times* presents the schoolteacher Thomas Gradgrind insisting with his young students to pay attention *only to the facts*, clearly identifiable scientific information and data. One of his students, Sissy Jupe, daughter of circus artists, innocently puts the class in uproar by claiming that facts, though scientific, only provide a limited knowledge of what human life is all about. Much more can be said about love and beauty and life and color. The philosopher Lesek Kolokowski has shown that natural sciences study reality as a dead object, with the consequent danger of falling into a kind of necrophilia, or love of death, because they are closed to the richness and unpredictability of human life and love and beauty and freedom and change and individuality and destiny. And these aspects of human life stand in need of a philosophical and theological reflection. Pope Francis in the encyclical *Lumen fidei* (34) writes: "The gaze of science… benefits from faith: faith encourages the scientist to remain constantly open to reality in all its inexhaustible richness." As Aristotle said in his *Metaphysics* (I, 2. 982a), "the philosopher does not know all things, but knows the 'all' of things." This brings us to the second question.

4. Who is the human being?

The question about the nature of humans—what the human being is—is not sufficient. We can only have access to certain aspects of our life through reason and scientific inquiry. To understand fully we need not only to *know*, but also to *love*. And from that emerges a certainty that humans have not only a shared nature, but a personal dignity. We address them as *who*. To ask someone "what are you?" would be bad-mannered to say the least, because it is (or should be) obvious that they are human beings as they stand. To ask "who are you?" is somewhat less jarring, and suggests interest in the following: (1) what are your peculiar and individual traits, your name; (2) what is your history and your narrative; (3) who are your parents, relatives and friends, where were you born, where do you live? The 'who' situates us within time and with others. Hannah Arendt says in *The Human Condition* (181): "the moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is; we get entangled in a

description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a 'character' in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us." And she goes on to explain that the distinction between the two questions—what and who we are—is revealed through love (242).

This brings us to ask the question: are humans really irreplaceable beings? We often say that this person or that is *unique* in the sense that nobody will ever be able to take their place. But this seems difficult to defend. If a bus-driver is indisposed, he can be replaced by another one in a matter of hours and the function he carried out continues as before. Clearly he *is* replaceable. Does it make sense that each and every one can say "I am important," "I must be taken into account," or "I'm irreplaceable," keeping in mind that 75 billion human individuals, after the advent of *homo sapiens*, have inhabited the earth (ten percent of whom, approximately, are living in the present moment). Perhaps there is a lack of humility in these affirmations. Self-affirmation is problematic, of course, if we are speaking about the *function* people are supposed to carry out, but not about their *individuality*. Are people right to resist elimination and substitution? Against the collectivism of Hegel, Kierkegaard (*Writings*, vol. 22, 122f.) once wrote: "The individual: with this category the cause of Christianity stands or falls… For everyone I manage to draw to the category of the 'individual,' I ensure he will become a Christian or better, since nobody can make this happen for anybody else, I can guarantee that he soon will become one." It should be clear here that what makes it possible for us to speak of the irreplaceable dignity of each and every human being lies in the fact that God has created them personally into existence, to live on forever. Should humans not be individually *immortal*, then to speak of their dignity or irreplaceability would be meaningless. We shall consider the issue later on when speaking about personhood (§ 39).

Of course the 'what' and the 'who' are not independent categories in the study of anthropology. They interact continuously in the singularity of the particular individual. One way of considering this is by looking at the unresolved polarities that characterize human existence, such as: nature/person; having/being; collective/individual; death/life, etc. Let us take an example. From the point of view of nature, of *what* we are, humans seem to be determined in their actions (so we are told by psychologists, sociologists, neuroscientists and others). From the point of view of being a

person (*who* we are) we usually say that each human is free. In fact Christian faith openly insists on the ethical responsibility that accompanies human action. But how can we reconcile the two affirmations, the what and the who? Are we basically determined and apparently free? Or are we fundamentally free and apparently determined? We shall return to this particular issue later on (§ 30).

5. Situating anthropology between science, philosophy and theology (II) (CGW 25-34)

In attempting to situate anthropology between science, philosophy and theology, we shall now address two further issues: why do we do anthropology; and the agnostic or unknown quality of anthropology. Then we shall draw some conclusions.

1. Why do we do anthropology?

Why do we spend so much energy reflecting on our lives, our own and that of others? The very existence of academic disciplines of many kinds shows that we dedicate enormous efforts to get to know ourselves. But why do we do this? Certainly we consider ourselves cousins of other primates. Still, that humans publish specialized periodicals on dolphins and monkeys is undeniable, but neither dolphins nor monkeys pay us a similar complement. Animals know themselves and interact with their environment on the basis of a hard-wired instinctual mechanism that leads them to satisfy their immediate, finite needs, especially those of nutrition and reproduction. So do humans, but they go much further, for the soul is potentially open to the whole of reality, as Aristotle said (*De Anima III*, 8). We may say that humans strive to know themselves better and better for three fundamental reasons.

First, with a view to overcoming the natural perplexities of life, and in that way, to act in a freer and more responsible way in keeping with their nature and identity. This is the *ethical motivation*. Second, humans strive to know themselves in order to contemplate, admire and discover their own lives as God's creatures, made in his image and likeness. "I have been as a portent to many; but you are my strong refuge," says the Psalmist (71:7): we admire the work of God in us. We know ourselves in order to 'give glory to God.' This may be called the *doxological motivation*. And third, the *dominating motivation*. Francis Bacon said that "Knowledge is power." And Nietzsche held that the "will to knowledge" is simply a part of the deepest human impulse, which is the "will to power." Jürgen Habermas spoke of the way our ulterior interests guide our knowing process in his work *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Yet Christians can recognize in a possessive or dominating or manipulative search for self-knowledge a significant presence of sin in their lives.

2. An agnostic anthropology

One of the outcomes of a properly focussed anthropology is the admission that *we do not know much about humans.* It makes sense to be 'agnostic' with respect to God, because God is above and beyond us in every way. Even the world around is unknown to us in many ways, despite the advances made by the sciences. But the same principle should be applied in anthropology: the more we seek an explanation, the more we strive to dominate man epistemologically, the further he seems to move away from us. Max Scheler puts it as follows in his work *The Position of Man in the World*: "We have a theological, a philosophical and a scientific anthropology before us, which, as it were, have no concern one with the other: yet we do not have one uniform idea of the human being. The ever-growing number of specialized disciplines which deal with the human being conceal, rather than reveal, his nature, no matter how valuable these disciplines may be… Hence, one can say that in no historical era has the human being become so much of a problem to himself as in ours" (11f.). Martin Heidegger spoke in the same way in 1929 in his work *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Bloomington 1962, 216):

> No other epoch has accumulated so great and so varied a store of knowledge concerning man as the present one. No other epoch has succeeded in presenting its knowledge of man so forcibly and so captivatingly as ours, and no other has succeeded in making this knowledge so quickly and so easily accessible. But also, no epoch is less sure of its knowledge of what man is than the present one. In no other epoch has man appeared so mysterious as in ours.

John Paul II in 1979 repeats this idea while addressing the III Celam Conference (28.1.1979):

> Perhaps one of the most obvious weaknesses of present-day civilization lies in an inadequate view of man. Without doubt, our age is the one in which man has been most written and spoken of, the age of the forms of humanism and the age of anthropocentrism. Nevertheless it is paradoxically also the age of man's deepest anxiety about his identity and his destiny, the age of man's abasement to previously unsuspected levels, the age of human values trampled on as never before.

3. Conclusion

To sum up, we may make four observations in respect of the contribution Christian revelation received in faith makes to anthropology in a wider

sense.

First, Christian revelation helps us understand the *role of sin* in human life, the way it is inextricably bound up with the lives of humans, while recognizing the power of the Gospel in identifying, overcoming and eliminating it. Indeed the elimination of sin requires a previous recognition of the power and dynamic of sin and concupiscence. In fact sin induces humans to consider creation as if God did not exist, leading us to substitute a respectful and patient dominion under God with an independent, despotic, arbitrary and even violent dominion. Sin induces humans to dominate and manipulate other humans and the rest of creatures. A proper anthropology requires therefore a kind of purification of the sinful inclinations that twist and impoverish our understanding of humans and the world.

Second, Christian wisdom reminds us constantly of the limits of our knowledge, that of God certainly, but also of man. Nicholas of Cusa in the XIII century spoke of the *docta ignorantia*, the wise ignorance that should mark the life of humans; Luther reminded us of the centrality of the *theologia crucis*, centered on the tragedy and apparent failure and contradiction of the Cross of Christ.

In the third place, the Christian definition of man is fundamentally relational or circular in character. Humans are creatures and therefore their existence is not primarily an ontologically autonomous reality *a se*, but rather an existence *ab alio*, 'from another.' Or better, *ab Alio*, for humans exist on the basis of the fundamental relationship they have with their creator, and as a result, in their relationship with others, with themselves and with nature. Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* (53) puts it as follows:

> As a spiritual being, the human creature is defined through interpersonal relations. The more authentically he or she lives these relations, the more his or her own personal identity matures. It is not by isolation that man establishes his worth, but by placing himself in relation with others and with God. Hence these relations take on fundamental importance. The same holds true for peoples as well. A metaphysical understanding of the relations between persons is therefore of great benefit for their development. In this regard, reason finds inspiration and direction in Christian revelation, according to which the human community does not absorb the individual, annihilating his autonomy, as happens in the various forms of totalitarianism, but rather values him all the more because the

relation between individual and community is a relation between one totality and another.

It is interesting to note that all the Christian definitions of the human are of a relational or circular kind: “image and likeness *of* God” (Gn 1:27); “Christ fully reveals man *to* himself” (GS 22); the believer as a “son *of* God,” etc. Irenaeus said in the *Adversus Haereses III* (20:2-3) that “the living man is God’s glory; the vision of God is man’s glory.” Augustine in his *Soliloquia* I, 7, proclaims: “I desire to know God and the soul. And anything else? Absolutely nothing else.” And in the same work (II, 1) we encounter the prayer *noverim me, noverim te:* ‘I will know myself, I will know you.’ In knowing ourselves we come to know God, and in knowing God who is the origin of the soul, we come to know ourselves better and better. Ratzinger cites Möhler saying: “Man, as a being set entirely in a context of relationship, cannot come to himself through himself, although he cannot do it without himself either” (*Introduction to Christianity*, San Francisco 1990, 184). The Jewish philosopher Abraham Heschel observed in *Man’s Quest for God* (77) that “prayer is not a need, it is an ontological necessity, an act which founds the very being of humans… the dignity of humans… is in the first place in the fact of having received the capacity of directing themselves to God.”

Fourth and last, the reflection we have just made helps us situate the sciences in the context of theology. We may say that (1) science in its different forms inquires principally into human nature, into *what* humans are; (2) theology needs to allow itself be challenged by the findings of science, but the opposite is also true, for theology reminds scientists that their field of research is wide open in every sphere, and will be so for many more centuries; (3) that philosophy and theology, besides studying human nature, look primarily into *who* humans are, in the widest sense of the word, philosophy paying particular attention to the human person, theology to God’s revelation of our life and destiny as children of God; and (4) that there are a series of “mixed questions” in which we try to synthesize the findings of science, philosophy and theology and establish a dialogue between them, for example in respect of human freedom, of temporality, historicity and sociality, of work, of the unitary constitution of human beings made of matter and spirit, of the individuality of humans as ‘persons.’ We shall consider the latter topics principally in the last part of the text on “Christian Anthropology” (§ 27-40).

6. “Christ fully reveals man to himself” (CGW 64-85)

Vatican II’s constitution *Gaudium et spes* (22) contains the following programatic words:

> In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come, Christ the Lord. *Christ the new Adam*, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, *fully reveals man to himself* and brings to light his most high calling.

The text is clearly saying that we come to know about human nature and personhood in the light of the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the ‘new Adam,’ that is, the new, original, definitive man. A possible precedent for the expression may be found in the XIX century French writer Joseph de Maistre, who said: “What does Christianity do? It reveals man to man.” John Paul II in his first encyclical *Redemptor hominis* (1979) comments extensively on the *Gaudium et spes* text, and he reminds us to gaze upon, to study, to love Christ, in action and prayer and contemplation. And this in the first place to know and love God better, but also and especially to understand man himself. Interestingly, whereas *Gaudium et spes* speaks of the greater *knowledge* we have of human nature through Christ, in *Redemptor hominis* Christ is presented as the *redeemer* of humanity, as the one who *restores* the dignity humans lost through sin. Thus Christ not only reveals human nature in general terms, but also human sinfulness and healing and regeneration. That is to say, Christ reveals not only our static dignity, or nature, but our freedom, our historicity, our being created by God with the gift of existence, and our immortal destiny. Christ indeed becomes a living perspective for humanity. John tells us “he himself knew what was in man” (Jn 2:25).

1. The epistemological issue

Theologians in general terms accept that Jesus Christ reveals man to man. But what does this mean? How do we come to know Christ, who in turn ‘reveals man to man’? Could it not be that the image we have of Christ is in real terms little more than a simple projection of ourselves, of our interests, needs, horizons and prejudices? Albert Schweitzer said that each one does his own Christology, an interested Christology, attempting to cover Christ with his own cloak.

When we say Christ reveals man to himself this comes across as a simple formulation: Christ, the perfect man, the true image of the Father enables us to know ourselves as we are or as we should be, since we are made in God's image and likeness. He is presented as the perfect model of humanity: from God to Christ, from Christ to humanity. But things are not as simple as this, for two reasons.

First, because humans are not in every way 'like' Christ in respect of his humanity, nor are they destined to be in the future. It is true that Christ is 'one of us.' But he is different from all of us, different from the sinner obviously, but different from the saint as well. According to Romano Guardini, Christ in relation to humanity is "the great contrast," because he is like humans in many ways but by no means in all. In fact with the Incarnation there has been established a "differentiated solidarity" between Christ and humanity, which we may describe in four stages. (1) Christ, the new Adam, is completely identified with us as regards human nature, what the eternal Father ever wanted humans to be: corporeal, free, historical, social, who could suffer hunger, tiredness and rejection. In that sense we can truly say that he, God's own Son made man, is very much "one of us." (2) Christ lives in solidarity with us in a "mixed," "temporal" or "functional" way with respect to certain aspects of historical, fallen human nature, for example in respect to suffering, ignorance and death. Christ, though free from sin, temporarily *assumed* these aspects of human life in order to redeem us. He freely makes himself like us (Jn 10:18), but remains different from us. (3) Christ identifies and contrasts with the human condition in a "prophetic" key, through his actions and teaching. He certainly consoles the downhearted, the weak, sinners (Mt 11:28-30). He is the joy of his people on many occasions. He is the true 'good Samaritan' (Lc 10:29-37), close to the wounded. But his behavior is often considered scandalous by the people. He puts the expectations of his listeners in crisis time and again. Of him Simeon said to Mary: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 2:34f.). The parables, full of apparent contradictions, surprise and disconcert his listeners. Many of his early followers later on abandoned him on account of his teaching (Jn 6:66). His life and words and works are anything but a comfortable confirmation of complacent expectations and reasonable aspirations… they are the

“Gospel,” the unexpected, prophetic disconcerting novelty of the preaching of the kingdom. (4) Christ has no solidarity whatever with a common aspect of human life, sinfulness. “He has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). There is no trace of sin in the life of Jesus. All he does is completely upright before his heavenly Father.

The second reason why Christ is different from us is that the humanity of Christ is not, and can never be, a perfect reflection of the Father. It is true that Jesus said that “he who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). But it is not a total, perfect reflection. Divine nature is incommensurate with created human nature.

This brings us to consider the different ways in which anthropology and Christology relate to each other throughout history. Two possible tendencies may be considered: Christology in the light of anthropology; and the reverse, anthropology in the light of Christology.

2. Considering Christology from the standpoint of anthropology

Throughout history Christology has always developed in tandem with anthropology. In the time of the Greek Fathers, the common human aspiration was that of being “divinized,” that is, made immortal and wise through God’s grace. Thus Christ was considered the perfect God-man who communicates divine life to us: God became man so that man could become God. From the time of Augustine up to the Middle Ages, Christ was considered primordially as the *savior* of mankind, because humans, though convinced of their immortality, feared the possibility of being condemned for their sins. So Christ is presented a benign, merciful savior who suffers for us on the Cross and repairs our life. From the time of the German Enlightenment (the *Aufklärung*), openly anthropocentric readings of Christ’s identity abound. Interest shifts to human morality. Christ is presented as a model of virtue and goodness for the whole of humanity. Romantic authors considered Christ as the model of a harmonic, strong, balanced, noble life. Personalist philosophers looked on him as the perfect man fully open to the Father and to all humans, source and model of communion. In the case of liberation theology, Christ, in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, dies at the hands of the oppressors, and becomes a model of liberation for the poor and persecuted. Again we can see how the anthropological horizon—determined in many manifestations of liberation theology by Marxist analysis—determines the profile of Christology.

Specific authors developed these ideas. For example in the area of religious experience, the XIX century Protestant pietist Friedrich Schleiermacher was important. The Catholic theologian Karl Rahner insisted on the need for an "anthropological turning" of theology and Christology. Anthropology is always an incomplete Christology, he says, whereas Christology is an anthropology that transcends itself. In other words we come to know about Christ on the basis of human transcendental experience. However, this tends to produce a flat Christology as well as a weak anthropology. Another example of this may be found in the historian and New Testament scholar Ernst Troeltsch. He suggests three criteria be applied to Biblical texts to ensure their historicity and trustworthiness: a rigorous historical *critique* (in order to identify the authentic text), *correlation* (to ensure the bonding and coherency between different aspects and stages of the text), and finally *analogy* (to confirm that the affirmations made are plausible and more or less in keeping with our experience). All three are reasonable, but the last one may be somewhat problematic if we end up judging the content of the Gospel on the basis of our human experiences. In this case our experiences would not be challenged by revelation, but actually end up domesticating it, by filtering out elements that fully belong to divine revelation. Again an impoverished, conformist, conservative Christology supports a weakened anthropology. The "differentiated solidarity" of Christ with humanity is neglected. Christ is simply "one of us." We have been covering him with our own cloak, as Schweitzer said.

It should be noted however that the Christologies just described are not without value, because they give expression to so many aspects of human life which are included in the humanity of Christ. "He himself knows what was in man" (Jn 2:25). Jesus Christ is more than the sum of universal reality, more than the sum of human aspirations, needs and desires, because he is the Lord of history, God's own Son made man. In him is to be found all the good and positive aspirations present in humans, and perhaps many others besides, of which we are as yet unaware.

3. Considering anthropology from the standpoint of Christology

Other XX century authors have attempted to invert methodology, ensuring that anthropology is mediated Christologically. Among them the Calvinist Karl Barth, the Catholic Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Lutheran Wolfhart Pannenberg. Each of them focuses on certain aspects of the life and identity

of Jesus which define, from above as it were, the reality of human existence. In all three Christology exercises an objective priority over anthropology. With Barth, the key element is *immortality*, of which we would be incapable were it not for the power of God in Christ; with von Balthasar the center is *love* (motherly love experienced by her child) which is revealed definitively by God in Christ (this is what he calls the aesthetic way); with Pannenberg, the key aspect is the *future*, which Christ revealed for us in his Resurrection, promising us eternal life.

Three possible approaches may be noted in the way Christ reveals us to ourselves. First, the *perpendicular* approach, in that God speaks to us from the top down, as it were, without engaging with scientific and philosophical aspects of anthropology. It tends to be fideistic. The foremost proponent is Barth. Others suggest a *concordist* approach, in the sense that God reveals to us in Christ new things about humanity we were previously unaware of. This is true of course, but it is not sufficient because at some stage philosophers or scientists might discover those very elements, and theology would pay the price for every new discovery.

And third we might mention an *integrative* approach, in the sense that Christ is seen as the one who pulls the pieces together, provides us with a unitary and definitive perspective and narrative to anthropology, based on a single divine project that God has prepared from all eternity (§ 10). The advantage of this approach is that it does not exclude or compete with philosophy or science as autonomous disciplines. Christ provides us with a harmonious confrontation, reintegration and re-dimensioning of many elements that may be known to some degree by other means: science, philosophy, spontaneous reflection, spiritual experience. Benedict XVI said the following of Christian faith: “Faith is not a parallel world of sentiment, which we allow as an extra element, but it is rather that which embraces the whole, gives it meaning, interprets it, and gives it interior ethical directives, in such a way that it can be understood and lived in relation to God and from God” (*Audience*, 24.9.2011).

4. Christ revealing man to man as a conversion experience

To comprehend man in the light of Christ, believers enter into a process of conversion. Some, when confronted with the life of Christ, closed up in themselves and “no longer went about with him” (Jn 6:66). Others, on the contrary, moved by the Spirit through the life, works and words of Jesus began a long, personal path of conversion, a conversion of life, of mind, of

heart, among them, the Apostles. This brings them to a new knowledge of Christ (Mt 16:17) revealed by the Father, the fulness of the truth. This is not a fulness they have achieved by their own efforts. Fruit of their loving knowledge of Jesus they come to know and appreciate their own life and vocation and identity and destiny. Henri de Lubac in his work *Catholicism* (San Francisco 1988, 368) puts it as follows:

> Christian humanism must be a *converted humanism*. There is no smooth transition from a natural to a supernatural love. To find himself, man must lose himself, in a spiritual dialectic as imperative in all its severity for humanity as for the individual, that is, imperative for my love of man and of mankind as well as for my love of myself. *Exodus* and *ecstasy* are governed by the same law.

The Apostles, when they were in the company of Jesus, felt secure, joyful, unassailable. When he was about to leave them, however, they lost their security and strength. And Jesus had to remind them, as he presented them with the task of evangelizing the world, that he would be "with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). At the last supper he promised them he would sent "another Paraclete" (Jn 14:16), the Holy Spirit, who would make his words, life and works present in their minds and hearts until he returned in glory. The encounter of the disciples on the way to Emmaus showed what a difference it made for them to experience the closeness of Jesus. The Christ who lived in them provided them with a new understanding, a new sureness, a clear mission. Jesus himself became more and more their true "identity."

This living communion with Jesus Christ did not mean of course that believers had a greater intellectual or thematic knowledge of anthropology and the world than did the great philosophers of antiquity. However, by living in Christ, with Christ, for Christ, by living in communion with the perfect man, they had at their disposal, "on loan" as it were, the whole of Christian anthropology, all the richness of the mystery of salvation, the destiny of the universe. Peter of course did not know more anthropology than did the philosopher Socrates. But he knew that his life had in Christ an origin, a meaning, a direction, and a full, immortal future that the greatest philosophers of antiquity could only suspect, dream of, and aspire to. Like Peter, any Christian who believes in Christ, follows him and lives his life, becomes "an expert in humanity," to use an expression applied by Pope Paul VI to the Church. To the lame man who begged in the temple, Peter

said: “I have no silver and gold.” As if to say: I have no human means, no esoteric knowledge, no sophisticated techniques, no medical qualifications, no extraordinary medicine. “But I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!” (Acts 3:6). The power and wisdom of Peter were real and efficacious, but they were not his “own”; they were not elements of knowledge under his dominion and control. Peter, a poor and ignorant fisherman, was certain that all he had and knew belonged to Christ, with whose eyes he saw, with whose strength he healed, with whose presence he consoled, by whose authority he taught.

A key moment in the consolidation of the identity of believers was on the occasion of the Resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15:12-17). When he appeared to the disciples he gave them his “peace” (Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19; 20:26). And peace of course is present when humans are aware of their own identity and accept and assimilate it without conflict. By giving us *his* peace (Jn 14:27), “Christ reveals man to himself.” Of course the Resurrection of Jesus “contained” or implied the resurrection of his followers, and the latter has very powerful anthropological implications as we shall see. On account of this hope Christians were moved to give their lives in the service of the Lord, many of them to the point of martyrdom. In doing so they affirm their faith in God and await final resurrection. Ignatius of Antioch on his way to martyrdom in Rome said the following to his fellow Christians: “Please, my brothers, do not deprive me of this life, do not wish me to die… Allow me to contemplate the light, and *then I shall be a man fully*. Allow me to imitate the passion of my God” (*Ad Rom.* 6:2f.). In other words, for Ignatius, the definition, the true identity of humans, of believers, is eschatological, obtained through the power of God. As we saw earlier, anthropology is meaningless without the eschatological complement.

Of course our understanding of anthropology is not determined exclusively by what we hope for in the future: eternal life and final resurrection. Otherwise anthropology would be a pure promise, a pure hope. Hope must refer back to the past, to memory, to the origins, and ultimately to the creation of the world. In the coming chapters we shall consider what Scripture has to tell us about the origins of the human race, made by God in his own image and likeness.

7. Humans made in the image and likeness of God (I) (CGW 89-99)

Scripture does not provide us with a developed and systematic anthropology. Yet both Testaments speak of human beings in a wide variety of ways, deeply related, with history, with other people, with nature and of course with God. Perhaps the most powerful anthropological affirmations are to be found in the first chapters of the book of Genesis. Two accounts of the creation of man are provided. They differ considerably in style but are entirely complementary to one another.

1. The creation of man in Scripture

The first one, chronologically, is Gn 2:4b-3:24, the "Yahvehist" account of creation which describes the origins of man, "drawn from the earth" (in Hebrew, *adamāh*) into whom God infuses the living spirit (*ruah*). The corporeal side of humanity is emphasized here. Humans are like the animals and when they die, they return to the earth they came out of. The same idea is to be found throughout the whole of the Old Testament, especially the Psalms and Wisdom literature (see § 28, 2). These texts have a lot in common with anthropologies of Eastern antiquity. They provide the everyday anthropology of the Old Testament.

The second account is situated in Gn 1:1-2:4a and, though situated before Gn 2-3, is a later text. It provides the "priestly" account of creation, so designated because the text has powerful liturgical resonances and induces humans to praise God for his great works. In it humans are not assembled out of different components, as it were, but are created by God as a single unit within a process which describes how God created the different strata of the a single cosmos, the world. Humans are presented as the keystone of God's overarching project and design. After having created the world, the firmament, the plants, the animals, he completed the process by creating humans "on the sixth day." Thus 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; and have dominion over the

fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gn 1:26-28).

Three verbs are attributed to God in this text: "let us make"… God before creating thinks, plans, contemplates, dreams about the creation of man; "So God created"… God goes on to make what he thought about, but he puts himself into the creation of man fully, whom he creates in his own "image and likeness"; "And God blessed them… and God said to them": lastly God provides his blessing of fruitfulness for man and woman, and then speaks to them (which he did not do when he created the rest of the universe).

It may be noted that the expression "image of God" is seldom applied to humans in the Old Testament: just three times in Genesis (1:26-28; 5:1-3; 9:6-7), once in the book of Sirach (17:3) and once in the book of Wisdom (2:23). On several occasions Gn 1:26-28 is paraphrased or glossed, for example in Ps 8. In spite of that, the expression has had enormous weight in Christian theology especially in Church Fathers, both Eastern and Western, and also in scholastic and modern theology. It is a central element of revealed anthropology. In *Mulieris dignitatem* (6), John Paul II writes: "In the Biblical beginning… the revealed truth concerning man as 'the image and likeness' of God constitutes the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology."

In this chapter and the next we shall consider the theology of the image of God in several stages, and first of all in the Old Testament. Then we shall look at the implications of the notion of 'image' in the New Testament. Finally we shall consider its theological meaning in the reflections of Church Fathers and theologians.

To situate the topic, we may say that it is possible to find two principal interpretations of Gn 1:26-28): first, that the image of God expresses the close relationship humans have with God, and second, that the image of God refers to the mission humans carry out on earth, that of "dominating" and subduing the world created by God. Of course the interpretations are complementary to one another.

2. The image and likeness of God in the Old Testament

Twelve aspects may be mentioned in respect of the exegesis of 'image and likeness.'

1. The description of man as the "image of God" is not unknown in the ancient East, especially in Egyptian literature, according to which the kings and Pharos are considered images of God, his representatives or

ambassadors. In some texts in fact all humans are considered as images of God. Plato besides spoke of the likeness of the soul to the divine spirit. This observation helps to situate the Old Testament texts that refer to the image of God.

2. Compared to the Egyptian texts, Genesis adds an important expression, 'made in.' It is not that humans *are* the image of God, but that they are *made in* the image of God, by an act of the divine creating will. Though made in God's image, humans do not share in God's immutability and eternity, because they are creatures, and thus open to change, to growth, to progress and (perhaps) to impoverishment, decline and death. Church Fathers such as Irenaeus of Lyons were aware of this aspect when they distinguished between "image" and "likeness": the "image" refers to human nature as such and does not change, whereas the "likeness" can change, especially with the reception (or loss) of divine grace.

This position was assumed substantially by many theologians. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (705) puts it as follows:

> Disfigured by sin and death, man remains "in the image of God," in the image of the Son, but is deprived "of the glory of God," of his "likeness." The promise made to Abraham inaugurates the economy of salvation, at the culmination of which the Son himself will assume that "image" and restore it in the Father's "likeness" by giving it again its glory, the Spirit who is "the giver of life."

Still, from the strictly exegetical point of view, the two terms used, *ṣelem*, which means sculpture, material copy, and is usually translated as "image," and *demûth*, "likeness," correspondence with an original, are more or less equivalent, meant to mutually strengthen one another, following the usual Semitic usage. In spite of the exegetical imprecision involved, however, the interpretation of Irenaeus and others contains an important truth: on the one hand, humans have an inalienable dignity, a permanent divine seal, by creation, and on the other, humans are capable of development or decline according to the way the act.

3. Some authors are of the opinion that the image of God was lost when man sinned. This was the position of Augustine for example until the Pelagian controversy arose. Even later, however, he held that sin drastically diminishes the likeness of God in humans. A similar position is to be found in Luther and other Protestant authors. Nowadays however virtually nobody

holds that the image of God is actually lost through sin. It would amount to a denial of human dignity.

4. What kind of relationship does creation in the image of God establish between God and humans? Gn 5:1-3 offers an interest adjunct to Gn 1:26-28. It says: “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them man when they were created. When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, *he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image*, and named him Seth.” Here we see that just as God created man in his own image and likeness, Adam generates a son, Seth, in his image and likeness. Two points may be observed. First, that the image of God in humans is communicated by generation… thus all humans, and not just Adam and Eve, are made in the image and likeness of God. And second, that being made in the image and likeness of God has clear filial connotations, even though the Old Testament on the whole does not speak of humans as children of God (§ 14, 1).

5. Gn 1:26-28 starts in the first-person plural: “Let us make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness.” Christian authors have frequently interpreted this expression, in the light of the New Testament, in a Trinitarian way, seeing the creation of humans as a manifestation of the eternal dialogue between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Still, from the exegetical and more modest standpoint the plural refers probably to celestial beings as agents in the work of creation.

6. In Gn 9:1f. God blesses Noah and his sons after the subsidence of the flood. The text provides an interesting paraphrase of Gn 1:26-28. And then it adds:

> For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it (Gn 9:5-7).

In other words, humans were meant to “dominate” over the fish and the birds, but not over other human beings. The latter may not be harmed because there are made in the image of God. To kill another human is considered a grave offense to the creator. This idea is confirmed in the book of Wisdom (2:23) which speaks of the immortality of humans: “For God

created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity [in the Septuagint the Greek term used here is *epoiēsis*, which may be translated as "nature" or as "eternity"]." Since humans are destined for immortality, having been made in the image of God, their lives should be respected.

7. One element of Gn 1:26-28 that stands out is that God created humans both male and female, with a view to propagating the species.

> 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; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gn 1:27f.).

Authors such as the Calvinist Karl Barth hold that the principal manifestation of the image of God in humans is situated in their social character, present to a maximum degree in the spousal love between man and woman. The image does not relate so much, he says, to the closeness of our relationship with God but to the relationship between humans. Now Genesis does make it clear that *one of the signs* of the image of God in humans may be found in the sexual distinction. However, it is not the only one. Both man and woman are created equally in the divine image but this does not mean that the likeness consists exclusively in the relation between them. We may observe, besides, that the expression "male and female he created them" is closely associated with "Be fruitful and multiply." For God created humans male and female with a view to propagating the species, thus exercising and extending their dominion over the created world.

8. What are the consequences of being made in the image of God for the life of humans? What can humans do that cannot be done by animals and other living beings? What does the image say about man's mission and destiny? On the face of things, the image of God in man implies a strong likeness of humans, both bodily and spiritually, to God himself. This seems to involve an excessively anthropomorphic reading of the priestly text. In fact some Fathers, such as Epiphanius, said that being created in the image of God is undefinable for the simple reason that God himself cannot be defined or described. However, as we saw, the common meaning of image of God present in Egyptian literature refers to the royal position of humans.

In that sense they may be said to share not so much in the divine being, but rather in *God's power and sovereignty over the entire universe*.

That is, God has destined humans to dominate and subdue the earth, as his special representatives. This comes up clearly in Gn 1: "'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; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'*" (Gn 1:26-28). Humans in other words participate in God's sovereignty over the earth as his representatives and delegates. This text provides perhaps the first "theology of work" in the Bible. Divine blessing according to the Old Testament is associated with life, fertility, fruitfulness, growth, prosperity and success. The task of humans is to consolidate, develop and confirm life on earth, on God's behalf. All creatures are subordinate to man and, through him, to God. Besides, he earth created by God is entirely "secular" and "worldly," not divine. It relates to God through man.

Gn 1:28 uses two terms to describe the actions of humans with respect to the created world: "to subdue" (*kāḇaš*), a term that is applied to the world in general, and "to dominate" (*rādāh*), referred to living beings. The first term speaks of an absolute form of dominion, obtained by force (Jos 18:1), by war (Nm 32:22.29), even by crushing other peoples (2 Sm 8:1) and slaves (Neh 5:5). The other word, *rādāh*, "to dominate," is applied in the Old Testament also to royal dominion (Pss 72:8, 110:2; Is 14:6; Ezek 34:4), as well as the process of treading the grape (Jl 4:13).

8. Humans made in the image and likeness of God (II) (CGW 99-117)

1. The dynamics of dominion

Let us continue considering the different aspects of the image of God in humans according to the Old Testament.

9. The dominion of humans over the world is not unlimited. God imposes a variety of restrictions to the power they can exercise. They do not dominate time and seasons, for it will be a "greater light" that will govern the day and a "lesser light" the night, that is the sun and the moon (Gn 1:14-18). Besides, humans are not entitled to damage the lives of other people, as we saw above (Gn 9:5f.). It should also be noted that humans dominate not through a native or physical power, but in other ways as well, for example through fear. In Gn 9:2f. we read: "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered." According to the first-century Jewish work *The Life of Adam and Eve*, while Eve and Seth were on a journey, Seth was assaulted by a wild animal, and Eve cried out: "Cursed beast, are you not afraid to attack the image of God?" In Gn 2 God limits the power of humans over the earth, not allowing them eat of "the tree of life" (Gn 2:16). Finally, whereas the power of God is unlimited, that of humans is severely limited, for "Of the Lord is the earth and everything it contains" (Ps 24:1).

In other words, the dominion exercised by all humans is not exclusively of a royal or absolute kind, but must be lived out under God who is the only Sovereign over the universe.

10. Other Old Testament texts likewise speak of the dominion of creatures over the earth. Two may be mentioned, Ps 8 which glosses Gn 1:26-28 and Sir 17.

> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have established; what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you should care for him? Yet you have made him little less than God, and crowned him with glory and honor. *You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,* all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Ps 8:3-9).

In Sirach 17:1-12 we find a further ample gloss on Genesis 1:26-28:

> The Lord created man out of earth, and turned him back to it again. He gave to men few days, a limited time, but granted them authority over the things upon the earth. He endowed them with strength like his own, and made them in his own image. He placed the fear of them in all living beings, and granted them dominion over beasts and birds (Sir 17:1-4).

11. From the texts we have seen it is clear that the image of God is the *root of human dignity.* Interestingly the term *ṣelem,* "image," is frequently used in the Old Testament, and usually translated as "idol." Of course the prophets condemned the adoration of idols out of hand, insofar as it contradicts the cult that is due exclusively to God. Yet humans *have* been made in the image of God, as the highest beings in the material world, his "idols." In other words there are no "idols" between God and man. The rejection of idolatry amounts to an affirmation not only of the absolute sovereignty of God and of our obligation to adore him exclusively, but also of the dignity of humans. Idolatry not only offends the creator but also degrades human dignity. Those who treat others badly, offend the one who made them in his image and likeness. Thus "He who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is kind to the needly honors him" (Prv 14:31). Rabbi Akiba in the II century said: "We must love man because he is made in the image of God" (*Genesis Rabba*, 24:8).

12. The image of God expresses the directness of the relationship between God and man, and the latter's capacity to dominate over the material world and subdue it. However on no account does this mean that humans are put on a par with God. In fact the prime duty of humans is not one of dominating the earth but rather that of recognizing the absolute sovereignty of God, adoring and praising him. Gn 1 is, as we said, a priestly text, liturgical in structure, from which we can deduce our duty to praise God. "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gn 1:31). Humans are meant to obey God and him alone (Gn 3). The ultimate expression of the dominion humans exercise over creation may be found in divine praise: as they work and subdue the world, they praise God for his gifts and direct them entirely to his glory. The following text from fifth Sunday Preface is indicative:

> For you laid the foundations of the world and have arranged for the changing of times and seasons; you have formed man in your own

> image and set humanity over the whole world in all its wonder, to rule in your name over all you have made, and for ever praise you in your mighty works, through Christ our Lord.

2. The image of God in the light of Jesus Christ, perfect Image of the Father

The fact is that the Old Testament speaks of man made in the image and likeness of God very seldom. Besides, the New Testament never applies the expression to humankind. So the question arises: why did Church Fathers and theologians throughout the centuries speak about it so much? Other anthropological expressions are much more frequently used (see § 28, 2). So why did "image of God" become so important?

One possible reason may be found in the extensive usage given to Platonism among Church Fathers. For Plato man through contemplation and ascetical life is called to find his true self by becoming more spiritual, and thus more and more like God, more in his image and likeness.

But the real reason is another one: Jesus Christ is the perfect image of the Father. In the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians we read, "He [Christ] is the image [*eikōn*] of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation" (Col 1:15; cf. 2 Cor 4:4), a text that refers both to creation and to salvation. In the letter to the Hebrews the same idea is to be found: "He [Christ] reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power" (Heb 1:3). When Christians encountered this expression (and others like it) in the New Testament, immediately the Old Testament texts speaking of the "image" came alive. Christ *is* the Image of God; humans are *made in* the image of God. As we saw earlier (§ 6) Christ "reveals man to himself." It is clear that the kind of image of God present in humans reflects and is determined by the Person of Christ.

It is interesting to note the consolidation of two different interpretations of the notion of "image of God" among Church Fathers. Among Latin authors such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, the definition of man as image refers to the entire human being, body and soul. In the image they detect an expression of the unity, integrity and corporeity of humans. They insisted on this aspect in order to avoid a dualistic or Manichaean view of humans that looks down upon the body, God's own creature. Lactantius and other authors see the image of God in the erect posture of humans, by means of which they are distinguished from animals and are capable of subduing them. This is likewise the most common reading among contemporary Biblical scholars.

However it is more frequent among Church Fathers, especially of the Alexandrian tradition, to say that the likeness of God in man is situated in his spiritual constitution, in the soul, specifically in the intellect (*nous*). And understandably so. After all, God is invisible and non-corporeal, as is the soul, created in his image. Besides what distinguishes humans from animals is spirit and intellect, not body. And animals have not been created in the image and likeness of God. Augustine for example asks in *De Trinitate XII*, 7:12: *ubi imago Dei?*, "Where is the image of God to be found?" And he responds, *in mente, in intellectu*, "in the mind, in the intellect." That is, not in the human body. For the most part, medieval authors adopted a like position, as did the early Protestant theologians.

So which of the two formulae is the correct one?

To understand this we have to consider the Christology that was behind these anthropological affirmations. Some Church Fathers, belonging to the Antiochene school, situate the Image of God rather in the *Logos ensarkos*, "the incarnate Word," and as a result the image of God in man in his integrated body-soul constitution. Certainly the non-incarnate Word or Son is in the Image of the Father. But the incarnation applies this notion more concretely to the life of humans, including the corporal and social aspects. Other Fathers, especially of the Alexandrian school, considered Christ as the Image of God *according to his divinity*, whom they called the *Logos asarkos*, "the non-incarnate Word." In this case a Christological reading of the image of God in man would refer principally to the human spirit, to the soul, and not to the body. However, this reading of the reality of Christ does not do full justice either to the incarnation of the Word or the corporeal constitution of humans..

3. A Christological understanding of the image of God

The following three questions may be asked here. What does the notion of Christ as Image of God add to our understanding of being human? What does the Christological aspect of the image add to the mission of humans to dominate and subdue the earth? Finally, if the image of God refers to the task of participated human dominion over the earth, through work, what place does the intellect and the body and physical activity have in this?

1. What Christ as Image adds to our understanding of human life lies in the supernatural power and grace which he communicates to us by which we became truly children of God (§ 14) in Christ. Divine fulness of the

image of God in humans consists, therefore, in their divine filiation, which provides the ultimate likeness of humans to God, the fulness of the image.

2. Paul presents Christ as the Lord, who dominates the entire universe. Besides, at the end of time, when he returns in glory, that dominion will find its fullest universal and public expression, in resurrection and judgment. Nonetheless, this is a process that takes place over an extended period of time (see Phil 2:9-11; 1 Cor 15:25-28; Heb 2:8f.; Jn 12:32). Christ intensifies the image of God in us by freeing us from sin, in that way allowing us dominate over the earth more and more, but fully and only under God.

3. The text of Sirach 17, already cited, explains with surprising power and beauty that the reason why God made man in his image and likeness, was to make it possible for him to dominate and subdue the earth. And clearly this involves not only intellect and spirit, but also bodily activity.

> The Lord… endowed [humans] with strength like his own, and made them in his own image. He placed the fear of them in all living beings, and granted them dominion over beasts and birds… He made for them tongue and eyes; he gave them ears and a mind for thinking. He filled them with knowledge and understanding, and showed them good and evil.

It should be clear here that the bodily character of humans and their physical action over the created world, are inseparable from their intelligence and will. Dominion is thus expressed corporally, through one's hands, physical constitution and action. It should not come as a surprise that Thomas Aquinas in *De Potentia* 5, 10 ad 5 says that the soul united to the body is closer to the image of God than the separated soul on its own. The image of God embraces the whole man, body and soul (see § 28-29, on body and soul).

9. Eternal Life and Grace in the New Testament: John and Paul (CGW 118-41)

The theological anthropology of the New Testament deals principally with grace, and is mainly to be found in the writings of John and Paul.

1. Eternal life in John

John does not speak often of "grace" as does Paul. Neither does he speak of "the kingdom of God" as do the Synoptics. The key word used by John, the equivalent of grace in Paul and Christian tradition, is *life*, and especially "eternal life," an expression that may be found sixty-six times in the Johannine corpus. Life of course derives always from God, the living God, as is apparent throughout the Old Testament. John's teaching on eternal life may be presented in four points.

First, eternal life comes to people from *God* through Christ and the Spirit and thence through the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, in faith. The beginning of the divine process is announced in Jn 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." As a result, Jesus says, "no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (Jn 6:65). John clearly teaches that life is to be found fully in Christ: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (Jn 1:4). And not only that, for Jesus says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6). In fact Jesus says of himself that "I came that they have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). And he concludes: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3). This involves a new birth, a regeneration, which is the work of the Holy Spirit and takes place through the sacrament of Baptism, for "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). Eternal life is also made present in believers, he adds, in their participation in the Eucharist (Jn 6:51-58). The fruit of this divine self-giving is called "divinization" by the Fathers of the Church.

Second, the gift of eternal life has to be received through *faith*. Faith is always faith *in Christ*, who directs it at the same time to the Father. Jesus teaches openly that the one who believes *already has* eternal life. "Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life… he has passed from death to life" (Jn 5:24; cf. 6:40). And what is the object of Christian faith? The light and life that come from God. For

God is the source of all truth, light and life; all of this is given to the Word and made available to humans through the incarnation in such a way that they can believe in the most human way possible. Yet some people, in spite of the abundance of words and "signs" (or miracles) of Jesus, refuse belief. For John in fact the fundamental sin *is* incredulousness (Jn 3:18), not believing. Whereas living in God excludes sin: "No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God" (1 Jn 3:9). What ultimately convinces people to believe, John tells us, is the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Only a God who is all-powerful, faithful love can be believed in unconditionally. This is beautifully explained in 1 Jn 4:7-18.

Third, the life given by God to the person is divine, it is God's own life… that is why it is called "eternal." God gives life to all creatures, but only "eternal life" to humans whom he invites to share his life forever. And as we saw, this life is present in the lives of Christians from the very moment they believe in God. It is an interior reality, yet it is real and actual. It is not a mere metaphorical or existential affirmation, for believers are truly regenerated by the Spirit (Jn 3:6.8). They are not just "called" children of God, but they "are" truly so (1 Jn 3:1). Besides, Jesus tells us, especially in John's gospel and letters, that God "abides" or lives on in the believer. This is the mystery of the inhabitation of God in man. "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (1 Jn 4:15).

Fourth, the fruit of this regeneration, transformation, abiding… is a renewed moral commitment. Living in God who abides in them, humans are moved to live a fruitful life. "He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit" (Jn 15:5), adding the critical phrase, "for without me you can do nothing." This fruit is manifested in two inseparable ways: in the observation of the commandments and in the love of one's neighbor. "If you love me, keep my commandments," Jesus said (Jn 14:15). "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; and he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20).

2. The life of Christ in humans: the experience of Paul, an experience for all

St Paul uses the term "grace" very often in his letters, more than a hundred times. Why does he insist so much on it? Why speak of "grace" and not rather of "ethics," of good behavior, of wisdom, of lifestyle, of vision? Or to put it more cogently: why did the great Apostle talk of divine action rather

than human activity? And the reason is simple: according to Paul, *grace is Jesus Christ in person*. So in real terms for him to speak of grace is to speak of Christ—no more and no less. Christ is God's definitive gift; in Him God has given us everything possible (1 Cor 3:21). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:23f.).

It made sense that Jesus himself, God's ultimate gift to the world, would not speak of "grace" as such, but rather of his Father and of the moral obligations binding those who become his disciples. Yet Paul did speak of grace, that is, of Christ. And he did so continuously, almost obsessively, because he had received and experienced it as God's free gift, like any disciple, like any Christian believer. He experienced the power of God's grace at his conversion in Damascus and on repeated occasions throughout his whole life. He spoke of grace because he wished to speak of Christ. In Paul's experience, "grace" took on several peculiar characteristics that over the centuries have become common language and doctrine of all Christians. Four may be mentioned.

Firstly, according to the teaching of the Apostle to the gentiles, grace is more than a kind of new knowledge about God's love and generosity. The latter position was taught by the Gnostics, who were very influential during the times of early Christianity. Grace, rather, is the life of Christ in us, a new life, which fills and almost takes over from the life that went before. Paul goes so far as to say: "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 2:19f.). In his Letter to the Romans, Paul says the same thing in a different way, and gives us an interesting key to unlocking the secret of his own life and mission: "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" (Rom 5:5).

This love within him moves Paul to strive to communicate the power of God to all of humanity: *caritas Christi urget nos*: "the love of Christ moves us on" (2 Cor 5:14). Paul is an Apostle not because he decides to be one, as if he was doing Christ a favor, as if he considered himself a collaborator or coworker of Christ's, as if he was a kind of "co-founder" of Christianity. He is an Apostle because *Christ lives in him*, acts in him, struggles in him, speaks in him and through him. The love of God gives him no peace—it

spurs him on, it convinces him that “time has grown very short” (1 Cor 1:29). It might be said that Christ communicates with humanity not only in the power of the Spirit but also through the incessant activity of Paul, indeed, through the lives of all believers.

In the *second* place, Paul is convinced that he cannot do anything useful or relevant or lasting without God’s grace. Jesus himself had already said so, as John tells us: “Without me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). For example, he has the following startling thing to say: “God is at work in you, both to will and work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). And he writes to the Ephesians: “Now by him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20f.). In brief terms, for Paul, the ultimate protagonist of the human will and of human action is God, no longer myself, because “I no longer live,” for “Christ lives in me.” Again, the same may be said of all Christian believers.

The *third* aspect of Paul’s doctrine that is worthwhile highlighting is his conviction that through faith he has become a son of God; an adopted son, doubtless, but a true son nonetheless. And this is based on his becoming a brother of Christ (Rom 8:28) who of course is the only Son of the Father. This union with the Father and the Son is such that the Holy Spirit lives within him as in a temple, reminding and convincing him of this new condition to the very depths of his being: “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” (Rom 8:14ff.; cf. Gal 4:6). Along with Paul all Christians guided by the Spirit become brothers of Christ and therefore children of God.

In the *fourth* place, lastly, Paul enquires into the provenance of divine grace for humanity, and finds it in God’s arcane project or design for creation and humanity, what he calls the divine “mystery.” Grace in other words is not something “instrumental” that God “invents” with a view to resolving contingent problems arising within human history. Paul sees grace everywhere: throughout the history of his own people, the Jews, in his own life and in that of early Christians, in the very world created by God. For God’s project of grace determines the entire course of human history.

Humans are created in order to live in eternal communion with God, that is in the grace of God. The meaning of their existence, the beginning, development, and fulfillment of life, is to be found in grace. Paul calls this grandiose plan "the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (Eph 3:9), "the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints" (Col 1:26) in Christ. Grace is not something that drops down from heaven on humanity all of a sudden, a divine afterthought riding roughshod over created reality, the human world, life, and culture as if they were of no value. According to Paul, on the contrary, divine grace has a history, a narrative, which may be perceived and admired ever more deeply as God's eternal plan gradually unfolds throughout history. Where Paul best describes the dynamics of this narrative is in the eighth chapter of the Letter to the Romans:

> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified (Rom 8:29f.).

Paul is speaking here of Christian believers and in a wider sense of all humans. He says that God has always known them, then predestined and called them, finally justified and glorified them. This is the narrative of divine grace in humans: an amazing adventure of love, joy, betrayal, hate, and then redemption and reconciliation, culminating in eternal glory. This is the Christian narrative: the narrative of grace. We shall consider the different stages of this narrative in the coming chapters.

3. Conclusion: Paul and John on grace

At a fundamental level, there is real convergence between Paul's theology of grace and John's understanding of eternal life: God is the only one who saves. And that saving power penetrates deeply into the life and being of believers. Still, their respective approaches are quite different. The theology of Paul, in simplistic terms, insists especially on the "healing," dynamic and communicative side of grace offered to the sinner: grace is presented in terms of liberation, as a presence of divine power that changes the lives of humans, allowing them to fight off evil; it finds direct expression in human action and ethical questions. John's vision, on the other hand, concentrates more on "elevating grace," which divinizes humans and makes them contemplatives and children of God. It may be said that both apostles—

from their own lived experience—attempt to express in their writings the impact that the life of Christ in the Spirit had on their own lives. If this impact oriented Paul more decisively in the line of missionary activity, it brought John to pay greater attention to the contemplation of the mystery of God.

10. God's Plan of Grace and the Predestination of Humanity in Christ (CGW 215-224)

In the mystery of God's action towards creatures as St Paul presents it, we can recognize the presence of a project of grace, a divine plan or design marked by gratuitous and intimate love, a project calling humans to life and inviting them to live in communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a story of love destined to last forever. The content of this plan, present in the Old Testament, is hidden mysteriously in the person of Christ, the Word of God made flesh, and communicated to humanity by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, in the Church. Indeed, Paul speaks of "the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed" in Christ (Rom 16:25f.).

The first stage of this plan, according the text from the letter to the Romans at the end of the last chapter, is described as follows: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined" (8:29). Here we shall examine the two issues: foreknowledge (creation) and predestination.

1. Foreknowledge, Creation and the Divine Plan

The first question to be asked is the following: what does it mean to say that God "knew," or "foreknew," the life and future of human beings? Does it mean that God discovered humans, then studied them, and in that way came *a posteriori* to know them? Obviously not. God does not "know" as we do. Humans are what they are because God has thought about them, has created them, has made them in his "image and likeness" (Gn 1:26) (see §§ 7-8). In that sense, God has "foreknown" them. God was the first one to think of creating human beings. So God first "knew" us, and then "created" us as an act of love, following through on what we might call his "eternal dream." It is interesting to notice that the Greek term used in Romans 8:29, *proegno*, may be translated as "to foreknow," but also as "to choose." In other words, the knowledge God has of humanity is anterior to existent human beings, and determines to the core both their nature and existence. It is equivalent to the act of love by which God creates human beings and gives them existence, by which he "chooses" them. The same idea may be found in another fundamental Pauline text that strongly resonates with Rom 8:29f. Speaking of the original divine plan, we read in the Letter to the Ephesians that God

> chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He predestined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (Eph 1:4-6).

We can see that the work of creation is the basis or foundation of the entire divine design or plan. It is the first stage of its development. On the basis of what God created, God acts, chooses, calls, justifies, prepares humanity for the eternal marriage feast…

2. Who has been predestined?

Now we can ask a second question: what does it mean to say that God has *predestined* human beings? Clearly there is continuity between foreknowledge and predestination. Throughout the history of theology some would say that when God "predestines," he is said earmark some people for glory and others for condemnation, whether they deserve it or not. This would amount to a simplistic, indeed unjust, reading of Scripture. An arbitrary Godhead and apparently free humans… this is not the image Christianity would ever wish to project throughout history. God loves all humankind, all human beings one by one, and invites them to freely live in communion with him. God wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tm 2:4).

We may note that in the Hebrew Scriptures "predestination" is equivalent to "election." It is true that God desires the salvation of all and that humans are invited to respond freely to his call. But it is also true that God chooses, decides, and generously offers his life to people. Nobody can save himself; nobody can save others; all stand in need of God's loving invitation. This is the ultimate meaning of the doctrine of predestination: salvation is not man-made or automatic. Let us consider now the dynamics of predestination as Scripture presents it, in four stages.

In the first place, the *theological* aspect. As we have just seen, the notion of predestination involves the supreme freedom and initiative of God who loves, the absolute priority of divine love over human response, the gratuity of divine election. Predestination therefore is an exclusively divine work. The second moment is *Christological*: according to Scripture the first one to be "predestined" is Christ, who "was predestined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake" (1 Pt 1:20; cf. Eph 1:4-6). In other words the one who is predestined is Christ in

the first place. The love of the Father is infallibly directed to his Son made man, to Jesus Christ. The idea of considering Christ as object and subject of predestination is now commonly accepted by Christian theologians, and was explained systematically by the Calvinist Karl Barth. In the third place, we may consider the *ecclesiological* side of predestination. It is true that God predestines Christ first, but Christ in turn through the redemption of humanity brings humans, who are members of his Body, the Church, to partake of this predestination. Paul does not speak of the special predestination of individual believers, but of the Church as a whole, of the community of believers. In the Letter to the Ephesians, already cited, the plural term "we" and "us" is always used, not the singular "I" and "me." God "chose *us* in him before the foundation of the world, that *we* should be holy and blameless before him. God predestined *us* in love to be children of God through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on *us* in the Beloved" (Eph 1:4-6). According to Matthew's Gospel, Christ guarantees infallible divine assistance not to individuals, but the Church as such: "I am with you [plural] always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).

And fourth, what of *individual* believers?

3. What is the situation of individual believers?

However the question of predestination is still a wide open one: what can be said of individual Christians? Are they predestined or not? And in what sense? Is divine predestination compatible with human freedom? Would it not be simpler to say that God saves all, with a unique and universal decree of predestination? The problem with this interpretation however would seem to be that God's grace cannot be resisted or rejected by human beings. It can only be accepted. So where does this leave human freedom? Of course here we are touching off the deepest and perhaps most insoluble aspect of the mystery of grace: the mysterious relationship between God's love and human freedom, between gift and reception… a mystery that the passing of time has never fully solved. Still, some idea of what is involved may be gleaned from reading the following words from Psalm 139:1-17:

> Lord, you know when I sit and stand; you understand my thoughts from afar. My travels and my rest you mark; with all my ways you are familiar. Even before a word is on my tongue, Lord, you know it all… Such knowledge is beyond me, far too lofty for me to reach. Where can I hide from your spirit? From your presence, where can I

> flee?… You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I praise you, so wonderfully you made me; wonderful are your works! My very self you knew; my bones were not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, fashioned as in the depths of the earth. Your eyes foresaw my actions; in your book all are written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be. How precious to me are your designs, O God; how vast the sum of them!

4. How theologians have understood predestination and the efficacy of grace

The question of predestination has arisen frequently in the history of the Church. On the basis of Augustine's writings some authors began to develop a theory of "double predestination." The formulation of Isidore of Seville is a classic one: *gemina est praedestinatio* (*II Sent.*, 6), "predestination is twofold": some are chosen for glory and others for condemnation. It is as simple as that. For Augustine, of course, it was a much more complex issue. However, a synod celebrated in Quiercy (France) in ad 853 rejected the following position formulated by the monk Godescalc according to whom Christ died only for the elect and not for all humans (the latter position would have confirmed the doctrine of double predestination). The synod concludes:

> As no man who is or has been or ever will be whose nature will not have been assumed by Christ Jesus Our Lord, so there is, has been, or will be no man for whom He has not suffered (DH 624).

Scripture speaks often of the power and efficacy of God's grace, which seems to impose itself on human beings (cf. Ezeq 36:27; 1 Cor 15:10; Phil 2:13). In his work *De correptione et gratia* (12:38), Augustine spoke of what he called the *gratia invicta*, an "invincible grace," which in a sense obliges humans to respond to God. On the other hand, many other biblical passages speak of a grace that humans can resist of their own free will (Is 5:4; Acts 7:51; Mt 19:21f.; 23:37). This suggests a possible distinction between an "efficacious" grace, which would seem to be irresistible, and a "sufficient" grace, which can be opposed. The whole issue turns on the question, which is easy to formulate but anything but easy to resolve, as to whether God's predestinating grace can be opposed or if it is always efficacious.

In the period that followed Luther and the Council of Trent, an important controversy arose regarding the efficacy of grace, called *de auxiliis*. On the

one hand, Domingo Báñez and several followers of Thomas Aquinas insisted on the efficacy of grace in terms of a kind of *physical* predetermination that obliges the human will. On the other side, Louis de Molina, along with some Jesuit theologians, attempted to defend the truth of human freedom in relation to grace, speaking instead of a kind of *moral* predetermination by grace. The discussion lasted for an extended period of time, and while Thomists accused their adversaries of being Pelagian, the followers of Molina said the opposite side was Lutheran or Calvinist. The controversy came to an end when Pope Paul V in 1607 said "enough was enough," excluding heresy on both sides (DH 1997). Of course the problem is still an open one, anything but resolved.… We shall come back to it again (§ 23). It was deeply present in the positions of the XVI-XVII century theologians Baius and Jansenius.

But what is at issue here? Why the differences and harsh mutual accusations? According to the "Thomistic" view of things (Thomistic in name, though not perhaps in fact), divine grace determines the will in such a way that predestination is completely unrelated to human merits and works (the technical expression used is *ante praevisa merita*), in that it precedes them radically. And this is so because God knows all things, also future ones, in a simple, unitary act of knowledge, in which everything that happens is infallibly decreed. According to Molina, on the other hand, grace does not determine the will, but works in consonance with it, in such a way that predestination is decreed *post praevisa merita*, to use a technical expression meaning "on the basis of foreseen human merit." To be able to predestine humans while respecting their freedom, Molina says, God possesses a special knowledge regarding future events, what he calls the *scientia media*, or "middle knowledge." That is to say: God gives grace according to what he foresees will be the reaction of a particular human being, thus assuring a positive acceptance, a kind of divine and human game of "cat and mouse." In this way, Molina attempts to respect both divine and human freedom. He does so however to some degree prejudicing divine simplicity, by introducing a problematic "middle knowledge" into God.

No totally satisfactory explanation has been given in recent centuries to explain the relationship between God's free and sovereign action and free human response. Maybe no such explanation will ever be found. The relationship of love between God and humans is too complex and rich and

mysterious. Perhaps the following idea, suggested by Augustine in his *Commentaries on the Psalms* (13), moves in the right direction: divine grace works on the human soul with the *suavitas amoris*, "the gentleness of love." God in a sense "seduces" human beings, not physically of course, but rather by awakening in them love and willingness, not violating their free nature, but rather elevating their will to fullness and perfection.

11. The Dynamics of Christian Vocation (CGW 224-230)

1. The divine plan becomes a calling

The word God directs to the created universe is destined to bring about a joyous and decisive response from creatures, from all creatures. According to the prophet Baruch, the very stars listen attentively to the voice of God and place themselves at his disposal, responding promptly and joyfully to his call. “Yet he [God] who knows all things knows her [the world]; he has probed her by his knowledge—He who established the earth for all time, and filled it with four-footed beasts. He who dismisses the light, and it departs, calls it, and it obeys him trembling, before whom the stars at their posts shine and rejoice. When he calls them, they answer, ‘Here we are!,’ shining with joy for their Maker” (Bar 3:32-35).

Above and beyond the material world, of course, God directs his loving attention principally to human beings, calling them one by one and seeking their response: “those whom he predestined he also called” (Rom 8:29). The very notion of call or vocation speaks of God’s delicate respect for human freedom. God whispers, inspires, suggests, addresses our hearts, appeals to our generosity, but does not impose his will with violence, fear, or selfish calculation… that is what is meant when we say that God “calls.” Besides, God’s invitation is directed to humans one by one, not as a mass, in and through the concrete circumstances of their life, history, and culture, through their desires and dreams, through the Church and other people, with extraordinary refinement and respect. God “will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick,” we read in a text of Isaiah (42:3), which Matthew (12:20) expressly applies to Jesus’s ministry.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, the tenderness and delicacy of God in calling humans is apparent. “But now, thus says the Lord [to Israel], who created you: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine” (Is 43:1). So also the boy Samuel responds freely, joyfully, repeatedly, to the divine call: “Here I am because you have called me” (1 Sam 3:5-8). It is interesting to note that in the Bible God is not seen to respond to the cry of human beings, to their desire of experiencing his closeness and protection (§ 3, 1). God presents himself to humans—Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah and many others—with a unexpected task, often undesired, at times stubbornly refused. The same thing may be said of the New Testament: Jesus seeks out and calls his disciples, often encountering in them surprise, incomprehension, resistance, infidelity,

reluctance; and sometimes, as in the case of the rich young man Matthew speaks of (19:16-22), outright refusal of the divine invitation. In the time of the new covenant inaugurated by Christ, the divine call is directed to the heart of humans through the Church, the Body of Christ, which evangelizes, calls, discerns, instructs, forms, and confirms believers in the faith. Ultimately, of course, only God calls, but he often makes use of ecclesial and human mediations in establishing and consolidating his call to humans. It is interesting to note that the Greek word for "calling" (*klēsis*) is very similar to that for "church" (*ekklēsia*, which literally means "convocation"): God calls human beings through the Church (we shall return to the issue in § 25).

2. Predestination and vocation

In the XVI century John Calvin, the founder of Presbyterianism, made a distinction between an exterior calling occasioned by the preaching of the Gospel and directed to all, and an interior calling that takes place in the power of the Spirit, conferring the capacity to believe. The latter is reserved for those who have been specially chosen, or predestined by God. This would seem to indicate that humans are chosen by God for glory or condemnation. Still there is something valid in Calvin's reflection, for the mere proclamation of the Gospel cannot represent for those who receive it a clear proof of having been called by God, which clearly requires the gift of the Holy Spirit and personal acceptance. The problem lies in the fact that God does not seem to be taking his desire to save all humans seriously. Besides it looks as if he is establishing an elitist distinction among those who listen the Word of God… after all, God's call is mysterious and personal. God calls humans one by one in the sense that the fruit of the call is personal communion with God. And he does so in and through the Church.

3. The calling of the whole person

The divine calling is not an accidental add-on to human life. God does not call people *a posteriori*, once their qualities and virtues have been recognized, as a talent scout would pick out promising football or basketball players. The basis for the divine calling is the same as for the creation of the person: the precedent will of God, who creates, chooses and seeks out simply because he wants to do so, or better, because he loves. But there is a paradox here: God chooses the person independently of his or her talents and capacities, but at the same time, he chooses the person while including

everything the person has and is: capacities, energies, talents and projects, without excluding limits, defects, and wounds. In that sense talents and capacities do not determine one's vocation but they are fully a part of it. As St Josemaría says,

> Christian faith and calling affect our whole existence, not just a part of it. Our relations with God necessarily demand giving ourselves, giving ourselves completely. The man of faith sees life, in all its dimensions, from a new perspective: that which is given us by God (*Christ is passing by*, 46).

Perhaps we may say that vocation, the divine calling, is what gives humans their *definitive identity*, thus becoming a unifying power in their lives, making it possible for them to live in "unity of life." Since vocation refers to the entire life of the person, without excluding anything, the vocational process of each person is closely linked with the concrete circumstances they find themselves in, whether they be personal, family, cultural, professional, social, temperamental, of character… These circumstances may even seem unimportant and banal. In some cases they may be even problematic, as if they were obstacles to living a Christian life. Yet through faith in God such circumstances may be perceived as ways in which divine providence is made present, in which the specific will of God is made known to the person, that is, their vocation.

The following three observations may be made on the general dynamics of Christian vocation.

In the *first* place, vocation in the fullest sense of the word is divine, and as such defines the life of the person forever, inviting him or her to a life of fidelity, to definitive commitment, to lifelong perseverance, even though the latter is ultimately a gift of God. The one who calls is a faithful God, and to live on the "wavelength" of a faithful God, humans themselves must also strive to be faithful and persevering to the divine call.

Secondly, the knowledge humans acquire of the specific profile of their own vocation is seldom clear and perfect. For this reason human freedom in the face of divine vocation may not be reduced to "the mere acceptance of a divine plan that is clearly and unmistakably knowable" (Ocáriz, *Vocation to Opus Dei*, in *Opus Dei in the Church*, Dublin/Princeton 1994, 83). Vocation, in other words, is not a kind of ready-made package, that drops down from heaven, determined down to the last detail, that just has to be accepted with the instruction manual. Rather, each vocation is the rich fruit

of the unforeseen and complex confluence between God's action directed to a particular person, as well as the latter's intelligent, free, creative and generous response to the divine call.

One *last* point. There is such a thing as "special" vocations, related psychologically to different moments of one's life, and recognized (and discerned) as such by the Church. In moments when people respond to such vocations, they are asked to respond once and for all, putting their life on the line. This is the case for example of the vocation to the ministerial priesthood or to the religious life. In other cases, however, those who are called may not be fully aware of the occasions and opportunities God uses to call them. But this does not mean they don't have a vocation, or that they are not responding to it. It often happens that as people look back over their lives, they discover and perceive, over a long line of events and personal experiences (professional career, marriage, children born, decisions made, moments of suffering and trial), a project, a plan, a design. In it they encounter a unitary narrative in which divine providence has been directly involved, a narrative in which the response they gave to the mysterious divine initiative was critical. Or better, perhaps, a long series of faithful responses. The same may be said of those who have "special" vocations, because God never stops calling.

4. God calls to holiness and apostolate

The ultimate purpose of Christian calling, of each and every calling, is holiness, perpetual personal communion of humans with God. Vocation is always directed towards justification and glorification, as we have already seen (Rom 8:29f.). Yet Paul recognizes, especially in the first Letter to the Corinthians a wide variety of charisms and special gifts God gives to believers. And this brings us to the question: where does each vocation find its specificity, what distinguishes it from other vocations? The following three observations may be made.

First, the love between God and each human being always takes on an unrepeatable profile. It is the richest and most personal of all relationships, as God makes each and every person become what he always wanted them to be: "a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it" (Rv 2:17). In this sense each human path and calling is unique; each person relates to God in a way that is entirely his or her own. God's love and our response is always special. As Augustine says

graphically in the *Confessions* (VIII, 6:11), God is *intimior intimo meo*, "God is closer to me than I am to myself."

In the *second* place, vocations are different one from another because the mission each one carries out in the Church and society is different. Vocations are not specified by a greater or lesser degree for holiness, of union with God, since the latter is essential to *all* vocations (though God may ask more of one and less of another). They are distinguished from one another on the basis of the mission or apostolate that each one carries out in the Church: thus we may speak of a lay vocation, a vocation to marriage, to the priesthood, to consecrated life, and so on. In real terms, of course, holiness is inseparable from Christian apostolate, from the mission to evangelize. Union with God moves each person, according to their personal circumstances and capacities, to attempt to bring others closer to God, in many different ways (§ 25, 2). This is the ultimate root of the variety that may be found in different Christian vocations.

And in the *third* place, Christian life as lived by each one gives rise to an ample variety of different ways or styles of relating to God, called "*spiritualities*," with characteristic pious practices, lived in the Church in accordance to the situation, the character, the apostolic activities, as well as the likes and dislikes of each one.

In brief terms, it can be said that God calls each and every person to holiness, but this finds its expression in a specific apostolic activity and spirituality.

12. The Universal Call to Holiness and Apostolate (CGW 230-235)

In this chapter we shall consider the universality of the call to holiness and apostolate.

1. The universality of the call to holiness

Scripture teaches us that God wants the salvation of all. Paul says clearly that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:4). Christ's saving mission is directed to one and all, without exception: "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" (Mt 28:19). As we saw above, Christ died for all. It makes sense therefore that Jesus would have said to his disciples: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). Still, the divine will is expressed in terms of a loving omnipotence that fully respects and undergirds the liberty of each person. Universal holiness is not an automatic process, it is not a foregone conclusion.

The fact that all are called to holiness means in the first place that God offers his grace abundantly to each and every one of the baptized. Saint Paul says it in the following terms: "The free gift is not like the transgression. For if any died through one man's transgression, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many" (Rom 5:15). This does not mean of course that the growth in holiness takes place automatically. Anything but. Sin weighs heavily on the life of each person. Besides, each one must cultivate a profound, life-long, persevering openness to God's grace in order for the soul to be purified and beautified to the core.

It should not come as a surprise then that the doctrine of the universal call to holiness, though firmly rooted in the New Testament and present throughout the history of Christianity, in practice has not always been appreciated and well received in the life of the Church. It has never been formally denied, of course, but in many situations it has been rationalized away. Still, many saints, reformers, and theologians have openly taught it: Augustine, Calvin, Francis de Sales, Theresa of Lisieux, Josemaría Escrivá. Benedict XVI noted in the exhortation *Verbum Domini* (48) that the latter has given the whole Church a reminder of the universal call to holiness. St Josemaría writes in *Christ is passing by*:

> This is the great boldness of the Christian faith… to proclaim the value and dignity of human nature and to affirm that we have been created to achieve the dignity of children of God, through the grace that raises us up to a supernatural level. An incredible boldness it would be, were it not founded on the promise of salvation given us by God the Father, confirmed by the blood of Christ, and reaffirmed and made possible by the constant action of the Holy Spirit (133).

Vatican Council II proclaimed the universal call to holiness far and wide, especially in the constitution *Lumen gentium*, chapter 5. Indeed, this teaching may be considered, according to Pope Paul VI in his "Motu proprio" *Sanctitas clarior* (3.3.1969), as the interpretative key of the whole Council. It is meant to mark the future path of the Church. We read in *Lumen gentium* (39)*:*

> In the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thes 4:3)… The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consummator of this holiness of life: "Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). Indeed He sent the Holy Spirit upon all men that He might move them inwardly to love God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength (Mk 12:30) and that they might love each other as Christ loves them (Jn 13:34; 15:12).

John Paul II repeated this in a programatic document *Novo millennio ineunte* (30), written at the beginning of the new millennium.

> It is necessary therefore to rediscover the full practical significance of chapter 5 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, dedicated to the "universal call to holiness." The Council Fathers laid such stress on this point, not just to embellish ecclesiology with a kind of spiritual veneer, but to make the call to holiness an intrinsic and essential aspect of their teaching on the Church. The rediscovery of the Church as "mystery," or as a people "gathered together by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" [Cyprian], was bound to bring with it a rediscovery of the

> Church's "holiness," understood in the basic sense of belonging to him who is in essence the Holy One, the "thrice Holy" (Is 6:3).

The theologian Karl Rahner in a study of the evangelical counsels in *Theological Investigations* (London 1977, vol. 8, 136) termed the Conciliar teaching on the universal call to holiness "an amazing event":

> For so far as the spontaneous attitude and outlook of the Church throughout almost two millennia is concerned with the truth embodied in this proposition [the universal call to holiness] has precisely not been self-evident. Of course… there always are Christians in all situations and walks of life who have been and are holy. But over and above this it has not been so immediately obvious that on God's side there is also a positive vocation and mission to marriage and to a worldly calling, to earthly tasks precisely as the manner positively ordained by God to the individual concerned, in which precisely he is to attain to the fullness of his Christian existence, the maturity of the baptismal grace bestowed upon him and in which he is to bring to their fullness the fruits of the Spirit.

2. The consequences of the universal call to holiness

Several interesting and telling conclusions may be derived from the Christian conviction that all the baptized are called to holiness. Four in particular.

The *first* is that each baptized person is called to holiness, in such a way that the evangelizing mission of the Church belongs natively to each one. From this affirmation we can deduce the fundamental equality of humans, the existence of a single human nature, of a single human "race," because all humans, without exception, are created and destined for communion with God. As Paul says, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). This may be called the *subjective aspect* of the universal call to holiness (see Ocáriz, *Vocation to Opus Dei*).

The *second* consequence of the universal call to holiness may be stated in the following terms: holiness is possible in every state or condition in the Church (ministry, consecrated life, laity) and in civil society (women and men, rich and poor, healthy and sick, married and single, young and old, people from every walk of life). And not only is it possible, but it is appropriate to each one. It is improper to say Christians can become holy *within* their state of life, or *in spite of* their state in life, as if the state were

an exteriority or an obstacle; they can attain holiness and carry out their mission *in and through* that very state. Thus the differences between different states in life, in the Church and civil society, do not refer to a greater or lesser level of possibility of reaching holiness, but rather to an ample variety of situations in which people act and live and express their Christian identity. As a result, it can be said that God does not primarily call people to a specific state of life, but rather to holiness *through* the state of life in question. We may call this the *objective aspect* of the universal call.

The *third* follows on from the second, and may be called the *ecumenical aspect* of the universal call to holiness. The fact is that what really unites Christians, or what really *should* unite them with one another, is that all are called to holiness. When Christian believers truly seek holiness, their own and that of others, then they are capable of living and collaborating with other people who are quite different from them in many other ways. As Josemaría Escrivá explains, the "common denominator" of being Christian is small, it is essential, yet there is space for a very wide and ample "numerator" in respect of so many aspects of social, cultural, political, ecclesial and spiritual life.

The *fourth* consequence is that the proclamation of the universal call to holiness means that there is no obstacle of an objective kind, whether in the world or in the ambit of personal life and the human condition that can *a priori* block or brake the power of grace and of divine vocation. We may call this the *cosmic aspect* of the universal call to holiness. In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes with deep conviction: "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" (Rom 8:38f.).

Still, it would be naïve to think that, because the call to holiness is universal, the way to holiness must be easy or routine or to be taken for granted. Holiness does not come about automatically or anonymously. The way to holiness is the way of Christ, the way of the cross, the way of heroism. It requires courage and fidelity. For this reason, besides persevering in Christian life at a personal level, two further 'external' elements must be considered necessary, at a practical level, for Christians to achieve holiness. One is the *support of charity* that God offers them through the life of others who accompany them on their way to holiness, making

that path as amiable and manageable as possible. Without the company, encouragement, correction and assistance of other people, it would very hard to reach holiness on one's own. On the other hand, the Church is bound to impart an ample catechetical, theological, and spiritual *formation to all the faithful*, a formation to which the latter have a right.

13. The Justification of the Sinner and the Need for Grace (CGW 235-238, 375-383)

"Those whom he called he also justified" (Rom 8:30). When God calls, he comes close to us, he calls us to follow him, to accept his love and friendship, he offers us his grace. Yet when God *justifies*, the process of giving grace is accomplished and crowned. The believer enters into the "state of grace." With justification humans become truly children of God, inheritors of eternal life, or as Paul often puts it, simply "saints." In other words, in justifying humans God establishes a permanent relationship with them which sinks deep roots into their spirit and life, into their very being. It is a path where there is no going back. Even when believers forfeit the "state of grace" and lose friendship with God by grave sin, something of the divine commitment always remains in them, because the seal that the Sacrament of Baptism inscribes within them is indelible.

1. Justification: the forgiveness of sin and sanctification of the believer

According to Scripture, the point of departure for justification is the sinful human being (Rom 3:23ff.; 5:18, 1 Cor 6:11). Justification is always justification *of the sinner.* The Council of Trent in its 1546 decree on justification defines the process of justification as "the passage from the state in which humans are born as children of the first Adam, to the state of grace and 'adoption as children of God,' through the second Adam, Jesus Christ, our Savior" (DH 1524). The Council then goes to on to explain that the forgiveness of sin is not a merely extrinsic act, a legal form of pardon, as some Lutherans taught, but rather the result or fruit of a new, reconciled life, a true sanctification, the effect of which is ontological renewal, a "new creation" as Paul describes it. Trent says besides that "justification is not simply the forgiveness of sins, but also sanctification and the renewal of the inner man, through the free acceptance of grace and the gifts that accompany it, by which the unjust becomes just and the enemy a friend" (DH 1528).

In effect, the object of justification is not humanity in a neutral state before God, but rather humans who carry within themselves the mysterious, centrifugal and destructive power of sin. Humans are not born fully developed but rather "are by nature children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). Humans are not born holy, but sinners, in a state of "original sin." For this reason they stand in need of being redeemed and reconciled. The measure of the

love of God for humans is determined not only by his ultimate will to live in perpetual filial communion with them, but also by the fact that humans, justified by God, have had to come a long way, tread a long path of conversion, for they were sinners. God desires to fully pardon those who offended him. Paul explains the greatness of the love of God as follows: "God shows his love for us in that *while we were yet sinners* Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). It is interesting to note the observation of the Frankfurt School philosopher Max Horkheimer in his work *Die Sehnsucht* (Hamburg 1970, 58), to the effect that the doctrine of original sin is "the most grandiose teaching of Christianity and Judaism." And Chesterton quipped that original sin is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved.

2. The opening of the heart to justification by faith

We have seen that the divine call and human response precede the effective infusion of God's grace that forgives and sanctifies, that is, justification. This response is called "faith." Through it humans open their hearts to justifying grace. Paul insists on this point again and again: humans are *justified by faith* (cf. Rom 3:28, 30; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:24ff.). Two issues need to be addressed, however.

The *first* may be formulated as follows. If humans receive baptism before enjoying the use of reason (the most typical situation is that of infants), how can we speak of a previous personal call, received in faith, which makes the effective reception of grace possible? In other words, in the case of the baptism of children, how can the call *precede* justification, as Rom 8:30 seems to indicate it should? It would be more reasonable to say that (generic) justification precedes (personal) call. We may respond in the following terms. It is obvious that those who do not have the use of reason cannot experience or recognize and respond to the divine call personally and consciously. Still, they are fully justified because the faith of the Church, through the assent of parents or godparents, accepts the divine call in the name of the baptized child. Hence, after God's call comes the response, that of the Church, and, as a result, justification.

The *second* issue refers to the motive Paul has for insisting so much on the need of faith in the justification of the sinner. What is at issue here is his insistent teaching to the effect that humans are not justified by good works, but by God's grace, not by proving ourselves to God, but by opening our hearts to his gift. This is a fundamental aspect of Christian doctrine. Where

grace predominates, only trust and faith provide a fitting reaction. “A man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal 2:16), Paul says. Faith is thus the inner complement of justifying grace. This does not mean of course that good works are unnecessary or superfluous, but rather that they are seen as the proper and more or less inevitable manifestations of the life of grace present in the justified. This notion may be observed in Paul’s expression *caritas Christ urget nos* (2 Cor 5:14): “the love of Christ, present in the heart of believers, controls us, moves us, inspires us.” Yet good works *on their own* do not justify humans, but only the grace of God, received in faith, which finds its ultimate expression and proof in good works. As James says: “Faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:26). Christians have an absolute need for divine grace received in faith in order to be forgiven their sins and receive new life and divine filiation, in order to live in a way that is truly pleasing to God. These entitlements cannot be earned by their own efforts. This position is fully accepted, among many others, by all major Christian theologians, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. But let us consider the question of the need for grace more closely.

3. The need for divine grace

Grace has two effects on the life of humans, which correspond to the two extremes of the process of justification: sanctification and forgiveness. On the one hand, through the infusion of grace, humans receive what is called *gratia elevans*, the grace that elevates their being and their faculties. In this way not only are they called children of God, but are so truly (1 Jn 3:1). They are divinized, sanctified, created anew. As a result, the human actions of the justified reach the throne to God, “touching off God in person” as it were. Thomas Aquinas says that through grace human action *attingit ad ipsum Deum*, “hits off God” (*S.Th. I*, 43, 3). The second letter of Peter tells us that God “has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become *partakers of the divine nature*” (2 Pt. 1:4).

On the other hand, grace has the power not only to pardon sin but also to heal humans from sin’s consequences. The latter do not simply disappear into thin air once grace has been received. The Council of Trent teaches that “in the baptized remains concupiscence, which cannot damage whoever does not consent to it, but struggles valiantly with the grace of Jesus Christ, because it [concupiscence] was left in order to make combat possible… The

Church has never held that this ‘concupiscence’ in those regenerated by Baptism should be considered a sin in the true and proper sense of the word. However it is called sin because it is born of sin and tends towards sin” (DH 1515). Insofar as it heals sin, grace is called *gratia sanans*, “healing grace.” But, as we saw, humans also stand in need of the *gratia elevans*, “elevating grace,” in order to live a life that is truly pleasing to God. Christian salvation involves both.

In a sixth-century liturgical document, the Gelasian Sacramentary, the Church expresses this conviction in the following formula: *quia tibi sine te placere non possumus* (PL 74, 1194c), “because we cannot be pleasing to you [God] if you does not concede it.” From the same period we can read the teaching of the II Council of Orange, inspired in Augustine’s writings:

> If anyone says that mercy is divinely conferred upon us when, without God’s grace, we believe, will, desire, strive, labor, pray, keep watch, endeavor, request, seek, knock, but does not confess that it is through the infusion and inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we believe, will or are able to do all these things as is required; or if anyone subordinates the help of grace to humility or human obedience, and does not admit that it is the very gift of grace that makes us obedient and humble, he contradicts the apostle who says: ‘What have you that you did not receive?’ (1 Cor 4:7); and also: ‘By the grace of God I am what I am’ (1 Cor 15:10) (DH 376).

Hence we can conclude that justification is not the fruit of human effort or virtue, not even of humility or obedience, but only of divine grace, which is the very thing that makes the exercise of virtue pleasing to God, also the virtues of humility and obedience.

Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae* (*I-II*, 109) asks if grace is needed in different ambits of human life. He does so in seven stages.

1. Aquinas asks if grace is needed *to know truth*, and responds, in general terms, that it is not. Humans possess by creation the natural capacity of knowing things, among them the existence and attributes of God, and the precepts of the moral law. Pope Pius XII taught that our knowledge of God and the moral precepts can take place “without the help of revelation and divine grace” (DH 3890). This capacity has not been lost by sin, although its power has been diminished. In fact Old Testament wisdom literature, especially as found in Proverbs and Sirach, considers the loss of wisdom as an effect of sin.

Of course divine revelation and faith are necessary to know the mysteries of faith: the Trinity, the Incarnation, and so on. Besides, humans have a moral necessity of grace so that God and his law may be known "by all easily, with firm certitude and without error," as Vatican Council I teaches (DH 3005).

2. Thomas goes on to ask if divine grace is necessary in order *to do good* and *to avoid sin*. He responds in two stages.

As regards *doing good*, he says that before original sin, humans had the power of doing good with ease, carrying out actions that were in full correspondence to the will of God. Still, without elevating grace, good actions are not fully perfect, because, though they may be upright in themselves (in that God's will is obeyed and virtue is consolidated), they do not "reach" or "touch" God fully, in his Trinitarian inner personal life: they are not supernatural acts. In the fallen condition of humanity, however, humans are capable of carrying out some good works, such as building houses and planting vines, Thomas says, but they do them with fatigue and with the moral need of grace that heals the soul, purifies the heart, and facilitates upright behavior.

In order *to avoid sin*, humans stand in need of God's grace, at least in general terms. After the fall of our first parents, to commit sin of some kind became more or less inevitable for humans. However, even in the fallen condition it is possible to avoid grave sin (if this were not the case then it could not be imputed) but not every venial sin. When humans are in the state of grave sin, they are capable of avoiding further sin, though not for an extended period of time. To avoid each and every venial sin is considered to be a special privilege that God alone can concede, a privilege that as far as we know has only been conceded to the Blessed Virgin Mary. For this reason the believer should ask forgiveness of God frequently for faults and defects. Yet he or she should also trust that God will give abundant graces in order to overcome the weakness and ignorance caused by sin.

3. Aquinas goes on to ask whether divine grace is necessary for us *to love God above all things*. It is interesting, perhaps surprising, to note that, substantially, he does not consider it necessary. Obviously in order to love God "face to face" in a personal supernatural relationship, sanctifying grace or divinization is necessary. Besides, sin introduces a considerable degree of disorder into human affections, inclining humans to love creatures as if God did not exist. In this sense grace is necessary in practice to love God above

all things. Still, Thomas adds, “to love God above all things is natural for humans.” *Above all things*, the text says, and the point is important, because humans—indeed all creatures—in their very depths tend towards their Creator, as the iron to the magnet, for he is the beginning and end of their existence, of their very being. Humans carry within themselves a mysterious and indestructible desire for God (see § 27). “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for” (CCC 27).

4. Thomas then asks if grace is needed to *merit eternal life*. Clearly humans can merit, with their own actions, true human rewards. However in order to merit the supreme gift of eternal life, of perpetual communion with God, they have need for grace. Without the previous promise and gift of God, the very idea of “merit” would be unthinkable (see § 23, 2).

5. Is grace needed *to prepare oneself for grace*? In other words, Thomas asks, in order to receive grace in a stable way with justification, do humans stand in need of God’s help? The response is in the affirmative: humans need “the help of God which moves,” what is normally called “actual grace.” In this way Aquinas takes position against the defenders of what is called “semi-Pelagianism,” those who took it that *the beginning of faith* is exclusively the result of human effort and stands in no need for grace. The fact is, however, that humans, in order to believe, need the grace of God that illumines, purifies, and prepares the way for justification.

6. *For conversion*, do humans need God’s grace? Yes, says Aquinas, because it is not possible to repent of sin without the help of God who forgives. In principle humans could simply stop sinning, as soon as they realize that their improper lifestyle brings them neither happiness nor fulfillment. But this is not the same thing as repentance or conversion to God. Every new conversion is the fruit of a divine initiative, because it involves a reconciliation with God, who acts and inspires the sinner to repent. Still, the grace of repentance is not an arbitrary act on God’s part, in the sense that God might forgive or might not as he sees fit on the spur of the moment, thus leaving humans in a stifling state of incertitude and anguish. It may be said that God’s offer of the grace of conversion is “guaranteed” as it were by the saving death of Christ on the cross, and made abundantly available in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

7. Lastly, Thomas asks whether or not grace is necessary *for final perseverance in Christian life*. His reply is in the affirmative. Scripture speaks frequently of the need to pray for perseverance (Lk 21:36; Col 4:2; Eph 6:18). Augustine insists on the gratuitousness of the gift of perseverance, especially in a work written on this very subject: *De dono perseverantiae*. If humans could merit perseverance on the basis of the state of grace they are in at any given moment, they would in a sense already be confirmed in grace in this life. But such a possibility has never been taught by the Church. People are confirmed in grace with certainty only when they see God “face to face.” Right until the end of our lives we can make the sad choice of separating ourselves from God and losing the grace he has given us. Final perseverance is guaranteed to nobody. It should be prayed for regularly.

14. Children of God through Christ in the Spirit (I) (CGW 247-262)

Grace has its origin in God, in God alone. Grace is, no more and no less, *God's own life*, shared by humans. Through God's self-giving the human person is divinized, made capable of living a divine life. But God who is considered as "one" in his nature and external actions (usually called actions *ad extra*), exists and lives within himself (*ad intra*) as a Trinity of persons. Thus the God who justifies is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Believers are baptized in the name of all three. Divine grace, by which humans share in God's own life, places them in a direct relationship with the triune God. Yet the person justified may be said to live in a differentiated rapport with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is a true personal relationship. This is not a mere question of personal piety, as it were, or "devotion" to the Father, to the Son, or to the Spirit. Rather it is an objective reality, the life of the three divine persons present in believers. Josemaría Escrivá writes in *Friends of God* (306):

> Our heart now needs to distinguish and adore each one of the divine Persons. The soul is, as it were, making a discovery in the supernatural life, like a little child opening his eyes to the world about him. The soul spends time lovingly with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and readily submits to the work of the life-giving Paraclete, who gives himself to us with no merit on our part, bestowing his gifts and the supernatural virtues!

In the single process of the infusion of divine grace, the believer becomes (1) a child of God the Father, (2) a disciple, friend and brother of Christ (God the Son, who became flesh), and (3) a temple of the Holy Spirit. In the next two chapters we shall consider these three stages, and then some consequences that derive from the fact that Christian believers become adopted children of God.

1. The believer becomes a son or daughter of the eternal Father…

According to the New Testament, the believer is related to God as a son or daughter. Grace makes him or her an adopted son or daughter of God. Let us see how this doctrine consolidates.

It is frequent among oriental religions contemporaneous with early Judaism to speak of God as a Father. This can be found in the religious writings of Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome. In the Old Testament, human

paternity and filiation are central. After all, Israel was a predominantly patriarchal society. Besides, the great mediators of the promises of the covenant between God and his people were called “the fathers,” and Yahweh was often called “the God of our fathers.” However, the title “Father” is very seldom applied to God in the Hebrew Scriptures. God is Yahweh, the all-powerful Lord and king, benevolent and merciful towards the people with whom he has established a covenant. He is protector, creator, sovereign Lord. But he is not Father… or at least he is not presented as such in Scripture. There are some references to God as Father of the people of Israel, or as Father of the king. Some of them are particularly expressive and moving. For example, the following text from the prophet Hosea:

> When Israel was a child I loved him, out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the farther they went from me… Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms, but they did not know that I healed them; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love… How could I give you up, O Ephraim, or deliver you up, O Israel? How could I treat you as Admah, or make you like Zeboiim? My heart is overwhelmed, my pity is stirred (Hos 11:1-4.8).

Jeremiah says the following about God’s aspiration to fatherhood over his people:

> I had thought: How I should like to treat you as sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful among the nations! You would call me, ‘My Father,’ I thought, and never cease following me. But like a woman faithless to her lover, even so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel, says the Lord (Jer 3:18f.).

The reason why the Old Testament speaks so little of the fatherhood of God is probably because the Jewish people, led by their prophets, wished to avoid at all costs the possibility of confusing the covenant with the idolatrous religious practices of the nations surrounding them. The prophets said again and again that God is completely transcendent with respect to the created realm, that he does not relate to the world in a sexual way, as other religions held, because he does not give life to the world or to the earth by means of a mutual relationship with someone or something else external to him. Rather, God creates the entire universe without presuppositions of any kind, by a sovereign act of his will. That is, the giving of life, of being, is

creation, not *procreation*. The fatherhood of God with respect to the world, therefore, is not of a biological or mythological kind, but is creative. That is the way Isaiah expresses it when speaking of Israel: “O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands” (Is 64:7).

Thus, to be a son or daughter of God is not a natural, original property of humans, the result of creation, but rather the fruit of a posterior election, of grace, of adoption. Judaism attempts to eradicate any trace of the mythological idea of God as “progenitor” of his people. Sexuality does not belong to the Jewish idea of God. In other words, while the Old Testament does not deny that God is Father, it maintains a kind of reserve about the idea in order to avoid deforming his relationship to the world in an idolatrous way. It avoids projecting natural human love for one’s parents, to whom humans owe their life, towards the Divinity.

The great biblical novelty in respect of divine paternity may be found in the New Testament: here God is called “Father” more than 250 times. God’s paternity in fact becomes a central element of the Christian gospel. In his preaching Jesus invites humans to treat God in a way proper to parents and children: with trust, obedience, and hope in the inheritance.

The notion of *trust in God* is present throughout the Synoptic Gospels, and especially in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). *Obedience* in a Jewish context is typical of the relationship between father and son. Christ himself was entirely and freely obedient to his Father (Jn 10:17ff.), even to death on the cross (Phil 2:7f.). And Jesus demands an analogous obedience of his followers: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love” (Jn 15:10). This obedience is filial, and therefore free, willing and joyful… which does not mean it is optional, easy, or indifferent. And a third element: filial spirit is expressed in the New Testament also in the hope-filled conviction that the believer will receive *the eternal inheritance*. The servant expects his salary; the son hopes for, is sure of, the family inheritance. And the son or daughter of God expects what God has promised: heaven, eternal life. The Lord says so clearly: “The slave does not continue in the house forever; the son continues forever” (Jn 8:35). Paul speaks of this as well: “And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with

him” (Rom 8:17). The Collect prayer of the XIX Sunday in Ordinary Time reads as follows:

> Almighty every-living God, whom, taught by the Holy Spirit, we dare to call our Father, bring, we pray, to perfection in our hearts the spirit of adoption as your sons and daughters, the inheritance which you have promised.

The reason for the sea change that takes place in the New Testament in respect of God’s fatherhood is not to be found simply in the reinforced emphasis on the paternal traits of God in his dealings with humans as Christ presents them to us. Christ reveals the fatherhood of God because *God is Father*, and this for the simple reason that *he is the Son*, consubstantial to him, from all eternity, the Word made flesh. Christ did not acquire his filial identity gradually over his lifetime. Within the mystery of his eternal existence Jesus simply *is* the Son of God… he always was and always will be God’s Son. He was the Son of God when he was born as a child, when he grew up, when he reached maturity, when he died and rose up from the dead. For this reason Jesus can proclaim,

> I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes. Yes, Father, for such is your gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Mt 11:25-27)

For this reason Jesus directs his prayer to the Father often using the title “Abba,” which is normally translated as “papa” or “daddy,” expressing as it does a special closeness and total trust. This may be seen especially in the culminating moments of the life of Jesus, such as the agony in the garden (cf. Mk 14:36).

2. … Disciple, believer, friend, and brother of Jesus Christ…

In order to fully understand the meaning of the divine filiation of Christians, we must reflect on the relationship between the Father and Christ, his incarnate Son. Four things mark this relationship: singularity, priority, assimilation, and equality.

First, *singularity*. The relationship between the Father and the Son is exclusive. Jesus is the Only Son of the Father (Jn 1:18). He calls him “my Father” at a personal level, but “your Father” when speaking with his disciples. His bond with the Father is therefore singular and exclusive. To

some degree this may be observed in Jesus' desire to move to the desert or to the mountain, to be alone his Father and to converse with him.

Secondly, the New Testament speaks insistently of the fact that the Son lives in submission to the Father, who enjoys, as a result, a kind of *priority* over the Son, and always conserves his fatherly prerogatives. Christ is sent by the Father (Gal 4:4); the Father gives him up (Rom 8:32); the Father is the source of all things (1 Cor 8:6). Jesus himself sums up this aspect of his relationship to the Father when he says: "the Father is greater than I" (Jn 14:28).

Third, we can speak of the *assimilation* of Christ to the Father. This may be seen in his firm decision to obey the Father in all things, a sign of his total openness to and trust in him, to identify with him. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (Jn 4:34). Jesus does not define his own identity by distinguishing himself from the Father, by separating himself from him, affirming his freedom by saying he is different, but rather by assimilating his life and very selfhood to him. Thus Christ works on the Sabbath because his Father does so (Jn 5:17); the Father has given over all judgment to the Son (Jn 5:22), because, Jesus says, "I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me" (Jn 5:30). His obedience is full, free, and willing; there is no hesitation or resentment. "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father" (Jn 10:17f.). The perfection of Jesus' filial obedience may be seen in the culminating moment of his death on the cross. In spite of his extraordinary suffering and of his natural resistance to pain and failure, Jesus cries out, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you: remove this cup from me; yet not what I will but what you will" (Mk 14:36).

Fourth and last, in the depth of his being Christ perceives that he is *equal to the Father*. Christ places himself throughout the whole of the New Testament on the same level as the Father. Whoever listens to Jesus understands immediately that he is on par with God. At times this occasions enthusiasm, at times surprise or indignation, at times even rejection. In spite of this, Jesus never goes back on his affirmations. Equality to the Father is particularly evident in the Gospel of John: whatever the Father does is also

done by the Son. Jesus himself concludes: “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30).

15. Children of God through Christ in the Spirit (II) (CGW 262-276)

Continuing with the question of the relationship between Christ and the Father, we may ask: is Christ subordinate to the Father, or is he equal to him? Assimilation and especially obedience seem to be opposed to equality between them. Doubtless, we are dealing here with one of the major paradoxes of the New Testament, the mystery of the Trinity. On top of it all, it is interesting to note that Jesus presents himself not only as one who submits himself to the Father, but also as one who is submits himself *to humans*, to each and every human being, also to sinners, becoming the servant of all. Thus he explains his operative identity in relation to humanity: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:26-28). Paul describes this lowering of Christ to the level of creature-hood in the following terms: "Though he was in the form of God, he 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… He humbled himself and become obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-8). The paradoxical fact is that the obedience of Jesus, apparent in his human life, is not presented in Scripture as a sign of inferiority before God, because in the depths of his being he is divine as the Father is, being consubstantial with him. The obedience of Christ is the voluntary, joyful, thankful obedience of a Son—the true, sacrificed, transparent obedience of an equal.

Whoever believes in Christ, and follows him, becomes his *disciple, friend, and brother.* This process takes place through faith in baptism, and is specified and consolidated through the daily practice of Christian life. The close unity of life, of intentions and affections with Christ, brings Christians necessarily to an ever-deeper sharing in his relationship to the Father. We may say that the one who is identified with Christ as a brother becomes *ipso facto* a child of God. In the text from Romans 8, which provides the narrative structure of this presentation of the doctrine of grace, we read that "for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be *the first-born among many brothers*" (v. 29). Christian believers relate to the Father as Christ does, as

the Son does: with the same love, the same trust, the same closeness, the same certainty of sharing the divine inheritance.

Still, we need to clarify somewhat the meaning of the epithet "same" applied to Christ's relation to the Father and our own, because the situation of the Christian before God is not identical with that of Christ. In effect, the New Testament clearly distinguishes the divine filiation of the believer from that of Christ, because it is always *an adoptive filiation*, a filiation by grace. In fact Paul speaks on several occasions of the adoptive filiation of Christians (Rom 8:23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5). Thus the living reality of the Christian's filial life is *like* that of Christ, but the way in which it is established is *different*. Christian believers are not children of God as Christ is. Perhaps we might say that believers share in the unique filiation of the Son *by grace*, by God's pure gift. The Christian becomes a "son in the Son." However, the divine filiation of the Christian, though adoptive, is not honorific or nominal, but real. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 Jn 3:1). The Christian is a son or daughter of God, and this becomes his or her deepest and most enduring identity. The entire life of the Christian believer is determined by it. More than being children of their parents or of anybody else, believers are in the first place children of God. As the French philosopher Michel Henry says in his work *C'est moi la vérité* (Paris 1996, 91), the dogma of the virginity of Mary expresses at heart the conviction that nobody is son or daughter of their father or even of their mother, but only of God.

3. … Temple of the Holy Spirit

The identification with Christ by which the believer becomes a child of God is not a human work but a divine one. It is the work of grace. We can learn filial traits of the Father from Christ by imitating his life and listening to his teaching, but this does not make us children of God. More specifically divine filiation is the work of the Holy Spirit, the eternal Gift of the Father and the Son, the personal expression of their love. Thus we can say that a Christian is a "son," or a "daughter," but not a "spirit," because the identification that takes place is with Christ, the Son, and not with the Spirit. Still, this identification is fruit of God's self-giving, and therefore result of the action of the Holy Spirit. The one who carves out Christ in Christian believers, the one who forges them in the image and likeness of Christ, the one who molds them into being *alter Christus, ipse Christus*

(“another Christ, Christ himself”), and thus children of God, is the Holy Spirit. Paul explains this beautifully in chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans.

> 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 (v. 14ff.).

Analogously, we read in the Letter to the Galatians: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’ So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir” (Gal 4:6f.).

St. Irenaeus in his work *Adversus Haereses V* (6:1) explains that the Son and the Spirit make us children of God as “the two hands of the Father.” But does this mean that Christ does one part, and the Spirit the rest? Not so. According to the New Testament, the Spirit does not add any new or diverse content to the teaching, to the message, to the redeeming work of Christ. Jesus is the Master, the only Word of the Father. Only he is the light of the world. And yet the Spirit occupies a critical place in Christian life, for he is the one who applies, communicates, or makes present in the life of believers what Christ taught and what redemption obtained as he died on the cross. In other words, the Spirit is the one who *produces* or *forges* in Christians their living identification with Christ. If the Christian is more and more attracted to Christ, evermore identified with him, with his message, with his person, with his sentiments, with his thought, with his style… this is not primarily on account of their own effort, but is due to the work of the Holy Spirit. “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance *all that I have said to you*” (Jn 14:26; cf. Jn 15:26f.). And elsewhere Jesus explains the action of the Spirit: “He will glorify me, for *he will take what is mine* and declare it to you” (Jn 16:14). In other words, humans become children of the Father because they become “Christ,” yet they become “Christ” through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Summing up, we can say that the Spirit brings Christians to be aware (1) of the Father of whom they are children, (2) of the Son, Jesus Christ, of whom they become disciples, friends and brothers, with whom and through

whom they become children of God, (3) of the Spirit as Gift in his magnanimous thrust of love of God and of humanity, and (4), finally, of the Church, the Body of Christ, from which and in which they joyfully live their Christian filiation and fraternity.

We can understand therefore, as Scripture tells us, that the Holy Spirit is stably present in the spirit of the believer as in a *temple*. John teaches that God, the Father, stays with the one who believes in the Son: “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God” (1 Jn 4:15). And the Son with him: “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23). And even more so, the Spirit, who is inseparable from the Father and the Son. Jesus says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:15-17).

The same position is taught by Paul. He considers the baptized as temple and home of God and of the Spirit. “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16). And again: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (v. 19ff.). “In Christ you also are built into [a holy temple] for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:22). We shall consider the question of divine inhabitation later on (§ 17, 2).

4. Is God the Father of all humans?

Ancient religions present God as the father of the cosmos and of humanity. Yet the Hebrew Scriptures, as we have seen, are reluctant to speak of God as a father. Conversely, the New Testament insists openly on divine fatherhood and on the consequent divine filiation, but *only for believers*, who in the power of the Spirit are united with Christ and become adoptive sons and daughters of God. Scripture does not say all humans are born children of God, but rather that they can become adoptive children through baptism, by divine grace. So the question we now ask is the following: is there any way we can say that *all* humans *are* children of God? We know that all are “made in the image and likeness of God,” as the book of Genesis (1:27) tells us. But are they children of God? And if so, in what sense?

The notion of divine filiation may be applied to human beings in a differentiated or analogous way. In the first place, only the eternal Word,

Jesus Christ, is Son of God in the fullest sense of the word, being God's only begotten eternal Son. For this reason if anyone is a son or daughter of God in any way, this can only be on the basis of a sharing, through creation or redemption, in the Word's eternal and unique filiation. Secondly, the saints in heaven, the baptized with God in glory as "good and faithful servants" (Mt 25:21), are children of God. They have already received their eternal inheritance (Rom 8:17), even though they await final resurrection in which they will receive a glorious body, like that of the risen Christ (Phil 3:21). This may be described as the enjoyed fullness of divine filiation, the definitive "glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). In the third place, we can mention the baptized in God's grace, children by adoption, truly sons and daughters of God, although they are as yet following their pilgrim path. Then, in the fourth place, we can consider the baptized who are in the state of sin. They have forfeited the life of grace and thus the heavenly inheritance, like the younger son who wasted his family fortune and ruined his own life (Lk 15:11-31). He no longer enjoyed his filial dignity; he no longer lived in his father's house. Nonetheless he decides to go back "to his father" so as to be treated as a salaried servant (v. 18f.). However his father, ever vigilant, awaits him with even more mercy and patience than before, with the intention, we might say the determination, to give back to him, if at all possible, the filial dignity he had willingly repudiated. The parable shows that the father becomes even more of a father than he was before, saying that "this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (v. 24). Then, fifth, we can refer to Christians who have been condemned, who, though originally constituted by God as children, have lost the eternal inheritance forever. Their original filial condition, instead of being a source of joy and consolation, becomes for them a motive of suffering, shame, and perpetual frustration.

Last of all, what can we say of those who have never received the grace of baptism by faith that justifies the sinner, either by sacrament or desire? They may be called children of God in an ample sense. And this for two reasons. Firstly, because the basic definition of man given by Scripture ("made in the image and likeness of God" as in Gn 1:27) is applicable to all humans, and the same book of Genesis indicates that the image of God is filial in a generic sense, as we can see in the following text: "Adam was one hundred and thirty years old when he begot a son *in his likeness, after his image*; and he named him Seth" (Gn 5:3). To be a son means, therefore, to

be “in the image, in the likeness” of the father. In the second place, we can say that all God does—creating, forgiving, saving, sanctifying—he does so paternally, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. God’s way of acting is simply *paternal*, no more and no less. As a result, the works of God relate inevitably to their Lord and Father in a filial way (or in an anti-filial way as the case may be). That can be said of the cosmos in general, for the whole of the created universe. But it is applicable especially to humans, created by God and directed towards his offer of grace, which they are invited to accept freely in order to eventually become, in the fullest sense possible, adoptive children of God, sons in the Son, capable of exclaiming for all eternity, moved by the Spirit, “Abba! Father.”

16. The Lifestyle and Attitude of the Children of God (CGW 276-277)

Being adopted as a child of God influences Christian life deeply. Christians do not only see God in a special way, as their Father, but also other people and the world they live in. We shall examine the question in this chapter.

1. The lifestyle of the children of God

Christian attention to divine filiation may not be looked upon as a mere devotion, for the simple reason that it is the fundamental ontological condition of one who has been "regenerated" by Christ in the Spirit. The Christian believer *is* a child of God to the degree in which God *is* their Father. And God is Father because he has an eternal Son, who became flesh in time, Jesus Christ. Hence, Christians *are* adoptive children of God, and on this basis live out their lives and relationships with others. The ontological fact (being a child of God) should determine the existential experience (living consciously as a son or daughter of God). Christians are invited by God's insistent grace to live as Christ lived, becoming more and more like him in attitude and sentiment: with a prayer full of trust and simplicity (Christian faith); with the responsible and sincere effort to carry out the will of God, lovingly, freely, in everything, as something of one's own (Christian obedience); with the effort to make sure God's sovereignty over the world is fully established (Christian apostolate); with love that is lived as service towards the most needy, my brothers and sisters, also children of God (charity); with the living expectancy of receiving the eternal inheritance which children expect and which consists of eternal communion with the Trinity (hope).

Two particular consequences of divine filiation may be noted: a fully Christian appreciation of the divine value of human relationships (paternity, maternity, filiation, fraternity), and a filial love for the world.

In the first place, those who are conscious of being children of God open their eyes with amazement and admiration as they consider the very human phenomena of paternity, maternity, filiation, and fraternity. They can find a reflection in all of it in the fatherhood of God and the divine filiation of Christians. Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians says so clearly: "I bow my knees before the Father (Greek, *patēr*) from whom every family (Greek, *patria*) in heaven and on earth is named" (3:14ff.). The Pauline term "family" has traditionally been translated as "paternity" or "fatherhood,"

and this makes sense given the play of words (technically called *paronomasia*) between "Father" (*patēr*) and "family" (*patria*). The expression indicates therefore that "from the eternal Father all paternity in heaven and on earth derive." This means that we do not call God our "Father" simply on the basis of our understanding and experience of human fatherhood. If we did, then the notion of paternity in God would be a simple metaphor. But it is not just a metaphor. It is not a metaphor because *God is Father*, always has been and always will be, because from all eternity he has had a Son, loved in the Spirit. God is the one who defines fatherhood, not humans. Human fatherhood (and motherhood), though real, is derived and shared; they are a poor reflection of divine fatherhood. People *become* fathers and mothers; God is so eternally. Jesus says so quite clearly: "Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven" (Mt 23:9). Benedict XVI explains this as follows: "Critics of religion have said that speaking of the 'Father,' of God, is a projection of our ancestors in heaven. But the opposite is true: in the Gospel Christ shows us who is the father and as he is a true father we can understand true fatherhood and even learn true fatherhood" (*Audience*, 23.5.2012).

As the Christian contemplates human paternity and maternity as a reflection of the foundational fatherhood of God, fundamental human relationships—fraternity, friendship, filiation—take on a new color, a new and richer meaning. The same thing may be said of the relationship of spiritual fatherhood Christians live out as a result of the preaching of God's word, the administration of the sacraments, the spiritual accompaniment of believers, and the entire dynamism of Christian apostolate. Paul speaks frequently of his own spiritual fatherhood over believers as the fruit of his preaching (1 Cor 4:14ff.; Phlm 10; 1 Tm 1:2.18; Ti 1:4). In this way the scope of Christian life opens out to every aspect of human reality, to every relationship.

In the second place, we said, the result of considering our divine filiation is a fraternal love for the world, God's creation. Being a son or a daughter, Christian believers consider themselves completely at home in the world created by their eternal Father. They are at home always, wherever they are, no matter what they do, even in the Antarctic, even on the planet Mars, if that were possible! It is true that God's Son, made flesh, was repudiated by humans, but it is still truer that he came to *his own* world (Jn 1:11), the world he had created (Jn 1:2), and was completely at ease and at home in it.

The same may be said of the Christian: “For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future; all are yours; and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor 3:21-23). One who considers himself or herself truly a child of God gazes upon, contemplates, admires the world with all the enthusiasm that springs from his or her love for the eternal Father. He or she is completely at home in it, capable of living a true “secularity,” dynamically inserted into the world, with filial joy, contemplation, and energy. St Josemaría, in *Christ is passing by* (65), explains this as follows:

> Divine filiation is a joyful truth, a consoling mystery. It fills all our spiritual life, it shows us how to speak to God, to know and to love our Father in heaven. And it makes our interior struggle overflow with hope and gives us the trusting simplicity of little children. More than that: precisely because we are children of God, we can contemplate in love and wonder everything as coming from the hands of our Father, God the Creator. And so we become contemplatives in the middle of the world, loving the world… God the Father, in the fullness of time, sent to the world his only-begotten Son, to re-establish peace; so that by his redeeming men from sin, ‘we might become sons of God’ (Gal 4:5), freed from the yoke of sin, capable of sharing in the divine intimacy of the Trinity. And so it has become possible for this new man, this new grafting of the children of God (Rom 6:4-5), to free all creation from disorder, restoring all things in Christ (Eph 1:5-10), who has reconciled them to God (Col 1:20).

2. The gaze of the children of God

In the relationship between the Father and the Son we have pointed out several characteristics, among them the singularity of their relationship, the priority of the Father, the assimilation (obedience) of the Son, and the equality between the two. The Son—Christ—obeys the Father, while being equal to him. Something of this paradoxical dynamic is reproduced in the life of the son or daughter of God by adoption.

The problem is of course that the obedience and equality of the Son in respect of the Father seem to be difficult to reconcile. They just do not seem to go together. If Christ is equal to the Father, then he cannot be subordinate to him and obey him; if he is subordinate then he is no longer equal. And yet the principal point made by the first great ecumenical Council of the

Church, which took place at Nicaea in ad 325, is in the simultaneous affirmation of the priority of the Father over the Son *and* the equality between the Son and the Father. Rejecting the position of Arius, who looked upon obedience as a sign of subordination (as slaves obey their master), the Church taught that the obedience of the Son was lived in a situation of equality with the Father, technically called "consubstantiality." It is the Christian paradox of obedience between equals.

In his influential work *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, the philosopher G. W. F. Hegel teaches that the fundamental relationships within human society are structured always around two dialectically opposed figures: the master and the slave. All interrelations in society are expressions of this fundamental one, also that which obtains between father and son. According to Hegel, the "master-slave" paradigm should be applied in order to understand, explain, and then resolve the fundamental problems of society. The psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud is a case in point during the XX century, especially in his explanation of the ambivalent relationship between parents and their children. To become oneself, Freud recommended, people had to separate from their father, reject their origin, affirm their own individuality and autonomy, thus escaping the suffocating pressure of the "master-slave" paradigm.

Still, in the light of the mystery of Christ, of his revelation of the Father and of redemption, this paradigm is radically inverted and substituted by another one, the "father-son" paradigm, that derives from creation and from the saving work of Christ, and is therefore not conflictual but essentially reconciling. The paradigm is inverted, thus showing that the predominance of the "master-slave" paradigm in certain areas of human life is actually a sign of the dominant power of sin, of the fallen condition of humanity. The "master-slave" paradigm gradually gives away throughout history to the redeeming power that pours forth abundantly from the supreme moment of willing submission, that of Christ to the Father, on Calvary. Here the true "father-son" relationship is revealed, a paradigm in which subordination, obedience, and filial receptiveness are seen to be compatible with equality, freedom, self-determination, peace, trust, and love. This new redemptive paradigm gradually overcomes the older "sinful" one, "master-slave," in which subordination and obedience are expressed necessarily in terms of inferiority, slavery, passivity, alienation, violence, mistrust, humiliation, and hate.

In an interview with Vittorio Messori, entitled *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (London 1994, 228), Pope John Paul II observed of the times we live in that the "master-slave" paradigm seems to be more present in the minds of people than is Christian wisdom founded entirely on the "father-son" paradigm. In fact the philosophies of arrogance and submission, of dominion and oppression, spring spontaneously from the "master-slave" paradigm. This is opposed by the power of the Christian Gospel, which redeems humans from sin and makes them children of God. The Pope concludes his reflection saying:

> Original sin attempts to abolish fatherhood, destroying its rays which permeate the created world, placing in doubt the truth that God is Love, and leaving humans only with a sense of the 'master-slave' relationship.

Elsewhere, in one of his dramatic works, John Paul says: "at the end everything will be seen to be unimportant and non-essential, except this: father, son, love."

17. The Transformation of the Human Creature by Grace (CGW 278-288)

The grace by which we become children of God is presented in Scripture not only as divine life that surrounds humans, reaching out to them from afar, but also as a created power within them: light, movement, perfume, wind, beauty… for God transforms humans as he divinizes them. The life of grace in a Christian is perceived as a quiet glow, as a deep power, which profoundly changes believers, transforms their being, and leaves a mark on the lives of those who are near them. The Christian becomes, as St Josemaría says, *alter Christus, ipse Christus:* "another Christ," one in whom the style and behavior of Christ shine forth, and even more, "Christ himself," one in whom Christ acts personally, one in whom it is possible to recognize and even "touch" the living presence of God, the light of Christ, and the perfume of the Spirit.

1. The grace that transforms the human being

In this chapter and the next we shall consider the way in which humans are transformed by grace, ontologically elevated, renewed to the depths of their being. The created effect of grace on humans is something very real and essential, though we cannot see or hear or feel it in an unequivocal way. Just as the "light" persists in the phosphorescent dots of a watch, God's grace produces in the being and faculties of humans, a glow, a warmth, that remains, that endures, that transforms. The justified person *is* a child of God and does not simply *act* or *consider* himself as such, as if grace was verified at a merely psychological level, as if it involved little more than a subjective conviction. Rather, a true change takes place in the depths of the being of the one justified. God's grace enters into his or her life and attempts to *penetrate and inform*, as it were, all levels and registers of human life: memory, imagination, intelligence, will, conscious and unconscious activity. It might nearly be said that grace penetrates the human body, which has been made a temple of the Holy Spirit. As St Josemaría puts it in *Christ is passing by* (103), "this divinization affects everything human; it is a sort of foretaste of the final resurrection."

God's grace is received at Baptism. Once received, however, it strives to seep gradually into the life of the believer over an extended period, in a process of purification and sanctification. We all have had the experience of a leg or an arm that has gone asleep. Yet as soon as the blood begins to flow

again, one experiences a sharp pain, renewed sensation, eventual relief. The renewed flow of blood through the vessels produces discomfort before providing appeasement. Something of a kind takes place with divine grace. Grace is meant to penetrate every pore of the human structure, spiritual and corporal, in all its complexity, purifying and renewing it. It is a long and painful process, though meaningful and full of hope, the joyous hope of those who allow themselves be cured of an illness, and wish to return to full health.

As we saw in the last chapters, it is common to say that the life of grace reproduces to some degree the life of the Trinity in humans. Humans are divinized by a God who is a Trinity of persons. The divine processions—the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit—are prolonged *ad extra*, "outside" God as it were, towards the created world. This is what Thomas Aquinas calls the "divine missions" of the Son and the Spirit, missions that affect and elevate the human creature so that it can live in communion with God. Aquinas describes this process in the following beautiful expression (*S.Th. I-II*, 110, 2): *id quod substantialiter est in Deo, accidentaliter fit in anima participante divinam bonitatem*: "that which is substantially present in God takes place accidentally in the soul of one who shares in divine goodness." Elsewhere he explains that divine grace makes humans in some ways like God himself (*S.Th. III*, 7, 13): "grace is caused in humans from the presence of God, in the same way as light in the air is caused by the presence of the sun."

But what does this "presence" of God truly consist of in the soul of the believer in whom the Trinity of persons lives as in a temple? Can we say that the life of God in some ways takes over from natural human life, occupying the place of the human essence by making it passive and atrophic? Should we take Paul's words literally when he says "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20)? Or might this not lead us the so-called "quietist" doctrine, typical of Miguel de Molinos and other XVII century authors, according to whom humans are invited to remain completely passive before the active presence of God's grace? Thomas insists in many different ways on the following fundamental principle: "the supernatural does not take away from, but perfects the natural." Not only does grace not take nature away, but it brings it to perfection. God's grace does not substitute, but raises up. It does not annul, but elevates. It does not substitute, but perfects. The one who receives grace

grows, becomes more human, is elevated in his or her humanity and operative capacity, moving more and more towards perfection. The one who is elevated by grace does not become less autonomous, but more so; does not become less free, but more so; does not become less social, but more so; does not become less oneself, but more oneself. This is one of the major paradoxes of Christian life: the deeply humanizing power of grace.

2. The presence of God in the soul by grace

After several attempts in earlier writings to describe the presence of the Trinity in the soul of the believer, Thomas Aquinas, in his work of maturity, the *Summa Theologiae* (*I*, 43, 3) explains it in the following terms:

> God is present in all things by essence, power and presence, as a cause is present in its effects which partake of its goodness and perfection. Beyond this common presence there is one special one reserved to rational creatures in whom God is said to be present as the known thing in the knower, and the loved thing in the lover (*sicut cognitum in cognoscente et amatum in amante*). And since the rational creature, knowing and loving, with its own operation reaches God himself (*sua operatione attingit ad ipsum Deum*), it may be said, precisely on account of this special mode of being, that God is not simply in the reasoning creature, but also lives within it as in a temple.

Several observations may be usefully made on this text.

First, for Aquinas it is clear that the human being in grace is divinized, made like to God. In that way the original image and likeness in humans by creation is reinforced. Specifically, humans become children of God, sharing, through the power of the Spirit, in the life of Christ and thus in the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son.

Second, the distinction between God and humans is always maintained: humans become like God to a certain degree, in his way of acting, but never become idenified with the divine substance, with divine action. The being and faculties of humans are elevated by the infusion of grace, and this makes them capable of knowing and loving God in his Trinitarian life. It would not be correct to say that God is the formal (or quasi-formal) cause of grace, because this would prejudice the distinction between Creator and creature. A one-to-one relationship can be spontaneously established between persons of the same nature, and often this relationship develops rapidly once the individuals manage to communicate easily with one

another, if they find a common language and culture, and share common interests. But of course humans do not share in God's nature. They are situated on an ontological plane that is infinitely inferior to his. God in his being and action is absolutely transcendent to the highest of creatures. We cannot find God; it is God who finds us and draws us to himself. Hence humans (and angels) stand in need of the elevating power of grace to transform their own nature and make it capable of acting in such a way that, as Aquinas says in the remarkable text just cited, the person "with its own operation reaches, or touches off, God himself." In effect, the personal bond between God and humans is a true miracle of grace, and should not be taken lightly, or for granted. Prayer, true communion with God, is not natural, as is human friendship, but supernatural.

Third, the new state humans are placed in by the infusion of grace—Paul speaks of the believer as a "new creature" (Gal 6:15)—never becomes a kind of autonomous capacity that humans can hold on to under their own control. Divine filiation is a perennial grace, a gift from on high. God, who gives himself to humans with grace, will continue to do so always, in such a way that we say that God *possesses* the human being. As St Bonaventure says in the *Breviloquium* (5:1), "to have God in reality means to be possessed by God."

In the *fourth* place, the inhabitation of God in humans, as it produces the elevation of nature, at the same time makes them capable of directing their attention, knowledge, and love directly and personally towards God. For this reason Thomas says that God "is present as the known thing in the knower, and the loved thing in the lover." It is not simply that humans are known and loved by God, but rather that they are made capable of knowing and loving him, of really directing their lives to God as children at prayer, work, and in all their activities. God lives in humans, we may say, as the only adequate object of their new capacity for knowing (through faith) and loving (by charity).

Fifth, the XII century Master of the Sentences, Peter Lombard, inspired by Augustine, taught that the virtue of charity may be identified simply with the action of the Holy Spirit (*I Sent*., 17, 1): "the Holy Spirit itself is the love or the charity with which we love God and our neighbor." The expression is inspiring and pious, doubtless, but may be easily misunderstood. It could be read in the sense that the action of the believer in grace is in some way absorbed into or confused with the divine action, and

that humans are no longer capable of acting on their own, freely, also before God. In reality, Lombard's position is not identical with Augustine's. In *De spiritu et littera* (32:56), the latter says that "the love of God is diffused into our hearts not in the sense that he loves us, but rather insofar as he makes us capable of loving him," literally, *ipse facit nos dilectores suos*. Humans are not only loved by God, but truly become God's lovers. Their faculties are made capable of really knowing and loving God. A similar phrase to Augustine's may be found at a crucial point in the decree on justification of the Council of Trent, that contrasts with the commonly held Lutheran viewpoint on this issue. The Council teaches, citing Augustine, that "the only formal cause of justification is the justice of God, not the justice by which he is just, but rather the justice by which he makes us just" (DH 1529). Grace therefore is not merely an expression of the loving action of God towards humans, but truly changes them, making them lovers and just in his presence.

18. Metaphysical aspects of Divine Grace (CGW 288-300)

In spite of the fact that our perception of grace may be hazy and indeterminate, grace is real. Not only in God, whose life in us grace is. But also in humans who are transformed by grace. But how can we speak of grace in metaphysical or ontological terms?

1. Thomas Aquinas and the reality of grace in the soul

All we have said in the last chapter is well summarized by Thomas Aquinas when he states that grace "places something in the soul," and that that "something" is not to be identified simply with the action of the Holy Spirit. Without a true elevation of our faculties, a true transformation and divinization of our being, a "new creation," humans would never be capable of establishing a direct relationship with God. Only a Pelagian could hold that we can reach God by our own energies. By grace, however, humans are rendered lovable and capable of loving; they become children of God. Augustine says as much in his *Commentaries on the Psalms* (191:5): "because you have loved me, you have made me lovable." Aquinas explains that grace elevates not only the faculties but also the whole being of the person. "The light of grace, which is a partaking in the divine nature," he says in *S.Th. I-II*, 110, 3, "goes beyond the infused virtues, which derive from that light and are ordered to it."

When Aquinas speaks of the life of grace in the human soul, he uses the philosophical category of "accident," and says that sanctifying grace should be considered as an "accident" in the soul. This may appear surprising, since the term usually denotes superficiality and impermanence. Still, we must remember that in this way Thomas is not saying grace is unimportant or irrelevant, as when we say in common parlance that "this is an accidental question," meaning that it is secondary or of little or no interest. What Thomas wishes to avoid here is an extrinsic view of grace in relation to the natural life of humans. According to Aristotle, the accident is what inheres in things but does not exist of itself. Now, if grace were not an accident, it could only be a substance. But a substance would necessarily be something that exists side by side with the original natural substance of the human being: it would be a kind of "divine material" that does not transform human nature, but remains contiguous and extrinsic to it. And that would be unacceptable, for the whole of the human person is elevated, in being and faculties.

2. Situating grace in the light of the dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics

Between Lutherans and Catholics the principle bone of contention as regards justification lies in the relationship between the forgiveness of sin and the sanctification of the person. In simple terms, Lutherans hold that justification simply brings about the forgiveness of sin that is extrinsic, and the process of sanctification follows on from that. Conversely, Catholics traditionally insist on the priority of the infusion of sanctifying grace over the forgiveness of sin. However, in the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* we read,

> We confess together that God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin's enslaving power, and imparts the gift of new life in Christ. When persons come by faith to share in Christ, God no longer imputes to them their sin and through the Holy Spirit effects in them an active love. These two aspects of God's gracious action are not to be separated, for persons are by faith united with Christ, who in his person is our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30): both the forgiveness of sin and the saving presence of God himself (JDJ 22).

"These two aspects of God's gracious action are not to be separated," the text says. Humans are truly pardoned as God infuses into their hearts his own life, with a grace that sanctifies and forgives.

3. Different kinds of grace?

It is common in theology to speak of different kinds or aspects of divine grace: sanctifying grace, actual grace, habitual grace and so on. The Calvinist theologian Karl Barth considered this tendency inappropriate because Christ himself is grace, according to Paul, and thus grace is single, simple and unique because divine action is unique and simple. Voltaire ridiculed the tendency among theologians to distinguish different kinds of grace. In his *Philosophical Dictionary* (London 1802, 181f.) he asked them: "Were Paulus Emilius, Scipio, Cato, Cicero, Caesar, Titus, Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius to revisit that Rome which they formerly raised to some consideration, you must own that they would be a little staggered at your determinations concerning grace. What would they say to your debates on St. Thomas's grace of health, on Cajetan's medicinal grace, on external and internal grace, on gratuitous, sanctifying, actual, habitual, co-operating grace, on effectual grace which is sometimes ineffectual, on sufficient grace

often insufficient, on versatile and congruous grace, sincerely, would they understand it more than yourselves or I?"

From the point of view of God who gives himself to humans, of course, grace is simple and unitary, like a fountain that springs up from the earth. However, grace does not destroy nature but rather perfects it, leaving the human structure basically intact, made up of nature and different faculties, of temporality, sociality, and so on. The complex human structure is elevated in its entirety, and divine grace respects this. In effect, grace does not draw humans into a simplicity that only God possesses. Thus we can say that grace is present in the life of humans in a complex and differentiated way, even though it comes from God alone in all simplicity, as the white light is refracted into a rainbow of colors by a prism. For this reason it is common to speak of different aspects or divisions of divine grace in humans. Following the explanation given by Thomas Aquinas (*S.Th. I-II*, 111), we can mention a few.

1. On the basis of the distinction between the social and individual aspects of human nature, we may distinguish between grace that is *gratis data*, and grace that is *gratum faciens*. The term *gratis data*, 'freely given,' comes from the words of Jesus to the disciples in Mt 10:8: *gratis accepistis, gratis date*, "you received without paying, give without pay." It refers therefore to the special gifts that Jesus gave to the disciples in order to facilitate their mission: "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons." They are special gifts, or charisms, that guide and facilitate the Church's mission. They are not received in personal benefit of the one who receives them, but are destined for the service of others. In the life of the Church, from the earliest times, as 1 Cor 12 shows, a great variety of gifts and charisms were to be found, with which the Spirit communicates his power to believers and facilitates the Church's mission. Such charisms are present in the great variety of vocations in the Church, then as now.

Grace *gratum faciens*, conversely, is, "the grace which makes the human being pleasing to God," Thomas says, the gift God gives each one personally for his or her own sanctification. This is the principal understanding we have of divine grace, grace in a personal sense. Thomas considers that it is superior to the graces *gratis datae* or ecclesial charisms. The reason for this is simple: the purpose of charisms in the Church is one of facilitating and promoting personal holiness, union with God, eternal life, all the fruit of grace. The call to holiness is essential, universal; the different

charisms and gifts are in function of this ultimate end. It would be abusive to employ them as ends in themselves.

2. We may also distinguish between actual grace and habitual grace, as basic manifestations of grace *gratum faciens*. The first is the divine impulse by which God moves humans to wish and act well. The second is grace insofar as it is received as a habit or stable disposition, also called "the state of grace," a state that can be lost on account of grave sin. It is obvious that habitual grace is not the kind of "habit" that derives from the sustained effort of humans, such as would result in a simple moral virtue. Rather it is the result of the act by which God commits himself in a stable fashion, faithfully, with the justified person. Yet habitual grace never becomes a kind of autonomous "property" of believers, to be used at their whim and fancy. In fact, in this life humans can never be said to be confirmed in grace.

3. Within the category of habitual grace, it is possible to distinguish between sanctifying grace, infused virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Sanctifying grace is a habit rooted in the being of the person, making them holy, children of God. Infused virtues are good operative habits, infused by God into the soul along with sanctifying grace. Some are called theological, because they have God as their object and source: they are faith, hope, and charity. Others are moral virtues, in that they elevate human ones, principally the cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Besides, with habitual grace are infused into the soul the gifts of the Holy Spirit, habits that perfect humans in such a way that they can promptly follow the impulses of the Spirit. Infused virtues and the gifts of the Spirit will be considered later on (§ 22, 2-3).

4. As regards the free action of humans in relation to grace, it is possible to distinguish between operative grace and cooperative grace. According to Aquinas, grace is said to be "operative" in that it is the principle of a meritorious act that precedes free human action. In so far as it is the principle of a meritorious action that also derives from human freedom, it is called "cooperative."

5. Thomas also speaks of prevenient and subsequent grace. The distinction refers to the insertion of divine grace within time, within the chronological narrative of the life of grace in humans. The different effects of grace coming one after another are, according to Aquinas (*S.Th. I-II*, 111, 3): "the healing of the soul, willing the good, doing the good efficaciously, persevering in the good, reaching glory." The grace producing the first of

these effects is considered to be “prevenient” with respect to the effect that comes second; the grace producing the fourth is considered “subsequent” with respect to the third and so on.

19. God's life in the Soul. The Theological and Human Virtues (CGW 301-307)

Grace elevates human beings in their entirety, divinizing them through and through. Grace therefore also elevates and transforms their faculties, intelligence, memory, and will. Thus God acts in and through believers. The properties of human action remain substantially intact, for humans are still, are always, creatures. But God acts in them and through them more directly, giving them what might be called a "supernatural organism," made up of virtues and special gifts. We shall consider them in the coming four chapters.

1. The Theological Virtues

On the basis of many New Testament texts (for example 2 Thes 1:2f.; Rom 5:1-5; 1 Cor 13:8-13), the Church teaches the existence of three so-called "theological virtues": faith, hope, and charity (DH 1530).

The theological virtues may be considered as divine energies by which divinized creatures are made capable of believing, hoping and loving in a way that goes simply beyond their natural condition, in that God himself in his triune life acts in them and allows them share in that life. Thanks to *faith* in revelation, the Christian comes to know what only God knows, God himself, in a way that goes beyond the natural knowing capacity of the human spirit. The believer can *hope* in something that can only be derived from divine benevolence. Those who believe and hope can come to *love* what God loves and as God loves, in a disinterested way, loving in him and for him all things that exist. The three virtues substantially increase the natural human capacity of believing, hoping, and loving, and show that partaking in divine nature is a true *life* and an real dynamism, an exercise of knowledge, desire, and will that is oriented, through God's own power, towards God and the things of God.

The theological virtues are closely linked with one another, and their proper acts cannot be exercised in a separated fashion. The reciprocal and harmonic relationship between faith, hope, and charity is made present often in Scripture. In effect, faith produces hope and moves towards charity; hope, based on faith, stimulates charity, and is reinforced by charity with a desire for union with God that is not as yet consolidated; faith, in order to be authentic, must express itself in acts of charity (Benedict XVI, *Message for Lent*, 15.10.2012). Pope Francis says: "Within the Christian tradition,

faith, hope and charity are much more than feelings or attitudes. They are virtues infused in us through the grace of the Holy Spirit… gifts that heal us and that make us healers, gifts that open us to new horizons, even while we are navigating the difficult waters of our time" (*Audience*, 5.8.2020). Of particular interest are the three encyclicals of Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* (2005), on charity, *Spe salvi* (2007), on hope, and *Lumen fidei*, on faith, written with Pope Francis (2013).

In any case, the proper object of the theological virtues is God in person, who is infinite and eternal. For this reason it is not possible to believe, to hope, and to love *too much*, because in God there is no limit. It is always possible to believe more, with greater trust, abandonment, and depth, because the mystery of God's intelligibility is ineffable and infinitely rich; besides, God is totally worthy of trust, being loving Truth itself. It is always possible to hope more because the One who has wished to share his own life with humanity, forever, is an infinitely desirable God, capable of satisfying all the longings of the human heart; besides, God makes hope possible because he is all-powerful, merciful and faithful to his promises. And it is always possible to love more the God who is infinitely lovable, because he is Love itself.

But the fact that humans can believe, hope, and love God in a stable way is possible only through divine grace. God is not only the *object* of the theological virtues; at a deeper level he is the inner power that drives and nourishes them, their *subject*, their living source and fountain; and humans share directly in divine life as they receive and live according to them.

2. Theological and acquired virtues

We may now ask: what is the relationship between the theological virtues that are given by God and are directed to him, and human (or acquired) virtues, those that we consolidate gradually in our lives by willing repetition and effort? It is interesting to observe that in the classical theories of virtues and virtuous life, faith, hope, and charity are substantially absent. Humans believe, hope, and love, certainly, but with these actions they are not considered to develop or consolidate their humanity. They are not virtues. According to the Stoics, for example, in the development of human life pride of place is given to the classical virtues: fortitude, justice, courage, wisdom, temperance, prudence. These virtues promote principally the ethical perfection of the *individual*, what nowadays we might call their independence or *autonomy*. This is not to say that they exclude positive

kinds of behavior towards other people. Yet is clear that faith, hope, and charity are essentially *directed to others*—they refer necessarily to relationships, to dependence, if you wish, to a *absence* of autonomy.

The Stoic by means of the classical virtues sought autonomy; the Christian, thanks to the theological virtues, gladly acknowledges and lives out his or her dependency on and communion with God and solidarity with other humans as something totally essential to life. The everyday dynamic of human life is very different in one case and the other. Christians know they live off the power of God, yet when they look at their own lives, they recognize they are weak, incapable of prolonged, heroic, virtuous, upright action. “For the sake of Christ then,” Paul writes, “I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10). And John says the same thing in another way: “this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith” (1 Jn 5:4). Though fully aware of their limits and weaknesses, Christians discover joyfully that true holiness and virtue is accessible to all people by God’s grace, for “all our fortitude is on loan,” as St Josemaría said (*The Way*, 728). Thus holiness is not a elitist category, meant for the few, for the strong, for the “virtuous” (which is what the Stoics generally thought), but for the many, those who, though weak, allow themselves be assisted by God’s grace.

Still, it is true that Christian theology has made the classical doctrine of virtues its own, considering the latter, one by one, in the light of God’s grace, more specifically, in the light of charity and its inner complement, humility. Charity has become in Christian ethics “the form of all virtue,” as Thomas Aquinas would say, drawing on the writings of Paul, especially 1 Cor 13. Charity configures every aspect of Christian action, in such a way that everything believers do is referred essentially to the glory of God and the good of neighbor. For the same reason, humility acquires a central role in the moral life of Christians. For the Greeks it comes across as the sign of inner weakness in the creature, but in real terms it opens humans to the power of God, from which is derived all their strength and possibilities. The primacy of charity and humility serves as a guarantee that at the heart of ethics is placed the adoration and recognition of God as Lord, whom the believer would freely and gladly obey. In effect, joyous adoration and confiding obedience make up a central part of the life of the children of God.

Differently from the theological virtues, which confer on those who receive them the supernatural *capacity* to carry out actions that are pleasing to God, human virtues give an acquired *facility* to carry out certain actions. This means that only through supernatural acts can humans direct themselves truly towards God as their last end, and merit, by grace, his love in response. Yet the theological virtues in principle do not make it any easier to act according to the human virtues, in the sense that they have no "magical power" capable of transforming human life instantaneously. Infused virtues communicate an inner inclination towards carrying out good actions and confer the capacity direct them to God and make them fully pleasing to him. This can be the case also with ordinary people without special gifts: divine grace can bring them to live a heroic life and even achieve martyrdom.

Still, human, acquired virtues are very necessary to live in a Christian way and to be faithful to the new life God has infused into the soul with grace, as well as to the commitment that derives from it. Infused and acquired virtues must be integrated one with the other. By way of example, fortitude without charity may become violent, non-respectful of other persons. Charity without fortitude, conversely, can easily fall into sentimentalism, the caricature of true love.

Without acquired virtues, it is difficult to carry out acts of theological virtue, and the supernatural life infused by God into the soul may well remain stagnant and atrophied; without the infused virtues, of course, human actions are not fully pleasing to God, in that they do not perfectly achieve their last end. They remain theologically sterile, like the needle with no thread, as St Josemaría said in *The Way* (967). In fact, such actions may well be compatible with pride, with vanity, with egoism. But when humanly virtuous actions are informed by a higher end, the supernatural end, and shaped by charity, then they find their ultimate meaning and highest motivation, and at the same time become truly Christian.

Summing up, we may say that the life of grace and the presence of infused virtues may become precarious and incline towards hypocrisy, infidelity, and perhaps clericalism, if the solid foundation of human virtue is missing. At the same time, human virtues, if they are not elevated by God's grace, may contribute to the improvement of the person, but will never bring the latter to live in communion with the Triune God. St Josemaría explains this as follows in *Friends of God* (74f.):

> In this world of ours there are many people who neglect God. It may be that they have not had an opportunity to listen to his words, or that they have forgotten them. Yet their human dispositions are honest, loyal, compassionate and sincere. I would go so far as to say that anyone possessing such qualities is ready to be generous with God, because human virtues constitute the foundation for the supernatural virtues… It is true that in themselves such personal qualities are not enough, for no one is saved without the grace of Christ. But if a man fosters and cultivates the seeds of virtue within him, God will smooth out his path, and such a person will be able to become holy because he has known how to live as a man of good will… You may perhaps have noticed other cases which are in a certain sense just the opposite; so many people who call themselves Christians because they have been baptized and have received other sacraments, but then prove to be disloyal and deceitful, insincere and proud, and… they fail to achieve anything. They are like shooting stars, lighting up the sky for an instant and then falling away to nothing.

In the following chapters we shall examine the three theological virtues one by one: faith, hope, and charity.

20. God’s Life in the Soul: the theological virtue of Faith (CGW 307-319)

In this chapter we shall consider the theological virtue of faith.

1. The theological virtue of faith

Intuitively we associate faith with human trust. We come to know many things on account of the trust we place in other people who tell us about them. Faith-certitude is not based on the information that is communicated —its content may be more or less attractive, interesting, rich, viable, or plausible—but fundamentally on the person who communicates it, and whom we judge to be more or less worthy of trust. We act in this way continually in our daily life; it would be impossible to live without accepting what people tell us. It also true that faith is facilitated when the person who communicates is capable of incarnating in their life and actions (and not only in their words) the message they are attempting to convey: thus the importance of *witness.*

At the same time we are aware that human beings are not fully worthy of trust, either because they may be mistaken in good faith, or because they attempt to abuse the trust (or credulousness) of others and end up deceiving them. For this reason, faith or trust is not normally considered in the human sphere as a definitive way to truth, that is, as a human virtue. In the human sphere to believe is not necessarily virtuous.

The situation would be different if the person who communicates is fully worthy of trust, because he or she is not mistaken, and cannot or does not intend to deceive others. The God of the Old Testament, the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, presents himself in this way, all-knowing and fully trustworthy. The study of fundamental theology explains that God is fully credible. Besides, what is revealed to us is not just any truth, but the depth of God’s own personal life, the life of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and his plan for humanity. The fact that God is perfect in his life and action is the very thing that makes faith in God both reasonable and virtuous.

The Greeks, as we know, were aware of the dynamism of trust or faith, calling it *pistis*. It made sense to trust certain people, according to their status and condition. The divinities were also trusted, to a greater or lesser degree, because they afforded inspiration or protection. Yet they were never considered as completely trustworthy, either because the divine world was

looked on as inaccessible (for example the Platonic “Good,” or the immobile mover of Aristotle), or because divinities enjoyed limited power (the Demiurge of Plato) or perhaps because the lesser divinities were just egoistic or envious. Of course Christians took it for granted that the most part the pagan divinities were just pious projections of human imagination. They were considered “atheists,” no less, for their pains.

In sum, the faith of Christians, though not unconnected to human trust, moves on another plane, because the God in whom they believe is perfect in being and action, and is therefore fully trustworthy. Thanks to divine revelation, faith becomes truly a “virtue,” a stable habit by which humans live out their own lives and existence to the full, a “life of faith.” Since it is directed towards God, we can say that faith is a *theological* virtue.

Faith is the specific way in which the whole human being opens itself to God who reveals. Benedict XVI in his *Message for Lent* (15.10.2012) writes: “Faith constitutes that personal adhesion—including all our faculties—to the revelation of the gratuitous and ‘impassioned’ love of God for us which is manifested fully in Jesus Christ.”

The one who reveals God definitively and fully to us is his Son Jesus Christ who, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, is “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). For this reason Christ’s disciples are called simply “those who believe.” Their faith is substantially identical to that of the Old Testament, although it is now directed towards the word and the person of Christ, God’s own Word made flesh, the fullness of revelation. And just as the personal faith of Moses stimulated and reinforced the faith of the people, so also the faith of the disciples of Jesus is communicated to many others and becomes the faith of the Church, which has lit up the world from the earliest times, and still does so. It is the power of God that becomes the true power of Christians in the world: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith” (1 Jn 5:4).

Faith therefore is not a simple psychological reaction to divine revelation. It is a true power that God infuses into the soul, an infused light, a habit, as Thomas Aquinas says. It may of course produce a more or less intense psychological response, but faith is more than that. Faith is divine light, the light of a pilgrim walking in the night. Perhaps we can say that faith makes the definitive future present in the now of history. In the Letter to the Hebrews, faith is defined as follows according to the Revised Standard

Version: “Faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for, the *conviction* of things not seen” (11:1). However, as Benedict XVI points out in his encyclical *Spe salvi* (7), this rendering is not fully precise, it is too subjective.

> Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a ‘proof’ of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a ‘not yet.’ The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future… Faith is a *habitus*, that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see.

Thus it would be more correct to translate Hebrews 11:1 as: “the *realization* of what is hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen,” as the New American Bible puts it, or even better: “the *foundation* of what is hoped for, the *proof* of things not seen.” In effect, faith is an infused theological virtue that binds humans to their ultimate end, God. Believers come to know God not with their own strength or intellectual power, but by the fact that God reveals himself to them in his Triune life. Thus humans, through faith, partake of the knowledge God has of himself. Faith is present in them as a light, a divine light allowing them to perceive God, and to see themselves and the whole of reality as God sees them.

Christians often speak of the “darkness of faith.” But we should remember that faith is above all a light, though it be a weak and imperfect one, not as yet the full and definitive light of glory. Rather than a twilight, faith is like an early dawn. Humans can be more aware of the “darkness” because they have not reached the fullness of light, the beatific vision. But faith as such is not darkness. As St. John of the Cross writes in his poem *Dark Night of the Soul* when speaking of the faith:

> With no other light or guide,
> than the one that burned in my heart.
> This guided me more surely than the light of noon,
> to where he was awaiting me.

2. Characteristics of the infused virtue of faith

Four characteristics of faith may be noted.

Firstly, faith is a *filial virtue*. Children trust their parents without hesitation, because they know they are loved by them. In spite of the defects their mother or father may have, the latter are "like God" for the child, on account of their unconditional and faithful love. Above and beyond any human parents, God who is Father, deserves on the part of Christians a completely unconditioned and loyal faith response. In a sense the term 'filial' is not a decorative qualifier for faith, but an essential part of it. The awareness of our divine filiation removes any fear and trepidation there may be in our relationship to God. "Do not fear," Jesus says to the head of the synagogue, "only believe" (Mk 5:36). Since God is Father, to have faith in him without hesitation, without reserve, in total openness, becomes a fully virtuous attitude.

Secondly, with faith, human reason opens up to the *fullness of truth*, to the very source of truth that is God, thus developing its potential to the fullest possible extent as we saw in § 2. "Reason" understood in terms of the restricted canons of rationalism, one might say, is "saved" by faith. Faith exerts a unifying role with respect to the whole of human knowledge. If we have said that charity is the "form of all virtue," then it might be said, analogously, that faith can become "the form of all knowledge." Pope Benedict XVI has said,

> Faith is not a parallel world of sentiment, which we allow as an extra element, but it is rather that which embraces the whole, gives it meaning, interprets it, and gives it interior ethical directives, in such a way that it can be understood and lived in relation to God and from God (*Discourse*, 24.9.2011).

In the third place, from our faith in God arises the *trust we place in other creatures*. The one who believes in God contemplates the world around as something that has been created by God, worthy therefore of esteem and trust. Those who believe consider things, persons, and events always in the light of faith in God, because they were all created by him, and are directed towards him (providence). The Christian is convinced of the *omnia in bonum*, the certainty that "in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Rom 8:28). As a result the believer retains a habitual attitude of trust towards people and towards life. At the same time the one who believes is realistic, because faith is directed, when all is said and done, to God alone who is the fullness of Truth, and not to creatures. Hence the Christian is neither utopian nor naive. In this sense the Lord says to the

disciples that they should be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Mt 10:16).

Fourth and last, God in order to reveal his love and truth for humanity has *made use of created elements* that are directly associated with his saving action, especially the word of the prophets in the Old Testament, and the humanity of the incarnate Son, who takes on a human nature that makes God’s love tangible, audible, and visible, and whose power is mediated and prolonged throughout the centuries by the preaching of the word in the Church and the sacraments, as well as by the lives, words, and works of Christian believers. Through these humble created mediations, faith is communicated and must be guarded and handed on faithfully from one generation to the next. Faith therefore is not only a personal reality but also an ecclesial and communitarian one. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read,

> No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone. You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others. Our love for Jesus and for our neighbor impels us to speak to others about our faith. Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers. I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others, and by my faith I help support others in the faith (CCC 166).

We shall return to this issue in § 25 when considering the dynamics of Christian apostolate.

21. God's Life in the Soul: the Theological Virtues of Hope and Charity (CGW 319-329)

In this chapter we shall consider the theological virtues of hope and charity.

1. The infused virtue of hope

The Greeks gave little or no importance to hope. For Aristotle it is a mere passion, something that happens to living beings (including animals) when stimulated in a particular way. In the case of hope, humans are moved by the *bonum futurum arduum possibile*, that is by "the absent good that is perceived as arduous, yet possible," to use an expression of Thomas Aquinas (*S.Th. I-II*, 40). In other words, humans experience the passion of hope in the context of a good that they desire yet do not possess, when the good is difficult yet possible to obtain. But a passion is not a virtue. It is a simple human reaction that in one way or another guides human action, though often in an ambivalent way. The reason why the Greeks gave little importance to hope was because it points towards future fulfillment, and the future, according to the classical doctrine of eternal return, is but a replica of the past. For the same things happen again and again. What I hope for has already happened. There is nothing new under the sun (Qo 1:9). What happened before will happen again. For a Greek a life of hope would be simply escapist or utopian. There is no place in Greek philosophy for what Christians call the "good news," that radical novelty introduced into the world by the incarnation of God's Word and the sending of the Holy Spirit that changes the course of history. Paul in fact designates the pagans as those who live "without hope" (Eph 2:12).

In effect, what brings about hope in Christians is *the divine promise of salvation*, a salvation that has already begun on earth, but that will reach perfection only in heaven. Hope is reasonable (and therefore virtuous) because it is based on God himself, on his love, on his call, on his power, on his truthfulness, on his fidelity to the promise. In that sense God is the source of hope because he infuses the very power to hope into humans. That is why we call it a theological virtue. This power is attributed especially to the Holy Spirit: "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" (Rom 5:5). Doubtless, hope is a gift infused by God, yet it requires on behalf of those who receive it openness, goodness, simplicity, generosity, an

optimistic spirit, the capacity to recognize and accept what has been given to them. Of course it also reinforces and unifies these virtues and attitudes.

Hope comes from God and is directed to him and only to him. No other creature is capable of satisfying the desire for infinite and perfect human happiness present in the human heart; nothing purely human, therefore, can be the object of a definitive and unconditioned hope. Only God can do this. See my work *Christ our Hope* (Washington D.C. 2011, 3-36).

Hope is marked by five things.

First, like faith, it is a *filial virtue*, an immediate source of confidence, of simplicity, of joy, of transparency; it gives a very distinct color to the life of the son or daughter of God. Christians hope unconditionally in God because he is their Father. Besides, the children of God hope to obtain one day the glory of heaven, their heavenly and filial inheritance (Rom 8:17). Christian hope is intrinsically filial.

Secondly, the theological virtue of hope responds fully to the *thirst for immortality* that is present in the human heart. Christians dare to hope that the gift of life received from God will last forever, not on the basis of their own energies or strength, but in virtue of the omnipotence, goodness, mercy, and fidelity of God. As the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel suggestively stated in *Être et avoir* (Paris 1935, 117), “perhaps hope is the very stuff out of which the soul is made.”

In the third place, it may be said that the human faculty hope is closest to is *memory*. Augustine explains that hope is configured by what is present in human memory, the future by the past: *ex memoria spes*. Aquinas also says in *De spe* (1) that “what hope is for future things, memory is for things past.” John of the Cross teaches in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (books II & III) that humans must purify their memory to the very core, in every single aspect, in order for hope to act in plenitude in their lives.

Fourth, it is true that hope is directed to God alone because only he is capable of *fulfilling the desire for happiness and for the infinite that is present in the human heart, made in his image and likeness.* It would not be proper or virtuous therefore to expect perfect happiness from other people, whoever they are, no matter how much they care for us, simply because this is beyond their capability. Human love is but a shadow, a passing shadow, of the love of God. Nonetheless, hope in God, far from drawing humans away from the world and all it offers, vivifies from within all noble human hopes, gives motives for optimism, helps to avoid idolatry and false

expectancies, purifies ambitions, moves people to commit themselves, directs all human projects to the glory of the Creator. In that sense the Christian manages to avoid the disappointment that comes from poor, passing, false, or unreal hopes. True hope helps to avoid the worst effects of depression and burnout. Hoping only in God as ultimate end, the believer manages to direct all his or her efforts towards the future, indeed towards heaven, in a realistic and practical way. We can conclude therefore that hope is situated at the heart of the everyday effort to *work in a Christian way*, thus making the Christian sanctification of work possible.

Fifth and last, classical thought considers hope only as an personal passion, that is, in an individualistic way: the *bonum futurum arduum* becomes *possibile* through the investment of one's own energies. Christian hope however introduces a distinct novelty into human life because the *bonum futurum arduum* may become *possibile* also due to the help received from others: from God in the first place, and also from other people who assist us. In that sense Christian *hope becomes supremely social and communitarian*: believers hope not only in God but also in humans made in his image and likeness. This leads us to consider the virtue of charity.

2. The theological virtue of charity

In classical Greek thought, love is considered as a characteristic of human existence and of social life. It is natural for humans to love one another, just as it is not infrequent for them to hate one another. Whatever we do as human beings is driven by love, is carried out on account of love: love defines and directs the path of a person during their passage on earth, it guides them in their actions. "My love is my weight," says Augustine in the *Confessions* (XIII, 9:10): I move, I act in the direction of what I love.

Still, according to the Stoics, who were among the most influential philosophers of antiquity, love is not a virtue in the strict sense of the word, because it can easily become a source of suffering, of bitterness, of anguish. Instead of contributing to human fulfillment and happiness, love frequently constitutes a brake or confinement. For the Stoa to live together is natural, it is a duty of humans, but committed love for another person should be avoided on the whole, because it easily becomes a source of pain. To obtain their proper end, humans should rather detach themselves progressively from everything they have around them, avoiding relationships and commitments rather than reinforcing them. Salvation for the Stoics, if this is the right term to use, is obtained through *apatheia*, indifference,

detachment. Humans reach fulfillment by *not* loving: it would be better not to commit oneself, better not to give, nor receive, nor accept. A noble anthropology, perhaps, an admirable one, but sad, solitary, and sterile at heart.

Christians on the other hand are convinced that charity, love, is and should be at the very core of their own lives. Not only that: charity is what structures all human action, it is the *rule* of Christian life. But charity is not just any kind of love, nor is it a purely human love. Love, as we know, is not always upright and can in fact bring people to occasion the destruction of their own lives and that of others. When Christians speak of the need to love, they are not thinking a kind of blind, voluntaristic dynamism: “all you need is love!” Nor do they think in terms of a selfish, short-term sentimentalism. They speak rather of the infused virtue of charity, by which they share mysteriously in the love with which the three-personed God loves himself. This love is communicated directly to humans, and makes them *capable of loving as God loves*: for God not only loves humans, but loves himself and others *through* humans. After all, God is Love by nature (1 Jn 4:8, 16). In that sense the love of God in the soul may be understood as a sharing, by grace, in the flow of love with which God loves himself in the inner life of the three divine persons. The one who definitively reveals the mystery of the love of God to the world, of course, is Jesus Christ: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

When confronted with the limitless love of God for us, the believer’s response assumes the shape of the first commandment of the new covenant (as of the old): “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mk 12:30; Dt 6:5). God indeed is the object of charity, in the sense that he is the only one capable of fulfilling the human capacity and inclination to love. But even more than that, God is the living source of charity. He is the one who infuses love into humans, and they in turn are transformed and become capable of truly loving God and neighbor with something of the heart of Christ. To love God with all one’s heart and soul and mind and strength is not the result of human effort, but of God’s grace generously accepted.

22. God's Life in the Soul: the Dynamics of Charity, Infused moral virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit (CGW 329-339)

1. The dynamics of the theological virtue of charity

We may point out five characteristics of Christian charity.

First, like faith and hope, charity is a *filial virtue*, because it consists precisely in a sharing—through the power of the Spirit—in the mutual, total, and eternal love that exists between the Father and the Son. As Benedict XVI writes in his *Message for Lent* (15.10.2012), "in faith we are generated as children of God… charity brings us to persevere concretely in our divine filiation, bringing the fruit of the Holy Spirit." In effect, the eternal Father-Son relationship in God is simply one of love. When we say "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8), we say that paternal and filial love in God is the maximum possible expression of love. Basil the Great writes in his *Regulae fusius tractatus* (prol. 4), "Either we avoid evil for fear of chastisement and then our disposition is that of the slave. Or we allow ourselves be drawn on by the attraction of reward, and then we act as mercenaries. Or rather we obey on account of the good in itself or from love of the one who commands… and then we are acting as children, as sons." And Thomas Aquinas writes in *De virtutibus* (2, 2 ad 15) that "charity is not virtuous in humans in that it is human, but because humans by participation become God and children of God, according to 1 Jn 3:1." And elsewhere he says, "the more one has of charity, the more one has of freedom" (*III Sent.*, 29, 1, 8, q.la 3).

In the second place, charity brings the *human will to fullness*. The will of humans naturally desires the good, and is open to the supreme Good. But it is incapable of reaching it with its own powers. Yet thanks to the virtue of charity, humans can come to love in the fullest possible sense. "The fulfillment of all our works is love," Augustine writes in his commentary on John's gospel (10:4), "here is our end, for this purpose we love, towards that objective we strive; when we reach it then we shall find rest."

Thirdly, infused charity is lived in two complementary ways, *according to the nature and situation of the person loved:* God and humans. As Josemaría Escrivá says in *Furrow* (749), "Your charity must be adapted and tailored to the needs of others, not to yours." In his *Message for Lent* (15.10.2012) Benedict XVI writes: "As God infuses charity into us, the Holy Spirit makes us partakers of the dedication proper to Jesus: filial towards God and fraternal towards each human being."

In the first place, by charity we have love *for God*. It should be noted that the normal way in which love is expressed—through donation and self-giving—does not apply strictly speaking to our love for God, for the simple reason that all we possess has been received from God in the first place. In that sense, to love God means primarily to *recognize* God as Lord and Father, and as the One from whom we have received everything. This recognition is expressed in filial adoration, in joyful praise, in thanksgiving, in Christian cult, in obedience to God's will, in dedication to his service, in zeal for the things of God.

Charity finds expression also in our *gratuitous love for neighbor.* This is the power that God infuses into the human heart, making it capable of loving others in a divine way, as it were, as Christ loves (Jn 13:34). Believers perceive in their hearts that they are loved by God and, full of gratitude and wonder, they feel urged by the abundance of God's gift to love their neighbor as themselves, generously communicating to him or her the gifts received from the Lord (Mt 10:8). For this reason, the works of charity, continues Benedict XVI, "are not principally fruit of human effort, to boast about, but they are born of faith, spring out of the grace which God offers in abundance."

The mutual bond between the two aspects of Christian charity is fundamental in Christ's message and a sign of evangelical perfection: "If any one says 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also" (1 Jn 4:20f.). Even though acts of charity towards one's neighbor are human actions and are therefore finite and limited—they are not divine acts, because humans love humanly—still they are meant to be carried out in a divine way, as an unconditioned and gratuitous donation to one's neighbor, in spite of possible rejection, offense, lack of gratitude or recognition, among others. The supreme manifestation of charity is forgiveness, when the Christian strives to love others in the same way as God loves him. After all, God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:45). As St. Bernard put it in his work *De diligendo Deo* (1), "the cause of the love of God is God; the measure of love is to have no measure."

In the fourth place, charity is closely *linked with both faith and hope*. In effect, the life of faith is present in the very exercise of charity. The two

virtues work side by side. Paul explains this as follows: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). In the life of Christians, an isolated faith is not enough, nor is humanitarian aid, as Benedict XVI observes in his *Message for Lent*: “For a healthy spiritual life it is necessary to flee from both fideism and moralistic activism.” It may also be observed that every act of charity in a sense is an act of faith, in that often humans do not perceive immediately the fruit of their own, generous self-giving: God wants to involve them in the risky adventure of the *agape*, of a gratuitous love that should be disinterested, joyful and discrete. Besides, in real terms, the secret of Christian charity is not so much the imitation of the charitable behavior of other people, but rather *docility to the Holy Spirit*. This docility brings the believer to do everything for the glory of God (Mt 5:16) as well as learning to identify the *true* material or spiritual needs of neighbor, without seeking immediate gratification or recognition. Christians are invited to follow the footsteps of Christ who sacrificed his own life as the maximum possible sign of love of God and of his followers (Jn 15:13).

But if charity is bound up with faith, it is also with hope. In effect, when humans love, necessarily they desire to be happy, to be rewarded: the Christian loves and at the same time hopes to be loved in return. It is true that in living charity humans give themselves to others and exercise their faith, for they frequently do not see the results of their generosity; but at the same time they hope, thinking of the prize, dreaming of the reward, in this life and the next, the “hundredfold and life everlasting” (Mk 10:30), when God wants this to happen, and as God wants it. For this reason, Jesus said to the apostles, “When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret”; yet he assured them: “and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Mt 6:3ff.).

Fifth and last, the role of charity is special in Christian life, because it is the *perfection and form of all virtue*, for it “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:14). Charity performs what might be called a *symphonic role* with respect to other virtues and the whole of human life. No virtue would be truly such without charity and its inner complement, humility. Paul says so incisively (1 Cor 13:2f.). Faith and hope, without charity, are dead or unformed (Jas 2:17). Charity moves humans to believe (“Love alone is worthy of faith” is the title of an important work of H. U. von Balthasar), and to hope in God as the authentic source of all good

things. The same principle may be applied to the cardinal virtues, of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Scripture teaches that charity is the source of all Christian behavior. Thus, in contrast with “the works of the flesh,” Paul speaks of the fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22).

2. The infused moral virtues

It is commonly said that, along with the theological virtues, sanctifying grace also informs the moral virtues, especially the four cardinal ones: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1813) links them directly to faith, hope, and charity: “The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues.” These virtues vivified by grace make it possible for humans to perform actions that go beyond their natural powers; they point the lives of humans towards God as their ultimate end. They confer not only the capacity to carry out supernatural actions, but also a certain facility in living virtue with a heroism that may be seen in many ways, even in unforeseen circumstances, among ordinary people, in the young, in those with little formal training in the faith, under duress.

In real terms, what we call the infused moral virtues involve a sharing in the life of Christ: in his charity, of course, but in all the other virtues. The *prudence* of Christ is a reflection of perfect charity that seeks the best way of speaking of the Father to the human heart and saving it; this brings him to choose the most suitable means of carrying out his mission, overcoming temptation, taking into account all the circumstances. *Justice* is revealed especially in the way Jesus redeems humanity: he gives back to the Father what is his own after the sin of humanity; besides, he will come, at the end of time, as the just judge of the living and the dead, establishing justice once and for all in the world. *Fortitude,* as a tension towards the arduous good, is manifested in the zeal Jesus shows for the things of his Father, in giving witness to truth, in his firmness when correcting, in his resistance to temptation, in the exercise of patience, and especially in his death on the cross. *Temperance* informs Jesus’ whole attitude, both balanced and serene, towards created goods, with an example that moves us to aspire after the greater goods.

3. The gifts of the Holy Spirit

We have already seen that the Holy Spirit is the source and fountain of all grace. He is the one who cries out in the heart of believers “Abba! Father!” The Church’s liturgy calls the Spirit *fons vivus, ignis, caritas,* “living fountain, fire and love.” And spiritual writers explain that the proper attitude to have before the Spirit is one of docility. Still, docility is not merely a previous disposition of a purely human kind, made of interior silence, sense of responsibility, capacity for listening, generous disposition. Christian docility is made possible by the gifts of the Spirit. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1830), we read, “The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit.”

According to the Fathers of the Church, the gifts are possessed in fullness by Christ, whose name means “anointed,” that is, the one who is filled with the Spirit. The doctrine of the gifts is traditionally based on the following text of Isaiah:

> There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord (Is 11:1-3).

Thomas Aquinas in *S.Th. I-II* (68, 4) defines the gifts of the Holy Spirit as “supernatural habits infused by God in the potencies of the soul so that the person can receive promptly and with facility the lights and impulses of the Holy Spirit.” The gifts are the fruit of a special presence of the Spirit, which produces in the believer an intuitive affinity for the divine: sensitivity, docility, promptness. The gifts overcome natural resistance to pain and sacrifice, enable the proper evaluation of different happenings, and induce believers to follow a supernatural logic; they help people discover and freely choose to carry out the will of God. In this sense the gifts perfect the virtues: in them the Spirit gives Christians a kind of naturalness and facility to live a good life.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are traditionally considered seven in number (CCC 1839ff.):

— the gift of intellect that favors a deeper knowledge of the mysteries of faith and helps believers recognize what their lives are directed to;

— the gift of wisdom by which believers obtain a loving knowledge of God as the cause of everything; this brings them to direct their actions with

greater ease towards him, the ultimate end of human life;

— the gift of knowledge allows believers to recognize divine providence in practice, to discern the value of created things within God's plan, and direct them to his glory and our salvation; the gift of knowledge is a prolongation as it were of the gifts of intellect and wisdom;

— the gift of counsel may be seen in a special docility to understand what the will of God is in each moment and what is necessary for our own salvation and that of others; it is the gift of risk and action that guides the practical decisions of believers;

— the gift of fortitude facilitates correspondence to God's will in circumstances where the obtainment of the arduous good requires true heroism, in the struggle against temptation, against fear, and in persevering in good works until the end of one's life, also with the possibility of martyrdom;

— the gift of the fear of God is fruit of a filial reverence that rejects anything that can distance the believer from God, who is Father and Lord, all-powerful and eternal, before whom all creatures are as but a puff of air (Jb 4:9; 7:7; Ps 39:6, 7, 12; 90:9; 94:11; 144:4); this brings believers to abhor sin as an offense to God;

— lastly, the gift of piety, which manifests in a singular way how the Spirit moves creatures to an awareness of their divine filiation, moving them to a truly filial love, and helping them to act according to that awareness.

23. Divine Grace and Free Response: Justification and Merit (CGW 340-355)

In the preceding chapters we have considered the life of grace—God giving himself to humans—in all its power and realism. Grace comes from God, from the very heart of the Trinitarian inner life. It springs from God's fidelity, from his love and omnipotence. It strives to establish perpetual communion with the creature. Yet we must examine things also from the side of humans who receive grace. That humans are in a position to accept or reject gifts from other people poses little difficulty for us. We do so all the time… in fact it is our right to do so as our equals, as creatures like us. But does the same thing apply in our relationship with God? After all, divine action is incommensurate with human action. Does it make sense for humans to say "no" to God's gifts? Does saying "yes" to God's gifts have any relevance? Strictly speaking, it is not precise to say that humans "co-operate" with God, for the simple reason that divine action and human action cannot be compared with and added to one another. And if God wishes make us partake in his inner life, who can refuse?

Still, Scripture makes it quite clear that without free human acceptance, divine grace does not make its presence felt into the lives of people. This is the mystery of the encounter between the infinite freedom of the Creator and the finite freedom of the creature. Church Fathers have commonly held that being made in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:27) is what makes us truly free. Besides, the life of grace makes believers children of God, and, unlike the slave, the son or daughter *is* free. Freedom qualifies divine filiation from within. As son or daughter one can freely receive grace or freely reject it. God does not want slaves in heaven, but only children, only people who can honestly say that they love the Lord with all their heart, and soul, and mind, and strength (Lk 10:27). However, if the rejection of a gift is understandable in a human context, the possibility that a creature may be truly capable of refusing the personal gift of God will always remain a mystery, a mystery hidden in God, who is Father and Love in person. In the New Testament, the relationship between grace and freedom has two special manifestations: the obedience of Christ on the cross (Phil 2:8), and the response of faith of the Blessed Virgin. Of the latter Benedict XVI said in a homily at Loreto (10.4.2012),

> God asks for Mary's free consent that he may become man. To be sure, the 'yes' of the Virgin is the fruit of divine grace. But grace does not eliminate freedom; on the contrary it creates and sustains it. Faith removes nothing from the human creature, rather it permits his full and final realization.

In the coming three chapters (23-25) we shall consider a series of questions that involve the interaction between divine grace and human freedom: the process of justification; the Christian doctrine of merit; grades of holiness; the experience of divine grace and the role of human mediations in the communication of grace, especially insofar as this refers to Christian apostolate. We shall conclude then with some observations on the role and need for grace in Christian life and in the sanctification of work, as well as on the ultimate meaning of human liberty. It should become clear that humans' free acceptance of the grace of God does not produce in them anything other than freedom, fullness, and happiness—in a word, life, indeed eternal life. Conversely, the rejection of divine friendship only makes humans more enslaved, more empty, more unhappy, like the walking dead.

1. Freedom and justification

Earlier on (§ 13, 1) we considered the central position occupied in Scripture by the doctrine of justification, in which God infuses grace into believers, sanctifying and at the same time forgiving them. Aquinas considers justification as God's greatest work, in that it elevates the human being to a quasi-infinite dignity, that of being divinized, of becoming a son or daughter of God.

In *S.Th. I-II* (113) he goes on to explain the different stages of justification, in which the priority of divine grace can be clearly seen, and at the same time, the need for a free acceptance of God's self-giving on the part of the human being. There are four stages, he says. The first consists of the giving of God's grace, a purely divine initiative. The second involves a movement of faith and conversion towards God produced by that grace. Humans are drawn towards God who created them in his image and likeness. The movement of the will towards God also produces in human beings—this is the third stage—a reaction against sin: they realize that closeness to God is simply incompatible with sinful habits, their perception of the ugliness of sin being reinforced by the perception of the beauty of living in closeness to God. As a result, the human being repents of sin and

moves away from it, because it goes against God… It is not just that sin does damage that we can measure and perceive, that it is disadvantageous for us physically or psychologically, or that it hurts our relationship with others, or perhaps ruins health and prosperity. Both effects, the movement of faith towards God and the movement of the will away from sin, are the direct effect of divine grace and at the same time fully involve the free human will. Humans could in effect resist the divine offer of grace, aware of the difficulties involved in overcoming sin, or in abandoning a lifestyle that is attractive in the short term, yet incompatible with God's will. This phenomenon is recounted graphically in Mark's Gospel in the case of the rich young man (Mk 10:17-27). The fourth and last stage involves God effectively pardoning the sinner through the infusion of sanctifying grace.

The point made by Aquinas is an important one. The power of grace, channeled through the Church, the sacraments and Christian apostolate, draws people to God and *as a result* draws them away from sin. This sets the scene for the proper profile of the Church's pastoral activity: firstly we need to present the good, and then, the evil and suffering caused by sin will be made all the more obvious.

2. Freedom and merit

Protestant reformers were convinced that human freedom and action are as nothing before the power and mercy of God. And rightly so: divine action is simply incommensurate with human action. Understandably, they have felt uncomfortable with the traditional doctrine of "merit," according to which humans in the state of grace can obtain from God a series of further gifts, among them, an increase in grace itself, a growth in holiness, as well as eternal life. The classic reference work *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (3rd ed., vol. 2, 506) states that "the Reformation was principally a battle against the doctrine of merit." However the theology of merit has deep roots in the Patristic period—Tertullian speaks of it, as does Augustine—and among medieval authors, especially Aquinas. It is also present in Scripture, especially in texts that refer to the prize promised by God to those who do his will.

At first sight it would seem absurd to say that humans can merit something from God, since God is the source of all gifts and is completely free in giving them. Merit may be described as a *ius ad praemium*, "a right to be rewarded," but "with regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man. Between God and us there is an immeasurable

inequality, for we have received everything from him, our Creator," as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states (2007). Still, following the teaching of Aquinas in *S.Th. I-II* (114), six conditions may be mentioned in order to speak of merit in the supernatural sphere.

In the first place, above all else, as the *Catechism* also says, "the merit of man before God in Christian life arises from the fact that *God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of his grace*" (2008). Thomas explains that God has debts with no one; thus he commits himself to reward humans with complete, sovereign freedom. At the same time, God's freedom is not arbitrary or approximate. God is faithful to his word and Christians can, indeed should, trust his promises, which find expression in Scripture and in sacramental life.

Secondly, as is obvious, merit requires *human freedom*: without freedom it would be meaningless to speak of human action and thus of merit. Besides, in the third place, merit is linked with the *historical condition* of humans, in the sense that only the one who is a pilgrim on earth, the *homo viator*, can carry out meritorious acts. If someone has already obtained the prize of heaven, then by definition they are no longer in a position to merit. In the fourth place, an obvious condition: the works carried out by those in grace must be not only free but also *upright*, in correspondence to God's will, carried out in filial obedience to the Father. And a fifth one: in order for an action to be meritorious, there needs be an *upright intention*, at least a virtual one of intending to receive what God intends to give (though there is no need for an actual intention).

Still, we should now ask: how can we combine these four "human" conditions—freedom, historicity, ethical, right intentioned—with the first "divine" one contained in God's promise to reward the just? Is the relationship between the two an extrinsic one? "Extrinsic" in the sense that God might simply observe from afar and accept that free, temporal, upright and well-intentioned actions of humans are meritorious just because he has decided to do so? Or could it be that there is an interior bond between the two, in such a way that divine logic and action are fully present in the heart and action of the believer? Christian theology has traditionally stated that *Christus solus meruit*: the only one to have truly merited is Christ, the Son of God made man. And if the Christian is able to merit, then he can do so only on the basis of his or her belonging to Christ, as a member of his Body, that is, on the basis of grace. The Council of Trent gives the following

explanation of the doctrine of merit considering the grace of Christ present in the heart of the believer:

> Jesus Christ himself continuously infuses strength into the justified, as the head into the members and the vine into the branches; this strength always precedes, accompanies and follows their good works which, without it, could in no way be pleasing to God and meritorious (DH 1546).

The only one who can merit in the strict sense is Christ, and in a derived way, those who belong to his living Body by grace. Cardinal Cajetan, who lived during the time of the Council of Trent and was a contemporary of Luther's, expresses this doctrine in a graphic way while glossing Galatians 2:20: "I merit… not I, but Christ who merits in me; I fast, but not I, for Christ is fasting in me" (*De fide et operibus*). This provides us with the sixth and last condition for a meritorious action: the person must be in the *state of grace*, must be a carrier of the life of Christ. Whoever does not belong to Christ simply cannot merit: an obvious but fundamental point. As Augustine says (*Epistula 194*, 5:19), "God, when he rewards our actions, crowns his own gifts." For this reason a classical aphorism has it that *prima gratia non cadit sub meritum*, "first grace cannot be merited." No one therefore can merit in any way if they do not belong to Christ, if they are not in the grace of God.

The next question follows: what are Christians in a position to merit from God? What is the object of merit? In an ample sense, the believer can merit from God anything that can be licitly desired (this is usually called 'congruous merit', or *de condigno*). In an ample sense, we said, because the Lord does not necessarily concede *everything* we ask for, and even less *when and how* we ask for it. Christian prayer should always be accompanied by a deeply felt aspiration: "your will be done" (Jas 3:15). In a specific sense, Thomas teaches that those who are in grace can surely merit certain gifts of God: in the first place, *eternal life and the grade of glory*, because the one who lives in grace is to some degree already "in glory" (§ 26, 1), and besides, *the increase of grace* (this is usually called 'condign merit', *de condigno*). In effect, believers with the good actions they freely carry out in this life under God's grace, come ever closer to God and grow in holiness, day after day. Every meritorious act brings about an increase in sanctifying grace and the infused virtues; the believer becomes ever more

alter Christus, ipse Christus, "another Christ, Christ himself." Without grace, of course, it would be impossible to merit anything from God.

The 1999 Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* does not speak of "merit" as such, but the idea is present:

> We confess together that good works—a Christian life lived in faith, hope and love—follow justification and are its fruits. When the justified live in Christ and act in the grace they receive, they bring forth, in biblical terms, good fruit. Since Christians struggle against sin their entire lives, this consequence of justification is also for them an obligation they must fulfill. Thus both Jesus and the apostolic Scriptures admonish Christians to bring forth the works of love (JDJ 37).

3. Grades of holiness: the increase and loss of grace

We spoke above of the increase of grace as the fruit of merit. But at a deeper level, it should be said that God can freely concede a particular person a fuller friendship, a more elevated degree of holiness, a greater intensity of grace. This does not constitute an injustice on his part. No one considers improper the fact that God communicated to the Blessed Virgin or to other saints an intensity of grace above that of the rest.

One reason for this may be that some people correspond more generously to God's grace. Humans, moved by divine grace, can open themselves with a greater or lesser generosity to God's gifts. The Council of Trent teaches that "each one receives within himself his own justice, according to the measure with which 'the Holy Spirit apportions to each one individually as he wills' (1 Cor 12:11), and according to each one's personal disposition and cooperation" (DH 1529). When all is said and done, however, what ultimately determines the level of holiness of a person is the grace of God, not their personal generosity, for the latter also depends on grace. Another question is *why* God actually gives himself more to one person than to another. Perhaps we can say that besides holiness, God confides to each one a special mission (§ 11, 4). Mary received the mission of being mother of God and mother of Christians… it made sense that God would fill her with abundant gifts to make it possible for her to carry out such a demanding mission, as a result of which the angel Gabriel could call her the "full of grace" (Lk 1:28). The same may be said of many of the saints.

We also know that believers can lose the state of grace on account of grave sin. This doctrine is openly taught in Scripture. In the Old Testament

we read for example: “But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and does the same abominable things that the wicked man does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds which he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, he shall die” (Ezek 18:24). The New Testament also speaks of a sin that leads to death (1 Jn 5:16ff.). Still, the sinner is always in a position to turn back to God and to establish friendship with him anew. As the Council of Trent teaches, “those who through sin have forfeited the grace of justification they had received, can be justified again when, awakened by God, they make the effort to regain through the sacrament of penance and by the merits of Christ the grace they have lost” (DH 1542). Venial sin, of course, does not destroy the life of grace, but if it is not repented of through daily penance, it disposes the believer to evermore grave sin.

24. Divine grace and Free Response: the Experience and Certitude of Grace (CGW 358-369)

In order to be able to give a free and fully human response to divine grace, we must consider the dynamics of the human will in an ample sense. The decision to open one's heart to God is made possible by the very giving of divine grace, and in that sense it exceeds purely human capacities. Still, the decision to respond to grace is not beyond the reach of humans: response to grace is not imponderable, intangible, athematic, hidden within the folds of the spirit. It is in fact a fully human decision, perhaps the most human of all decisions, and when positive certainly the most humanizing: responsible, conscious, involving all the fibers of our humanity. God enlightens the intellect, moves the will, stimulates the imagination and purifies the memory; God brings us face-to-face with our lives, our destiny, our personal situation, and our identity as they are. He makes his grace present in a tangible way by the sacramental signs, through his word and through the witness of the life of other people. Grace acts interiorly, of course, but also through external mediations. And God gives grace abundantly and widely, while always respecting human nature as he created it. As we saw already, Augustine said that grace acts with *suavitas amoris*, with all the "gentleness of love." God, without violating our nature, in a sense it "seduces" us and invites us to react positively to his gifts. In this chapter we shall consider more closely the topic of the experience of the grace of God in a more ample context, that of religious experience. We shall also consider the question of the certitude, or otherwise, we may have of divine grace.

1. The experience of divine grace

The first thing to note is that the experience of divine grace is a true *human experience*, because it directly affects our sensibility. At the same time, it is, it should be, an *experience of God*, that is an experience of God's action within us. The experience of grace has its origin in God and points to him. In that sense, true religious experience is not identical with human experience in a general sense, as in the case of love, anger, fear, anguish, or joy. What humans experience often takes on an ambivalent character, on account of the complexity of human subjectivity, influenced besides by sin. This is also the case with transcendent, religious experiences. In fact strong "religious" experiences are often difficult to understand and interpret, given

besides that they are often short-lived and to be found in a small number of people.

This brings us to apply to experience in general, and especially religious experience, a proper *sense of discernment*. Two observations may be made.

First, religious experience should be subject to *ecclesial discernment*, to the Church's authority. Let us think of the conversion of Paul, recounted frequently in the New Testament (Acts 9:1-22; 22:3-16; 26:9-18). His experience of encountering the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus was deeply personal and extraordinarily intense. Yet he perceived that his experience of God's grace, and the consequent union with Christ, was destined to be lived out by all believers. For this reason a very considerable part of Christian theology, especially regarding vocation, grace, sin, and the Church's universal mission, is critically determined by the once-off experience of the Apostle to the Gentiles. And even though other Christians do not experience grace in the same way as Paul did, nevertheless they know through faith, with the certitude that the Church gives them, that "Christ lives in them" (Gal 2:20), that they have been regenerated by the Spirit who cries out in their hearts "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:15). They know it and they experience it, each one in their own way, realizing serenely and without sentimentalism, confirmed by the Church, that God acts in their lives.

A second observation as regards discernment may also be made. The true content of a presumably religious experience of one or many Christians finds expression sooner or later in a dogmatic reflection undertaken on the basis of a spiritual reflection. The fact is that all dogmatic statements (or articles of faith) are ultimately the fruit of human, tangible experience, of God acting in history: the life of God's people, the words and admonition of the prophets, and especially the words, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9), as Paul says. John the evangelist speaks of the disciples who have *heard, seen, contemplated, and touched* the Word of life, Jesus Christ (1 Jn 3:1-3). Following this lived, experienced narrative, many truths about God's nature and action can be gradually deduced by the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, such as the fact that God is faithful, and merciful, and omnipotent, and so on. Interestingly, the end result of the Church's reflection on the rich, historical, particular, unforeseeable, and impassioned experience of believers tends to be remarkably simple, sober, and universal.

The Church does not invent Christian teaching. Rather, under the guidance of the Spirit, the Church distills down the complexity and ambivalence of multiple experiences, situated in the midst of Christian life, into the simplicity and clarity of dogma, usually over an extended period of time. Once formulated, dogma then allows us in turn to discern and evaluate ulterior experiences.

Let us take the following example that can illustrate what has just been said. Luther says that the justified believer is *simul iustus et peccator*, "at the same time both just and sinner." This is a perfectly valid expression of Christian spiritual experience. In effect, the existential perception of the saints is frequently one of feeling the closeness of God, and, as a result of that closeness, of living what they consider deeply sinful lives. Grace and sin come together vitally in their lived experience of God. However, from the point of view of revealed, objective truth, Luther's expression is imprecise, because if humans are justified, then they are not sinners, and vice versa; even though they may *feel* they are sinners, they *know* through faith they are not, since the grace that sanctifies them at the same time pardons them. As Trent says, *in renatis nihil odit Deus*, "God hates nothing in those who have been regenerated" (DH 1515). What remains in the baptized is the concupiscence or *fomes peccati*, the tendency towards sin. But this is not sin, but rather a sinful inclination that convinces believers of the need to seek help from God, to struggle to overcome their defects, to avoid confiding in their own capacity for perseverance. Yet they know, thanks to the simple objectivity of faith, the shared faith of the Church, that their sinful inclinations should never bring them to despair.

Let us consider now some specific aspects of the experience of divine grace: the first of a more personal and interior kind (the certitude of the state of grace), the second rather of a social or external kind (the visible mediation of grace, in the next chapter).

2. The certitude and incertitude of being in the state of grace

Can the believer know he or she is in the state of grace? Can the state of grace be perceived directly? Is it possible to "touch" it and in that way be assured that God is acting in the life of a Christian?

Christian modesty and humility convince us that it should not be possible to know with certitude what God, and God alone, works in the soul. The presence of divine life within the believer does not enter directly into the "radar field" of human sensitivity. The Council of Trent observes that

“whoever considers himself, his personal weakness and his lack of disposition, may fear and tremble about his own grace, since no one can know with a certitude of faith which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained God’s grace” (DH 1534). Luther would have said as much.

Of course humans could know they are in the state of grace if God revealed it to them. They could be sure of it should they see God “face to face” in the very act of giving them grace. But these are not common situations. But to some degree believers can experience the state of grace indirectly, through signs or effects. Thomas Aquinas mentions the following ones (*S.Th. I-II*, 112, 5): joy for the things of God, despising mundane things, a good conscience as regards one’s own behavior, an awareness of carrying out works of disinterested charity, detesting evil, gladly listening to the word of God. Other saints speak of spiritual consolation, of courage, of interior fortitude, of peace and joy, of the love of God that places creatures in second place. On the basis of these experiences, believers can infer the existence of the state of grace, without ever having a full, direct, felt certitude.

Still, the following observation should be added. We have already said that the life of grace involves the presence and experience of the cross of Christ they must carry (Mt 10:38; Lk 9:23). Whoever truly experiences the cross—not the cross that perhaps we invent, but the true cross of Christ—may find in it a clear sign of the presence of God who acts in their lives, in spite of a deep sense of discomfort, of abandonment, of suffering. “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).

Besides, we may ask the question: why should we experience incertitude as regards the state of grace? Would it not be more logical on God’s part to assure believers with a firm subjective certitude, in such a way that they can live and act with a clear commitment and unwavering dedication to the demands of holiness and the needs of others? In real terms, this incertitude serves two purposes.

The first is that it provides a space within which the free human will can move and react with greater or lesser generosity and authenticity. If humans had total certainty of being in God’s grace and enjoyed his presence as if they were already in heaven, then their will would never really be stimulated, moved, provoked, interiorized. Freedom with respect to grace would be but a “mere word,” as Luther said. There would be no space for

risk, for generosity, for creativity, for the adventure of love. The author of the Song of Songs put it very beautifully:

> On my bed at night I sought him whom my heart loves—I sought him but I did not find him. I will rise then and go about the city; in the streets and crossings I will seek Him whom my heart loves. I sought him but I did not find him… I opened to my lover—but my lover had departed, gone. I sought him but I did not find him; I called to him but he did not answer me (3:1f.; 5:6).

In the second place, subjective incertitude regarding the presence of grace in our lives becomes a living reminder of the fact that religious experience is not an end in itself, but always refers to an Other whom I do not perceive directly. It expresses the radical otherness of God and humans, and serves to avoid any possible idolatry created by the human imagination, any form of self-complacency in the spiritual life. Religious experience is human, indeed, but, if authentic, it does not have its source in the human, but in God, who is totally Other. And God does not tolerate rivals.

25. Divine grace and human response: the Ecclesial and Human Mediation of Grace (CGW 355-359; 369-374)

We experience grace as God's call and inspiration. But grace comes to us not only interiorly, but also exteriorly, through the senses, through other people. In this chapter we shall consider the role of visible and tangible mediations in the communication of grace. This has important consequences in understanding the theological nature of Christian apostolate. But grace is also "mediated" by each and person within their own lives. This involves a close personal participation in the life of Jesus, of Christ crucified, and leads Christians to live an ascetical life (we shall see this at the end of the chapter).

1. Grace and the role of visible mediations

Luther was right when he spoke of the need to trust in God alone and not in one's own works, whether they be personal or corporate. God is the one who saves, who elevates, who purifies. Good works, such as they are, are the fruit of grace working within the lives of believers. Trent taught more of less the same thing. Of course the problem is not so much in the idea of the Christian trusting in God or not, of having faith in God's works and promise of pardon. The concern of Luther was in the perception that human trust might be directed to God, but also, though partially, to *human mediations* which in one way or another are connected with the work of justification. Certainly, human mediations can and do communicate divine goods, but equally well they can brake, restrict, empty and condition them. Whether we like it or not, God himself has wanted to associate the gift of grace with created mediating agencies: God does not direct his love only to the interiority of the person (John Henry Newman said *cor ad cor loquitur*, "the heart speaks to the heart"), but to the whole person, in his or her spiritual, material, corporeal, and social qualities. This is hard to deny. Let us try to understand it a bit better.

The Council of Trent explains that the "instrumental cause" of justification is the sacrament of baptism: God justifies us by water and word. According to Luther, however, this "instrumental" role should be played by our unconditioned faith in God, what he called "fiducial faith." For Trent however it is a visible, objective action of the institutional Church; whereas for Luther it was something interior and very personal. Still, it should be kept in mind that the Council specifies that baptism is

always the “sacrament of the faith,” adding, “without which no one has ever been justified” (DH 1529). This is an important addition: “without which,” *sine qua* in the Latin original, means “without faith.” And baptism may be received really and physically, or by desire (DH 1524), but never without faith. So the message is really coincident with Luther’s: without faith there is no justification. Nonetheless, what Trent is saying is that faith is inseparable from baptism, interior faith from the external action of the Church. To quote the title of Anthony E. Harvey’s book, it is impossible to believe without belonging. The act of faith, though very personal, cannot be separated from an action that is sacramental, ecclesial, social, tangible, institutional, just as the soul cannot be separated from the body, or the invisible from the visible, or the individual from the social. The life of grace is inserted into the very depths of the soul, but fully involves corporeity, passing through mediations established by Christ that act as channels for the action of the Holy Spirit.

Speaking of the topic of the “certitude” of grace, considered above, the *German Catholic Catechism* states that “‘certitude’ is possible in the community of the Church, in the mutual encouragement and consolation of grace and hope that comes from her, as also from being brought along, all together in the single ‘we’ of faith and hope” (English ed., San Francisco 1987, 208). Christians do not experience grace only when they enjoy the presence of God in solitude, or when they have no personal awareness of grave sin, or when they advert to the presence of the cross in their lives. God’s grace is also experienced in sincere and concrete belongingness to the ecclesial community, and this involves an attentive listening to the Word of God, participation in the Eucharist, the faithful fulfillment of the Church’s law, reception of the sacraments, sharing, and Christian charity. To be a Christian in other words involves the entire human being, body and soul, thought and action, individuality and collectivity.

It is quite obvious that God has no ultimate *need* for created mediations in order to communicate his gifts to humanity. God counted on no mediator to create the world, though the Platonists and neo-Platonists suggested he did. God can open his inner life to whomsoever he wishes, when and how he wishes, perhaps in ways we are unaware of. In the words of Ratzinger, God “needs no intermediary channels by which to enter the soul of the individual, to which he is more intimate than he is to himself” (*Introduction to Christianity*, San Francisco 1990 183). What we do know is that he

wishes the gift of gifts, divinizing grace, to be communicated to the entire human being in all its dimensions: spiritual, intellectual, affective, corporeal, social, historical, living within a particular existential situation… God comes close to humans not only as Love but also *with love*, adapting his action delicately, to the greatest degree possible, to the circumstances and structure of each one. God does not show himself directly to his people. Rather he makes use of the simplest and humblest human means, often material and perishable, in order not to impose his power and love on the free will of humans, but rather inviting them *suaviter et fortiter*, "gently yet firmly" (Wis. 8:1), to open themselves to his grace. In synthesis, created mediations are not necessary for God, but they correspond perfectly to human nature and free response. God has no need for them, but we do.

At the same time, the presence of visible mediations makes believers aware not only of the reality of their new condition as children of God, but also of their radical otherness and distinction in respect of the Creator, and thus of their incapacity of entering into communion with God on their own strength. The visible mediations used by God emphasize: the otherness of God, the gratuitousness of his gifts, the creaturely condition of humans, and the realism of their freedom.

2. Christian apostolate

The Church, Body of Christ and People of God, brims over with divine gifts (Lk 6:38). From this abundance and divine vitality, she is moved by the Spirit to act in an essentially missionary and committed way in the communication of the gifts received, as a mother and teacher. The Church exists in order to evangelize. That is its very purpose, as Pope Francis reminds us in the exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*. For this reason, Jesus constituted the college of the apostles and sent his disciples to prepare the way for his coming, reminding them that "you received without paying, give without pay" (Mt 10:8). And after the resurrection, "Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*; and I am with you always to the close of the age'" (Mt 28:18-20).

This mission involves not only the apostles and their successors and direct collaborators (bishops and priests), but all Christians without any exception. Just as Paul felt personally urged to communicate faith in the Lord Jesus to

one and all ("the love of Christ moves us," 2 Cor 5:14), he also exhorted his disciples to evangelize, wherever they were, whatever circumstances they were in. His letters show he had many collaborators, both men and women, both laity and priests. Divine gifts are given to all Christians, who in turn are sent as missionaries to the whole world to communicate the good news. Basil the Great in *De Spiritu Sancto* (9:23) puts it in the following way:

> Just as bodies become luminous and transparent when they come into contact with a ray of light, and thus communicate another glow to themselves, those who carry the Spirit and are illumined by the Spirit, become themselves spiritual, and project grace towards others.

The same conviction is to be found in numerous Church documents, especially Vatican II's *Apostolicam actuositatem*, Paul VI's *Evangelii nuntiandi*, John Paul II's *Redemptoris missio* and *Christifideles laici*, and Pope Francis' *Evangelii gaudium*. St Josemaría speaks of the Christian as *alter Christus, ipse Christus*. With this expression he attempted to express the idea that the Christian is not merely the depositary of a series of revealed doctrines and exemplary virtues and divine treasures that refer to Christ only indirectly, as if a Christian was a kind of extrinsic and occasional instrument for the communication of God's grace, a Christian functionary. According to St Josemaría, Christ acts directly in the world in and through Christians, *in spite of* their limits, faults, and lack of virtue, indeed, to some degree he acts *through* these very characteristics. At the same time, apostolate can only be considered effective if it brings people to God, and not so much to the one who communicates: not only to the envelope, as St Josemaría would say, but to the letter the envelope contains. Jesus urged his disciples to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and *give glory to your Father* who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16). Religious experience, as we have seen, if genuine, is always the experience *of God*, experience of his grace, divine splendor recognized as such by humans.

3. Grace and Christian ascetical life

We have already seen how Pelagius explained his view of Christian life on the basis of human effort and struggle. Without excluding the role of divine assistance, he took it that humans, with their own spirit of self-denial and personal struggle, could overcome the attraction of sin and move towards holiness. The same idea is not uncommon in the times we are living in: we recognize the need for human effort, for discipline, for spiritual combat, for

good living, for self-help, for persevering commitment in overcoming sinful inclinations and acquiring virtue. Indeed Christians experience the effort to overcome their habitual reluctance in carrying out their duties *as something of their own*, as they strive to dominate "the old man" and in following the voice of their conscience. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recognizes this openly:

> The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. Spiritual progress entails the ascesis and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes (2015).

However, we may ask whether or not this view of Christian spirituality is sufficient. If we have received "grace," that is the gift of God that reinforces the will, illumines the intellect, elevates and purifies all the faculties, forgives sin and saves man… then why is ascetic struggle so important? Why spiritual combat, the effort to follow Christ, to discover and overcome one's defects? And even more: why encourage apostolic endeavor towards others? Would it not be better to leave it all in God's hands? In other words, the more we underscore the importance of God's action and gifts, the less do we need to emphasize the efforts of humans, their actions and merits. Or so it seems. The more trust we have in God, the less we need to place in our own contribution. The logic seems to be, therefore: the more grace there is, the less necessary will human struggle be. Conversely, the stronger humans are, the more they struggle, the less need they have to rely on divine grace.

To resolve the dilemma we should keep in mind, as we saw earlier on, that grace in the believer takes on the profile of the life of Christ. Grace not only elevates human faculties, but also reproduces in humans the style and life of Christ: his birth, family life, work, preaching, fatigue, joys, friendship, sorrow, glory. For this reason to live in grace does not simply mean to bask in glory, ease, harmony, consolation, light, love. The life of Christ is reproduced in the different stages of the life of Christians in its entirety, insofar as they are members of his body, living out their earthly pilgrimage. And that includes sharing in the cross of Christ. Paraphrasing Galatians 2:20, the believer could say, "it is no longer I, member of Christ's body, who struggles; it no longer I, but Christ who struggles in me."

We can say therefore that what moves Christians to struggle, to commit themselves, to fight, to battle against their faults, using all the means at their disposal, is precisely the grace of God. They are not an alternative to grace,

but its fruit. The grace of God moves believers to do things, to work, to overcome difficulties, to accept, to believe, to trust, and to be humble… to be like Christ, joyously, moved by love. Grace, divine life in the soul, as it divinizes, it awakens, purifies, and involves all human energies, penetrating every fiber of human existence. But on no account does it dispense Christians from the daily chore, but rather precedes, accompanies, and follows their actions so that they are directed whole and entire to the glory of God. In the *Actiones nostras* prayer of the *Gregorian Sacramentary* (VIII century), we read, “Inspire our actions, o Lord, and accompany them with your help, so that all our prayers and works have you as their beginning and their end.” Christians live to the full the gradual purification that the infusion of grace requires. God’s grace inspires and invites them to a commitment that is meant to involve their entire existence, to penetrate every pore of their being. Ascetic struggle therefore is not primarily the result of human initiative, but rather the fruit of God’s grace in the believer. It is the result of the action of grace and of human cooperation, which is moved and accompanied by grace itself. Paradoxically, grace brings Christians to struggle more than they would have without grace.

On the one hand, grace facilitates life, because it gives meaning and purpose and joy to existence, it gives the energy and perseverance that accompany actions carried out for love. On the other hand however grace brings humans to partake more fully in the redeeming work of Christ. For that reason, as St Josemaría said, the call of God—and with it grace—often *complicates* life for us (*The Forge*, 902). As the novelist Flannery O’Connor writes in *The Habit of Being*, “grace changes us, and the change is painful” (New York 1979, 307).

Ascetic struggle produces holiness, in the sense that it opens the human heart to God’s gifts, but it is God’s grace in the first place that invites and moves us to establish that openness. Christian struggle is fruit of the free though uphill acceptance of grace. Ascetical struggle therefore is not the prime cause of holiness (only grace can occupy that place), but it is a clear sign that grace is at work and holiness is consolidating. It is experienced as something in which humans put something of themselves into their Christian life, and consists of allowing themselves be conformed progressively by the Spirit to the doctrine, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

26. The Definitive Blossoming of Grace: Eternal Glory and the Blessed Virgin (CGW 238-246)

1. The glorification of humanity and the eschatological purpose of all grace

"Those whom he justified he also glorified," concludes the text from the Letter to the Romans (8:30) that we have been glossing throughout this text. In it we have attempted to understand, as best we could, how the arcane design of God is fulfilled throughout history, that is, how the "narrative" of divine grace works out. If we ask why God made the world, for what purpose, we can say: for glory. And why did he predestine and call humans? Again, for glory. Why did he justify humans, why did he forgive their sins and fill them with his own life? For glory: for immortality, for eternal life, to be able to share with them, for ever, his own Trinitarian life. Heaven—eternal life in the resurrection of the dead—is the secret that explains the ultimate meaning of grace and of the very existence of the world. Thus Paul reflects on "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him…" (1 Cor 2:9). If we are not aware of our last end, if we do not live for it, if we know little about it, we can keep going for a while, we can deal with certain aspects of life, but as time goes by things begin to lose their meaning, they no longer give permanent fruits and answers, they may even end up badly. Nietzsche put it in an incisive way in *The Twilight of Idols* (8): "It is absurd to wish to devolve one's essence on some end or other. We have invented the concept of 'end': in reality there is no end."

When we speak of grace we easily imagine something ethereal, inconsistent, even irrelevant. One reason for this is that we have to employ a language that's symbolic, metaphorical, imaginary. But grace, divine life in the soul, is something very real, even though we cannot see it, or taste it, or touch it… or much less dominate and control it, because grace *is* Christ who lives in us, not some idol that we invent. We use a metaphorical language to describe it, but it is not a metaphor. In human love we only see the signs: the silence, the glance, the waiting, the patience, the glow. We don't see love… but it is there, as real as anything else that exists. If it weren't there, then all relationships would collapse, life would slow down, winter would reign unopposed in the human heart. Neither do we see electricity… but it is there, in the cables, as real as anything else, as anybody who has been electrocuted can tell you. The same may be said of divine grace: though invisible, it is absolutely real, as real as the love that

drives human life, as real as the electricity that makes the world go round. Where divine omnipotence is most directly involved, Thomas Aquinas tells us, is not in the miracle, but in creation and in the work of justification, the giving of grace, the "new creation." Aquinas also says that in real terms, grace and glory are the same thing. "Grace is the beginning and the pledge of glory in us" (*S.Th. II-II*, 24, 3 ad 3) whereas glory is "consummated grace" (*De Veritate*, 27, 5 ad 8). The English Oratorian Frederick W. Faber in his work *The Foot of the Cross* (London 1858, 24) says that "Grace is not a different thing from glory. It is only glory in exile, while glory is but grace at home." Glory may be considered as the definitive, visible, luminous flourishing or blossoming of the life of God in humans: it is *grace at home*, eternal life (see my work *Christ our Hope*, Washington D.C. 2011).

This explanation helps us understand that grace cannot be reduced to a simple form of contingent divine help meant to avoid or overcome sin. It is much more than that: grace already contains eternal life, communion with the Trinity, it is the seed of a divine promise that will blossom and last forever, because divine filiation reaches out for its reward, for the inheritance. We can say therefore that the principal purpose of grace is eternal salvation, not upright ethical behavior. Of course the behavior of those in grace is anything but indifferent. It is essential to salvation and for this reason humans stand in need of divine help, but at a deeper level, for true ethical life is the *fruit* of saving grace.

The eschatological purpose of Christian grace in glory allows us to appreciate two fundamental and inseparable aspects of grace itself: its realism and its hidden or enigmatic character. In effect, the life of the Christian is "hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3). It is marked by what we might call an "eschatological reserve": it is situated in the human space, but is open to development, to growth in the interiorizing of faith, of hope, and of charity, and it is marked by the *chiaroscuro* of history and human freedom. The promise of glory informs human life to the core, but does not resolve each and every problem that arises along the way. Christians do not *see* grace, and they do not perceive divine life in itself, "for we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7). Christians *believe* in the life of grace and *hope* in its future blossoming. That is the first aspect. The second lies in the fact that within the space opened by the divine promise in human existence, we are offered the risk and opportunity of living out the love-adventure of

Christian life with energy and personal generosity, in the practice of Christian *charity*.

2. Mary, "full of grace," prototype of humanity

Christians have always recognized the singular and exceptional features of the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary among all believers. And rightly so. She is the only one to have been conceived without the stain of sin; the first to have believed fully in Christ, in his divine identity and mission, thus becoming the mother of the Redeemer though conserving her own virginity; she accompanied the mission of Jesus and of the early Church in a special way; she was assumed into heaven at the end of her earthly life, and there she intercedes for all the faithful and partakes in the heavenly liturgy in a special way, being placed above all the angels, as their queen and that of the whole universe. At the moment of the annunciation to Mary, the angel proclaimed her true identity, addressing her as the one who is "full of grace" (Lk 1:28) for all generations of believers.

Still, we might easily get the impression that the privileged and exceptional situation that marked the life of Mary would end up separating her from the rest of humanity, giving the impression of her being far from the lot of common mortals, perched on an unreachable pedestal. In other words, Mary might be considered the "full of grace," but not the prototype of humanity, not a necessary point of reference for Christian anthropology. It might seem that she, exempted from the stain of original and personal sin, from the common concupiscence of the human race, does not truly share the situation of the ordinary human being: thus she should not be considered a model or representative of the Christian or of humanity.

Nonetheless, the Church has insisted frequently in recent decades on the idea that Our Lady is not only an *icon of God's grace*, but also the *perfect model* of Christian and human life. Indeed, it may be said that it is precisely as "full of grace" that she is to be considered model of redeemed humanity. This idea has been developed in a special way in Vatican II's *Lumen gentium*, in Paul VI's *Marialis cultus* (1974) and in John Paul II's *Redemptoris mater* (1987). In *Lumen gentium* we read,

> In the mystery of the Church, which is itself rightly called mother and virgin, the Blessed Virgin stands out in eminent and singular fashion as exemplar both of virgin and mother… In the most Blessed Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (63 & 65).

And Pope Paul VI in a homily (15.8.1966) has it that:

> Faced with the incalculable expectancies of the human heart, in drama and torment, the Church invites us to look at the Mother, the One who impersonates truly the original, authentic idea of what man is, image of God.

The mission of the Church, says John Paul II (*Discourse*, 22.12.1987), "does not look to anything else except to form the Church in that ideal of holiness which is already formed and prefigured in Mary." The principle formulated by Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes*, 22, "Christ reveals man to man" is well known (see § 6). But John Paul goes further, and applies the principle besides, in a derived way, to Mary (*Mulieris dignitatem*, 2). This means at heart that Christian anthropology is essentially a Marian anthropology.

All in all we may say that theological anthropology finds its fulfillment in the vocation, life, and mission of Our Lady. This is so in three ways.

In the first place, Mary, in her life, in her action, and in the divine mystery of her privileges, shows what God wanted humans to be from the very beginning of creation. Eschatological perfection is found in her to some degree already in this life. In her, say the early Fathers of the Church, God has revealed the "new Eve," that is the person whom he wanted humans to be like from the very beginning. According to Réné Laurentin, "Eve was a first anthropological sketch of the woman… Mary is the restoration and perfection of the failed project." And Dante Alighieri in his *Paradise* (32:86) says that Mary is "the face that is most like the face of Jesus." She is the maximum expression of humanity, he says in the same work (33:19-21): "in you there is mercy, in you piety, in you magnificence, in you is gathered up anything good there is in to be found in creatures."

It is clear at the same time that the original holiness of Mary does not make her less human than fallen human beings. In her holiness we can see that sin is not a part of God's original plan for humanity. In fact, the transgression of divine law and perseverance in sin do not make us more human in any way. Quite the contrary: sin destroys humanity, it separates us from God, it splits up human relationships, it leads us towards death, it turns us against the created world. Precisely on account of her *holiness*, of her fullness of grace, of her union with God, Mary is "more human" than

anybody else, except of course for her Son, *perfectus homo*, and source of all holiness. St Josemaría writes in *Furrow* 443,

> ‘A great sign appeared in Heaven: a woman adorned with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars about her head’ (Rev 12:1). From this, you and I and everyone may be sure that nothing perfects our personality so much as correspondence with grace.

Besides, as John Paul II explains throughout *Redemptoris mater*, Mary is exemplar and a point of reference for humanity on account of the faith with which she received the call of the Lord, becoming in that way Mother of God and carrier of the redeemer. Her charity and fortitude are revealed in her virginity, in the maternal solicitude with which she cares for humans, and also in her fidelity at the foot of the Cross, as her Son was dying. We have already made mention of the idea that the virginity of Mary accounts for a central thesis of Christianity: that we are in the first place children of God and only in a derived way children of a man, or of a woman. The Assumption of Mary into heaven shows that death and bodily corruption do not belong to God’s original design for humanity, destined for bodily immortality. Death entered the world, in fact, on account of sin, and Mary is the only one truly immune from dying, for the simple reason that she was not stained by sin of any kind. In *Lumen gentium* (68) we read,

> The Mother of Jesus in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise she shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim people of God.

In this “singularity” of our Lady, a singularity of grace and moral perfection, is revealed humanity in its need to be saved; to contemplate her enkindles a powerful nostalgia for the original lost purity, made available anew. Mary helps us to understand that the present situation of humanity does not correspond fully to God’s will. At the same time, she is placed before us as an icon of human perfection, fruit of divine grace abundantly poured out on her, and by her generously accepted. This produces in us the consoling hope of reaching holiness one day. She reminds humans what it is possible to become. In effect, the Church contemplates Mary with admiration and hope: *tota pulchra es tu Maria, et non est macula in te*, “you are all beautiful, Mary, and there is no stain of sin in you,” we pray in the

liturgy of the Immaculate Conception. She is the *spes nostra* and *causa nostrae laetitiae*, "our hope," "cause of our joy."

Secondly, we have seen that Mary received abundant gifts from God. And this could make us think that she has been placed way above us, beyond the common human condition, on an inaccessible pedestal. Abundance of grace would have given her an extraordinary facility and naturalness in living according to God's word with sublime faith, hope, and charity. Still, the following should be kept in mind. As we saw earlier on, the purpose of grace is not primarily one of facilitating Christian life, but rather of making the entire life of Christ present in believers, and thus fully pleasing to God. Thus Christian life is meaningful but not always easy. In fact an important part of Christian existence is occupied by the experience of the cross. Simeon predicted this openly for Our Lady: "and a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (Lk 2:35); besides, she suffered unimaginably at the foot of the cross as her Son was dying (Jn 19:25-27). In Mary, more than in anyone else, we can see how the abundance of divine grace goes side by side with the dark night of the soul. St Josemaría observes in *Christ is passing by* (172), "don't forget: if God exalted his Mother, it is equally true that he did not spare her pain, exhaustion in her work or trials [orig. *chiaroscuro*] of her faith."

God did not spare Our Lady suffering or pain or misunderstandings of all kinds. It was her very mission as mother of God and of Christians, a direct consequence of the fullness of grace accepted by faith, that brought her closer than anyone else to sinful humanity, more than the 'good Samaritan' (Lk 10:30-37), to the "existential peripheries," if we may employ an expression frequently used by Pope Francis. She is the mother of the Redeemer, and at the same time mother of the redeemed. Thus she shares, thanks to a deep spiritual solidarity, in the destiny and disgrace and dishonor of the whole of sinful humanity. Mary did not suffer the limits and wretchedness of the human condition as the result of personally committed sin. Still, in becoming the mother of God and our mother, she suffered out of love, with the solicitude of a mother, what we suffer by inheritance. It is a paradox: the very fullness of grace in Our Lady, that is her charity, is what brought her closer to humanity, turning her into the closest of all human beings. In her humanity finds only motives for hope: Mary is one of our race—she is "Eve"—but she is not a sinner as we are. In this way she shows

in her life the efficacy of the grace of God that overcomes sin, becoming "the new and definitive Eve."

And in the third place, finally, Mary, the full of grace, shows us a "new humanity," precisely as a woman, living her feminine self as mother and as virgin. Mary carries out her own unique mission in an exquisitely feminine and motherly way, that is in "in a painful struggle of interiorizing, of patience, of waiting, of contemplation," in the words of Bertola. In *Lumen gentium* (65), analogously, we read, "the Virgin has been a model of that motherly love with which all who join in the Church's apostolic mission for the regeneration of mankind should be animated."

Christian Anthropology

This third section of the text (§§ 27-40) will deal with what it means to be human *in the light of Christian faith*, or, more concretely, in the light of saving grace, in the light of the Person, life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. This section will consider a series of issues that, besides involving Christian revelation, are also the object of philosophical and scientific inquiry. We shall attempt to provide a Christian response to the great issues humans formulate concerning their lives and existence in the light of faith and spiritual experience.

Of course divine grace regenerates the human being, purifies and prepares it for filial and perpetual communion with the Trinity. Besides, grace presupposes the existence of the human subject. Yet revelation and grace illuminate the nature and narrative of each human being. As Maximus the Confessor in his *Epistula* 24 says of the life of grace: "on account of divinization all things exist and have stability and are created." In effect created reality is shown forth in its fulness and beauty only in the light of grace which purifies and elevates and brings it to fulfillment, without destroying or substituting it.

In the light of divine grace, sin is seen to be a breaking up of our relationship with God (§ 9); humans perceive that they are made in his image, which is the point of departure for filial elevation (§ 14); human freedom is understood in the context of the reception (or rejection) of divine gifts (§§ 23-25); history and temporality as the human space that allows both for God's action and human response within time; human sociality as a form of mediation employed by God to communicate his gifts (§ 25); human work as an ambit in which God's power is made present in the world with a view to definitively establishing his sovereignty over the whole of creation (§ 25, 3); and, finally, the concept of the human person, which may be understood fully only on the basis of the unconditioned, Trinitarian love with which God created humans and called them to holiness and glory (§ 11). All these aspects of being human, of course, are susceptible and accessible to philosophical and scientific reflection (§ 4-5). Yet the light of faith illumines the more paradoxical and hidden aspects of human life to the core. For this reason von Balthasar in his *Theo-drama* (vol. 2, 343) concludes that "no other, mythical or religio-philosophical anthropology, can attain a satisfactory idea of man, an idea that integrates all the elements, but the Christian one."

It would be mistaken to hold that Christian faith simply offers a series of solutions to the apparently insoluble problems that arise in the ambit of philosophy or science, like a knight in shining armor who saves the day at the last moment. For revelation not only explains and clarifies what has been heretofore misunderstood; it also provokes, asking questions that had not been raised before. By way of example, Greek philosophers never had to deal with the doctrine of the Trinity, in which three persons share in a single nature, nor with that of Christology, in which one Person lived and acted in two natures. Neither was the notion of personhood and individuality at their center of their speculation. These originally revealed novelties opened a wide field for philosophical thinking, inviting a previously domesticated rational mind to stretch beyond all known limits. The same may be said of other aspects of anthropology. Revelation, and especially the action of grace in the depths of human nature, put the human subject into a situation of crisis, and contributed towards overcoming the opposed polarities that mark human existence.

Before examining these issues, it should be noted that a kind of tension does remain between the life of grace and human nature, between the supernatural and the natural, between the sphere of theology and that of science and philosophy. They are not the same thing. And the reason why we can say so is because even in the absence of the life of grace we still remain fully human. We can lose grace without losing our humanity. The coming chapter (§ 27) will attempt to present the principal efforts made in the history of theology to clarify the issue, and will serve as a 'hinge chapter' to connect the study of grace with that of anthropology in the strict sense.

After that we shall look into the different aspects of the Christian reflection on humans as *a union of body and soul* (§§ 28-29); as *a free being* (§§ 30-31); as a *temporal and historical being* (§ 32); as *a social being* (§§ 33-34); as *a sexual being* (§§ 35-36); as *a working being* (§§ 37-38); and as *a person* (§§ 39-40).

27. The natural and the Supernatural (CGW 387-405)

John's gospel teaches us that through faith in Christ humans become carriers of a life superior to the mortal, earthly life they now live, a new, regenerated life, "eternal life." Paul also speaks of the "new creation" that is the fruit of grace. This seems to imply that the life of humans moves on two planes: life as we know it, natural, common, everyday, and spiritual life that mysteriously acts in the depths of our soul, the life of grace, "eternal life." In the words of Baumgartner, in his work *La grâce du Christ* (Tournai 1963, 24), "to live in Christ, to exist in Christ, means that the life of the Christian is a life that emanates from his or her union with Christ; he is the source of this life, its exemplar and author, on the basis of his active presence in the Christian." When we say that Christianity is the definitive religion, or that it is superior to others, this does not refer necessarily to the moral superiority of individual Christians, to their "natural" life, or even to their personal response to the divinity, but rather to the presence of God's grace in their lives. Christianity is about what God does in us, not what we do 'for' God. The natural and the supernatural may relate to one another in three possible ways.

First, in an *extrinsic* way. Grace would be considered here as a kind of superstructure artificially grafted onto human nature, a gift that is received but that might well be absent, a "gratuitous" gift, a mysterious, magical, elusive elevation or designation of the human being, something like the icing on the cake, and at heart irrelevant.

Second, in a *partial* relationship. It is frequent to focus supernatural life in the context of *healing grace* alone, a light for the intellect and impulse for the will that God gives humans in order to overcome sin. This of course is an important aspect of grace (§ 13), but such an explanation would lead sooner or later to a conflict between the natural and the supernatural. When the former is strong then the latter may be weak, and vice versa. Besides, when healing grace has done its work for those who have obtained eternal life, then grace is no longer needed. Thus grace must be understood besides in terms of *elevating grace*, divine power that lifts up nature and purifies it.

And thirdly, we may speak of an *intrinsic* relationship between the natural and the supernatural. Bernanos in his *Diary of a Country Priest* famously declared that "all is grace." And with that he seemed to be saying that since creation and grace are both works of God, they should not be separated in

any way, for they belong to one another. There is only one all-embracing divine design. There is only one order, whether we call it natural or supernatural. But then why do we retain this duality?

Nowadays the terms “natural” and “supernatural” are not particularly common in theology. They are present in Vatican II council documents however, and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Authors such as Henri de Lubac and Walter Kasper have insisted that this living duality is necessary in order to understand the proper dynamics of the Church, of society and of Christian life.

1. Historical pointers on the distinction between the natural and the supernatural

Fathers of the Church such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen speak openly about the two orders, using a variety of terms. One thing is the created world, made by God, and another thing is the living presence of God in humans he elevates to participate in his own life, as he divinizes believers. The Latin term *supernaturalis* is probably from the VI century. Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite and Scotus Eriugena used it systematically. Augustine did not employ this terminology, for his anthropology was structured on the basis of the opposition between grace and sin, not grace and nature. The Middles Ages witnessed the introduction of Aristotelian categories, among which was the notion of “human nature” as such. Understanding the life of grace in this context occasioned discussions that arose subsequently. The most important contribution to the debate was made by Thomas Aquinas, whose theology set the stage for all further debate up to the present time.

According to Aquinas, “nature” in each human being refers to the common metaphysical nucleus of beings created with intelligence and will, body and soul in the image and likeness of God. This nucleus gives them their native capacity to relate to God, and therefore to be open to the life of grace. The “supernatural” order refers to the concrete, historical realization of this native openness through the donation and reception of grace, which sanctifies and elevates and brings them to become children of God. He says three things about the relationship between the two. First, that the supernatural order is situated above and beyond the natural limits and possibilities of human nature: “grace exceeds the condition of created nature” (*S.Th. I-II*, 112, 1); in fact he goes so far as to say that the good contained in a single grace is superior to the natural good of the whole

universe. Second, the new, supernatural order is not opposed to that of nature, but rather brings it to perfection: “the supernatural does not take away nature, but rather perfects it” (*S.Th. II-II*, 188, 8). And third, he says that humans are *capax gratiae*, capable of receiving grace (*S.Th. III*, 9, 2). Let us consider the latter.

The capacity to receive grace is not to be understood in the sense of an active power like that of our eyes which makes it possible for us to see. We do not have an active capacity for grace that develops more or less inevitably. But neither is the capacity for God a purely passive one, because *grace speaks to nature* and elevates it, while at the same time nature is simply incapable of obtaining grace for itself. This is a fundamental principle. Grace elevates nature, but does not denaturalize us.

This would seem to indicate that there is a two-plane structure in humans on account of grace. But Thomas makes it quite clear that although a duality persists, there is only *one last end* for humans, the supernatural one. It is not as if the natural and the supernatural can develop and go their merry way… rather they interact with one another while retaining each one its own peculiarity. There is only one divine plan, as we saw, that involves creation, predestination, vocation, justification and glorification.

Thomas also inquires into the question of the *desire* or longing humans have for God. And he asks: is the desire for God the fruit of grace in humans, or is it rooted in human nature itself? Is it hard-wired in the original and unchangeable constitution of humans made in the image and likeness of God? According to Aquinas the desire or appetite for God is rooted in the spiritual constitution of humans, it is natural to them. He says that “every intellect naturally desires to see the divine substance” (*Contra Gentiles III*, 57, 4). As we saw, of course, this does not imply on the part of humans a positive exigency of being fulfilled. We shall return later on when considering the “natural desire to see God.”

In the XVI century Thomas de Vio Caetano, or Cajetan, attempted to clarify some of the issues that arose in the teaching of Thomas and, later on, in that of Duns Scotus. He holds that there is no natural appetite or desire in humans directed towards the beatific vision. Should there be, he says, it would have to be fulfilled always, and so the supernatural order would no longer be gratuitous. The desire to see God, Cajetan says, is exclusively the fruit of grace. Thus humans are merely passive in respect of the reception of grace; we live in a state of “pure human nature.” Another author, previous

to Cajetan, Dionysius the Carthusian, said substantially the same thing: “the natural desire does not go beyond the capacity of nature” (*De lumine christianae theoriae I*, 56). Should humans naturally desire to see God with their own energies, Dionysius and Cajetan say, they would have to be able to count infallibly on its fulfillment, and so grace would no longer be a divine gift. The position of Luther is similar, and is reflected in his conviction that human nature is corrupted by sin… this would mean of course that nature would have no particular theological value.

The topic of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural continued during the XIX and XX centuries. M.-J. Scheeben insisted on the clear separation of the two, as did the neo-Scholastics of the early 1900s. Other authors began to contest this position, denying outright that the notion of “pure nature” can be attributed to Church Fathers. Of these the best known was Henri de Lubac in his 1946 work *Surnaturel*. He re-proposes Aquinas’s position as regards the naturalness of the desire to see God. His position has been generally accepted, even though he attempted to explain things with greater precision in later writings.

2. The correspondence between desire and capacity

We saw that for Cajetan and others if we *desire* to see God and be united with him then we must count on the *capacity* to do so. And if this is the case, then grace is no longer gratuitous. But their position is based on a reading of Aristotle that Aquinas had already transcended. The cosmos works in this way: what things desire, they have the means to achieve. For example if a stone can fall it will. Its “desire” pairs off perfectly with its capacity. But this dynamic may not necessarily be applied to spiritual beings. The rule that works for stars and stones may not be applied to humans or angels, to the person. And Thomas clearly understands that certain aspects of human development are made possible through the help of another person: “it is said that a woman conceives a child naturally, but this of course is not possible without receiving the seed from her husband” (*De Veritate*, 24, 10 ad 1). Humans may desire to have things (such as union with God) they are incapable of obtaining by their own powers. So humans may desire to see God, but are absolutely dependent on him giving concrete fulfillment to that desire through grace. In doing this God of course is not treating his creatures inappropriately, arbitrarily, because he is faithful to his promises. Thus the principle stated by Dionysius the Carthusian and

repeated by Cajetan is inapplicable to the human situation and does little justice to the Christian reading Thomas makes of Aristotle.

But how does this natural desire to see God work in the lives of Christians and those who are not? Certainly the saints, whose lives are deeply penetrated by God's grace, consciously desire to see God more and more during their pilgrim journey on earth. "My eyes are ever toward the Lord" (Ps 25:15). "My heart says to you, 'I seek your face, o Lord.' Do not hide your face from me" (Ps 27:8). "I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God" (Ps 69:3; 1 Cor 13:12; Phil 1:23). Sinners on the other hand seek out the darkness to hide their sin, angrily fleeing from the face of God. "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps 14:1). But in real terms the sinner is fleeing from the God to whom he is attracted by the light of his conscience that seeks him out and attempts to bring about conversion. This impulse, however, is present in every person. Openness to God, the capacity to see him, the desire to open ourselves to the whole truth, is present in every person, at least at an athematic level, perhaps weakly and feebly, but certainly. As time goes by in the life of a Christian, the knowledge of God and desire for him can become more and more thematic, intense and efficacious with the help of divine grace. But if there were no initial natural openness in the human spirit to God, eventual reception of the divine could only be the result of pure faith (fideism). It would be simple, irrational, inhuman jump in the dark. As a result, the act of faith would have no moral connotation and could make no appeal to conscience. Christian evangelization would constitute simply an act of arbitrary violence towards and disrespect for humanity.

Students of Thomas Aquinas (for example Sylvester of Ferrara and Francisco Suárez) have distinguished between an "innate desire" and an "elicit desire" in humans. The former is occasioned by objects proportionate to their nature: we have an innate desire for food or rest. Likewise, a stone possesses the "innate desire" to fall. But this cannot be referred to our desire for God, who is not a "being" like other beings, for other reasons because it would involve a necessary union with him. The elicit desire derives from the knowledge either of the works of God or the metaphysical limits of the created human condition. In effect, in recognizing their limits as creatures before the Creator, humans can desire to go beyond them, thus willingly

directing their lives to the one who created them. Thus the “elicit desire” is occasioned by the *indirect* knowledge we have of God through creatures.

3. The “pressure” of the supernatural on the natural

Summing up what has been said in this chapter we may say that the natural and the supernatural coincide in the indivisible simplicity of the divine essence. Yet they encounter one another deeply in the concrete person who believes. After all, whereas God is simple, the human being is not. There is a distinction between our created nature, and our redeemed super-nature. The natural tends towards the supernatural, but does not contain it. Nature is not grace, though it contains to some degree the logic of grace, because it is a created gift of God. Between the two orders there is a distinction but not a separation, and much less an independent existence or opposition. Perhaps we may say there is a living polarity, that reflects other fundamental polarities that mark the Christian economy: Church and state; Christianity and world; growth of the kingdom of God and human progress, and so on. In a general sense we may say that supernatural life “pressurizes” natural life, informing it, illuminating it, purifying it, elevating it, filling it with joy, love and liberty, challenging it, “seducing” humans in the sense used by Augustine when he spoke of God’s grace as *suavitas amoris*. While avoiding an identification of grace with nature (and the integralist vision of human life, ethics and political action that easily derives from this), divine grace may be seen as a kind of “pressurizing” of human nature, while bringing out the best in it.

In the coming chapters we shall consider several aspects of the natural constitution of humanity in the light of divine grace according to the logic of the distinction and union between the natural and supernatural orders.

28. The union of body and soul: Scriptural, Patristic and Medieval Presentations (CGW 406-423)

So far we have spoken of human beings as persons, as a simple unity. However, from time immemorial students of anthropology—whether scientists, philosophers or theologians—have posited an important duality within human nature, between soul and body, spirit and matter, mind and brain, subject and object, thoughts and things… or whatever. In these chapters we shall consider the different attempts made to explain the statute and relationship between the soul and body. They are four in number: in Greek philosophy (marked to an important degree by dualism); then in Scripture, in Church Fathers, medieval thinkers and Church teaching (all of which insist on the unity of the human composite); subsequently in the modern period (which attempts to re-establish a dualistic view of man); and inseparably in the contemporary scientific debate on the origins of humans, evolution and "hominization" (which insists, not out of keeping with Scripture and Church tradition, on the profound unity of body and soul that goes to make up the human being).

1. The soul and the body in Greek antiquity

The term "soul" (*psychē*) is an ancient one, that arose in an ethical and religious context rather than a physical and cosmic one. For the Presocratics, the soul is the center of the human being, the source of intuition and mystical experience. There is a significant commonality between "soul" and terms designating air, breath, wind, life and fire. The soul is considered the source of life. Ancient philosophers spoke often of the cosmos itself enlivened by an *anima mundi*, a world soul. Two fundamental understandings of the term consolidated among the Greeks: some spoke of the soul as the seat of true human identity, and its union with the body in clearly dualistic terms (Plato, principally); and others, taking a more rational and empirical approach, developed an understanding of the human being as a "substantial unity" of body and soul (especially Aristotle). The same two tendencies have arisen time and again throughout the history of anthropology.

Plato considers human souls to be of celestial origin, particles broken off the infinite spirit that enter material bodies in order to breathe. Given their heavenly origin, souls, if they behave correctly, will be purified and reintegrated into their primitive spiritual source, leaving behind the material

body which existed for the express purpose of their purification. If they misbehave, they will reincarnate in different bodies for as long as necessary to obtain purification (the technical term is *metempsychosis*). Of the soul Plato says (1) that it is the "principle of life," moving of itself and for itself… thus it is present not only in humans but also in the stars, the sun and the earth; (2) it is immaterial, for it is destined to thought and to the intelligible world, and contains three parts, the rational, the passional, and the concupiscible; (3) the passional and concupiscible parts are mortal whereas the rational soul is immortal and eternal. "Of all the things man possesses, his soul is the closest to the gods, and its properties are most divine and true" (*Laws*, 726a).

Plato's ideas have been taken up frequently throughout the history of philosophy, especially in the different Platonic schools. Likewise by the Stoics. Seneca takes it that "the body is a weight and chastisement for this soul" (*Epistula* 120:14). The position has been enormously influential over the centuries, in part because of its continuity with Eastern religious forms, in part because of its ethical and religious thrust. However the Platonic view of the soul is dogged by its inherent dualism and the scarce attention it pays to the human body, to matter, and to the findings of science. Aristotle pays much more attention to the latter.

Aristotle's understanding of the soul in its relationship to the body may be found in his work *De anima*, deeply influenced by his scientific findings and his conviction in respect of what is called the 'psychosomatic' unity of the human being. This means the soul is directly united with the body as its "substantial form." The soul is not a separate being from the body, but its form. Not unlike Plato, Aristotle distinguishes between the vegetative soul, the principle of nutritive, growth and reproductive actions; the sensitive soul, origin of knowledge, appetite and the senses; and the *rational soul*, the principle of rational knowledge. It is not clear whether or not Aristotle teaches the immortality of the individual soul; several of his commentators hold that we all share in a single, unifying separate substance, called the "agent intellect." It would seem therefore that Aristotle teaches the immortality of the human collectivity, but not of each individual. This is unacceptable from the Christian standpoint.

It is clear that for Plato reflection on the soul and body is determined by a religious ethics that leads people to immortality in the afterlife after death understood as a liberation from the weight of the body. For Aristotle on the

contrary, the soul and its relationship to the body is focussed in a metaphysical and empirical way, the human spirit is bound intrinsically to the sensitive and material world, and death seems to involve the destruction of individual life. This dilemma is dealt with in depth in Judeo-Christian revelation.

2. Human nature in Scripture

Scripture does not contain a systematic anthropology. When Scripture speaks of humans it uses a series of terms which, however, may not be considered as separable "parts" of the human composite. Three of them, closely bound up with one another, are particularly relevant: *basar*, that is "flesh," used over 270 times in the Old Testament; *nefesh*, equivalent to "soul," used about 750 times; and *ruah*, or "spirit," used about 380 times. Two other terms are also used: *lēb* (heart) and *refa'im* (the dead, the shades).

The first three describe the entire human being with different nuances: *basar* emphasizes weakness, corruptibility and dependency, *nefesh* indicates individual vitality, while *ruah* speaks of the divine source of the living being. *Basar* evokes weakness and mortality, is often used to indicate a blood relationship between people (who are "of one flesh"), and expresses the contrast between the creator and the contingent creature. It is usually translated as *sarx* in the New Testament, which often expresses what is opposed to God. *Nefesh* or soul is that which "breathes," and is associated with the life principle of blood. It designates life in general, and is less closely associated to Plato's *psychē*, even though the latter term is used frequently in the New Testament. *Ruah* is the spirit that comes from God, again closely associated with breath or breeze. By the *ruah* God gives life to humans and communicates with them. In the Septuagint and New Testament the term is usually rendered as *pneuma*, or spirit.

Thus Scripture seems to propose a kind of tripartite anthropology: humans are living flesh, *basar*, with a vitality, *nefesh*, that is the fruit of the divine breath, *ruah*. Though this does not involve a philosophically precise anthropology, two notions are clearly expressed: the unitary character of the human being; and the deep relationship of humans with the world, with other humans, and with God.

The term *lēb*, heart, is also very important in the Old Testament. Sensitive, affective, voluntary and inaccessible actions are said to be rooted in the heart. The heart is the organ of identity both of the individual and of the

people. In it is situated the memory of the great works of God that should be handed on to future generations. In the words of Eichrodt in his *Theology of the Old Testament* (London 1967, vol. 2, 143f.), *lēb* "is a comprehensive term for the personality as a whole, its inner life, its character. It is the conscious and deliberate spiritual activity of the self-contained human ego." The Old Testament speaks also of *refa'im*, literally the shades, that is the dead. They are the part of the human being that "survives" in the *she'ol*, or underworld. The term is normally used in the plural, as a collective term, for the quality of life in the underworld is low: the *refa'im* cannot praise God, they do not know what happens on earth.

3. The soul and the body in Church Fathers, Church teaching and medieval theology

Christians in the early centuries payed more attention to Platonic than to Aristotelian philosophy, for it provided a clearer explanation of immortality and the next life, which was considered to be the basis of human dignity, and provided a better focus on upright human behavior, spirituality and asceticism. Less attention was paid to Aristotelianism which saw the world in terms of an unbreakable bond between soul and body, and affirmed the social and secular character of human life.

However Christian authors carefully avoided dualism. A strict body-soul dualism would involve a double origin for the universe, unthinkable in a Judeo-Christian monotheistic context. God created matter and the body just as he did spirit and the soul. The point of reference for this is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and its logical outcome, the final, universal resurrection of humans at the end of time: the ultimate destiny of humans involves the unity of body and soul. Earlier on (§ 8, 2) we saw different ways in which this is explained by Church Fathers: some of them speak of the unity between body and soul, others of the net superiority of the soul. However one and all recognized the value of matter, created by God *ex nihilo*, and rejected the Platonic idea of the preexistence of souls (defended by Origen). In fact Augustine in his *Sermo 154*, 10:15, says "it would be false to say that man consists of the mind [*nous, mens*], and then go on to say that what is in the flesh is not human."

In the context of Gnostic and Manichaean teachings, the Church in different synods, councils and Papal declarations, spoke quite a lot about the realism of the body and the soul, as well as their union and distinction. This was based on a series of fundamental Christian doctrines: (1) the creation of

the whole world, spirit and matter, by God; (2) the Incarnation of the Word, that God himself became *sarx*, flesh; (3) the sacramental economy according to which God communicates grace through material elements, and (4) the doctrine of final resurrection, as we just saw. As a result the Church teaches that the soul is not a part of God, nor an emanation of the divinity, but is, rather, created by God directly and without intermediaries, "out of nothing." Souls do not exist *ab aeterno*, from all eternity, nor are they enclosed in mortal bodies as a punishment for sin. Likewise the Church professed the original goodness of matter, of the body and the world, as true creatures of God, rejecting besides the Gnostic error in respect of the perversity of marriage and procreation.

The anthropology typical of the theology of the Middle Ages shifts from Platonic categories to Aristotelian ones. Granted, the early Middle Ages, with Bernard, Bonaventure, Hugh of St Victor and others, still draws on Platonism, as does Thomas Aquinas to some degree. Body and soul are considered complete substances, accidentally united with one another, and so the separated soul may be considered a person in its own right. As a result, final resurrection is of little theological import. The decisive twist may be found in the reflection of Thomas Aquinas, who takes on the Aristotelian notion of the soul as the "form" of the body. This means that the soul's essential function is that of informing matter and making the body truly human. As a result the soul without its body is not truly a human subject, a person, because it is lacking in a critical aspect of its perfection.

Thomas says that the soul is the form of the body because of the kind of substance it is (by "substance" he means something that exists *per se*). It is neither a pure spirit nor a separated substance, but rather an intellectual substance that informs, shapes or configures the body. Besides, since it includes no materiality in its own structure, the soul is simple and incorruptible; the soul communicates being to the body at the level of formal, not efficient, causality. In brief terms, the explanation he gives is as follows: (1) the rational soul is the form of the body not through its potencies and capacities, but by its very essence; though the soul is subsistent, it is proper for it to "inform" the body, and the soul stands in need of the body for its own perfection; (2) the rational soul is the only form of the human body, containing at the same time vegetative, sensitive and rational functions… thus there are no connecting intermediaries between body and soul; (3) the soul is metaphysically but not temporarily

prior to the body: “the body receives being from the soul; thus the human soul communicates to the body the being in which it subsists; therefore when the body is removed the soul remains” (*De anima*, 14 ad 10); and (4) the separated soul may be considered human but is not simply identifiable with the human being, a “person”; after death it retains a natural bond or tension (*commensuratio*) with its own body, a tension that will be overcome at final resurrection.

29. The union of body and soul: from the Middle Ages to modern Philosophy and Science (CGW 423-441)

1. Reactions to the anthropology of Thomas Aquinas

Two aspects of Aquinas's anthropology were contested after his death in 1274. First of all that of the unicity of the human soul. Certain authors (for example Pier di Giovanni Olivi), more in line with Plato, proposed there were three distinct souls in humans, the vegetative, the animal and the rational (this is usually called the "polymorphic hypothesis," from the Greek *morphe*, or form). Of course this theory was not in a position to explain the fundamental unity of the human person, a point Aquinas considered as capital. Each person would end up becoming several distinct substances juxtaposed to one another and connected only indirectly with the body.

Others philosophers, however, began to re-state Thomas's position of the soul as the only form of the body. This position was assumed, substantially, at the Council of Vienne in 1312, which states that "the substance of the rational soul truly, of itself and essentially, is the form of the human body" (DH 902). Interestingly, the point of departure for the teaching was Christological in character: the same decree taught, against Olivi, that the unity/oneness of the saving humanity of Christ is what points to and underpins the substantial unity of human beings in general (DH 900). The Word was united to the whole human being, body and soul, and not to the body *through* the soul. Thus we truly say 'the Word became flesh.'

The second contestation of Thomas's anthropology involved the statute of the separated soul. He was keenly aware that after death the separated soul does not fulfill its essential purpose, that of "in-forming" the body. Authors such as Peter Pomponazzi began to re-propose the classical position of the Arabic commentators of Aristotle to the effect that the human soul is not an individual entity, but rather one that is common for all humans. This amounted to an denial of individual immortality, a position Aquinas decisively eschews, for example when he states in *S.Th. I*, 76, 1, *hic homo intelligit*, "this man thinks." Lateran Council V, in 1513, rejected, with the approval of Pope Leo X, the proposition that "the human soul is mortal or that it is one for all humans" (DH 1440).

In principle, the teaching of Protestant reformers, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and others, differed little from what was commonly taught during the Middle Ages as regards the union between body and soul. Yet under the

influence of nominalism and Augustinianism, a subtle change began to take place. It was no longer accepted that the immortal existence and spiritual nature of the soul could be arrived at by rational deduction, through philosophy. They can only be known through faith, it was said. Pomponazzi and Cajetan were of the same mind. Immortality was no longer considered a "natural" quality of the human soul, but rather a gift of divine grace, deducible only on the basis of revelation and faith. And of course the rational explanation of human dignity—based on the philosophical explanation of the spirituality of the soul—is emptied, and we are left with a purely fideistic affirmation of human spirituality. Interestingly, Lateran V insisted on the value of rational proofs for the soul's existence and spirituality (DH 1440), as would Vatican Council I did with respect to the existence and attributes of God.

2. Subjectivity and the modern understanding of the human composite

The existence, subsistence and immortality of the human soul became, after the existence of God, the principal, unquestioned "article of faith" of the early modern period. However the soul was considered not so much in metaphysical but in subjectivistic terms, as the locus of human thought and consciousness. Whereas Middle Ages authors were interested in the *ens creatum*, the created being in its ontic objectivity, modern philosophers consider being in the context of humans who think, represent and produce. However two different approaches are taken to the soul and its relation to the body, called *dualism* and *monism*.

The XVII century philosopher René Descartes attempted to obtain complete certainty in respect of man and the world on the basis of a "clear and distinct idea." "I can be sure of nothing," he said, "but that I think." And as a result, he concluded, *cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." The fact that I think convinces me I exist. The soul for Descartes is thinking subjectivity, self-thinking self, and its existence is as obvious as the fact we think. Thought and the soul, he observes, are clearly distinct from the body and its activity. Thus humans are composed of two parts, connected with one another, but not formally coincident: the *res extensa* (the body) and the *res cogitans* (the soul). "I have a body to which I am closely united," he says (*Meditationes VI*). His position is clearly dualistic, and was very influential both on modern philosophy (for example that of Malebranche, Spinoza, Leibniz etc.), and also on the spirit of separation that marked modern science as it shifted away from interest in the soul and the life of

the spirit. In other words, Cartesian dualism sooner or later opened up the way to secularization. Kant however did insist on the metaphysical side of the soul, and explained that were there no such thing as the human soul, it would be impossible to develop a consistent ethical system. The soul, he concludes, “is a postulate of practical reason.” It is interesting to note, however, that Kant considers resurrection—which makes ultimate sense out of the union between body and soul—to be of no interest whatever.

The monistic position arose on the one hand from traditional dualism, which never quite disappeared from philosophical thought, and on the other, from the subjectivization of the spirit, and the eventual denial of the soul as a metaphysical co-principle. The XVIII century philosopher David Hume, in open opposition to Descartes, argued that human selfhood is but a “bundle of perceptions.” In other words, consciousness derives from the presence of objects perceived but not from a pre-existent spiritual soul. He does not deny the soul’s existence, but just says there is no way to prove it exists. In a like fashion, William James took on an open materialism, concluding that the soul does not exist, but is merely a coming together of psychic phenomena. Likewise, Bertrand Russell would graphically describe the spirit as “matter in the gaseous state.”

These positions were confirmed by the development of experimental psychologies, those of Freud, Jung and Adler. All of them, however, took much interest in psychologies “of the deep,” or of the unconscious, and came to appreciate that the life of the spirit may not be identified simply with conscious thought, as Descartes argued. The mind has a life of its own rooted in something deeper than conscious thought. This “depth” was already present in the thought of Augustine and Bonaventure and confirmed the real (and not only conscious) existence of the spirit. Paradoxically this amounts to a confirmation of a more metaphysical view of the soul. For Freud and others of course the “soul” remains entirely self-referential, unrelated to God or religion, in such a way that psychology and psychiatry are often considered to take the place of the spiritual life and redemption.

Some XX century authors of the phenomenological school, such as Edmund Husserl, attempted to go beyond a merely scientific or descriptive psychology with a view to establishing an *ontology* of the spirit. But on the whole the materialistic explanations of the human psyche prevailed. The “soul” be just a kind of epiphenomenon or product of matter, as Marx and Engels held.

3. Soul and body in modern science

An important moment in the scientific development of modern anthropology is the publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin's famous work *The Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection.* Humans were presented as a more evolved form of primates. In fact, we are told, they may well have evolved ultimately from even lower forms of life. Of course this would render superfluous the hypothesis of a spiritual soul, created by God and infused into humans. Some Christian authors came up with a "transformist" hypothesis according to which—it is said—the body derives from non-humans and the soul is created directly by God. This would seem to simplify things a lot: science would deal with the body, philosophy and theology with the soul. However it just amounts to a new shoot in the tree of dualism that may well lead to secularization. Pope Pius XII in his 1950 encyclical *Humani generis* made it clear that the evolutionist hypothesis is not *a priori* contrary to Catholic faith (DH 3897). This teaching was made more precise by John Paul II who referred to evolution as a "theory" rather than a mere hypothesis (*Address*, 26.4.1985), and by Benedict XVI who insisted on the compatibility between the doctrine of creation and evolutionary theories (*Address*, 31.10.2008). Evolution of course is widely accepted nowadays, but the process of "hominization" is still a mystery, especially in respect of what is called the "missing link" between the spiritual and the material.

Quite clearly the study of the "soul" during the XX century has shifted towards the scientific sphere. It is held that humans are considered as highly complex machines whose laws and workings may be deduced by scientific observation of their external behavior (this is usually called "behaviorism"). It is taken for granted that man is a purely material reality; dualisms of all kinds are excluded. Of course behaviorism was severely criticized because the "mind" clearly occupied a central place in human life. But what is the relationship between the mind (the self, consciousness) and the body, or more specifically the brain? Many theories have been proposed: the theory of identity of Helmuth Feigl which teaches the real existence of the human mind in a materialistic key; that of emergentism of Mario Bunge who insisted on the difference between the brain and the mind; and the interactive dualism of Karl Popper and John Eccles who affirm the distinct existence of the mind with respect to the brain.

Theologians have also attempted to offer new proposals for hominization and mind-brain interaction, among them Karl Rahner and Wolfhart Pannenberg.

4. Conclusion

A few final observations are in order at this stage.

One point that needs to be emphasized at the end of this brief overview of the history of the human soul in its relationship with the body refers to the *knowability* of the soul, in its spirituality and immortality. In a 1979 letter on "intermediate eschatology," the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has insisted on the existence and incorruptibility of the human soul. But this is not a simple postulate of faith. Were it such, all anthropology would remain flat and insipid, open to the grossest forms of materialism, closed to God and spiritual values. Medieval philosophers paid a lot of attention to demonstrating the soul's spirituality. In fact Vatican II teaches that the human being "rightly follows the intuition of his heart when he abhors and repudiates the utter ruin and total disappearance of his own person" (GS 18).

Second, Thomas Aquinas's hylomorphic explanation of the body-soul relationship seems to be in a position to overcome the difficulties of both monistic and dualistic accounts of the rapport between body and soul. Thomas insisted besides on the individuality of each human soul, without which it would be possible to speak of the unity and nobility of the human race, but not of the dignity of each and every human individual, as well as their personal freedom and inalienable rights. Humans would be mere exemplars of the species, but not persons (§ 40).

In the third place, on the basis of the study of science, philosophy and theology we have come to speak of the need for a unifying principle of the human individual, a spiritual, "informing" center, the soul, the *anima forma corporis*. If science has insisted mainly on the psychosomatic unity of the human person, and thus the inseparability of body and soul, philosophy has favored distinguishing the body from the soul to a greater or lesser degree, with a certain cyclical tendency towards dualism. But Christian revelation has offered substantial reasons to explain the fact and the nature of the union and distinction between body and soul, with the doctrine of creation (which contains the oneness and simplicity of divine creative action), with the incarnation of the Word (since God does not act on the material sphere through the soul but in the body); and with final resurrection (which posits

the survival of the separated soul while it awaits the final and definitive union God wanted for man from the beginning).

30. The Gift of God and human freedom: History, Freedom and Determinism (CGW 442-460)

God made humans in his image and likeness (Gn 1:27). The clear consequence of this is that they are meant to exercise dominion over the earth as his representatives (§§ 7-8). Under God's ultimate sovereignty, they receive the capacity and responsibility of administering the entire material universe. People are meant to live before God and respond to the gifts they have received. Their response is personal. Thus it is free. Humans are invited to freely respond to God's gifts: this is the ultimate meaning of human freedom. Church Fathers have consistently recognized that the image of God in man is at the root of their personal free action. "Man has been given by constitution the freedom and the power to decide, like a needle in the balance, for the good given him by God," in the words of Tertullian (*Adversus Marcionem II*, 6:4f.). A similar position may be found in Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux. Thomas Aquinas in the prologue to his treatise on moral theology and anthropology (the *secunda pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*), cites an important text of John Damascene's *De fide orthodoxa II* (12), which says: "The image of God in man means intellect, free will and power over oneself." Likewise, Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes* says that freedom is considered "an exceptional sign of the divine image" in humans (17).

1. Freedom and free will

We speak of human freedom normally as a fact or situation, a physical and/or moral reality. If someone is said to be free this means they are in a position to overcome the physical or moral restrictions to their actions. The possibility of *being able to move and act freely is essential* to human life and happiness. Still, we can easily recognize that unconfined freedom is impossible for us, that reality itself limits us in all our actions. We may tend to push back against these limits, and strive to acquire an ever greater freedom. Still, the desire for an unrestrained or infinite freedom will always be illusory and impossible for humans. Ancient philosophers recognized this when they contrasted *hybris* with *nemesis* in human affairs, pride with the fall, presumption with retribution. We have to admit that our freedom is finite.

Our understanding of freedom may also be made by contrasting external circumstances and interior reality. Are we free on account of what happens

to us, of what is exterior to us? Or is it a reality that is present in our own spirit, that stems from our own inner life? The philosopher Isaiah Berlin distinguished between what he called “freedom from” and “freedom for.” The first is equivalent to freedom from restriction, from limit. But of course the question remains: what is the freedom have attained actually for? What can we do with it? What can it achieve? What is its purpose?

In this chapter and the next we shall examine three issues. First, we shall look at what some philosophers and theologians have said about freedom throughout the centuries. Second, we shall examine the dynamics of the free action from a phenomenological point of view in a Christian context. And third, we shall draw some practical consequences from the latter reflection.

2. Historical pointers to the meaning of human freedom

The Greek term for freedom is *eleutheria*, which literally means “one who belongs to the people.” A group of individuals who make up a single community are said to be a “free” people. But why would an expression such as this be applied to those who wish live without restraint? Clearly people who willingly form a group intend to deal with life as they wish… thus they are “free.” The term expresses the autonomy of the state and capacity of its citizens to self-determine. The one who is free enjoys full political rights. By definition of course the slave is not free, but is subjected unconditionally to someone else, since he belongs to them. For the Greeks, in other words, as for many other peoples, freedom was a social or political condition, not a native or natural one. People are not *born* free; rather they (or some of them) may *become* free.

Besides, at a wider level Greek cosmology is decidedly determinist. Freedom can at best be carved out, one by one, in the midst of the necessity, destiny and fate imposed by the cosmos. According to the Stoics to be free in fact means obeying the laws of nature. As Seneca said, *ducunt volentem fata, nolentem trahunt* (*Epistula* 107, 10): “destiny leads whoever is willing, and drags whoever is not.” But he also identifies freedom with *autarkeia*, which means self-sufficiency. According to the neo-Platonists, to be free means to be unencumbered, that is, to be divine, to contemplate the Divinity. When one belongs to God, then one is free, free from matter and social pressure. This position is developed especially by Philo and Plotinus, the III century philosopher. And freedom will only be contemplated, Plotinus says, when the soul is definitively liberated from the dead weight of the body.

In the New Testament the term *eleutheria* is not used in the secular sense of political freedom. Jesus unambiguously swept aside all misunderstandings here. He and his kingdom do not live by an external, social or political freedom. He made no claims to establish political freedom for his disciples. Time and again he disappointed Jewish expectations of a forthcoming political messiah. His aim was to bring people to God, to the Father, overcoming the interior slavery of sin and hypocrisy through sonship. Neither does the New Testament envisage the possibility of us doing whatever we wish with our lives. In fact it is enjoined on us that we fulfill the will of God in all things (Jn 14:15.21; 15:10). Rather the ultimate hope of Christians is "that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought to the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). And this will not take place in the world as we know it, but in the eschatological end-time. In this sense true freedom is to be found where there is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17), for "Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1). All possible forms of social freedom lead ultimately to being liberated by Christ. As a result Christians are no longer slaves, but even in their freedom are meant to be servants of Christ and of others (Mt 20,27f.). Paradoxically "the Lord's freedman" is at the same time "Christ's slave" (1 Cor 7:22).

Christians identify themselves before God with whom they establish a free, loving, child-like relationship, that is above and beyond all the relationships they may have with other people, and with society as a whole, even if they live lives of little freedom, socially or psychologically. Salvation and the ensuing union with God have become liberating for them. They are convinced that their lives and the entire cosmos are not predetermined but can be changed and improved. Thus they break with all fatalism, magic and astrology. Clement of Alexandria writes in his *Excerpta ex Theodoto* (76):

> A foreign star has risen, a new star [Jesus Christ] that breaks the old power of the constellations. It shines out with a new light that is not physical. It opens new and salutary paths. This star is the Lord, who came to the earth to guide humankind, to bring those who believe in Christ from the kingdom of *heimarmene* [necessity] to that of providence… Just as the birth of the Savior has made the power of the horoscope and necessity depart in flight, the baptism of the

> Savior has freed us from the fire of his suffering, because we all follow him.

Like Paul, Augustine understands freedom in terms of liberation by divine grace, from sin and all its consequences. The Christian is the one who has been liberated by divine justification. The very conviction that evil derives not from things (it is a *privatio boni*) but from the will of spiritual beings constitutes in itself a profound liberation for Christians, for it reminds them that they can overcome the enslaved situation they are in. Likewise Maximus the Confessor (*Ambig. In Io*., 7:42) associates human freedom with divine grace in the work of divinization.

During the Middle Ages, the principal object of reflection is rather the dynamics of *free will*, the way humans act freely in the context of reason, appetites and passions. This takes place of course on the background of the Pauline and Patristic doctrine of liberation by grace. For Anselm, in his work *De libero arbitrio*, freedom is founded on the will, and human action is determined by an end or purpose, indicated by reason and freely chosen by the will. A similar position may be found in Thomas, for whom the free act arises from *the entire human being*, and involves an encounter between reason seeking truth, and the will directed to the good.

After Thomas an important development was that of voluntarism (or nominalism) involving a clear impoverishment of the discourse on human freedom, with an exacerbation of a solitary notion of free will. Emphasis is placed on the free will alone, as pure choice, unconnected with reason, appetites and passions. The free act is a simple act of self-determination, marked by indifference, arbitrariness and contingency. It aspires to infinity, and in a sense to divinity. It is not guided or directed. Free will thus tends to become an absolute. “Freedom is a kind of indifference or contingency,” says William of Ockham (*I Sent.*, 6). Human freedom is considered to be a kind of replica of divine freedom, which is looked upon as arbitrary and contingent. Whatever God decides, whether “good” or “bad,” is right.

From the XVI century onwards, freedom plays out on center-stage. Martin Luther’s open denial of free will (if God is free, then I am not) in his work *De servo arbitrio*, occasions a counter-reaction decisively affirmative of free will (if I am free then God is not). This logic is present within the process of secularization that has been verified over recent centuries. The affirmation of human freedom seems to require the denial of God’s will, and even God’s existence. The paradox of modernity, however, is that it has

witnessed clear affirmations of the very opposite of free will, that is determinism, as well as powerful affirmations of the value of human free will. Let us consider them briefly.

3. The denial of free will: determinism

Human beings, according to the XVII century pantheistic philosopher Spinoza, are a perfect image of God insofar as they reproduce in themselves two divine attributes, thought and extension. In fact they are a part of God's own being. Clearly therefore they are not free. "Those who believe they are free are mistaken," Spinoza says, "and their opinion is due to the fact that they are aware of their actions, but not of the causes that determine their actions; that is, their idea of freedom is that they do not know the cause of their actions" (*Ethica*, prop. 11, coroll.). That is, humans think they are free but in reality they are simply ignorant. Thomas Hobbes concludes that all human actions are mechanical in character and structure, and therefore, not free. Hegel follows the line of Spinoza to the effect that what we call human freedom is simply the result of our ignorance. Darwin speaks of the necessary character of the evolutionary process and "freedom" is just a name resulting from causal combinations.

Throughout the XX century, particularly in the area of psychology and biology, it has been commonly said that humans are fundamentally determined. In spite of our personal aspirations towards freedom, we are for the most part just drawn along by inflexible, impersonal and unconscious drives. This is confirmed by the scientific study of human behavior, especially in the area of neurobiology. Behaviorists such as B. F. Skinner insist on this. In his novel *Walden Two* (Indianapolis 1976, 241f.) he says: "I deny openly that there is such a thing as human freedom. I have to deny it, because to the contrary my program would be completely absurd. You can't have a science about a subject matter which hops capriciously about. Perhaps we can never prove that man isn't free; it's an assumption. But the growing outcome of the science of behavior makes it more and more plausible."

Many contemporary neurobiologists hold likewise that human free will is but apparent. We are not truly free but at best aspire to freedom. Experiments made by Benjamin Libet, Patrick Haggard and others, seem to show that the "conscious" (and thus "free") decision to react to a particular stimulus is seen to be *preceded* by a previous cerebral activation. Haggard

says that “we have the sensation of choosing, but in reality this is not the case.”

Whereas the Greeks hold that human life was controlled on a grand scale by the deterministic nature of the cosmos, now this seems to be the case on a reduced scale in that we are controlled by unconscious, hidden impulses. We take it for granted that people *want* to be free, yet philosophers will tell us that this is no proof of our freedom, but just the sign of an overheated imagination. Interestingly, however, the aspiration is freedom is not universal. Many people in fact *do not want to be free*, they are happy to let their lives be organized by the powers of nature or by other people. They do not want to assume moral responsibility. “Nothing is more unbearable for humans and society than freedom,” observes one of Dostoevsky’s characters in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The Hindu writer Sri Aurobindo says: “the whole world aspires to freedom; still, each creature loves its chains.” And Paul Claudel in *Cinq grandes odes*: “My God, I am free. Free me from freedom!”

4. The modern affirmation of freedom

Most modern philosophers however insist on the realism of human freedom, which is what gives meaning to human life. “Freedom is the new religion, the religion of our time,” said the XIX century poet Heinrich Heine. Descartes insisted on it, as did Kant. Bergson says in his *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Geneva 1945, 170): “Freedom is a fact and, among the facts present to us, there is none clearer.” And Romano Guardini in *Person and Freedom*: “Freedom means belonging to oneself. I experience myself as free when I realize I belong to myself: when I realize that in acting I depend on myself, that the action does not pass through me, in that way seeking out something else, but it arises in me, and therefore it is mine in a special sense, and in it I am myself.”

Two opposed positions, therefore, have arisen during the modern period: on the one hand, a closed determinism, justified by an invasive divinity or a dominating sub-conscious or DNA; and an all-too-obvious freedom and autonomy, often justified by a desire to *flee* from divinity or from the confines of nature. What is clear, as Plotinus had already noted, is that freedom is determined theologically, for good or for ill. Hegel has the following to say about Christianity and freedom in his 1817 *Encyclopedia* (482):

> When individuals and nations have once got in their heads the abstract concept of full-blown liberty, there is nothing like it in its uncontrollable strength, just because it is the very essence of mind, and that as its very actuality. Whole continents, Africa and the East, have never had this Idea, and are without it still. The Greeks and Romans, Plato and Aristotle, even the Stoics, did not have it. On the contrary, they saw that it is only by birth (as, for example, an Athenian or Spartan citizen), or by strength of character, education, or philosophy (the sage is free even as a slave and in chains) that the human being is actually free. *It was through Christianity that this Idea came into the world.* According to Christianity, the individual as such has an infinite value as the object and aim of divine love, destined as a mind to live in an absolute relationship with God himself, and have God's mind dwelling in him: i.e., man is implicitly destined to supreme freedom.

The philosopher Kierkegaard explained that human freedom is neither absolute nor obvious, but is rooted in the individual's decision of faith before God. He deeply critiques Kant's autonomous ethics and affirms that the basis of freedom can only be the all-powerful, free God we come to know through Christian faith. This affirmation constitutes a clear rejection of the thrust of modernity, a discovery that freedom is not merely a moral autonomy, but an opening up of oneself to God's grace. The Orthodox writer Nicholas Berdjaev in *The Freedom of Spirit* (London 1935, vol. 1, 216) puts it in the following terms: "The Christian doctrine of grace constitutes the true doctrine of freedom."

Speaking of Spinoza and determinism we said that "humans think they are free but in reality they are just ignorant." Descartes on the contrary says we claim to be free because we "see" or know ourselves acting freely: "man thinks he is free, and therefore he is." To be convinced of freedom seems to be almost an incontrovertible object of *faith*: whether this be faith in God or faith in myself. However a series of XX century authors, mainly personalists, hold that human freedom may be known rationally and not only theologically, or more precisely in relationships with other people (including God). For Lévinas freedom is situated not in autonomous, uncalled-for human initiative but in the original relationship of responsibility humans have for one another. Karl Jaspers in his work *The Way to Wisdom* (New Haven 1954, 64) said that "we are aware of our

freedom when we recognize imperatives addressed to us. It is up to us whether we carry them out or evade them." The philosopher Gabriel Marcel, citing Jaspers, follows the same line. Freedom is to be found as a response to an "appeal" that being addresses to man. It consists essentially not of an *act* of free will, but rather in an act of acceptance, of reception, of consent upon being offered a gift. Thus freedom is not so much an attribute of the human individual (he does not accept that we are "born" free), but rather the way in which I open myself, I receive or accept a gift or grace from another person, which establishes a deeply lived intersubjective fullness with them. Within this "mysterious" process of giving and reception we begin to observe and be aware of being free. Marcel prefers not to say that humans are self-determined but rather that they are *sur-déterminées*, determined by what comes from above or beyond.

So it is quite clear that on no account are gift and freedom opposed to one another. Applying this principle to the Blessed Virgin, Pope Benedict XVI said,

> As we contemplate Mary, we must ask if we too wish to be open to the Lord, if we wish to offer our life as his dwelling place; or if we are afraid that the presence of God may somehow place limits on our freedom, if we wish to set aside a part of our life in such a way that it belongs only to us. Yet it is precisely God who liberates our liberty, he frees it from being closed in on itself, from the thirst for power, possessions, and domination; he opens it up to the dimension which completely fulfills it: the gift of self, of love, which in turn becomes service and sharing (*Loreto,* 10.4.2012).

5. To what degree are we determined?

Doubtless, our freedom is a limited reality, as we are determined in many ways. Scientists and philosophers know this. And as creatures it makes sense. Only God is totally free and sovereign. The Cartesian experience of "obvious" freedom is ambivalent, as neuroscience has shown. Here the problem lies the coincidence Descartes establishes between freedom and consciousness. As Marcel has shown, the dynamic of human action is more hidden, mysterious, personal, profound, subtle, than Descartes would allow, because it touches the very depths of human personhood, of being, of the subconscious, where my deepest aspirations and God's grace are fully at home. The neurobiologist Michael Gazzaniga in his work *Who's in Charge?* (New York 2011) holds that neuroscientists who consider the question of

human freedom should think of a complex net full of different interactions rather than of a series of processes working in parallel. The specific moment in which we become clear-mindedly aware of a decision, therefore, does not have all the importance attributed to it by authors such as Libet and Haggard. In other words, the moment of conscious awareness is not to be identified as the moment of freedom, as Descartes thought it was. That is because in the end, as Gazzaniga suggests, “the brain is determined, but the person is free.”

So we can say that without the offering and reception of gift (or grace) our reflection on freedom simply cannot take off. A solitary free action is simply meaningless. Our free actions derive from our whole being (Bergson said “we are free when our acts emanate from *our whole personality,* when they express it”) in relationship to other people who give and take, and fundamentally with God who is the original source of all donation. As Habermas says, humans are never free “on their own.” Likewise Marcel does not use the word “freedom” on its own, but always pairs it off with others: “freedom and fraternity,” “freedom and grace,” “freedom and existence,” “freedom and hope,” and so on.

31. The gift of God and human freedom: a Phenomenology (CGW 461-471)

1. A phenomenology of free human action

This chapter will attempt to provide a phenomenological reflection on free human action in a Christian context. Two questions will be kept in mind throughout. First, are my free actions truly my own? And second, are they relevant and influential?

There are two possible ways in which people normally say they are "free." One is that they are doing what they spontaneously want to do. They control their lives and do as they wish. Of course this common experience is compatible with a deterministic anthropology, for our actions may well be dominated and controlled by passion and hidden impulse, as many modern psychologists have held. Those who are satisfied with simply doing as they wish may be deceived by the taste of freedom without its substance. Their actions are their own, but are they influential?

The other way we commonly say we are free is when we distance themselves from a series of options among which we can choose. Freedom means simply indifference when faced with a variety of choices. This is of course a valid expression of human freedom. Interestingly, both Descartes and Marcel consider it to be the lowest possible grade of freedom. It is true that people choose, but they may achieve simply nothing with their choice, nothing new, or relevant, or enriched, or permanent, or committed. The action may be relevant, but is it their own? Does it really belong to the person?

In the coming pages we shall attempt to justify the following thesis:

> The free human act normally involves a choice between two or more options; in its materiality and immediacy it involves a choice. Yet beyond or above the choice between different particular options is situated a choice between two different planes, two ways of perceiving the good, two ways in which humans can mold and reinforce their identity: either in terms of the acceptance of reality as gift, or in terms of the rejection of reality as a gift. The possibility of a relevant exercise of human freedom or otherwise refers, therefore, sooner or later, to the ultimate source of all gifts—that is, God.

Three possible examples of this dynamic may be presented. *First*, humans choose between two things perceived as identical in goodness, for example between two equal apples. This is a free choice, but nothing substantial is

achieved by it. One has the sensation of acting freely but there is no novelty, no progress, no achievement. The fact is that a multiplicity of options gives a purely illusory sense of dominion, like Buridan's donkey, who died of hunger because it was unable to choose between two identical piles of hay. *Second*, one may choose between things that are clearly different, one better than the other, for example €10 and €1,000. There is a true choice here, but again an irrelevant one, a choice that could have easily been made by an animal or a computer or some form of artificial intelligence run on algorithms. This is the way a consequentialist ethics works.

Third, humans choose between two different things, one perceived as inferior and the other as superior, for example between bread and cake. The choice of the "inferior" object (the bread let us say for argument's sake) cannot be explained by its "inferiority," because the natural, spontaneous thing would have been to choose the "superior" object. The choice of the inferior object takes place on the basis of an ulterior motive, rationally known, a motive that goes beyond the immediate gratification of choosing the superior object. For example one might choose bread instead of cake in order to avoid tooth decay or diabetes. Many other examples could be given. Now what meaning may be read into such an action? In what way is it "free"?

A relevant free act involves a choice that goes beyond the particular options to *two different planes*, levels, or projects tied up with the concrete choices. If the choices are on a single plane (as in the first two examples) then there is no relevant free action, for nothing is produced. What makes a free act relevant is the purpose sought: the end, the plan, the scope, the incentive, with which one identifies. When humans act freely they attempt to identify themselves with a project or image that constitutes (or should constitute) or reinforces their own identity. Besides the concrete choice, they are attempting to make common cause with a project or vision envisioned but not yet achieved. They may not actually do so, but even in that way—acting badly, immorally, out of keeping with their true identity—they make a free decision, though a destructive one.

Now, what do these "planes" people choose between actually consist of? Two possible approaches may be mentioned, one Platonic (in a general sense), the other Christian.

2. Choosing between planes: Platonism and Christianity

There is a clear dual-plane structure in the Platonic world-view, between *spirit*, which is immortal and intelligible, and *matter* which is corruptible and sensitive (§ 28, 1). In each action humans are meant to consolidate their immortal, spiritual identity, but they may well do the contrary and reinforce their mortal or material identity (evil, corruption, multiplicity, the provisional). True philosophers are meant to overcome the immediate attraction of material things, which are corruptible, ephemeral and sense-bound, and latch on to what is immortal, permanent and spiritual. What is of interest here is that the dynamic and relevance of free actions is determined by *the fundamental structure of reality*, God, man, cosmos, past, present and future.

From the Christian point of view, again, believers again may choose between what is eternal and permanent and leave behind whatever is not. Christians, like Platonists, seek eternal life, and strive to “store up treasures in heaven” (Mt 6:20). However the structure of the cosmos and of human life is simply different from what Platonism holds. The world is created by God and exists as a gift entirely dependent on his benevolence. Thus Christians do not choose between spirit and matter, for both have been equally created by God. In fact what we may call “spiritual” may actually be “spiritualist” and involve a dose of proud self-affirmation, whereas matter and sensibility and passion have been created by God and may well lead us to know God’s will and do the right thing. And so Christians are meant to act and react before the world in a way determined by creation’s fundamental gift structure. Either they choose to reinforce their will for autonomous power over reality, willfully excluding God’s ultimate dominion, or their choice reflects and recognizes reality as a divine gift, thus intensifying their adoring dependency on the Creator. The free act is an act of rejecting the gift of creation, or of accepting it. In one case created beings are treated as objects to be manipulated and possessed arbitrarily; in the other case they are perceived and treated as gifts that are received, admired, understood, enjoyed, used and shared, and above all referred to God from whence they came. In one case people separate themselves from God, the giver of all gifts; in the other, they unite themselves to him in their use of creatures, thus contributing to the establishment of the dominion of God over the world. Each and every particular choice we make, no matter how concrete or “irrelevant” it is, involves the grateful acceptance of God’s gifts or their self-affirming rejection.

The discernment Christians make as they decide how to best show their gratitude to their Lord and Savior through their actions takes place in the very heart of the human being, and is called *conscience* (see GS 16-17; DH 1-3; CCC 1776-1802).

3. The implications for moral theology

But could this explanation not involve a subjective view of Christian morality? It would seem as if we can use created beings as we wish as long as we recognize and proclaim they have come from the Creator. In other words it would be enough to act with a good intention. But the explanation given above definitely involves the nature of the actions we carry out. The gratitude involved in the reception and acceptance of a gift leads us to attempt to understand the nature of the gift received. And if it is not used according to its proper nature, then *ipso facto* it has not been received and treated as a gift from God. Our gratitude to the Creator brings us to consider and contemplate the gifts we have received, understand their logic and accept them whole-heartedly. Benedict XVI put it as follows:

> In opposing their Creator people go against themselves, deny their origin and consequently their truth; and evil, with its painful chain of sorrow and death, enters the world. Moreover, all that God had created was good, indeed, very good, but after man had opted freely for falsehood rather than truth, evil entered the world (*Audience*, 6.2.2013).

By way of example, human sexuality, which is an extraordinary gift of God, needs to be exercised in a way consonant with its inner logic, in other words with what we call “natural law.” Not to do so amounts to a self-affirming rejection of one of God’s most precious gifts, the gift by which we deeply imitate the very thing in which God excels, which is the communication of life.

Two final observations may be made here.

First, that the relevance of free human actions lies not so much in the activity, in the production, in results, in making things happen, but rather in the apparently passive reception of the gift of other people, and ultimately of God. In Jane Austen’s novel *Mansfield Park* the young protagonist, Fanny Price, seems to be, with respect to the other characters in the book, a limited, passive person, submissive, oversensitive, not very creative, and unsure of herself. Paradoxically, however, in everything she does and does not do, she is the one who determines the destiny of all the other persons of

the story, many of whom have much more “personality” than she has. In such a case we could say that free action is not primarily in doing, but in accepting, in receiving. And if acceptance always requires a “yes” to the one who gives, it may often be expressed as a “no” to an immediate appeal. As the neuroscientist Vilayanur Ramachandran put it: “Our conscious minds may not have free will, but they have, certainly, a ‘free won’t’!”

The second observation refers to the weight or importance we normally attribute to human freedom, the relevance of free acts. Humans are finite beings, and their own actions, on the margin of the existence of God and that of others, are likewise finite and limited. What we do reflects what we are, and we are intrinsically finite. So why should we give such weight to free actions? But if the essence of the free action is acceptance and reception of the gift of another, and particularly a gift from God, then we can understand that a truly finite action on our part can “produce” a surprisingly infinite effect. The acceptance of the grace of justification involves, doubtless, a finite, limited, human action… but the fruit of that free action is, no more and no less, divinization, the eternal union with the infinite Godhead. Humans are given the possibility of accepting (or rejecting) the quasi-infinite gift of eternal life. In the *Magnificat* Mary not only spoke of her lowliness, her finitude, but also said that “all generations will call me blessed”, giving the reason for that: “he who is mighty has done great things for me” (Lk 1:46-56). Only in this context does it make sense to defend human freedom passionately as a great and noble aspiration, without which we cannot love God and live forever… and at the same time be ourselves.

32. The temporality and historicity of Human Beings (CGW 472-494)

We have spoken frequently in previous chapters of human nature, those aspects of human life that in principle are stable, fixed, inalterable… the physical, biological, psychological and spiritual DNA of humans, summed up in the question *what is the human being?* However, as we saw earlier on (§ 4), there is another question that expresses the identity of particular human individuals in their relationship with others and that is: *who is the human being?*, or *who are you?* Nature remains, but relationships change and shift. That is why time and history are important… they affect fundamental issues such as progress, evolution, tradition, memory, development, mobility and dynamism. But their importance depends on their relationship with nature. Nature and history pair off with one another fruitfully.

As the philosopher Luigi Pareyson says in his work *Esistenza e persona* (Genoa 1992, 198f.), "On account of his indefinite advancement man develops, but is not reduced to his history, because man has history, but is not history… Thus, to speak of the historicity of man is only possible in the sense of a programmed plasticity, in which reason is not an instrument but a norm." Nature and history are not opposed from the Christian standpoint because God created the world with established laws and perennial inclinations. And at the same time he also made change and development possible, but not according to a law of necessary progress (which would amount to a reduction of history to nature). Proof of the reality of progress and development lies in possibility of the world going into reverse, declining, deteriorating, decaying, decomposing. This is what is meant when we say that Christian anthropology is a "dramatic anthropology." It is destined to fulfillment and completeness only at the end of time, when Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead.

1. What is "history"?

The term "history" may be understood in two ways, as *event* and as *interpretation*. For an *event* to be historical three conditions must be met. *First* is that it is a free act performed by one or more individuals (§ 31). Without freedom there is no history, but simple natural development, as happens with a tree that grows, matures, decays and dies. A volcanic eruption may be very influential in the lives of people, but it is not a

historical event. Within the free act, of course, human reason is present, the mind, thought, imagination, a project, a dream. The *second* condition is that the event in question has an effect on society at large, on other people… an effect that is some ways measurable, involving a handing on, a transmission, a tradition. The *third* condition is that the event contributes to form and give shape to what we call "history" as such, that immensely vast yet strangely harmonious symphony of events and effects, accumulated over time, the ultimate result of the intersection and intermingling of nature and events, of things and persons. History, like nature, seeks out a single subject. Hegel was deeply aware of this.

But the term "history" may also be understood in another way, as *interpretation*. In effect, a reality (a thought form, a scientific theory, an artistic expression) is often called "historical" in the sense that it has consolidated at a particular moment in time, in a contingent way. So it expresses things that pass, that change, that may be superseded. Thus historicity is a mark of culture, of the structures of sin, of popular customs, of languages. In its extreme version, this is often called "historicism." When we study a written document from another period of history we attempt to understand the culture, the circumstances, the social and intellectual context of the period or place in question, in order to be able to interpret it correctly. Not to do so would be "fundamentalistic." Thus *hermeneutics*, that is the science of interpretation, is necessary because thought forms, and customs, and laws and languages are historical. According to the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer all knowledge *is* interpretation.

We may ask here: how do these two understandings of "history" relate to one another, the event and the interpretation? Simply put, the former makes the latter possible. If there were no historical events (free, efficacious and permanent) that change the course of history, then things would be now just as they always were, and there would be no need for interpretation, for hermeneutics. Truth would be as it is, eternal and immutable, and historically conditioned interpretation would become circumstantial and needless.

Let us consider three ways of interpreting history: Greek, Christian and Enlightenment.

2. The Greek view of history

The Greek vision is typical of many other cultures. It begins with the cosmos, the earth, the moon, the sun and the stars. They move in cycles, the

same things coming back again and again: days, weeks, months, years and epochs follow one another, endlessly. Humans see themselves as small and puny specks when faced with the power and vastness of the cosmos. They are convinced they are simply an insignificant part of a much bigger process. This is expressed in what is commonly called *the myth of eternal return*. We may say therefore that human history is little more than a phenomenon within the cosmos. Primacy is not occupied by the person, the individual's free actions, but by the universal, the ideal. There is nothing new under the sun (Qo 1:9).

This vision typical of the Greeks may be understood in two possible ways: in a *historiographical* way, in the sense that the *same kind* of things keeps recurring throughout time and history… which means of course that there is no such thing as history, because there is no epochal change; and in a *metaphysical* way, in the sense that the same world comes back again and again, indefinitely. The latter position is typical of the Stoic vision which is centered on the idealization of necessity and the irrelevance of free will. Marcus Aurelius put it as follows towards the end of the II century in his "prayer to the cosmos" in *Soliloquia* 4:23: "All that is in harmony with you, O Cosmos, is in harmony with me. Whatever for you comes at the right moment, for me is neither too early nor too late. For you are all things, in you are all things, to you all things return." This view of history involves an anthropology very different from that of Gn 1-3.

The doctrine of eternal return has been critiqued often by Christians and in recent times by science. For believers eternal return would leave everything determined, full of tedium, emptiness, futility, despair, irresponsibility. Augustine was particularly acute in his rejection of eternal return, saying "I cannot imagine a more terrible vision than this one" (*Epistula 166*, 9). And scientists, starting with Copernicus and following with Kepler and others, began to contest the astronomical basis for the notion of eternal return. They realized, for example, that the circle is not the typical form of movement in the cosmos but rather the ellipse. Besides, contemporary physicists are convinced that the universe is not a simple fixed space but rather a process of expansion and even of growth.

3. The Christian understanding of history

The Christian view of history is based on the creating and saving and providential action of a God who is all-powerful, eternal and infinite. God creates, he sets the world in motion, and he acts within time. Put simply,

God changes the course of history. Time in Scripture is not only *chronos*, time that passes, but also *kairos*, occasion when things change, and finally *plērōma*, future plenitude of what was not present before. The "Gospel" means just that: the good news, God changing the course of history, for the good of course. The Incarnation of the Word is the most decisive moment in which history is changed, when God became man.

But what can we say about the role of human freedom in the historical event? After all we are talking about the historicity of humans. As we know, the Incarnation took place through the free human cooperation of Our Lady, and its power continues to change history through the obedience of Jesus himself, and that of humans. In a sense our first parents, Adam and Eve, "made history" in reverse by rejecting God's offer of grace and friendship. And now Mary, the new Eve, accepts and embraces the greatest grace possible, the source of all grace, giving flesh to the Word. Under God's grace she is the one who, human speaking, changes the course of history definitively. Her finite, free, time-bound, modest act makes the infinite work of redemption possible.

Of course the Incarnation takes place only once… it is an *efapax* (Heb 7:27), a once and for all event. It is not a typical or mythical event, but a historical one, the most central of all. Believers, under Christ, live out their lives changing history, contributing to the preparation of the *Parousia*. The ultimate model for history, even secular history, is the history of salvation. The first Christian thinker to develop a systematic theology of history was Augustine. In his work *The City of God* he speaks of three intertwining histories: that of the city of God, of grace and redemption; the history of sin with the damage and destruction it inflicted on humanity; and the history of the human city, of society, which can be studied, documented and analyzed with greater or lesser precision. Clearly the three interact with one another, they "pressurize" one another in different ways. But it is not easy to distinguish between them at an empirical level, like the grain and weeds the Gospel speaks of (Mt 13:24ff.). As the French philosopher Raymond Aron observes in his work *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris 1948, 148), "humans make history, but they do not know the history they make."

Among the different ways Christians have interpreted human and divine history, two models have emerged, the *apologetic* and the *apocalyptic*. The first looks at the present and the future on the basis of the past: Christians optimistically look forward towards the future triumph of Christianity

which, according to some, began to consolidate under Constantine. This position is defended by the historian Eusebius of Caesarea, and has been frequently held during the two millennia of Christian history. However it has lost influence in the modern epoch with the advent of secularization. The second interpretation, the apocalyptic, looks not towards the past, but rather toward the future, in which the eschatological promises God revealed in Christ will reach fulfillment. The past was considered a time of darkness, of sin, whereas the future is the time of light, of peace, of triumph. This position consolidated among Christians who suffered for their faith, and dearly longed for the return of their beloved master, Jesus Christ, in glory. To this was added the attraction and fascination of millennialism (Rv 20:4-7). The desire for the power of God in the Spirit to eventually break into the world, bringing with it peace and universal conversion, has recurred quite frequently throughout history.

Both positions, the apologetic and the apocalyptic have shared a common view of Christian hope. Christians look upon the world and history in a contemplative and humble way, in a committed but modest way, with a gaze of faith and hope. They are convinced that saving grace cannot be measured empirically, nor is it open to human analysis. However what has marked our understanding of history in recent centuries is another version, that of the Enlightenment.

4. The Enlightenment as a secularization of the Christian vision of history

The modern understanding of history, like the Christian one, may be expressed with the symbol of a line, an ascending line, which suggests the growth and progress of humanity, thus affirming the efficacy of individual freedom over nature and society in the constitution of the future. The principal difference, however, between the Christian and the modern secularized view of history lies in the fact that the latter is a closed and hermetic process because any intervention of God's mysterious, creative providence is excluded. We have already considered the process of secularization and its roots (§ 2) on the basis of two factors: science and technology, which reinforced the conviction that humans can dominate the world even without God's help; the diminishing of Christian life and practice, which brought people to attempt to hold on to the fruits of a rich humanism without recognizing its Christian roots. From the "theology of history" we pass on to a "philosophy of history." Two authors are of particular interest here: Voltaire and Comte.

Voltaire in his 1756 *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* speaks openly of a "philosophy of history," avoiding any religious reference to a divinity who intervenes in or guides the affairs of humans. God is the great architect, the *deus ex machina* that sets the world going. But once that is done, only humans make things happen, preparing and constructing the future. Luther's "If God is free then humans are not" is inverted with Voltaire: "If man is free then God is not."

Auguste Comte, the XIX century founding father of modern sociology, speaks of three successive stages in history and of thought. The first is the stage of theology, centered on myth and meant for uncritical primitive peoples; the second is that of philosophy, centered on reason and on the immobile contemplation of truth; and third, the stage of science, the positive knowledge of facts that brings humans to action, with clarity and without doubt. The first stage is of the child and of the immature person; the second of the adolescent, passing through a phase of crisis and growth; the third of the adult, serene master of his own life and destiny. Clearly Comte's is an optimistic position which was disproved by a variety of XX century disasters.

Whereas Christianity understood that history would come to fulfillment at the end of time, with the return of Jesus Christ in glory, modern philosophers of history took it that it would come to fulness within history itself, within the world as we know it. This was the case with Hegel and Marx. In other words the modern view of history turns out to be a secularized form of Christian eschatology. The following four problems arise in the Enlightenment view of history.

First, that the true protagonists of history will not be the ordinary man or woman, but a small group of persons; Hegel thought in this regard of Alexander the Great, Napoleon and others. From the Christian point of view any person can "change" history, can make history happen, the most humble of persons. For example, Our Lady. Clearly the modern view of history is reductionist, mundane, elitist and conducive to racism. The *second* limitation is the careless optimism marking the dogma of necessary progress, which in fact hides a secret despair, because full realization will never be enjoyed by individuals, but only by the collectivity, by humanity at large. In the *third* place, the conviction that history will end within history itself. This is often referred to the utopia, literally, 'no place.' Of course the promise of a perfect society is clearly a vain one, and the result is an

unrealistic, irresponsible flight from reality, either towards the world (hedonism), or from the world (New Age movements, dualistic spiritualism, etc.).

Last of all, the *fourth* limitation of the modern view of history. During the XIX century several thinkers began to realize that thought-forms closed to transcendence were bankrupt and the old doctrines of eternal return were making a strong comeback. Thus Friedrich Engels, a close collaborator of Karl Marx. In his work *The Dialectics of Nature* he teaches that matter is subject to a process of eternal return: it will eventually destroy its most sublime fruit, the thinking intellect. Friedrich Nietzsche was especially attentive to the reappearance of eternal return. He exalts life, but paradoxically concludes that life is completely futile. In *Thus Spake Zarathstra* (Edinburgh 1916, 201) he says:

> Everything goes, everything returns; eternally rolls the wheel of existence. Everything dies, everything blossoms forth again; eternally runs on the year of existence. Everything breaks up, everything is integrated anew; eternally the same house of existence builds itself. All things separate, all things again greet one another; eternally true to itself remains the ring of existence.

The same position may be found in his work *The Gay Science* (New York 1974, n. 273).

Something of a kind may be found in Albert Camus's work *The Myth of Sisyphus* which we referred to in § 3. Clearly once it is forgotten that God is the only one capable of bringing humans to their transcendent end, the result is a the doctrine of eternal return and, sooner or later, nihilism. Postmodern thought attempts to abolish history, eliminating the optimistic titanism of the rationalist and the idealist. And only an awareness of God's creative and provident intervention in history, seeking out free human correspondence, will bring back a true sense of history. As Henri de Lubac said in his work *Paradoxes* (Paris 1959, 108), "Christianity is not a historical magnitude; rather history is a Christian magnitude."

33. The Social Condition of Humans in the Light of Faith (CGW 495-499)

That humans are social beings is rather obvious. That human sociality has been considered throughout the history of anthropology as something ambivalent, is undeniable. The question is: what is the meaning of sociality? And for believers: why did God make us social, dependent on others, capable of enriching them and of being enriched ourselves in turn? Using the terminology of Charles Taylor in his work *A Secular Age*, why did God equip human beings with "porous" boundaries? In this chapter we shall attempt to describe certain historical episodes dealing with the reality and ambivalence of the social condition. Then, in the coming chapter, we shall look into human sociality in the light of faith, particularly in the context of human equality and inequality.

1. Historical pointers on human sociality

Aristotle teaches openly that man is *zōon politikon*, "a social animal." In an important passage of his *Politics* he explains that whereas for humans sociality is necessary and unavoidable, the opposite—asociality—is a mark only of divinities and animals, because in general terms they need no help from others of their species to survive and to thrive: gods and beasts are solitary beings. In some cases Aristotle's position has been exaggerated to explain humans in exclusively social terms: man is humanity as a whole. According to Karl Marx, for example, "the human essence is the ensemble of the social relations" (*Theses on Feuerbach*, 6).

Other authors insist preferentially however on the primordial *individuality* of humans. Sociality would be a sign of weakness, imperfection, impropriety. For Plato the human being is identified with its own spiritual soul and therefore must overcome the claims of living in a body, of depending on other people. Likewise, Plotinus in the *Enneads* (I, 4:16) was convinced that "it is not possible happily in society, 'with a body.'" According to Epicurus, humans only need themselves in order to obtain peace and happiness, not the state (*polis*) nor other people. For man is ultimately autonomous and individual, whereas the social element is accidental.

Something of a kind may be found in certain modern philosophers, for example in Leibniz who considered reality in the light of monads, individual and separate subjects. Relationships between individuals, and

thus within society at large, are established *a posteriori*. Hobbes said on this account that *homo homini lupus*, "man is wolf for man." Some XX century existential authors take a similar approach, warning against the danger of depersonalization through collectivism and gregariousness. They rightly fear that humans, as they immerse themselves unthinkingly in the company of others, will be drawn along by them to the point of losing themselves, of foregoing their "authenticity." Thus authors like Martin Heidegger and Simone Weil. In other words, where Marx, following Hegel, sees the individual as the fundamental form of alienation, Heidegger and others, taking up the lead of Kierkegaard, see in the human collectivity the origin of the true loss of humanity.

Individualism and gregariousness emerge here as two sides of the one coin. So which is it to be? Which is the root and which the leaves? Which the substance and which the accidents? Did God create individuals who *a posteriori* relate to other people? Or did he create humanity as such out of which individual personalities emerge?

2. Human sociality in the light of Christian faith

According to Christian faith in creation, all beings, including humans, are the fruit of God's creating action; they are *ab alio*, or better, *ab Alio*. They depend entirely on this foundational creative relationship. Humans are made "in the image and likeness of God" (Gn 1:27). They are essentially beings in relation. But the Old Testament adds a very important point: God relates to believers through a Covenant, with people as a whole, not just one by one. God created us as beings who belong and relate to one another, "male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27). This is what makes it possible for us to enter into relationships with other people. For this reason we can say that humans are social, relational, to the very core of their being. This is so, *first*, because the eternal project that God has thought out for each person—ultimately, his vocation—develops and reaches fulfillment through and with other people, because God has wanted to give humans his many gifts—existence, grace, talents, happiness, eternal life—through others and along with others. And *second*, human beings develop as humans in communicating to others the gifts God has confided to them through the exercise of the virtue of charity, which is the "form" of all virtues (§ 22, 1). Man is essentially a giving and a receiving being.

Gn 1 clearly says that the domination humans exercise over the world involves the basic social cell of society: "male and female he created them."

Scripture tells us in fact that “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gn 2:18). So it quite clear from Scripture that humans are fundamentally social beings. In *Gaudium et spes* (12), we read: “For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.”

The principal expression of human sociality in the light of faith consists in the fact the humans, in spite of possible appearances to the contrary, depend very deeply on others: at the beginning of their lives, in their growth and education, in the process of salvation in and through the Church and the sacraments, and in eschatological fulness.

Still, it is not enough to describe the *fact* of human sociality. From the theological point of view we need to understand *why* God made us social in the first place.

3. The significance of human equality

Humans relate to God in a condition of *inferiority* and submission. They relate to the material world, with which they share the created condition, as *superior* beings, capable of knowing and dominating the things they encounter. But they relate to other humans as their *equals*, of the same race and the same nature. Still, it is undeniable that there are many *differences* between humans: distinctions between man and woman, between sick and healthy, between old and young, between tall and small, between weak and strong, between intelligent and ignorant, between poor and rich, between those who suffer much and those who have suffered little, between those who have received a good education and those who have not, between those who have enjoyed good fortune and human success and those for whom life has been to all appearances a failure. It would seem, therefore, that there is anything but equality between humans. So what place does equality and difference occupy in God’s plans? How do we look on it as Christians?

In classical antiquity humans were not generally considered as equal. In fact the great majority were slaves by nature, and were considered as inferior to the rest. The few who were free had the right to live and act differently, governing the state, themselves and their slaves. There was only equality among those who were politically free. Equality was a limited commodity. It did not have its roots in human nature as such. In the Roman Empire only the father, the *paterfamilias*, had full rights. Women, children, slaves and those from the provinces were considered inferior, and

subjugated. The condition of the latter in many cases was little better than that of beggars.

Among philosophers and jurists some exceptions may be found to this general rule. Herodotus declared equality among humans (*Histories III*, 8). The sophist Antiphon said: “By nature we are all created equal in every way, barbarians and Greeks” (Diels, *Fragmente* B44, B2). The Stoics likewise affirmed the equality of humans, thus introducing the principle of universalism. According to Cicero all share alike in the same *logos* or reason, which controls the universe. Seneca says the same thing. The Roman jurist Florentius holds that slavery is an institution of the *ius gentium*, but goes against the nature of things. Likewise the jurist Ulpian.

The message of the fundamental equality of all humans is particularly present in Christian revelation and life. According to the Old Testament, all have been made in God’s image and likeness. In the New Testament the message is particularly clear, for God calls all humans to filial and eternal union with him, through the mediation of a single savior, Jesus Christ (1 Tm 2:5), which finds expression in the universal mission Christ commended to the Church (Mt 28:20). The following texts go the heart of the message of Paul. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). And elsewhere: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). And finally: “Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all” (Col 3:11). They set the scene for Paul’s work of universal evangelization.

Michel Meslin, a student of early Christianity, said in his work *Les grandes inventions du christianisme* (Paris 1999, 51): “Humans are no longer defined, as Roman Law laid down, on the basis of an individual statute of an ethnical, sexual, social, or political kind; neither were they defined, as the Stoics said, on the basis of a natural equality; rather they were alike in the equality of being creatures, all of them children of the one God.” The III century Christian writer Lactantius said in his work *De ira Dei* (14): “God, who generates and enlightens all humans, wished them to be equal… Nobody is a slave for him, no one a master. If he is for all one and the same Father, then we are all his children with the same right. Nobody is poor for God, except the one who is lacking in justice.”

The critical role Christianity played in the genesis of the common conviction of the fundamental equality between all humans has been pointed out by modern philosophers. Rousseau in his 1755 work *Discourse upon the Origins and Foundation of Inequality among Humans* points out that Christian charity indistinctly embraces the whole of the human race, and that only Christianity universalized common fraternity to a sufficient degree. Hegel was also convinced this was the case. As was the political historian Alexis de Tocqueville, and the philosophers Max Horkheimer and Jürgen Habermas.

The following question may be asked at this stage: do we know of human equality through faith alone? Or is it in any way accessible to reason? Doubtless, Christian faith paved the way for the common conviction, but in recent centuries the affirmation of human equality has generally been considered an achievement of secular thought, summed up in the French *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. It is probably correct to say that Christian faith and life has "pressurized" rational conviction, in such a way that a passage was established from a restricted, theoretical awareness of equality to a practical realization and conviction. After all, grace, without changing nature, illumines and purifies it, thus making it possible for reason to arrive at this conclusion. Still, the ambivalence as regards the source of equality conviction is well expressed by Voltaire who said in his *Philosophical Dictionary* (151) that "equality is at the same time both the most natural and the most chimerical thing."

34. The dynamics of human Sociality and Equality (CGW 499-513)

1. The meaning of human equality and inequality

If according to Christian faith all humans are fundamentally equal, why do so many inequalities exist in the first place? The reply to this question, we shall see, should give us an important key to understanding the dynamics of human sociality. Thomas Aquinas in *S.Th. I* (47, 2) inquires into the meaning of inequality among creatures, asking "whether the inequality of things derives from God." He mentions a well-known position of Origen for whom all spiritual beings were created at the beginning of time, all alike, entirely spiritual, contemplating the eternal Word. Of these the angels did not sin, some did sin and became demons, the rest of humanity are in the situation they are in on account of the intensity of the sin they committed. Yet at the end of time all will be reconciled; this is the *apokatastasis*. Thus there is a foundational, angelic, spiritual equality between all humans, whereas the differences and inequalities between them are due to the sinfulness of each one. For obvious reasons of course this is a problematic position. According to Scripture God created all humans freely, with a variety of different talents and gifts. Inequality and diversity in other words find their roots in God's creative action, but not in sin.

Thomas Aquinas replies to the question as regards the divine origin of inequality as follows: "Divine wisdom is the cause of the distinction present in things on account of the perfection of the universe; the same may be said of inequality. The universe, in effect, would not be perfect if in it there was only one grade of goodness" (ibid.). In other words the divergences between things are not defects or flaws but rather sources and occasion of their perfection. But would this not seem to be an injustice on God's part? A sort of improper discrimination? The following words St Catherine of Siena places in the mouth of God may be helpful.

> I distribute the virtues quite diversely, I did not give all of them to each person, but some to one, some to others… I shall give principally charity to one; justice to another; humility to this one, a living faith to that one… And so I have given many gifts and graces, both spiritual and temporal, with such diversity that I have not given everything to one single person, so that you may be constrained to practice charity towards one another… I have willed that one should

> need another and that all should be my ministers in distributing the graces and gifts they have received from me (*Dialogues I*, 7).

The saint's intuition is simple and profound: God not only creates humans as social beings, but creates them with differences with a view to bringing them to exercise charity with one another. Thus they can live their sociality as a free dedication in charity. If God had created all humans equal from the beginning, equal in everything, then human sociality would be purely decorative, without meaning or relevance. Rather God established there would be inequalities to make sure humans are urged, nearly coerced, to contribute to the enrichment of others. Inequalities are overcome in a sense without ever being eliminated; they take on a charm all of their own. What gives meaning and dynamism to the interaction between inequalities is charity. The needs of others become a kind of divine calling so that the one who has in abundance can give to the other what God has given them for that very purpose.

God of course could have constituted humans perfectly made from the beginning, down to the last detail. This would have emptied temporality and sociality of meaning. But God has preferred to communicate his gifts and grace to humans, who freely receive them (§ 30-31), within a temporal and historical process (§ 32), and through the action of other people (this chapter). But once we have attempted to understand the purpose of inequality, the following question is still an open one: in what way are humans *equal* to one another?

2. Equality, giving and receiving

We have seen that God gives humans goods and talents not only for themselves but also for others. Instead of giving each one exactly what they need directly, which might be simpler, God has taken a more complex but more perfect way of communicating his gifts through the mediation of others. This requires a deep equality among humans in the sense that all *can* communicate something to others and at the same time are able to receive from them. We are equal to one another in the sense that all can equally give and receive. Of course, giving of oneself to others requires a real knowledge of them in their true situation and needs; the concrete profile of lived charity is determined by the person loved, not by the one loving, as we saw in studying the virtue of charity (§ 21).

However a further difficulty may arise here: those who are capable of enriching others might well consider they are superior to them, and have no

need for other people. But this is not the case.

Firstly because all gifts and talents have their origin ultimately in God alone. Self-giving to others is primarily an act of reception and acceptance, because all that is given comes from God and often through other people. In this sense humans do not really give; rather they hand on what they have received. Augustine in his *Sermo 260* (2) says that "the one who does not give is ungrateful to the One who filled him with gifts." It may be added that the one who is generous may seem to "lose" what they give, but in real terms they are replenished by God as they accumulate treasures in heaven (Mt 6:20). "For to him who has will more be given," Jesus said (Mk 4:25). Augustine comments as follows in *De doctrina christiana I* (1:1): "God will give more to those who use for others what they have received: God fills up what he has given from the beginning." The Lord encourages his disciples in the following terms: "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Lk 6:38).

And secondly, the fact of actually receiving something as a gift in itself constitutes an act of donation to the one who gives, an act of profound humanity, of openness, an act of gratitude. Ratzinger says in his *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco 1990, 191): "He who only wants to give and is not ready to receive, he who only wants to exist for others and is unwilling to recognize that he for his part too lives on the unexpected, unprovokable gift of others". Those who receive open their hearts gratefully and humbly to be enriched by others. So just as the giver should take no vain credit for giving, neither should the receiver feel humiliated or frustrated by the fact of receiving. In fact, Jesus places the following words on his disciples' tongues: "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (Lk 17:10). And Jesus himself reminds them, "You received without paying, give without pay" (Mt 10:8). Likewise Paul speaks of the "abundance" Christians possess and exhorts them: "As a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality" (2 Cor 8:14).

It may even happen that receiving from another requires more effort, humility, trust, openness and humanity towards others than does giving, because it requires the central virtue of the spiritual creature, gratitude. Animals are not consciously grateful, but humans are, or at least they

should be. So in brief terms, humans are equal to one another insofar as *they can all give and take*. The Stoics as we saw attributed human equality to common reason… but as an elitist movement, Stoicism could not but admit that some are more intelligent than others. Pope Francis said: "Being created in the image and likeness of God, we are social, creative and solidary beings with an immense capacity to love. We often forget this" (*Audience*, 26.8.2020). "Christian hope, rooted in God, is our anchor. It moves the will to share, strengthening our mission as disciples of Christ, Who shared everything with us" (*ibid*.).

Summing up, we may say that God offers humans gifts in abundance, of nature and of grace. They are called to accept them freely, with humility and gratitude, and as a proof of the latter, to communicate and share them generously to those in need. A shared good, based on the original divine donation gratefully received and willingly handed on, produces a "new good" that is shared by the many. Its origin is God but it belongs both to the giver and to the receiver… this brings about what is called *communion*. Of course people may refuse to enter into the adventure of receiving and giving, thus entering into a cycle of egotism, individualism, and sterility.

3. Inequalities and discrimination

What may be said of the inequalities that develop and consolidate as a result of sin, that is, of the willing closure to the needs of others, of a refusal to share with them the goods received? *Gaudium et spes* (29) puts it this way:

> The equal dignity of persons demands that a more humane and just condition of life be brought about. For excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace.

Inequalities, instead of becoming sources and opportunities of enrichment that open spaces for donation and reception, may well end up damaging and corroding human dignity, closing humans in on themselves. So is there a difference between the inequalities that God permits *propter perfectionem*, for the sake of the betterment of the world, and those which humans create for themselves, in order to narcissistically reinforce their own security and close their hearts to the needy?

Three kinds of inequality may be mentioned. *First*, inequalities not wanted by God, being connected directly with sin, to infidelity to one's

vocation, etc. They cannot be accepted but need to be rejected. *Second*, the inequalities God positively wants in creating the world as he did: race, gender, the fact of being born in a certain place and time, one's own vocation, genetic constitution, level of holiness. These differences do not affect one's fundamental human dignity and should be accepted and loved. In *Laudato si'* (155), Francis wrote: "Valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment."

And third, there are divergences between persons deriving not simply from God's gifts, but also from human action, social life, history and culture. They are inequalities that God wills to some degree, perhaps we might say *secundum quid*, that is on the basis of a higher purpose. This is the case with issues related to intelligence and education, professional and social opportunities, riches and success. From what we saw above, God gave these gifts in greater abundance to some *in order to communicate* them to others: intelligence and education, to generously provide instruction for those who need it; professional and social opportunities as well as material riches, in order to facilitate the lives of others. "If we make something our own," Francis says, "it is only to administer it for the good of all. If we do not, we burden our consciences with the weight of having denied the existence of others" (ibid., 95).

Material prosperity has been considered traditionally as a sign of God's favor: certainly throughout the Old Testament, in Calvinistic thought, and in some modern forms of "prosperity religion." Still, the Gospel reminds us that those who have little in this life are to be considered especially blessed by God (Mt 5:3). We have already seen that God gives each one certain goods… but it is also true that the created world was created for all humans without exception. Thus the fact that some, for whatever reason, have more than others does not mean they can egoistically hold on to it for their own exclusive benefit against the reasonable claims of others (the Church speaks of the "social mortgage of private property"), or, even worse, considering themselves especially favored by God. Pope Francis spoke of "the sin of wanting to possess and wanting to dominate one's brothers and sisters, of wanting to possess and dominate nature and God Himself. But this is not the design for creation… It is our duty to make sure that its fruit reaches

everyone… We are administrators of the goods, not masters. Administrators. ‘Yes, but the good is mine’: that is true, it is yours, but to administer it, not to possess it selfishly for yourself” (*Audience*, 26.8.2020).

From the political point of view, the question to be asked is the following: must the State oblige people share their excessive spiritual and material goods, thus facilitating justice at the expense of the institutionalization of charity, or would it be better to leave people the possibility of handing on their goods freely to others with minimum State intervention, thus avoiding the institutionalization of charity while ensuring social justice?

35. Humans created as Male and Female: Historical Pointers (CGW 514-526)

The most obvious of distinctions between persons is the sexual one, between man and woman, between male and female. Sexual difference manifests itself physiologically, psychologically, with a variety of features in the areas of affectivity and cognition, areas which go beyond the scope of this text. In this chapter we shall attempt to consider the *theological statute* of the difference, by asking the question: *why did God create humans male and female?* As we saw in the last chapter there is a fundamental equality between men and women, but also difference. And what is their meaning of these differences?

In recent decades the Church has spoken frequently on the issue in the light of theology. John Paul II spoke of the "feminine genius." His 1988 apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem* and his *Letter to Women* (29.6.1995) are particularly important. As is the 2004 document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and the World*. First we shall examine some recent episodes on the issue of the identity of women and men. Then, in the next chapter, we shall consider some of the Biblical, historical and theological issues involved.

1. The contemporary debate between sex and gender

During the XX century three moments of feminine identity have taken on relevance.

First, a "feminism of identity," which under the inspiration of the French Revolution insisted on the equality between genders in society. The best-known author here is Simone de Beauvoir mainly in her 1949 book *The Second Sex*. She says that femininity is not given by nature but is just a social and civil construct. "Woman is not born, woman you become," she declared. To be a woman is not given by birth but is reached and determined, consciously and freely, independently of natural conditions. Woman needs to be emancipated, de Beauvoir argues, by rejecting the identity proposed by official culture, which is predominantly male chauvinist. She observes that whereas man lives free from his body on account of his rationality, for a woman her body is still her destiny, especially on account of motherhood, from which at some stage she will have to liberated. Nature she says must be overcome by culture. Clearly, de

Beauvoir provides a basis for the contemporary distinction between sex and gender.

The second stage may be designated a “feminism of difference.” The best-known exponent is Luce Irigaray, especially in her 1974 work *Speculum*. She recognized when she wrote the book that social and political emancipation of women had been achieved to an important degree. The key issue was rather the role of the individual with respect to surrounding culture. Men and women are different, she says. Yet specifically feminine identity has been neglected because of the arbitrary dominion of males. She attempts to avoid the notion of a human nature common to all, because this will inevitably be focused in a masculine way. In this the title of her work *To Speak is Never Neutral* is significant. She proposes therefore that women should produce their own form of thinking from the standpoint of themselves and the world, on the basis of their own bodies. They must create a feminist philosophy, a feminist theology, a feminist economy, etc. Of course this approach would affect the use of language which is, in general, divided between masculine, feminine or neuter. Besides, the Christian understanding of being human does not begin with one kind of human being, for example men, expanding it therefrom to all the rest. Rather a Christian anthropology is based on the living union and exchange between man and woman, a union made up of donation, reception, acceptance and communion. The “feminism of difference” is clearly individualistic in character, and in that sense, reductive.

Thirdly, in the last quarter of a century, the position of de Beauvoir is resurrected, and specialists speak of the “theory of gender.” In simple terms the male/female polar paradigm of the sexes is denied, because one’s identity is not defined by sex but by gender. Whereas “sex” is biological and fixed, “gender” is a highly plastic category. The most influential contemporary defender of this position is Judith Butler, especially in her 2004 book *Undoing Gender*. Above all she attempts to overcome the classic heterosexual paradigm, the “immoveable” polarity between man and woman, dominated by nature. Each one must emancipate him- or herself from their own gender, throwing off all dependence on the “truth” contained in nature or culture. In *Gender Trouble* (London 1999, 6) she says that “gender itself becomes an artifice free from every bond.” This of course is not an easy position to maintain, as Francis Bacon had said several centuries earlier: “Nature is often hidden, sometimes it is overwhelmed, but

very seldom it is extinguished" (*Essays*). And Philippe Destouches put it this way: "Hunt out the natural, it will return with a gallop" (*La Belle orgueilleuse*). Horace had already said so: "Throw out the natural with a fork, and it will come back all the same" (*Epistula I*, 10:24).

Doubtless a certain tension may be detected between sex and gender, not unlike that which exists on a broader level between nature and culture. But still to say that "gender" is a perfectly plastic aspect of human existence comes across as somewhat exaggerated, with a surfeit of ideology and a deficit of science. A unitary anthropology, based on Scripture, developed by Thomas Aquinas and expressed in terms of the *anima forma corporis*, affirms the deep union between body and soul, destined to rise up one with the other at the end of time and live on forever, leaves little space for such a tension. Whereas a dualistic, Platonic, Gnostic, or Cartesian anthropology might embrace it more generously.

2. The theological meaning of the distinction between man and woman

Scripture makes it clear that God created humans in his image, from the beginning, "male and female" (Gn 1:27). A tone of divine self-approval and self-complacency emerges in the text. God is happy with the work he carried out: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gn 1:31). God establishes human sociality from the beginning in terms of the creation of man and woman.

Gn 2-3 speaks of the relationship between man and woman in a different way. The human being is presented first of all as masculine. God places him in paradise "in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gn 2:15). Yet God "perceives" that man is not perfectly content with the simple company of water and plants and work, and says "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gn 2:18). It is as if he was saying that humans needed to live in relation to one another. The first companion God prepared was in the form of animals and birds, but still, "for the man there was not found a helper fit for him" (Gn 2:20). For this reason God creates the woman, similar to Adam, drawn out of man himself. God joyfully and enthusiastically presents her to him. And the man recognizes and accepts her, exclaiming: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman [*'ishsha*] because she was taken out of Man [*'ish*]" (Gn 2:23). He sees her as his equal. In fact, as Pope Francis says, "woman is not a replica of man; she comes directly from the creative act of God" (*Audience*, 22.4.2015). As a result "a man leaves

his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gn 2:24). The meaning of one is to be found in the other, they are destined to live in a lasting communion, "a unity of two," as John Paul II often said.

Besides, Gn 1 points out the ultimate purpose of the distinction and union between man and woman in terms of procreation and filling the earth. As the exegete Phyllis Bird in the *Harvard Theological Review* (1981, 157) said,

> Gen 1:27 contributes the notion, rightly understood if wrongly isolated and absolutized in traditional interpretation, that sex, as differentiation and union, is intended for procreation—a divinely given capacity and power conceived both in terms of blessing and command. But the word that activates the endowment addresses the species, not the individual, and is limited in its application by the setting in which it is spoken, a limitation made explicit in the qualifying amplification, 'and fill the earth.'

As the X century Jewish document, the *Talmud of Rashi* says commenting on Gn 2:24, "it is in their child that they become one flesh."

Genesis also speaks of the fall of our first parents. Fooled by the serpent, Eve induced Adam to sin, and together they lost divine friendship and fell into disgrace. God punished them for their sin, the man with the travail of work, the woman with the pain of childbearing. God also punishes the woman saying that the man "shall rule over you" (Gn 3:16). It is clear that the dominion they were meant to exercise over the earth together becomes ambivalent, and man will abuse the weakness of the woman and dominate not only over the material world, but over her as an inferior reality. "He shall rule over you" is not a divine precept, but a reality that derives from sin, that will persist from one generation to another between man and woman until sin finally disappears. Interestingly, from the moment of the fall, woman is no longer called *'ishsha* (taken from her husband) but rather *hawwah*, that is, "the mother of all the living" (Gn 3:20). After sin no longer is there an intimate familiarity between man and woman together before God. Rather, relationships have been broken and filled with suspicion.

How may we explain theologically the distinction between man and woman throughout the history of philosophy and theology? Let us consider three authors: Plato, Philo and Gregory of Nyssa.

Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* offers an interesting mythical explanation of the origin of the sexual distinction among humans. The god Zeus created the first man as a solitary and perfect being, androgynous, that is without sexually distinctive features. Because the human in this situation is excessively strong and becomes a threat for the gods, Zeus diminishes its power by dividing it in two, into masculine and feminine. Between the two parts love and sociality grow. Of course sociality is seen as a sign of weakness, that is still in second place to the original, aspired-after androgynous autonomy. "From that time onward," concludes Aristophanes, "reciprocal love was born among humans and it attempts to reconstitute the ancient nature, saving it and making of the two a unity" (*ibid.*, 191d).

There is a clear resonance here with the Biblical text: "the two will be one flesh" (Gn 2:24). But there is an important difference as well. For Plato the distinction between man and woman is a presented as a kind of anticipated punishment meted out by a weakened and threatened divinity. This means that human sociality is fundamentally a defect, a limit to human nature. The distinction between man and woman is a sign of imperfection that must eventually be overcome, restoring original nature that is androgynous, autonomous, individualist.

Philo of Alexandria, in *The Creation of the World*, sees in the two accounts of creation two temporal stages in the divine creation of man. The first refers to the spiritual, original man, made in the image of God, asexual, ideal, androgynous. In the second comes the fall of humans and with it, sexual differentiation. The distinction between man and woman emerges as they fall from grace. Passages that speak of shame and the need to wear clothes (Gn 3:7) are interpreted by Philo as the dressing of human souls with a physical body. The dominion of man over woman is considered an acquired right. He concludes that the creation of man and woman was not the direct and primary will of God and that original sin was of a sexual kind, connected with the will of man to dominate woman. For obvious reasons, this account is difficult to reconcile with Christian doctrine, although it left its mark among Alexandrian theologians such as Origen.

The IV century theologian Gregory of Nyssa, in his work *De hominis opificio*, explains that "Adam" designates the complete and perfect man, made in the image of God, who prefigures the New Adam, Jesus Christ, the true archetype of humanity. He says that the sexual distinction appeared in the context of sin. But he does not explain this as Philo did, by speaking of

two separate stages of creation. Rather the distinction arose in the creative mind of God, in the foreknowledge of the work of creation. God, in creating humans free, foresaw the possibility of them sinning and rebelling. In order to ensure the unity of the human race and reduce the danger of sin and destruction, he established that human development and growth would take place through sexual reproduction, in close dependence on other people. It was a kind of security measure to limit the possible damage done by sin. In effect, when humans are bound to one another by blood and kinship, it is more difficult for them to destroy one another. This brakes the propagation of sin and destruction. In sum, the social origin of humanity is not part of a positive divine plan, but rather is seen as an emergency measure designed to avoid the extremes of the destructive solitude that arises from sin.

Gregory's position is subtle and intelligent and on the whole has been quite influential in the history of Christian anthropology. But it has important drawbacks. First, the social condition of humans and sexual differentiation are not direct consequences of sin but rather its distinctive sign. Gregory would have considered virginity as being more perfect in God's mind, insofar as it was more original. Hence marriage is considered as a concession to weakness and a sign, though indirect, of human sinfulness. Second, the *imago Dei* for Gregory corresponds to the superior part of the human being, the *nous*, or intellect. But it has little to do with human sociality and corporeity. This is not the position of Scripture (§ 7). Third, Gregory presents Christ as the perfect man, the ideal image of God. He interprets Paul's programmatic text incorrectly: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28), and concludes that Jesus did not have a clear sexual identity. Paul's text of course does not refer to an asexual Christ, but to the fact that rivalry, enmity and violence between men and women can be overcome.

36. Humans created as Male and Female: the Theological Significance (CGW 526-536)

In this chapter we shall consider different ways in which Christians have attempted to understand and appreciate feminine and masculine identity.

1. The understanding of femininity in the history of philosophy and theology

Christianity has, from the beginning, offered a strong and decisive contribution to a proper understanding of woman and her equality to man. This may be found above all in the teaching, and action, and attitude of Jesus towards women. William H. Frend in his work *The Rise of Christianity* (London 1986, 67) observes that "the attitude of Jesus towards woman was revolutionary… For him the sexes were equal." The sin of a woman is no worse than that of a man (Jn 8:1-11). Jesus was particularly attentive to the most neglected women in society, widows. In fact the order of deacons was instituted to ensure they were properly cared for (Acts 6:1; cf. Jas 1:27). The same appreciation for women and their dignity may be found in Paul's letters (Gal 3:28). Frend observes that "the converts we hear most about were women… many of them leading women" (*ibid*., 99). Rodney Stark in his work *The Triumph of Christianity* says that "women were especially drawn to Christianity because it offered them a life that was so greatly superior to the life they otherwise would have led" (New York 2011, 122). Infanticide and abortion were severely prohibited; monogamous and indissoluble marriage was established; the free consent of the spouses was defended and the age of marriage (for the girl) was raised; the custom of arranged marriages was avoided, as was marriage between blood relatives.

In the Middle Ages the historian Jacques Le Goff said in his work *Le long moyen âge* that "the idea that woman is equal to man determined the Christian concept of woman and influenced the vision and attitude of the medieval Church… I believe that respect for women is one of the great innovations of Christianity." Francesco Agnoli in his *Indagine sul cristianesimo* (Casale Monferrato, 2010, 42f.) says that woman was seen as

> secondary and marginal, relegated to her rooms in the Greek world; under the perpetual supervision of man, father or husband, like an object, in the Roman world; a hostage of male power among the German peoples; open to repudiation and juridically inferior in the Jewish world; victim of infinite abuse and violence, including

> infanticide, in China and India; an inferior form of reincarnation in traditional Hinduism; subjected to polygamy, a humiliating affirmation of her inferiority, in the Muslim and animist world; victim in many different cultures of real physical mutilation; subjected to repudiation by the male, in all ancient cultures, the woman became with Christianity God's own creature, on the same level as man.

In spite of these testimonies there is still plenty evidence that women were not always well treated or considered throughout the history of Christianity. Christian revelation, inspired in the life and action of Jesus Christ, was clear enough on the matter. Yet theologians and philosophers were slower to realize the seriousness of the issue. Besides, even predominantly Christian societies resisted the affirmation of the dignity of women. Of course, fallen human nature being what it is… Let us consider the position of some theologians and philosophers.

It should be mentioned that the Old Testament presents women prevalently as socially inferior persons, as may be seen in the efforts of Moses to defend them with the law of repudiation (Dt 24:1). Jewish women did not have the possibility of creating and spreading literary texts, because this was reserved to priests, Levites, scribes, sages, officials, merchants, professions from which women were excluded. Still, throughout the Bible the problematic relationship between the sexes is seen as the fruit of sin and not of creation, for all are made in the image of God, male and female. In fact many women played central roles in the history of the chosen people.

Among Christian authors we may mention Ambrosiaster from the IV century. Commenting on Gn 2:23 ("This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh") and 1 Cor 11:7 ("For a man… is the image and glory of god; but woman is the glory of man"), he teaches that Eve did not receive her soul from God but that, along with the body, she received it directly from Adam. Woman is placed under man's dominion by divine decree. Augustine and others rejected this interpretation observing that the image and likeness of God in "man" refers to their being "male and female" according to Gn 1 (*De Gen. ad litt.* 10:1). In fact the view of human sexuality proposed by Augustine is substantially positive, moderate and humane. Sexual life was problematic in his writings only on account of the presence of sin.

But the position of Ambrosiaster was not an isolated one. We have already seen the position of Gregory of Nyssa. During a synod at Macon in France in 585, according to the writings of Gregory of Tours, some bishops asserted that women should not be considered human at all. Others opposed them, on the basis of Gn 1:27 and the importance of Marian devotion. But the fact that this could happen is significant.

Thomas Aquinas draws from Aristotle the idea that woman is an *animal imperfectum*, or as he says elsewhere a *mas occasionatus*, a defective male (*S.Th. I-II*, 102, 3 ad 9; *In I Cor.* 11, lect. 2). "When a girl is born, this happens on account of the weakness of the (masculine) creative power, or perhaps because of an indisposition of matter, or because of some external mutation, for example when humid winds blow from the south… Thus the woman is faulty and defective" (*S.Th. I*, 92, 1 ad 1).

Of course the position of Thomas is determined to an important degree by the biology of the time, that of Aristotle, developed some 1500 years before. Aristotle in effect considers the woman as the weak and passive stage in the process of human reproduction. Thus, Aquinas adds, woman is inferior as regards the particular nature, but not as regards human nature as such, because this depends on the will of God who creates us all in his image. He holds besides that God creates the soul, and in the soul there is no sexual distinction (*S.Th. I*, 93, 6 ad 2). Besides he is aware that Eve was formed "from the rib of Adam" (Gn 2:21f.) which indicates her equality with him.

Something of a kind may be said of Paul's words to the Corinthians: "For a man… is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man" (1 Cor 11:7). The Apostle goes on to explain: "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God" (vv. 11f.). And he concludes: "If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice [that of women covering their heads in Church], nor do the churches of God" (v. 16).

2. Man and woman as a "unity of two"

Christians accepted from the start that man and woman were equals as believers and human beings. The difficulties arise when we became aware of the inequalities between them, and of the futility of attempting to deny them. The category of *complementarity* is often used; John Paul II spoke of the *reciprocity* of male and female. The XIX century philosopher Pierre

Proudhon in his work *De la justice dans la Révolution et dans l'Église* (Paris 1930) said: "Man and woman can be equivalent before the Absolute; but they are not equal, nor can they be, either in the family or in the State." Earlier on (§ 34) we have seen that equality is not the same thing as uniformity, but finds its principal expression in the capacity of giving and receiving, which is made possible precisely by the inequality between man and woman.

Some authors in the patristic period identified the image of God with the male principle. Others, more recently, identify it entirely with male-female sociality, especially as regards the spousal relationship. These extreme readings of Gn 1:27 should be avoided, the first for its individualism, the second for its collectivistic view of things. Rather we should speak of a strong bond between male and female, in the sense that the very union between them is a powerful sign of the image of God. This reading has become popular in recent times, for example with Matthias J. Scheeben, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Erich Przywara. Of particular importance besides is John Paul II's 1988 apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem*.

John Paul insists on the fact that man and woman were created together in the image and likeness of God. Three elements emerge. First, that man and woman are persons because they were created in the image of God; second, the image of God is present in them in their unity composed of two persons; and therefore, third, this unity which reflects the presence of God in the created order, is intrinsically ordered to fruitfulness and procreation, to new human life made in the image of God. Albert Frank-Duquesne in his work *Création et procréation* (Paris 1951, 42-46) says man and woman are present in creation as "two diverse but inseparable realities, of which one is the fullness of the other, and both are ordered to a supreme definitive union… Double, without the multiplication of one in two, simply two poles of a single reality, two diverse actuations of a single being, two *entia* in one *esse*, one existence in two lives, but certainly not two diverse fragments of a totality that might be recomposed as in a puzzle." And in the words of Francis, "The difference between man and woman is not meant to indicate opposition or subordination, but is for the sake of communion and generation, always in the image and likeness of God… The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution… God entrusted the earth to the alliance between man and woman: its failure deprives the earth of warmth and darkens the sky of hope" (*Audience*, 15.4.2015).

37. The History of Work (CGW 537-543)

The Orthodox author Nicholas Berdjaev made the following observation:

> Labor is the greatest reality of human life in this world, it is a primary reality… In labor there is both a truth of redemption ("in the sweat of your face shall you gain your bread") and a truth of the creative and constructive power of men. Both elements are present in labor. Human labor humanizes nature; it bears witness to the great mission of man in nature. But sin and evil have perverted the mission of labor. A reverse process has taken place in the dehumanization of labor, an alienation of human nature has taken place in the workers… Man has been seized with the desire to be not only the master of nature, but also the master of his brother man, and he has enslaved labor (*Slavery and Freedom*, London 1943, 220f.).

1. Work, world, secularity and corredemption

The fact that the human person, male and female (§ 36), has been created by God as a deeply unitary being, with a soul that acts as "the form of the body" (§ 28), has the following important consequence. Humans are fully material, "mundane" beings, profoundly inserted into and truly belonging to the created material world, with which they share not only limitations, restrictions and mortality, but also openness, communication and dynamism. Humans exist not only in relation to God and other people but also with respect to the world, their natural habitat, their "common home." "The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men" (Ps 115:16). And just as it is impossible to establish a net separation between body and soul, it is likewise impossible to completely distinguish between humans and the cosmos/world in which they live and act. Between the two there is a living and fruitful polarity and symbiosis. Made in God's image and likeness, humans are meant to "give form" to the cosmos, shaping the world by exercising dominion *over* it, thus bringing it under the effective sovereignty of God. At the same time, humans are conditioned *by* the world and live out their lives and vocation under the limitations and stimulus of their worldly condition. And even with final resurrection, the renewed cosmos will become our definitive home.

All human beings live out their existence through a series of actions that are proper, free, personal, and irreplaceable. Still, our freedom is always a situated and finite freedom, being located within history and circumstance,

referred to certain specific people, in a living and creative confrontation with the world as it is, through which the voice of nature may be perceived, the voice of the creator from whom humans have received the task and summons to mold and dominate the earth. This is the "mundane" or "secular" character of human existence: we have been equipped for and charged with exercising dominion over the earth of which we are a part. This will and can only be a sharing in the sovereignty Christ won over the world when he died on the Cross and rose to a new life. This is the destiny of humans on earth: to dominate the world under God, in filial contemplation, that is without fear or anguish, yet with the effort and commitment that stems from being convinced the world is their own because it was created by their Father, as they strive to govern the world along with other humans, also children of God.

The above chapters on Christian anthropology have worked through the consequences of the theology of the image of God. This will be the final one in that series, taking up what we saw earlier on when studying the Biblical doctrine of the divine image in humans (Gn 1:26-28: §§ 7-8). In effect, "the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gn 2:15). The term "work" usually used in Aramaic (*'avad*) can also mean "give cult to God," "serve the Lord," and even "carry out the Levitical (priestly) service." When humans carry out the divine command to cultivate and rule the earth, they carry out God's will and glorify their creator, thus becoming "perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

2. Historical pointers on the meaning and value of human work

Modern studies on the genesis and development of human work often refer to the critical role it has played throughout history. Work, the demanding activity in which humans invest their best intellectual, psychical, and physical energies in the world about them, alongside other people, belongs to the very definition of being human. Animals do not work; rather, they hunt, and eat, and sleep and reproduce (unless they have been domesticated by humans to do their work for them). Emmanuel Mounier in his book *La petite peur du XXe siècle* (Neuchatel 1959, 20) says that "man is essentially an *artifex*, a creator of forms, a doer of works… The form of being human is to act." Man is a *homo faber*.

Among the Greeks the VII century BC author Hesiod said that "through works men become rich in herds and wealthy, and when they work they are

much preferred by the immortals [the gods]. Work is no misfortune, but laziness is a disgrace" (*Works and Days*, 308-11). However in spite of its importance and value, philosophers on the whole have looked on work as something negative and damaging to the proper development of humans, especially their intellectual development. Work, in particular manual work, was meant only for slaves. Plato excluded the mechanical arts from the government of the state. Aristotle looked on all kinds of physical work as vile and oppressive of the human spirit. The Stoics Cicero and Seneca exalted leisure (*otium*) over work. This of course was made possible through slavery. One reason for this was that, according to Plato, man's purpose was to obtain perfect contemplation, and this required separation from the material world. In Mesopotamia (in present-day Iraq) it was said that humans were created by the gods with a view to rescuing the latter from the fatigue and dead weight of work. What Plato aspired to for humans, the gods had already arranged for themselves. Of course in ancient times physical work was grueling and backbreaking in ways we can hardly imagine nowadays, it was only for slaves. Claude Mossé in his work *Le travail en Grèce et à Rome* (Paris 1966, 81) writes: "Work in antiquity does not have the moral value that has been attributed to it after twenty centuries of Christianity. Contempt for manual work appeared to many as the counterpart of slavery and, at the same time, as the cause of the stagnation of technology."

Even though God placed humans in Eden "to till it and keep it" (Gn 2:15), Gn 3:17 does refer to the fatigue that marks physical work as a chastisement for sin. According to many Church Fathers, the purpose of work is principally one of purification. This may be found in Athanasius's *Life of St Anthony*, in the writings of John Cassian and Augustine, and to some degree in Benedict's *Rule*. Besides, the reflection of Thomas Aquinas on work did not go beyond the generally accepted position. He never spoke of the hidden life of Jesus, his years of work and family life. Jesus's "entry into the world" began with his Baptism in the Jordan (*S.Th. III*, 27, praef.). The late medieval work of spirituality *The Imitation of Christ* pronounces a severe judgment against the role of work in Christian life, considering it as one of the elements that cause particular misery and unpleasantness for devout Christians. Another well-known XIV century work, *Meditationes vitae Christi*, stated categorically that Jesus never worked in his life.

Luther and Calvin, and the Protestant reformation in general, on the contrary, valued human work and connected it with creation. Still, they did not consider work as something capable of sanctifying humans because of the damage done them by sin. The “good works” involved in work are of no use; what is needed is “fiducial faith” in God. In spite of some references to the value work among modern Christian authors (for example in Francis de Sales) the topic was substantially neglected in Christian spirituality and ethics over recent centuries. Vatican Council II made an important contribution to the role of work in Christian life, as did the life and work of St Josemaría Escrivá.

A special effort was made to promote a renewed awareness of the value and dignity of human work in society from the Renaissance period onwards, not in a religious/theological context but in a humanistic one. Authors involved included Pico della Mirandola, Erasmus, Thomas More. In the modern period work was placed more an more at the center of human attention. This renewed awareness coincides materially with the secularization of society and a movement away from religious practice. De Lubac sees in the growing importance given to work in recent centuries an attempt “to flee fatality, which, from time immemorial was considered invincible” (*Oeuvres*, Paris 2006, vol. 4, 246). Voltaire encouraged one and all to carry out some worthy task to provide for their own sustenance and for the good of humanity, because work overcomes three evils: boredom, vice and need.

Karl Marx was particularly important in the philosophical development of the centrality of work. Paying little attention to the *homo sapiens*, or to the *homo volens*, he concentrates on the *homo faber*, the man who works, who produces, who constructs, who expresses himself through work, no longer interpreting the world but transforming it once and for all. Human work is the motor of all human progress. Thus work—or “labor” as it is called—far from being a mere instrument and means as it was in antiquity, to be avoided if at all possible, becomes in the modern period a central reality, virtually an end in itself, with which man identifies himself. Of course we are acutely aware nowadays how technological advances are bringing humans back to new kinds of slavery, because not only are they agents of change but also objects of transformation. Some are free, as in antiquity, some are still slaves. The dilemmas present in antiquity are still relevant today.

Both in Vatican II (GS 3) and in later papal documents (especially John Paul II's 1981 encyclical on work, *Laborem exercens* and Francis *Laudato si'*) the Church has encountered in Scripture the deep, anthropological meaning of work in the modern period. In effect, it is not enough to consider work as a means of purification of the sinful tendencies of humans, still less as an activity unworthy of humans, because the task of working and ruling the earth, according to Genesis, is something previous to the original fall. God placed us in paradise "in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gn 2:15).

38. The Theology of Work and Rest (CGW 543-551)

In this chapter we shall attempt to explain the principal theological elements of work in Scripture and Christian life. First, the theology of work in the Old Testament, which in fact gives special weight to the notion of “rest”. Then we shall examine the New Testament to comprehend work in the light of the life, death and Resurrection of Christ. Finally we shall present some elements of the “common priesthood” of all Christian faithful, called by God to sanctify the world through their activity.

1. Elements of the theology of work in the Old Testament

Let us consider what Scripture has to say about work and human activity.

In earlier chapters we have considered the texts from the first chapters of Genesis. On the whole, in fact, Scripture speaks positively about work and human activity. Sin has not substantially changed our destiny to work, for, as an exegete of Genesis says, “paradise was not a life of leisured unemployment” (Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1, 57). Still, sin introduced disorder into all human activity in such a way that we do not easily recognize the sovereignty of God in which we share.

Another important issue in Scripture is divine mandate of *resting*. Dt 5:12-14 describes it thus:

> Observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your manservant, or your maidservant, or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you (see also Ex 20:8-11; 23:12).

The Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel in his work *God in Search of Man* (New York, 1963, 417f.) powerfully comments as follows on these texts:

> Lift up your eyes and see: who created these. Six days a week we are engaged in conquering the forces of nature, in the arts of civilization. The seventh day is dedicated to the remembrance of creation and the remembrance of redemption, to the liberation of Israel from Egypt, to the exodus from a great civilization into a wilderness where the word of God was given. By our acts of labor during the six days we participate in the works of history; by sanctifying the seventh day we

> are reminded of the acts that surpass, ennoble and redeem history… The Sabbath, as experienced by man, cannot survive in exile, a lonely stranger among days of profanity. It needs the companionship of the other days. All days of the week must be spiritually consistent with the seventh day… In the language of the Jew, living *sub specie aeternitatis* means living *sub specie Sabbatis*.

To work for the glory of God means that humans must relive and reproduce in their lives a proper, spiritual and theological blending of activity and rest, of conquering and remembering, of searching and contemplating, of straining and relaxing, of acting and dreaming, inaugurated by God when he created the world. Of course the unredeemed side of human nature does not facilitate a serene integration of work and rest, which are often lived by fallen human beings as destructive forms of self-affirmation and escapism, respectively.

The Old Testament insistence on the Sabbath rest also shows that work has an intrinsically social side to it, in that it is meant to express care for the weaker members of society, servants, children, and even domestic animals. Work is meant to express divine praise and service to our neighbor. And rest serves as permanent corrective to all human attempts to confuse the means (self-affirming human activity, constructing the world) with the end (salvation, giving glory to God), thus ensuring we remember that God is the only Lord. “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep” (Ps 127:1f.)

Human life is directed by God to the “promise of entering his rest,” we read in the letter to the Hebrews (4:1)… this refers to the Sabbath rest yet is clearly eschatological. But this is not the direct fruit of human work, but rather of God’s grace. We cannot force our way into the kingdom, which is God’s gift and invitation. Still, the fact that humans are saved by grace does not exclude the idea that there will be authentic human activity in heaven. Heschel puts it as follows in *The Sabbath* (New York 1993, 19): “The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the

world." And Pope Francis observes that "we tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary, but this is to do away with the very thing which is most important about work: its meaning." Rest, Pope Francis says, "is another way of working, which forms part of our very essence. It protects human action from becoming empty activism; it also prevents that unfettered greed and sense of isolation which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else" (LS 237).

Wisdom literature pays frequent attention to work and human activity especially in a practical and moral context. Laziness is condemned out of hand, and work, even of the most humble kind, is positively evaluated. Those who carry out a manual task, says the book of Sirach, "keep stable the fabric of the world, and their prayer is in the practice of their trade" (38:34). In other words, work itself can become prayer.

2. The theology of work in the New Testament

The contribution of the New Testament to the theology of work confirms what is taught in the Old Testament, and moves in six directions.

First, in line with the Old Testament, Christ reminds his disciples that without God's grace their work and activity are of no use: "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Only God can save the world. Work may be a sign of grace working, but it will not change reality. *Second*, the central place of the Sabbath in the Old Testament is now occupied by Jesus Christ himself, "for the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Mt 12:8). Thus we can say that the reality of human work is actuated in and through the life and power of Christ present in each person. Paraphrasing Gal 2:20 we might say not only that Christ "lives in me," but that Christ "works in me." *Third*, the fact that Jesus himself worked for many years at a manual task is highly significant: he was the "carpenter's son" (Mt 13:55). He worked assiduously for many years, as we can see in his capacity to work tirelessly during his public ministry. Of himself he said: "My Father is working still, and I am working" (Jn 5:17). Paul also worked diligently both as a tentmaker and an apostle, perceiving how God worked in him and through him: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them [the other apostles], though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me" (1 Cor 15:10). He roundly condemned the behavior of some Christians who were "living in idleness, mere busy-bodies, not doing any work" (2 Thes

3:11). And so, he concludes, “if anyone will not work, let him not eat” (ibid., 3:10).

In the *fourth* place, Rom 8 speaks repeatedly of the fact that creation is reconciled to God in and through the life and activity of the children of God. Creation is meant to glorify God through humans. “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:19-23).

In the *fifth* place, in the dialogue between Jesus and the sisters Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42) we find an interesting expression of the dilemma Greek philosophers were aware of, between contemplation and work. Jesus reminded Martha, in the midst of her demanding work, to make sure she looked after “the one thing needful.” He made it clear that the materiality of manual work requires an inner, contemplative complement, made up of thanksgiving, praise, listening to God’s word, in order to ensure the activity in question is fully pleasing to God.

Sixth and last, human work carried out according to the will of God and for his glory offers the believer the opportunity and occasion of communicating the faith to other people, for work itself is apostolate. Christ indeed instructs his disciples: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:16).

3. Work and the common priesthood of believers

In the book of Exodus God speaks to Moses, saying: “You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel” (Ex 19:6). In God’s mind, this is the identity of the Jewish people: a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Heschel claims that “the great dream of Judaism is not to raise priests [Levites, etc.], but a people of priests; to consecrate all men, not only some men” (*God in Search of Man*, 419). The twelfth-century Jewish philosopher Maimonides observed that not only the Levites were consecrated to God, but “every human being born into this world whose spirit stirs him and whose intellect

guides him dedicates himself to the Lord in order to minister to Him and worship Him and to come to know Him, and the one who acts in conformity with God's design… becomes sanctified with sublime holiness" (*Mishneh Torah, Shemitah ve-Yobel*, 13, 12f.).

The first letter of Peter repeats Ex 19:6 almost to the letter. It declares to believers: "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" (1 Pt 2:9). In his letter to the Romans Paul writes: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (12:1). J. D. G. Dunn in his commentary on *Romans 9-16* (717) writes: "The sacrifice God looks for from humans is no longer that of beast or bird in the temple, but the daily commitment of life lived within the constraints and relationships of this bodily world".

On the basis of these texts and others, it is common doctrine that Christians are truly made priests by baptism, sharing validly in the priesthood of Christ, though not as ministers. The notion was widely commented on by the Church Fathers. It is of particular importance to Protestant authors. Followers of Calvin were called 'presbyterians', because all Christians are considered priests, 'presbyters'. Vatican Council II's *Lumen Gentium* (10) explains it as follows:

> The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of the Christian man they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pt 2:4-10). Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (Acts 2:42, 47), should present themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1). Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them (1 Pt 3:15).

The royal, priestly role of Christians entails not only obedience to Christ as "the rule of kings on earth" (Rv 1:5) but also participation in his rule over others: "and they shall reign on earth" (Rv 5:10). But even more, it involves ensuring that God is loved and praised in all human activity: the

Christian's life should be a self-offering in gratitude. Besides, the fact that such a sacrificial self-offering can be made in a real way in the midst of suffering links suffering and praise together in Christian life (Phil 2:17). It is clear that "the living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" would involve sanctified human work carried out by believers who thus "reverence Christ as Lord."

39. The History of the Human person (CGW 552-560)

This chapter and the following one shall return to the question already asked: *who is the human being?* And the response can only be: *a person.* This is Christianity's foremost contribution to anthropology.

We have seen that humans exist and live as beings in relationship, as *ens ab Alio*. They depend completely at an ontological level on the creator, however little they realize it. That is what gives them their identity, their personhood. Of course human beings not pure, abstract relationships, up in the air, for they exist *a se*, with a distinct and separate existence, as real beings, both spiritual and material, with an inner dignity given to them by God.

1. The genesis of "person" in Greek philosophy

It is fair to say that the notion of "person" is an almost pure product of the philosophical reflection that developed out of Christian life, assimilated, practiced and preached. Greek philosophers were very penetrating in respect of *human nature*, of the workings of the world, but could not quite manage to integrate the corporeal and spiritual into a single unitary reality, that of *being someone*.

The term "person" probably derives from the Greek *prosōpon* (originally from the Etruscan *phersu* and later the Latin *persona*) which is to be found in tragic drama and is usually translated as "face." It connects easily with the term *prosōpeion*, or "mask." Greek theater was considered the place where conflicts between the rational and universalist necessity for a harmonious world (the Greek ideal) played out against individual human freedom and aspirations. People attempted to acquire and consolidate their own personality in the midst of the rational, impersonal force of necessity, for the most part without managing to do so.

For both Aristotle and Plato the multiplicity of beings, the fact of the existence of a variety of individuals, is in real terms a sign of cosmic imperfection. Multiplicity must be overcome in order to achieve the harmonic unity of all beings. For Platonists the human ideal is one of being absorbed into the universal mind. To remain locked into one's own corporeal individuality is clearly an imperfection. Plotinus, the neo-Platonist, attempted to evaluate distinct human individuality, but could not quite make it happen. The individual exists on account of the whole, the multiplicity for the all. For Aristotle the individual simply cannot be

defined, and philosophy is interested in it only insofar as it is a member of a species or class.

The use of the term “person” and notion of “personal” human dignity may be found in ancient civilizations, indirectly at least. In Mesopotamia, 1000 years before Christ, there is evidence of a direct legal rapport between transgression and responsibility, which indicates the notion of an accountable individual, and so, a person. The Stoic Cicero had a similar position. Brunschvig observes that “from Stoicism humans have learned to say ‘I’.” Human worth for the Stoics is based on the common rationality of humans, which confers on them dignity and responsibility.

2. The Christian basis of the human “person”

Three stages may be indicated in the consolidation of the notion of the human person.

In the first place, the dignity and worth of the individual human being is clearly present in the life and preaching of Jesus, in the way he cared for people one-by-one, in the parable of lost sheep he sought out while leaving the ninety-nine on the side of the mountain (Mt 18:12-14) and many other occasions, in the “personal” call of the disciples and apostles after a night in prayer (Lk 6:12-16), which was personal and un-transferrable, and above all in the way he sacrificed his life for each and every human being. Besides, as we saw earlier on, the theology of vocation (§ 11) clearly underpins the theology of the person.

The second stage may be found as theology developed. The term “person” was not used in the New Testament. In fact the notion arose first of all in the theology of Christ and the Trinity. An important moment within this process coincided with the confession of the full divinity of the divine Word with the eternal Father against the Arians at the Council of Nicaea in 325. Arius taught that the *Logos*, or Son, is not co-eternal with the Father but was “created” or generated as a “second god” within time. “There was a time when the Logos did not exist,” Arius said. Of course if there was a moment when the *Logos* did not exist there must have been a time, “before” the generation of the Word, when God was not a Father, when there were no persons in God, when God was “mono-personal.” There had to be a phase when God existed on his own. The Trinity would arise later, and so would be something accidental to God himself. This marked a direct passage from Arianism to Modalism.

But the God of Christians creates not individuals who later on acquire a personal existence but rather real and true persons from the beginning of their existence, because God is, in the depths of his eternal being, *always totally personal*, indeed tri-personal. God was never alone as a Father, later on fulfilling a potency to fatherhood as he generated a son (as creatures do). This means of course that an anthropology based on a "mono-personal" God is not capable of founding a rigorous doctrine of the human person.

During the Patristic period the doctrine of the Trinity was gradually clarified along with that of Christ. There was a consolidation of the distinction between nature/substance (*physis/ousia*) on the one hand, and subject (*hypostasis*), on the other, along with an identification of the latter with "person" (*prosōpon*). For the Greeks the individual human was of no particular value. For Christian faith, the exemplar of the human species was the concrete object of divine, creative benevolence, loved by God "personally." Gradually Christians were forced to find a new language and a new metaphysics to explain the revealed reality of the Trinity, three persons in one substance, and Christ, two natures in one person. Heretics consistently attempted to reduce the revealed mystery to an older metaphysical scheme according to which each nature corresponds to a single subject, or hypostasis. Three examples should clarify the dynamic.

Neo-Platonists described the divine referring to three different hypostases in God: the One, the *Nous* (or mind) and the World-Soul. All three were connected in a hierarchically subordinate triad. Clearly each hypostasis is distinguished from the others by having its own nature: three hypostases and three natures. But this is not Christian teaching, for in the Trinity the three persons share the same nature.

According to Sabellius, the "three persons" refers simply to three aspects, roles, modes or moments of the one and only divine substance; this is usually called "modalism." Again therefore we have one divine nature corresponding to a single divine hypostasis, although the latter has been manifested in three different ways throughout salvation history.

In the V century Nestorius (perhaps it would be better to speak of Nestorianism) attempted to resolve the problem of the union of the divine with the human nature by reducing the personal union between the two natures in Christ to the level of a merely moral bond. Again, the same principle is involved: two natures require two persons, or subjects.

Church Fathers strove to encounter a correct formulation which gradually emerged. Tertullian coined the Latin expression *una substantia, tres personae*. In the East the Cappadocians spoke of "one *ousia*, three *hypostases*." They gave priority in God to the persons over the common nature. No longer did "nature" constitute what is most fundamental in being; the latter is now occupied by "person," what is most perfect among all existing beings. This involved a true metaphysical revolution.

The third stage in the theological and philosophical consolidation of the human person is to be found in the application of the Trinitarian term "person" to the human being. The first to do so was probably Augustine. "The name person does not designate the species, but rather the singular and the individual… The individual human being is a person" (*De Trinitate VII*, 6:11; XV, 7:11). The XX century philosopher Xavier Zubiri in his work *Man and God* (Lanham 2009, 235f.) offers the following observations on the genesis of the notion of the human person:

> Greek metaphysics here encounters significant limitations, stemming from the idea of the possible actuation of a potency by an act, or of a possible Platonic participation of some realities with respect to others. But above all it has a fundamental and serious limitation: the complete absence of the concept and the very term "person." It took the titanic effort on the part of the Cappadocian Fathers to divest the term *hypostasis* from its characteristic of pure *hypokeimenon*, from its characteristic of *subjectum*, and of substance, to bring it close to the juridical sense the Romans had given the term "person," as distinct from the pure *res*, the thing. It is easy to speak during the course of philosophy of what a person is in respect of the *res naturalis*, for example in Descartes and above all in Kant. But it should not be forgotten that the introduction of the concept of person in its specificity was the work of Christian thought and of the revelation that thought refers to.

3. Definitions of the "person"

Though deeply rooted in the life and work of Christ, in the Christian calling, in Trinitarian and Christological reflection, philosophers from the VI century onwards began to "take over" the notion of the human person in applying it to humans. Particularly important was the definition given by Boethius in the early VI century: *naturae rationalis individua substantia* (an individual substance of rational nature). Similar versions were taken up by

many medieval authors. In the early Middle Ages, Richard of St. Victor defines “person” in two ways: *Persona est existens per se solum iuxta singularem quemdam rationalis exsistentiae modum.…* and also: *Persona est rationalis naturae individua [vel incommunicabilis] existentia* (the person exists of itself as a singular only according to a determined mode of rational existence; the person is a singular [or uncommunicable] existence of rational nature). Alan of Lille offers the following definition: *Hypostasis proprietate distincta ad dignitatem pertinente* (the person is a hypostasis with distinct property qualified by proper dignity). Thomas Aquinas defined the person as *subsistens in rationali natura* (that which subsists in a rational nature). Bonaventure, following Alan of Lille, says: *Persona de sui ratione dicit suppositum distinctum proprietate ad dignitatem pertinente* (The person of itself means what subsists with distinct property and proper dignity). Finally, Duns Scotus says that the person is *substantia incommunicabilis naturae rationalis* (an incommunicable substance of rational nature).

In the next chapter we shall consider some of the implications of these definitions.

40. The Human Person: Christianity's Contribution to Anthropology (CGW 560-567)

In the light of the historical reflection on the person, in this final chapter we shall reflect on Christianity's greatest contribution to anthropology: that each exemplar of the human species is a "person."

1. Human person and human nature

Virtually all the classical definitions of the person may be found, not in works of anthropology, but of Christology and Trinitarian theology. The concept of "person" belongs in the first place to God. For this reason Aquinas says that only God is "person" in the original sense of the word (*S.Th. I*, 29, 3), whereas humans are designated as persons in an analogical way. Berdjaev summed this up by saying in *Slavery and Freedom* (33) "that the awareness of God as person preceded the awareness of man as person." And Max Scheler says in *Die Stellung des Menschen* (15) that "the idea of 'person' applied to God is not an anthropomorphism! In fact God is the only perfect and pure person, while that *quid* we call by the name 'man' is only an imperfect and analogically understood 'person.'" It may be noted besides that the structure of the definition offered by medieval authors is basically the same: the person is presented as a subject, as an individual, marked by a particular characteristic, which is rationality.

The following observation is an important one: "person" is not a simple attribute of human nature. The above-mentioned definitions are saying that an attribute belonging to the nature of the human individual (rationality, spirituality or whatever) is what identifies this human individual not only as an exemplar of the species, but as an irreplaceable and eternal being, a person. Thomas says openly that "the person is that which is most perfect in the whole of nature" (*S.Th. I*, 29, 3). By identifying the specific nature of humans we can affirm that *that* individual is a person. Robert Spaemann observes that "person and nature are realities that are simply incommensurable with one another." Thomas and the medieval authors employ an individualized and personalized notion of rationality, and not a common human rationality that Aristotle and his commentators spoke of. We might say that humans possess their dignity not as members of humanity (though that belongingness does allow us to identify them as human), not because others recognize them as such, not because of the 'rights' they have obtained, not on the basis of their rationality, not because

of their nature, but because they are creatures of God, loved into existence one by one "in his image and likeness."

Several of the definitions offered above spoke of the person as *incommunicable*. This might seem to amount to a denial of our fundamentally relational character, with God in the first place, and with other human persons. But the term *incommunicable* should be properly understood. Against the interpretations of Aristotle by Averroes and others, Thomas rejected the idea of a common human intellect, shared by all, that would end up destroying the dignity of each one. Each person therefore, though created by God and maintained in being by him, though open to other persons, is ontologically incommunicable. The person simply cannot be eliminated. In other words they were not speaking of a psychological, existential or personalistic incommunicability, but rather of a metaphysical one. And the key point is that humans are capable of freely and responsibly establishing and reinforcing relationships with others insofar as they *do not lose their individuality.* Paradoxically, they can communicate because they are incommunicable. That is why the relation between humans and with God is called *communion* and not simply union.

As we saw earlier on (§ 29) modern philosophy tended to put more and more emphasis on human subjectivity than on the metaphysical subject, and with that the person came to be seen as a psychological entity rather than an ontological one. Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant and Hegel and others focused on the person in this way. Kierkegaard reacted vigorously against Hegel's notion of common humanity, insisting on the value of the "singularity" of the human being, saying that with this category the cause of Christianity stands or falls. During the XX century personalism became an important school of philosophy. Husserl, Scheler, Buber, Lévinas and others reflected on the relationships that exist between the "I," the "it," the "you" and the "we." Personhood is detected and manifested by interaction with others. The problem with personalism is that for some of these authors the person does not coincide with the human individual. If the latter has not been recognized as such, or accepted, or loved… it may mean they are not (yet) a person. Christian philosophy holds however that wherever there is a biologically living human organism, there is a person, no more and no less. Paul Ricoeur noticed the weakness of personalism in the title of a study: *Meurt le personnalisme, revient la personne*: "once personalism dies, the person returns, remains, and takes over."

2. Human person and Christian faith

Another interesting episode as regards the understanding of the person may be found among Protestant authors during the XX century. Their anthropology is centered on salvation and redemption in a personalist key. When Luther said *fides facit personam* ("faith makes the person," WA 39, 1:293), what he said was true, that is humans obtain their full potentiality through faith, grace and justification; besides we come to appreciate our personal dignity fully only through revelation. But this does not mean that we *become* persons through faith. Emil Brunner for example was of the opinion that becoming a person takes place in the very act of responding to the Word of God. But this is unacceptable: humans are not constituted as persons through faith or during their lifetime. Either they are persons at the very beginning of their existence or they will never become persons. Jesus Christ is our Savior of course but is at the same time our creator.

The personalist explanations of humans provide a useful relational understanding, but neglect the more ontological side of personhood. Human beings are persons independently of whether or not they think, or act meaningfully, or believe, or are accepted and recognized by others. Romano Guardini reacted against all reductionism of the person. In *Welt und Person* (Wurzburg 1940) he says the person means "being there in itself and disposing of self. The person means that in my very being I cannot, when all is said and done, be possessed by any other instance, but that I belong to myself." Thus, he concludes incisively, "the person does not arise from the encounter, but only acts within it" (94, 107).

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