

The Titles of Christ

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The Titles of Christ

Matthew the Poor



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Preface

I never met Father Matthew the Poor (Fr. Matta El-Meskeen), the well known Coptic Orthodox Abbot of the St. Macarius Monastery from the deserts of Egypt, who has recently fallen asleep in the Lord; but I met many of his spiritual children here in America — Coptic Orthodox Christians, who have impressed me beyond words by their love for Christ, for their spiritual master, and especially for their Pope and venerable Church. I consider it a great blessing that I have had the opportunity to be exposed to the rich spirituality and faith of this venerable Christian people, who have suffered so much, but have preserved so zealously the holy tradition of the Gospel as it was expounded by the early spiritual masters, like the Great Anthony, the professor of the desert, as we call him in the Greek Orthodox Church, and the great ecumenical teachers, like St. Athanasius and St. Cyril. I feel privileged to have been a member of the joint committee for the theological dialogue between the Eastern and the Oriental Orthodox Churches as a representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, which recommended that in spite of the divisions of the past, and the differences in formulating the faith once delivered to the saints, there is today a basic consensus on the Orthodox faith and especially on the most crucial of all dogmas, the blessed person of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ and a desire for confessing the faith together and drawing into unity ecclesiastically. It is, then, with

such feelings of solidarity and commitment to the orthodox faith that I write this foreword to a book which expounds the rich meaning of the person of the Blessed Lord of all humanity, who has offered Himself for all and wants all to be one. Father Matta's book will help every reader to return to the Lord who created us and who invites us to a perfect salvation and eternal life. I am glad that the Orthodox Research Institute is publishing a second book by a Coptic Orthodox father, after the great and successful book of Metropolitan Bishoy of Damiette. May the Lord give rest to Father Matta and bless exceedingly Pope Shenouda III and the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Fr. George Dion. Dragas

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On Christ's Place in the Godhead and How It Determined the Destiny of Mankind

To glean enough evidence from the books of the New Testament to allow us to say, “Christ is God,” is very difficult. For a paramount principle prevents the title “God” (Θεός) from being applied directly to Christ. He is the “Son of God” — and the Son cannot be “God” except with the Father.

However, in order to define or reveal himself as truly God (Θεός) with the Father, Christ proclaims: “I and the Father are one” (Jn. 10:30), and also, “I am in the Father and the Father [is] in me” (Jn. 14:10). This means that the Father can never be without the Son or the Son without the Father. In other words, whenever the Son is mentioned, the Father is clearly and consistently alongside him. The implication of this is that the Son, or Christ, is God; for he always exists in the Father. Christ can never exist alone: “You ... will leave me alone; yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me” (Jn. 16:32).

The scribes and Pharisees, the theologians of the old covenant, are Christ's obdurate opponents. When they hear him declare himself the “Son of God,” the expression leaves them no room to doubt that Jesus considers himself fully divine: “... and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one” (Jn. 10:28 – 30). The Jews then react by attempting to

stone him, saying, "You, being a man, make yourself God" (Jn. 10:33), evidently because he has said, "I and the Father are one." In point of fact, Christ is so; he and the Father are one. He does not make a god out of himself, but, being divine, he has made himself man. This is the point they miss. But this he has done in order to reveal God to them in himself visibly and audibly: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9).

Although Christ avoids saying directly that he is a god or is God, he is actually declaring it with the maximum emphasis possible when he says, "I and the Father are one." For if the Father is truly God, it follows that Christ also is truly God. But in order to avoid duality in the Deity, we say that the one God is the Father and the Son. However, God can never be the Father alone; neither can he be the Son alone. God the Son and the Father are the one God. The word *one* here is not numerical, and in no way relates to physical or measurable numbers. It is but one in spirit. God is one: Father and Son; we, therefore, say that God is Father and Son in spirit. Or, to make it clear, we say that God is spirit: Father and Son.

However, the Father and the Son are not two beings but one being in whom there is both Fatherhood and Sonship. Out of the divine Fatherhood every kind of fatherhood in the whole world proceeds (Eph. 3:15), and from the divine Sonship also every kind of sonship in the whole world proceeds. God then is the source of every fatherhood and sonship in the world: they derive their entity, activity and perpetuity from God, and it is well known that every life and existence in the world is built on fatherhood and sonship. So, should fatherhood cease to exist in the world, life will disappear and the world will come to an end. The same also applies to sonship. Therefore, divine Fatherhood and Sonship, which are permanent and immutable attributes of God, are the basis, the building blocks, for the continuing survival of life in his whole created order. It follows then that there can never be an exclusive fatherhood or an exclusive sonship in God. Neither can God be without fatherhood or sonship — otherwise there would never have been life or a living creature in this universe.

According to the Holy Nicene Council, one should not speculate about who preceded the other in the persons of the divine Being — the Father or the Son? For the divine Being is an absolute existence or entity; it is not subject to time. Therefore, there is neither first nor last; the Father and the Son make up the existence of the one, divine Being. It is an eternal existence: neither the Father nor the Son, of necessity, has a beginning.

The Father is co-equal with the Son, and the Son is co-equal with the Father; for they are one Essence and one Being. The Father perfects the Son with His fatherhood, and the Son perfects the Father with his sonship. Co-equality then is imperative: absolute congruity is essential if the entity is one. For this reason, we declare the absolute oneness of God; for God is one absolute, and there is no variance between the Father and the Son except in fatherhood as an intrinsic attribute of God and sonship also as an intrinsic attribute of God. They are one, single Being; for the Father absolutely loves the Son by giving him all that belongs to Him, and the Son also absolutely loves the Father by giving Him all that belongs to him.¹ In absolute, divine love the Being of God is held together in union; God is one and one only — not in terms of numerical figures but in terms of perfectly reciprocated love which captivates mind and heart. The oneness of God is the interaction of His perfect love through which He created a magnificent universe; and so His love penetrated into all His creation, which adores this overwhelming love and submits to it.

Christ was sensitively aware of his co-equality with the Father; extremely so, for he is the only beloved, incarnate Son. Out of his awareness of the absolute love of his Father (Jn. 3:35; 5:20) and of his own love for the Father (Jn. 14:31), he saw that co-equality as a reality

¹ It is here that fatherhood and sonship in God become necessary; for the divine Being should be an absolutely perfect one: God is perfectly loving, which is the quality of fatherhood, and also perfectly beloved, which is the quality of sonship. And, thus, God becomes absolutely loving and absolutely beloved within Himself, which is the ultimate perfection of His Being.

which he lived out and preached. He carried out the work of redemption, which his Father placed on his shoulders, in a submissiveness which surpassed that of a slave. For it was comprehensive submission, uncompromised by slackness or weakness — an absolute submission dictated by the wholehearted obedience of a Son and guarded by the conscience of a filial love. So his sacrifice was in perfect accordance with the will of the Father.

If you ask how can the one Being contain both fatherhood and sonship together, you have to examine man's being. Every man contains fatherhood and sonship together. But in mankind sonship proceeds out of man by marriage, that is when sonship, which exists in man's entity, takes a body from a woman and a son is born to him. The son was hidden in man's entity and came out into being by marriage, in which he took flesh from a wife. As for the divine Being which is free from marriage, the Son of God, which was hidden in the entity of the divine Being, came out into human existence by the incarnation; that is, he took flesh from a virgin by the Holy Spirit without marriage. He came out into the world as the "Son of man" because he is born of a woman. However, he remained the Son of God, for he was born of the Holy Spirit and of the Holy Virgin Mary. He came out into the world of mankind while still remaining in the divine Being with his Father (Jn. 1:18). It was the Father's will to send him into the world: "I came from the Father" (Jn. 16:27). He came to reveal in himself the true presence of God the Father and the Son. We would never have known the divine Being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit were it not for the incarnation.

However, although the Son of God has been born of the Virgin and of the Holy Spirit, he was never born of the Father in the temporal sense of the word. For God the Father is a spirit far removed from childbirth or temporal events. Childbirth is a temporal event which takes place in the world of flesh and time. Time may never flow through God, not even at the level of spirit or eternity.

This paramount fact is what St. Athanasius of Alexandria meant to express when he said that the "Son" is born before all ages. "Before

all ages” actually means “non-temporal,” that is, before time existed or without any beginning. St. Athanasius said this in order to free God from any act or event of birth in its temporal sense. For in eternity and before the ages or time itself came to exist, neither any action nor any event took place. Consequently, there was no act of birth. St. Athanasius states it most clearly that “born” here is a condition and not an act or an event. In other words, we do not say that he “was born,” which stipulates the element of time, but that he “is born” as an existential condition. Christ was not born in an act of birth which took place some time ago, but as an existing state of being in the eternal sense. In other words, Christ is born from the Father in eternity without an act of birth; that is, he existed as long as the Father did.

St. Athanasius adds in clarification that in the Father and Son there is neither first nor last; neither forerunner nor follower. In other words, the existence of the Father did not precede that of the Son; neither did the existence of the Son follow that of the Father. Otherwise, time would pierce into the nature of God — which is impossible. The existence of the Father is concomitant with that of the Son: both of them existed from eternity.

St. Athanasius thus stated his theological axiom which was adopted by the Council of Nicea and became a creed of the Christian faith: The Son is “born before all ages,” which means that the Son existed with the Father before time; that is, from eternity. This *per se* frees God from any act of birth, which was an unnecessary source of confusion to non-Christians and even Christians themselves. St. Athanasius has a clear-cut statement to make in this respect:

For the offspring of men are portions of their fathers, since the very nature of bodies is not uncompounded (that is, not simple but breakable into parts), but in a state of flux (sons then fathers then sons, and so on), and composed of parts; and men (and women) lose their substance in begetting, and again they gain substance from the accession of food. And on this account men in their time become fathers of many children; but God, being without parts, is Father of the Son without partition or passion; for there is neither effluence (ἀπορροή) of the

Immaterial, nor influx from without, as among men; and being uncompounded in nature, He is Father of One Only Son. This is why He is Only begotten (μονογενής), and alone in the Father's bosom, and alone is acknowledged by the Father to be from Him, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17). And He too is the Father's Word, from which may be understood the impassible and impartitive nature of the Father, in that not even a human word is begotten with passion or partition, much less the Word of God. (*Defence of the Nicene Definition*;² PG 25, 444; NPNF 1st Ser. Vol. IV, 157)

Spirit and eternity are free from time and from events or acts. Such is the transcendent nature of God which cannot be assailed by actions or temporal events. Christ is the Son of God who is ever-present in the divine Being as a Son together with the Father from the beginning, from eternity. He came out according to the Father's will to the world of human time by taking a body from a virgin, that is a virgin body without a man, and so remained holy after his birth: "Therefore, the child born of you will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). And so he willingly united himself to mankind by taking a body from a woman. When he was born, he became God's representative in the flesh of man as the Son of God within the sphere of mankind. He proclaimed the Father, for he and the Father are one in absolute co-equality. He revealed the existence of the unseen Father: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). He fulfilled the whole of the Father's will with regard to the salvation of mankind from the bane of sin and death, which have blighted our race on account of our disobedience. And so he bore the sin of mankind in the flesh and died in the flesh to redeem the flesh, that is humanity, from sin and the punishment of death. He rose after death and raised the flesh, that is the flesh of mankind in

² Several Fathers also share this idea with St. Athanasius. The title "Word" absolutely clears the sonship of Christ of the physical concept of effluence. See St. Cyril the Great, *Thesaurus: On the Trinity*, 5; St. John Chrysostom, *On the Gospel of John*, 2:4; St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomius*, Bk. III, p. 107.

the spirit so that it might live again, but this time a life free from sin and death. Mankind may thus live with God as he lived in the person of Adam before the fall, but without a second fall or disobedience or death.

His life in God will be everlasting. It is by being united to the body of Christ that a renewed humankind may appear in Christ before God the Father and be received in a genuinely filial relationship as a son together with the Son.

The title "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι) means "I am the Self-existent" or "I am the Being."³ This title which was uttered by Christ recalls the mystery of the same speaker in the books of the Old Testament: "I am the Lord" or "I am the Lord God."

The Gospel of John, being a revelatory Gospel, makes this title its own property. This title occurs 29 times in John, while not more than 4 times in the Synoptic Gospels. As for the Old Testament, it occurs 102 times in its literal form "I am." The Gospel of John highlights the revelatory nature of this title by mentioning it as a personal name of Christ in some places. It draws upon the Old Testament to reveal the Person of the speaking God. But what draws the attention here is that the Gospel asserts that the name of the Father "I am" is now given to Christ. His name also becomes "I am," representing the Father most powerfully and most perfectly. For in John 17, Christ addresses the Father thus: "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, which Thou hast given me" (Jn. 17:11). This conforms with what the book of Exodus throws into bold relief in ch. 23:20, 22: "...do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him." It is evident here that Christ is "God speaking" or "God the Word" or "God's personal message." For when Christ speaks, it is God speaking. In order that the reader may catch this sense, we cite an example here:

³ Cf. *Introduction to the Exposition of St. John* by the author, pp. 218–246 (in Arabic).

Old Testament "God"⁴

"And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh" (Ex. 14:18).

"That you may believe me and understand that I am he" (Is. 43:10).

"I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God ... And they shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them" (Ezek. 34:15, 30).

"Hearken to me, O Jacob, and Israel whom I called! I am he, I am the first, and I am the last" (Is. 48:12).

"I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give every man according to the fruits of his doings" (Jer. 17:10).

New Testament "Christ"

"When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he" (Jn. 8:28).

"for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he" (Jn. 8:24).

"I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me" (Jn. 10:14).

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8).

"And all the churches shall know that I am he, who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve" (Rev. 2:23).

It is evident here that the name of God in the Old Testament was "I am" or "ἐγώ εἰμι" and that God gave this name to Christ the "Son": "And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him" (Deut 18:19), "for my name is in him" (cf. 23:20:21).

But of what significance is it that Christ should bear the name of the Father?

Christ answers this question most clearly and convincingly: "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (Jn. 5:43); "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to me" (Jn. 10:25).

When Christ says "I am the good shepherd," he reveals, first of all, his Godhead by mentioning the complete name of the Divinity = "ἐγώ εἰμι" that is "I am the Self-Existent" or "I am the Existent," and then he declares what he is now — the Shepherd. It is to be understood

⁴ Cf. the whole list in *Introduction to the Exposition of St. John*, pp. 244 – 246.

thus: "I, the Self-Existent, have become a shepherd," which is a literal translation of the Greek for "I am the Shepherd." And this applies to everything that Christ uttered when saying "I am;" in Greek it is: "I am the Existent" — "ἐγὼ εἰμι."

It is here that the power of the divine expression in Christ's description of himself is manifested before our eyes: he is the eternal Self-Existent. He is, thus, not a shepherd of dumb, animal sheep, but a good shepherd: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God" (Mk. 10:18), which means he is a divine shepherd pasturing rational sheep. And so he also says, "I am the true vine" (Jn. 15:1). "True" here takes away the material and visible entity of the vine along with its relationship to the earth; for the "true" is the heavenly and eternal which is other than the visible, material, perishing form. For the quality of truth which is in the vine corresponds to "I" for which there is no beginning = "I am the Self-Existent" or "I, God, have become a true vine through My incarnation; and in Me you have become My own flesh and bones" (cf. Eph 5:30).

And so we draw the reader's attention to the name "I am," which gives the whole Gospel a new transcendent and elevated sense. It truly befits Christ who says, "I and the Father are one." For "I am" or "ἐγὼ εἰμι" is one name for the Essence of the Father and the Son. It is a clear and lucid name of the Deity which brings confidence and joy.

August 1993

Christ, the “Son of God”

Such is the awe-inspiring title, deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, designating the person of the coming Messiah. He is the “Son of God” —but in an obscure and inscrutable way. This tradition is handed down from one high priest to another throughout all generations. We note it most clearly in the words of the high priest when he asks Christ during his trial: “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (Mt. 26:63). In the Gospel of Luke, it is told as follows: “And they all said, ‘Are you the Son of God, then?’ And he said to them, ‘You say that I am’” (Lk. 22:70). It is also ascribed to Christ in a mocking way: “So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if He desires him; for he said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Mt. 27:41 – 43).

In very early Christian tradition, the first man to declare the title of Christ as the Son of God is St. Peter. He receives his confession of Christ by a special revelation, directly from God the Father. He proclaims it forthrightly: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16). And Christ witnesses that it is God who has revealed it to Peter.

According to Jewish tradition, the title “Messiah” is associated with the “Son of God.” The title “Son of God” was a personal revelation

to Christ himself. So he handles it with caution, seldom pronouncing it or expounding it at length. This keeps him clear of the snare laid for him by those Jews who accuse him before the Romans of being an earthly, political king. For according to Jewish tradition, the Messiah, or Son of God, will come to wage war against the Gentiles (in this case the Romans) and save Israel from their grip, establishing once more the kingdom of David.

But this does not prevent Christ from preaching or working with the authority of the Son of God — which confuses the Jews, causing them to inquire of him by what authority he does so. To their amazement, he answers that he is doing the Father's work. What he says is taught to him by the Father. In short, he attributes all his words and deeds which transcend human understanding to the Father. He declares himself unequivocally to be the Son of God.

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone me?" The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are Gods'? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be broken), do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn. 10:31 – 38).

It is clearly evident from Christ's debate with the Jews that people may be called gods, according to the Torah, if they accept the word of God. But Christ does not just accept the word of God: he *is* himself, *par excellence*, the Word of God. He is then in very truth to be called "God" and "Son of God;" for the Father hallowed him the moment he was incarnated, and so he ranks above all people in holiness. It is the

Father who has sent him, as the angel made known to the Holy Virgin Mary. "So the holy one to be born of you will be called the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35 NIV). This means that the hallowing of Christ did not come after his birth, but he is originally holy and has also been born holy. If he then says he is the Son of God, this is not merely a claim but a reality demonstrated before them in word and deed. He does nothing but the work of God, not as one inspired by God like the saintly prophets, but authentically speaking out the power of God Himself.

Although Christ has received a revelation and testimony from God during baptism that he is the Son of God with whom He is well pleased, he does not draw upon it because it has been sent to him in person. He enfolds that testimony in his heart and sets out in accordance with it to do the works of God as a Son. It is not the quality of his sonship which Christ employs in performing the signs or wonders which he does. Rather, he presents with his sonship an amazing example of obedience to his Father. No one can attain such a level except a Son who is intimate with his Father. By his obedience, he defies death on the cross without fear; for it has been his Father's will. Christ has been very sure that he will rise and be glorified with that glory which has been his before the creation of the world. He has been sure that he will rise above all the heavens to proclaim to the whole world, both heaven and earth, that he has been obedient to the point of death as a true Son, that God his Father might be glorified. By this very death, he has reconciled the world to his Father.

Christ has received the same testimony, that he is the "beloved Son," through a demonstration of the radiant glory of God from heaven. Two witnesses from the other world — one representing the Law (Moses) and the other the prophets (Elijah) — appear with him. This takes place in the presence of two of his disciples — one of whom represents love (John) and the other boldness (Peter). But Christ does not employ this as a testimony; for he regards it as a private one for him as a Son. His Father thus makes the Law and the Prophets an aid to him that he might enact his exit from Jerusalem and accept death. He will have thus fulfilled the glory of the Law and the glory of Prophecy. His will

have been an atoning sacrifice able to fulfill the entire Law and all the Prophets as well. Christ then goes out to the cross encouraged by the Law and urged on by the Prophets. The Son drinks the cup delivered to him by the Father's hand until he says, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30).

The cross is then the greatest witness that Christ is truly the Son of God and "is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11). And so everyone who believes in the cross believes in Christ as truly the Son of God. This has been declared by the centurion as admiration of Christ overwhelmed his heart and mind: "And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus cried out and breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God'" (Mk. 15:39). Scholars or critics may belittle the centurion's confession that Christ is in his eyes the "Son of God" as coming from a pagan army officer. Yet, it is sufficient vindication for him that he has presented the greatest possible testimony. For it ranks among us as the highest confession and the most powerful point of faith.

Likewise, there is another confession, surrounded with a halo of fear and glory, which the disciples make after the sea has surged up against them with its overwhelming waves, and the howling winds inspire dread of an inevitable death. But then Christ approaches the disciples' boat which has been tormented by the waves: "And when they (Christ and Peter) got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (Mt. 14:32 - 33). Again, scholars or critics may play down such a confession, which comes out of hearts filled with a mixture of fear, awe, thanksgiving and joy. Yet, it is not only truthful, it also ranks with the best confession the greatest theologian of our day could make. The disciples' appraisal of Christ's Sonship to God is the greatest assessment by which a savior may be appraised.

It is said that the best testimony comes from the greatest enemy. To that extent that that is true, we can say that it comes from Satan. To tempt Christ, the fallen angel has been allowed to use all the cunning and guile he has got. He has contrived a plan to exploit God's

own testimony to Christ at the River Jordan to make him fall from his obedience to his Father. He tempts him to use his private authority apart from the Father, making his title "Son of God" a matter of doubt to him: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread" (Mt. 4:3). The devil says this while Christ has been fasting for forty days and has become hungry at last. Christ then turns to him, adhering in obedience to the word of God: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Mt. 4:4). In this way, Christ proves that he is truly the Son of God, and that he has life in himself which needs no earthly bread: "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in himself" (Jn. 5:26).

Again, the devil attempts to make Christ doubtful of his sonship to the Father at the same level and for the same purpose: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down (from the pinnacle of the temple); for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'" (Mt. 4:6). But Christ turns to him and answers from the same Scripture: "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Mt. 4:7). And so Christ proves for the second time that he is truly the Son of God; for he refused to test his Father, choosing instead to live in obedience to him.

The devil's eyes have thus been fixed on God's revelation to Christ, as he heard it on the River Jordan, that he is the "Son of God." The crux of his temptations has been to make him doubtful of what he is sure of; but he fails. The devil, therefore, also witnesses in spite of himself that Christ *is* the Son of God. This maneuver only reveals the devil's knowledge that Christ is sure that he is the Son of God. The devil's aim has been to pervert him from his filial obedience to God his Father by enticing him to use his personal authority—without referring to the Father. For it is evident from the life of Christ and all his works that he does not act of himself; everything shown him by his Father, that he does. The first and foremost message of Christ lies in his obedience to the Father, even to the cross.

From Satan's temptation in the desert we can see that Christ is surely known to him as the Son of God. When Christ conquers the devil by his absolute obedience to God, he thus proves that he is truly the Son of God.

Yet, it is neither from the devil's temptation, nor from the question of the high priest, nor from the affinity with the title "Messiah" handed down from Jewish tradition, do the disciples know that Christ is the Son of God. The question then which poses itself here is: Where does the doctrine and faith in Christ as the Son of God come from and how did it become established in the early Church?

The answer is that no source exists other than Christ himself. This source lies in his overt sayings which proceed from his transcendent knowledge of God as Father. He repeatedly mentions God as his true Father. The verses which most inspire the Church with the conviction that Christ is truly the Son of God are words which he puts into effect by his works: "... no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt. 11:27). The knowledge which Christ has had of himself as a Son to God is disclosed by his extreme intimacy with him. This appears in his prayers among his disciples and in his talks which set their hearts on fire. For they admit, "You have the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68). As for the signs and wonders which he performs, they are only done to indicate that he is the Son of God, but are not an end in themselves. This is most clear from his words to his disciples, "... he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do" (Jn. 14:12).

But what has firmly established the doctrine of the Son of God in the hearts of the disciples and the early Church after receiving this piece of information from his mouth, whether it be overt, implied or indicated by his works, is the prophecies. The second Psalm had a most powerful impact on the hearts of the disciples as to the doctrine of Christ being the Son of God. This is evident from the way they quote it in their prayer after having been beaten and insulted for the name of Christ shortly after Pentecost: "And when they heard it (the

news of the beating of Peter and John), they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth, and the sea and everything in them, who by the mouth of our father David, Thy Servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit: Why did the Gentiles rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed — for truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate ...' (Acts 4:24–27). As for the rest of the Psalm, it says unequivocally: "I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession'" (Ps. 2:7, 8).

In such a lucid manner God has uttered the prophecy through David to declare that His Anointed is, first and foremost and above all else — His Son. But we would like to note here that "Today I have begotten you" does not refer to the day of his birth from the Virgin, but to the new birth of his resurrection from the dead, which is the greatest day in human history; for on that day, the Son of man is born by resurrection from the dead, and has afterwards risen to the highest heaven to sit on the right hand of his Father. And in him has humanity been raised up as a partner in his glory.

God's words in the Psalm, "Today I have begotten you," refer to mankind's day of deliverance from the curse and redemption from the bondage of sin and death. For the day the Son of man, the second Adam, was brought forth from among the dead, is the very day on which mankind was restored to a new, everlasting life. It was for this reason that the Church at the very beginning of its practice set for the rite of baptism the hymn of the great deliverance, sung by the attendants of the baptized person, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light," which St. Paul quoted in Ephesians 5:14.

The prophecy of Daniel also is illuminating. It provides a guiding principle for the thinking of the Church in her search to clarify the

truth and realism of the title "Son of God" for Christ. For they are highlighted by the words of the prophecy, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like the son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:13 – 14).

The disciples witness the ascension of Christ. They see a cloud carrying him away from their sight. They also hear the angels confirming to them that he "was taken up from you into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Consequently, they compare this to the promise Christ already made when he affirmed, "Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms ... I go to prepare a place for you ..." (Jn. 14:1, 2).

And, thus, they learn from the words of Christ that he is going to the Father; and so they also become assured of the words of Daniel, "... and he came to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him ..." (Dan. 7:13 – 14). It, therefore, becomes clear before their eyes that the "Son of man," whom they have heard about from Christ for so long is himself the "Son" who "was presented before the Ancient of Days (i.e. the Father)" to have "dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him." Insofar as they understand that he is the Son of God, they understand their message which they have received from him: "And 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 ...'" (Mt. 28:18 – 19).

Therefore, Christ, who worthily attributes to himself the title "Son of man" in accordance with the prophecy of Daniel, does truly believe that he is the "Son of God." And so the same certitude of being the Son of God in which Christ has lived among his disciples as the

Son of God, is also the same certitude in which the disciples and the early Church have set out to preach, believe and confess him as the Son of God.

Likewise, whenever Christ reiterates his title "Son of man," he also reaffirms to his disciples in both word and deed that he is the "Son of God." It is by God's authority that he speaks and works and even dies and rises. Thus, St. Paul describes him as "... designated Son of God ... by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

As for Christ, the title "Son of God" holds sway over all his faculties. His consciousness of it links him to God as a Father whose presence he always feels: "... yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (Jn. 16:32). The feeling he cherishes for this title is the source of his peace, security, pride and work: "... but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (Jn. 14:31).

He feels extremely sad, in a way incomprehensible to the world, that the Jews humiliate him when he glorifies and dignifies his Father in word and deed: "I have not a demon; but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me" (Jn. 8:49). As for his pride in his sonship to God his Father, it reaches its zenith when he accepts the cup of suffering and death from his hand, while annihilating his own will: "... nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done" (Lk. 22:42). Thus, he obeys his Father's will to the point of death.

And so by the Son's obedience to his Father unto death, we have received our exemption from death and our life from the Father. We will ever remain indebted to the sonship of Christ to God and his obedience unto death, not only for our lives, but also for receiving our sonship to God in him. And, thus, the title "Son of God" has become the foundation of our faith upon which we draw our life.

As for our indebtedness to the Son of God, it is the gospel which no longer addresses us as slaves but as children and beloved — in His Son. God's compassion towards us reaches us purely through His compassion and love towards His only Son. Moreover, we cannot lift up our love to God directly from ourselves, but only through the Son's love for the Father can we present our love for God as sons in Christ.

Even the life we shall live in the kingdom of God springs from the life of the Son to whom the Father is accessible. Likewise, our reconciliation to the Father is accessible to us through the cross of His Son: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself... that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them..." (2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

To sum it up, we shall not reach the zenith of our salvation and reconciliation to God the Father without the mediation of the Son who is one with the Father. It is from the oneness of the Son with the Father that we receive the fullness of love, forgiveness, salvation, adoption, glory and finally communion and unceasing life: "... that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us... The glory which Thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and Thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that Thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as Thou hast loved me" (Jn. 17:21, 22, 23).

And so it becomes clear to the reader how valuable the great sonship of Christ in God is. For on account of the love which the Father has for the Son, the Son receives all that belongs to the Father; and on account of the incarnation of the Son, the Son gives us all that belongs to him. And so the sonship of the Son to God becomes the source of all of God's gifts to us. For in the Son we have become close to God — even children and beloved; but without the Son, we shall never come to own anything that belongs to God. We will remain strangers or maybe enemies subject to the wrath of God (Jn. 3:36).

It is no coincidence that the Gospels of both Mark and John should begin with the baptism of Christ and the heavenly announcement, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Mk. 1:11). For this is the heavenly disclosure of the identity of Christ, which is recorded in heaven, as it were, and which John the Baptist has heard and witnessed to. With this title Christ sets out as Son and

Heir to preach the Gospel, saying that the kingdom is at hand and calling for repentance and salvation. The heavens are rent apart to receive the case of mankind; and here is the intercessor and advocate who will adopt the case of man and abolish the sentence of the curse and death, laying as a pledge his blood for our sake. For no one but the Son, by his obedience righteousness and purity of heart and hands, is worthy of taking away the Father's wrath. He is to accomplish reconciliation and peace with the sacrifice of himself in the sight of heavenly and earthly beings.

As Christ came out of the water, the voice of the Father came resounding from heaven and echoing across the ages, "You are my beloved Son." No sooner did Christ see the heavens open to his prayers, than the revelation of the way of the cross began to stir within his heart. Christ embraces it on the spot with an obedience that will be all-consuming to the end. From this time on, the shadow of the cross never leaves his mind; for the will of his Father concerning the consummation of his death becomes the joy of his heart.

From this time on, he never discerns any other will for himself than obedience to the Father, just as he used to feel in eternity. With this eternal union with the Father, he enters upon the temptation of the devil, not as Adam has entered and been crushed and awarded with death, but as a Son in the bosom of his Father who has crushed the devil with his obedience to God to the point of death. He, thus, hurls the devil to the ground and snatches the verdict of death against us from his teeth — for it is the devil who has been its cause.

St. Paul speaks of the mystery of God and Christ which was unveiled and entrusted to him. He says:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name (τὸ ὄνομα, i.e. Lord) which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee

should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5 - 11).

Here, in this rich theological saying, we can grope for what the voice of the Father from heaven on the Jordan brought about when he addressed him, "You are my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." How has the thought that he is co-equal with the Father occurred to him? This is not a thing to be snatched, but has taken place with the testimony and authorization of the Father. But this has not prevented him from emptying himself from every visible glory and being incarnated as a man, taking the form of a servant so as to render the kind of obedience which cannot be carried out except by a "servant" who is also a Son. This obedience is valued by God his Father, who has highly exalted him to his previous state of glory and let him "sit at His right hand."

As an intimate Son, Christ is aware of all that will happen to him; he accepts it and welcomes it before it takes place. He dedicates a feast to commemorate his crucifixion before being crucified. He offers his blood willingly, consigns it to the eucharistic cup, and gives it to his disciples to drink. His flesh as well he surrenders willingly, consigns it to holy bread, and with it feeds his beloved. And so man has become a partner in the new covenant by the shedding of blood and the sacrifice of flesh, thus sharing with Christ the exaltation he has received. He has also been seated with him as a Son at the right hand of the Father.

Were it not for the actual existence of the Son of God-relationship which Christ lives out with the Father, he would never have been able to obey or make out of the cross a love feast in which to present the sacrifice of his body to the Father on behalf of the world according to his Father's will. Moreover, had it not been that he who is crucified is really the "Son of God," no man's sin would ever have been taken away, neither would a kingdom ever have been opened for anyone. Therefore, the Father purposely intended to say twice in his hearing: "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." This He did

to support him in the dreadful journey of death, that he might be conscious of victory as he tramples death and him who has the power of death underfoot. So those in heaven and on earth may know with certainty that he is the Son of God. It is with the flesh of man, whom Satan enticed one day in paradise to disobey God and transgress his commandment, that the Son of God has bruised the head of the serpent on the tree, and thus, man has won a happy and everlasting return to God's bosom.

For this reason, from his very birth, visions from God aid him; even when he is still a foetus in the womb, the angel says, "... so the holy one to be born of you will be called the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35 NIV); "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High ..." (Lk. 1:31, 32). These promises, which are revealed regarding him, he knows in the Spirit. They have dwelt in his heart and consciousness, and he retells them as they are to the scribes and Pharisees: "... do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?'" (Jn. 10:36).

What has been uttered by witnesses concerning Christ, even the devils know. They scream in his face: "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (Mk. 1:24); "And whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God'" (Mk. 3:11). Last of all, it is uttered by the disciples: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Jn. 6:68, 69 KJV).

In the parable of the wicked tenants of the vineyard, Christ reveals, as if it were no more than a simple riddle, that he is the Only Beloved Son in this manner: "He had still one other, a beloved son; finally he sent him to them saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill

him, and the inheritance will be ours.' And they took him and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard ..." (Mk. 12:6-8).

And now, to conclude our brief research into this glorious title, "the Son of God," we quote this divine hymn:

At that time (after Peter's confession,¹ "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"), Jesus declared, "I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things (Christ as the Son of God) from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes (the disciples); yea, Father, for such was Thy 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 anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt. 11:25-27).

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¹ It is clear from the Gospel of Luke (who is a meticulous historian) that the words of the Lord, "I thank thee Father ..." (Lk. 10:21, 22) are preceded by Peter's confession, which is mentioned in Lk. 9:18-20. The Gospel of Matthew, on the other hand, is not much concerned with the temporal order of events.

The Son of Man: The Title Christ Loved

Christ chose this title, “Son of Man,” to overshadow the title “Messiah,” which figured in the hopes and expectations of the Jews in its sense of the king, the son of David, who would come to restore sovereignty to Israel and establish the kingdom of the Prophet David according to the prophecies. They interpreted these to signify the victory of Israel over the nations and the supremacy of their kingdom over the kingdoms of the world. He also chose this title to reveal the truth of Christ that had escaped the minds of the Jews — that he was the Son of God and master of the heavenly kingdom under the Father, which is the true title of the Messiah in the prophecy of the Prophet Daniel.

In order to explore the meaning of “Son of Man” as Christ saw it in himself, we list for clarification below the responses of Christ in which he uses the title “Son of Man.”

“And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘My son, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ‘Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, ‘Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your pallet and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins ...” (Mk. 2:5 – 10)

Here, Christ gives the Son of man the same power as God to forgive sins. This makes clear to the reader the futility of all the scholarly research that has drawn the conclusion that the title "Son of man" means no more than "man." It is impossible that the words of Christ could mean that man has the same power as God to forgive people's sins. What Christ in fact clearly meant was that the title "Son of man" was the incarnational title specific to the Son of God, for only the Son of God has the same power as God to forgive sins. Here, Christ directs their attention, though in vain, to the fact that his power to forgive sins and perform a miracle to heal the paralytic at the same time has nothing at all to do with his being just a man, but rather was rooted in the fact that he was the Son of God who became human in form when he took a body for himself. His speaking in this way is a declaration that the title "Son of man," as it occurs in all the Jewish apocalypses in the books of Ezra, Enoch and Daniel, refers to the heavenly messianic man who has all the characteristics of the Lord Yahweh. This title is always given to one described as riding upon the clouds, which is a description of the God Yahweh alone, and one which Christ had already given of himself at the beginning of his ministry: "He said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man'" (Jn. 1:51). So is the Son of man here simply a man, as the scholars says?

The Lord repeats this, adding to it the detail of his riding on the clouds to awaken the spirits sunk in ignorance. "I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mt. 26:64). This messianic text is extremely clear: Christ appears at the right hand of God, indicating absolute equality and then comes again with glory on the clouds.

Christ's linking the Son of man with the forgiveness of sins (Mk. 2:5 – 10) and with the coming judgment ("He has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man," Jn. 5:27) greatly enhances the importance of the Son of man, since judgment is attrib-

uted to him as if he is greater than it. It is given to him because he is the Son of man, or, as we say, because he is the Son of God, or because he is God. Here, it is Christ's direct intention to make the glory and power he had before his incarnation just as effective in his incarnate state. It is as if he is saying repeatedly that the Son of man is the Son of God who has become a new Adam with all the powers of the Son of God.

Christ also paints a picture of the Son of man full of light unequaled by any creature, when he speaks of his coming as the Son of man who would light up the heavens from one horizon to the other as by the presence of God Himself: "For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man ... and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:27, 30).

Here, Christ is eager to awaken our hearts to the fact that the body that he took from our humanity will not be separated from him when he is risen forever at the height of his glory and power. The Son of man is Christ manifesting his divinity in his humanity. His glory and authority and power are not separate from his humanity. Rather, his humanity makes it possible for us to look upon him and see him perfectly and know him and draw close to and even participate in his divinity.

Christ's use of the title Son of man is an elevation of his humanity and at the same time a declaration of his divinity, and he persists in using this title to rejoice our hearts and gladden our spirits so that we will approach him with the simplicity of children and the joy of sages, for he is our brother, the first fruit of the resurrection from the dead. The one who rose up to the highest heavens and became the bearer of gifts and graces and blessings showers them unstintingly on all those who approach God through him. When we see him filling the heavens with light from horizon to horizon, we shall know him and love him and we shall not be afraid of him because we shall see him as he is, the Son of man who loved us and gave himself up to death for us, and regained his glory in his divine essence in order to give

of it without measure. As for the sign of the Son of man that will appear in heaven to declare that it is he, it is the circle of saints, whom we shall know by name, around the Lord. By that, we shall not fail to recognize him.

But Christ did not omit to warn us not to fritter away our love and make light of it, undervaluing his love and his sacrifice on the cross, lest he come unexpectedly when we are not ready to meet him and rejoice and cheer and give him glory. "Watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man" (Lk. 21:36). According to his promise, Christ is constantly in touch with us. It is he who fires us with a love of prayer and petition for he longs that he will find, when he comes in splendor, that we are people after his own heart, and to discover in us the warm fervent burning faith appropriate to his glorious coming. "But when the Son of man comes will he find faith on earth?" (Lk. 18:8). The question is addressed to you, dear reader, and to me. The voice of the bridegroom is at the doors and our lamps are almost out.

Among the most powerful and profound parables that Christ gave of the death of the Son of man, at once redeeming and saving, is found in his works, "He answered them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth'" (Mt. 12:39–40). The explanation of this parable is absolutely sublime, but unfortunately the commentators have preoccupied themselves with the three days and three nights, which stand only in the margins of the parable. The heart of the parable is critical, because the sailors threw Jonah into the sea thinking it was better that one should die than that the whole ship should perish. God's turning the death of Jonah into his rescue is in itself an amazing miracle, but his rescue and his life were also the salvation of the people of Nineveh, who repented at his preaching. This is an exact image of how it was

with the Sanhedrin of the leaders of the Jews and their declaring that it was better that one should die for the people than that all the people should perish, so they pushed him towards death (Jn. 11:50). But the same miracle took place with Christ from death in a wonder beyond understanding, and God was glorified in his life and his death became the redemption of the world and his life its salvation.

Here, the person of the Son of man is raised gloriously high, because he battles with death by the Spirit of God that was in him. Because of his supreme holiness and the holiness of his body, in which the fulness of the divinity dwelt, death had no power over him. Indeed, the son of man brought down death by his death and eliminated its power by his resurrection not for himself and his own body alone, but for the whole of humanity, which he redeemed by his death and revived by his life.

This theological explanation, which is what Christ intended to be understood from the parable, changes it from a simple simile spoiled by weakness and ambiguity to an illuminating theological truth, which shows Christ's death to be the most sublime image of salvation and his resurrection the greatest power for the renewal of life. Through it the Son of man acquires the title of Redeemer and Savior at one and the same time.

And just as the whale was unable to overcome Jonah when he was inside it, and consume him, and indeed Jonah was a pain in its stomach, so it was when the Son of man was in the abyss. It could not close its mouth on him or hold him fast, for what power has death over the Giver and Master of life? And just as the whale vomited up Jonah from its stomach in exasperation, so the abyss, stricken with shame and defeat, cast out the Son of man.

As for the sinful and evil generation likened to the people of Nineveh, they are still waiting to be called to repentance by the preaching of Christ and the Gospel.

Christ gives a picture of the days of the Son of man passing full of happiness with the disciples, with Christ teaching something new every

day and unlocking the mysteries of his love so that those who love could think it freely, while faith in the hearts of the disciples was transformed into the source of rivers of life. Christ likened the days of the Son of man to a wedding that lasted as many days as the bridegroom was with them, but when the bridegroom was lifted up, then the disciples would fast and would long for one more day of feasting on the bridegroom's love... Ah! Who will give it to us?!! The days of the Son of man, as Christ saw it, are the days of the only beloved Son incarnate spent with those he loved, and especially with those he loved to the end.

A PICTURE OF THE SON OF MAN ON THE DAY OF HIS COMING. Christ likened the day of the coming of the Son of man to the day the Flood came suddenly to destroy all who were outside the Ark, who were busy with the affairs and desires of the world. "Watch, therefore, for you do not know at what day your Lord is coming... Therefore, you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Mt. 24:42, 44).

The identification of "your Lord" with "the Son of man" is clear here.

Here in anticipation Christ begs and urges "Watch," because he does not want the image of the Son of man to be terrifying or distressing to us, for he is the beloved and dreads being dreaded. So, he urges us to keep a picture of the sweetness of the Son of man in our hearts and wait for him like the wise virgins with their oil at the ready, keeping watch and ready for the moment when the cry of praise would sound: "The bridegroom is coming!"

And let it not escape you, dear wise reader, that when Christ speaks here about the day of the coming of the Son of man, he is speaking of himself. Christ longs to be seen in the midst of those who love him like a true bridegroom whose love and beauty capture their hearts, for the bridegroom cannot be a bridegroom unless he has a bride that is the watchful virgins.

Christ in his concern for us asks that we have faith, till he comes to be glorified surrounded by his saints and that we keep watch till

he comes in the midst of the praises of those who await him. In these ways, he conveys to us his concern that we should not make light of the present time lest salvation fade from our hearts by default, or fritter away our lives in futility lest the time of harvest come and the seeds are found to have been eaten by the birds.

In contrast with the picture of the Son of man lighting up the whole sky on the day of his coming in the midst of the cheers of his loved ones and his children and his devout followers, Christ paints the picture of a thief coming at an unguarded moment to snatch away the life of man and rob him of all hope. "Remember then what you received and heard; keep that, and repent. If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you" (Rev. 3:3), and in the words of the Apostle Paul, "For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5:2).

The prophecy of Daniel clarifies the role of Christ in the hereafter: the Son of man, in Daniel's vision, after completing his work and life on earth, was seen coming on the clouds of heaven and being borne to "the Ancient of Days," an expression that is an unequivocal reference to the Father: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dn. 7:13 – 14).

If we place this prophecy with all its intricacies beside the actual event witnessed by the disciples and the angels forty days after the resurrection, when Christ ascended in a cloud of heaven, we find the precise details that Christ lived and alluded to according to the prophecy of Daniel, as Luke the Evangelist reports in the Book of Acts:

"In the first book (the Gospel of St. Luke), O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when

he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God... But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:1 – 11).

If we accept the description of the son of man in Daniel, we find that it is an eschatological name, that is a name assigned to a heavenly person like a son of man who comes and is presented to the Ancient of Days. This is an expression clearly referring to the coming Christ who was not at all on a level with the children of men, but who was like a son of man. So, we see that when Christ used the name the Son of man, he used it in an eschatological context, that is, referring primarily to the future of the life of Christ according to the prophecy of Daniel. He uses it to express the suffering, the cross and the death he would endure because of his having emptied himself as a God and become like a son of man, or even a slave. "...but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7, 8).

He also used it in connection with his ascension and sitting at the right hand of the Father, and his glorious triumphant second coming. "For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done" (Mt. 18:27). The link between the title Son of man and God as Father is noteworthy here, for it is clear that he is one and the same as the Son of God in relation to the imminent judgment.

But Christ would use the title Son of man very wisely. When Peter was inspired to say, "You are the Christ," Christ rebuked him and forbade him from telling anyone. He then quickly gave a true description of himself contradicting completely what the Jews expected of the coming messiah, and attributed it to the Son of man, by which he meant himself. "Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ.' And he [Christ] charged them to tell no one about him. And he began to teach them that the son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men'" (Mk. 8:29 – 33).

To those who do not appreciate the precise use of language, these words appear to be a riddle. But the fact is that when Christ saw that he had been clearly recognized as the messiah by his disciples, he wanted to hide it so that the Jews would not pick it up and say that he was calling himself the messiah. It was well-known that the Jews believed the messiah would come as a king to annihilate their enemies and fight for them, and consequently would resist Rome and Caesar, so the Jews could accuse him as a revolutionary of enmity toward Pilate and so put him up for trial to get rid of him.

It is clear here that Christ was willing and pleased that the disciples should declare the truth of his being the messiah, but he quickly repudiated the idea that he should be the warring messiah who would oppose Rome, and began to reveal what would happen to him: "He would suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be put to death." It was impossible that this should happen to the messiah of the Jews. If the Jews heard him say such things, they would be reassured that he was not calling himself the messiah, and at the same time, he was showing his disciples the reality of his future suffering as a man and his death as the messiah of the New Testament, the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

Our concern here is to point out to the reader the importance of the Son of man as a title of Christ which he used with superlative wisdom to hide himself from the speculations of the Jews that he was the messiah coming to liberate Israel from the Romans, and at the same time to associate the person of the Son of man with his future suffering, death and resurrection, thus pointing to himself. Thus, with the title Son of man, Christ achieved two aims: the first to hide himself from the eyes of Israel lest they should think him to be the messiah, and the second to announce at the same time to his disciples the truth about himself as the Christ of God.

The reader should take note that the disciples did not once call him by the title Son of man. It was particularly Christ who used it, because the title Son of man is veiled in obscurity. It is an expression generally related to the life to come, and it would have been very difficult for the disciples to perceive Christ's purpose in using it.

Christ was happy to use the title Son of man to conceal his divinity from the understanding of the Jews, which was completely devoid of spiritual characteristics. The crowd even asked him once, "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" (Jn. 12:34). Here, it is clear that the Jews understood that he was alluding to himself as the Christ hidden under the title Son of man, and they wanted him to declare his relationship with the messiah and the Son of man. His reply was intended to embarrass them. "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you" (Jn. 12:35), thus showing that they would desire in vain to know who he was as long as they lived in the darkness of ignorance, because he was the true light, but only to those who lived in the light, while to those who lived in darkness Christ must remain a hidden god as Isaiah the prophet testified and preached. "Truly, thou art a God who hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior" (Is. 45:15). The Son of man is the veil behind which Christ hid himself so that those who hated the true light would not know him.

But Christ affirmed to his own circle that they would certainly know him when he was lifted up before their eyes on the cross and after the cross. "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he" (Jn. 8:28). This is confirmed by the Apostle Paul. "... designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

As for the relationship between the Son of man and God, Christ explained that it was exactly the same as the relationship between Christ and God the Father. "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man" (Jn. 3:13).

Christ also clearly pointed to the relationship between the Son of man and the work of Christ as Judge. "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and He has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man" (Jn. 5:26, 27). Here, Christ links his mission on earth as Son of man with his future mission as the Christ.

So the title Son of man occurs exactly parallel and equal to Son of God, whether in his descent from heaven, or his ascension, or his being on earth or in heaven. "The Son of man (who is on earth) who is in heaven" (Jn. 3:13).

WHY DID CHRIST USE THE TITLE SON OF MAN IN RELATION TO US? In using the title Son of man Christ shows practically and conclusively the relationship between himself as representative of humankind, Son of man, and God his Father, for he was the supreme example of the destiny in relation to God the Father of humanity chosen in and united with the Son. For Christ bears redeemed humanity in himself in heaven and stands as its head before the Father. On the one hand, he ransoms it as the Christ, and on the other, he glorifies it as the Son of man before the Father. The Son of God in his eternal form came down from heaven as the Son of man to gather the chosen humanity together in his person and to ascend with it to heaven so that it would receive its inheritance as part of this inheritance as Son of God, and stand sanctified and blameless in him before God to praise him forever.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined 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. 1:3 – 6).

This shows how comprehensive was the meaning with which Christ invested this title Son of man. We, the redeemed believers, find ourselves invited with Christ in this title in all its aspects and in the essence of his relationship with God the Father. The Son of man is Christ the Son of God who carries humanity in himself, he being its head and it being his body, and thus, we understand and perfectly perceive the meaning of “He raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). The Son of man is “the Son of God and us,” but on the level of the sons of God! The Son of man is the title of Christ that conveys to us the depths of the doctrine of redemption and salvation with no explanation! The Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Ephesians describes how Christ took the title Son of man as follows:

“He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things ... to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ ... speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body [is] joined and knit together” (Eph. 4:10 – 16).

This is Christ the Son of man, both head and body. In Psalm 80, which the Church always uses to testify to its essential unity with Christ the Son of God, glimpses of the Son of man appear: “Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt ... it sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River” (I am the vine and you are the branches, Jn. 15:5). “Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven and

see; have regard for this vine, the stock which Thy right hand planted and upon 'the son' whom Thou hast reared for thyself... and upon the son of man whom Thou hast made strong for Thyself! Then we will never turn back from Thee; give us life and we will call on Thy name! Restore us, O Lord God of hosts! Let Thy face shine that we may be saved!"

Here, the names are interchanged without distinction, and they all point to the unity of "the son" with "the vine," which is his people, so that the Son of man may emerge in his fulness: Son of God and Son of man together.

This prophecy is a powerful pointer which actually drew out Christ's thinking about himself. "I am the true vine and you are the branches" (Jn. 15:1). That is, his special people are the branches of the vine. Here, the branches united to the vine can only be understood as being the vine too. Thus, Christ sees himself truly united to his people, for if the vine of Christ is the true vine, then its branches are the true branches. Here the union is a true union that culminates in a vision of Christ and his people, that is the Church, as one unit: "I am Christ." The title Son of man is given to express the profound union that has bound Christ to his redeemed people as the true branches in the true vine, and this is the basis of the mystical saying that mysteriously and awesomely unites Christ and the believers: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you'" (Jn. 6:53).

Here, Christ shows the extent of the diffusion of his divine nature as a true vine into the true branches so that they and the vine may become one true vine. And he clarified this further: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (Jn. 6:54). That is the life of Christ flows like sap, that is blood, from the source to the branches in an unspeakable mystery. Now, if the vine is really "true," that is divine and eternal, then "My body is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed" (Jn. 6:55), that is, eternal, above and beyond appearance and form. If the sap, that is the blood, flows from the source to the branch, the branch becomes truly and immovably established. "He who eats

my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him” (Jn. 6:56).
“He who eats me will live because of me” (Jn. 6:57).

Here, Christ clarifies the truth about himself as the Son of man sacrificed on the rational heavenly altar of God and given to the world as a love feast prepared to feed those who long for the love of God and to be counted among the beloved. For God so loved the world that he gave His only-begotten Son to the end that all who eat his flesh and drink his blood should not perish. He has loved me, and given up himself for me so that I should feed on him and no longer live for myself but for him who loved and gave up himself for me.

Who is the Son of man? Is he not the one who took our body and gave us his body so that he is now in us and we in him, and he remains in the Father and we in him (Jn. 14:20).

November 1993

The Christ and the Messiah

How could they have failed to recognize you, Messiah of glory and love?

*How could they have disgraced you, you who did honor to your Father?
How could they have killed you?*

How can day be called night? How could they see as darkness you who are the true light?

Through death you opened up springs of life. Through your resurrection you raised up a new creation.

You have turned slaves into masters, or rather into the beloved kings and priests of God your Father.

With your coming, tears and grief and sighing disappeared. In the light of your face, the Father's face shines on us. And the fire you started has kindled unquenchable flames of love in us.

The "Messiah" in Hebrew means "the one anointed by God," and the coming of the Messiah is what the Jews were awaiting in

hope, so that he would save Israel from slavery to the Gentiles, that is, the Romans. They had built his personality on a number of prophecies, which they understood in their own way, such that they were awaiting an earthly king with heavenly power, able to annihilate their earthly enemies and rule over Israel for ever.

In fact, these prophecies were about Christ and were fulfilled in him, but the Jews did not believe in him because his coming did not meet their hopes. He did not come as an earthly king, but as a heavenly one; he did not come to rule over Israel, but over all the nations, of which Israel was but one, who believed in him; he came not to annihilate the enemies of Israel, but the enemies of humankind, sin and death, and to sow love in the human heart.

The stages in the life of Christ that fulfilled the truth of the Messiah, and by which he revealed that he was the true Messiah anointed by God, were as follows:

1. The anointing with the Holy Spirit openly, and Jesus' declaration that he was God's beloved Son.

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Lk. 3:21, 22).

Thus, in the anointing of Christ the reality that he was the Son was declared, as well as the reality of the love that was being poured out on humankind.

2. Jesus was aware that he was anointed by the Holy Spirit and he declared this before the assembly, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah the prophet:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recover-

ing of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4:16–21)

The prophecy awakened the heart of Christ to the fact of divinity, and the spirit of Christ rejoiced and his heart pulsated with it, and the destiny of the poor became for him the high note of his message.

These two incidents — first, Christ’s baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him openly with the voice of God from heaven saying, “You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Lk. 3:21), and second, his reading in the synagogue of the prophecy of Isaiah that foretold how the Messiah would be anointed by the Holy Spirit and prepared for his ministry and the liberation of humankind from slavery to sin and death, and Christ’s declaration that this prophecy was fulfilled in him that day — declare, and confirm through Christ’s own agreement, that Jesus is the promised Messiah, but on the basis of the new covenant: “Bringing good news to the poor, healing the broken-hearted, giving sight to the blind, liberating those in slavery and preaching the day of salvation.”

Happy are you today Isaiah. All your songs have come true, your book has been elevated.

Of course, from the prophecy of Isaiah about preaching to the poor of the earth, and from Christ’s describing himself as a doctor to the blind and broken-hearted and prisoners of sin, it is clear that the anointing was not the anointing of the Messiah as the Jews had expected and hoped it would be, with his coming as a king with a sword and a spear to establish a kingdom for Israel upon the ruins of the kingdoms of the nations and the corpses of the Roman Caesars.

Thus, Christ faced an enormous difficulty: how could he declare that he was the Messiah — according to God and the spirit of the text of the Torah — coming to begin a new covenant in the Spirit of love and peace towards their enemies? Was not the meaning of this that he was

not the Messiah of the Jews, or in any way linked to their hopes? And so he was aware that he would face complete and inexorable rejection.

This is why we find that Christ, although he perfectly knew that he was the Messiah of God coming for the salvation of Israel and the world, shrank from declaring to anyone, near or far, that he was the "Messiah." In fact, when his disciples became aware of the fact that he was indeed the Messiah, he rebuked them and told them not to tell anyone. The clearest example of this was when Christ asked his disciples what people said of him and who they thought he was. They said, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets." And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." And he charged them to tell no one about him (Mk. 8:28–30). This means that he agreed with the declaration and considered that it was from God the Father (Mt. 16:17), but his immediate desire was to erase from their minds any idea of Christ related to the messianic expectations of the Jews and so he changed the title "Christ" to the title "Son of man" and strove to present an image of himself totally different from the image of the Jewish Messiah. "And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed and after three days rise again" (Mk. 8:31). After that, how could the Jews be mad enough to believe that he was the Messiah?

3. But, perhaps, the most difficult stand Christ took in relation to declaring whether or not he was the Messiah was with the chief priests: "And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, 'Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?' But he was silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?'" (Mk. 14:60–61).

This was a cunning question devised by the high priest so that if he said yes it would be held against him that he was the messiah awaited by the Jews, that is that he was a king come to establish the kingdom of David and save Israel from the Roman yoke, or, to put it simply in political terms, that he was a rebel against the Roman

occupation determined to lead a revolution against Roman rule and Caesar. This would be sufficient for him to be arrested and tried before the Romans and so got rid of. In the end, they succeeded in this strategy by using false witnesses and deception and fraudulent charges. If, however, he replied in the negative, that he was not the Messiah, he would appear before the masses to be a deceiver and impostor and this would only have to be spread about by the elders for the people to abandon him, and in that way too, he could be brought to trial.

Thus, the high priest's question was contrived to get rid of him, whether he answer yes or no.

Now, we come to Christ's reply. We know that it was impossible that he should deny he was the true Christ, just as he could not agree that he was the Messiah expected by the Jews to come as an earthly king. So we expect that Christ's answer will be neither yes nor no, but will express clearly and truly that he is the true Christ of God and not the Messiah of the Jews. So, let us begin to study his reply:

a) **The reply in St. Mark's Gospel (14:62)**

"Before the high priest in the midst of the Sanhedrin Jesus said, 'I am (ἐγώ εἰμι).'"

In Greek, this means, yes, but in the other Gospels, the reply appears as follows:

b) **The reply in St. Matthew's Gospel (26:64)**

"Jesus said to him, 'You have said so (σὺ εἶπας).'"

In Greek, this also means, yes.

But the Greek has not precisely conveyed the sense of the Aramaic, for in Aramaic the meaning is "It is you who have said so, not I." This does not at all state a definite yes, but gives a meaning with negative implications. It is clear that Christ is avoiding replying either yes or no and so he neither denies nor agrees with the charge in the high priest's question, "Are you the Christ?", which is exactly what we had expected. In Christ's heart, the answer was yes one hundred percent because of the anointing of God for the new covenant mission of salvation, but it was also no one hundred percent to the understanding the high priest had in his heart of the Messiah as a warring king.

This was understood by the early Fathers of the Church. Origen in his Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (*Patrologia Graeca* 13:1757) writes clearly that Christ's reply to the high priest was neither in the positive nor the negative and describes it as evasive.

Then, in St. Matthew's Gospel, Christ adds to his reply a sentence that dismisses the idea that he was the messiah expected by the Jews, that is a warring king come to restore the kingdom of David and subjugate the Gentiles. At the same time, this sentence confirms the message of the Christ of the new covenant who came to die for sins and to rise to give life and be raised to heaven to sit at the right hand of God and rule the world forever:

"But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mt. 26:64).

[The Arabic translation "Aidan" = "also" is not accurate, and should rather be "but."] The word "but" here is very significant for it puts forward a fact that contradicts the high priest's understanding of what he had just said. "You have said so, but hereafter you will see the Son of man ..."

The sense of the conversation taken as a whole according to St. Matthew is as follows: "You have said so, and I will not answer this question, but I tell you another truth ..." Here, Christ introduces the "Son of man" and what would become of him. This is the title Christ chose to replace his divine title "the Christ." Christ here uses the title "Son of man" to express the fulfillment of his special mission, which was to end in his death at their hands, though the fulfillment of his mission in heaven would be his sitting at the right hand of the Father and coming again on the clouds of heaven, which was quite unrelated to the Jewish expectation of the Messiah. Christ was saying to them, "You do not understand the mission of the true Messiah. That is why you will kill him with your own hands. But by killing me you will, in spite of yourselves, complete my mission, which is to be a true heavenly king in heaven who will come on the clouds, as Daniel has described to you in his vision."

c) **The reply in St. Luke's Gospel (22:67 – 70)**

“He said to them, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God.’ And they all said, ‘Are you the Son of God, then?’ And he said, ‘You say that I am.’”

The first part of the reply:

“If I tell you, you will not believe.” Christ said this to them and to the people hundreds of times in the street, and in the assembly and in the temple. Christ performed works that no one else could perform and clearly said of himself that he was the Son of God. “Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’” (Jn. 10:36). Why should he say this after they had revealed their intentions many times and shown that their attitude to him was one of rejection and hostility and were planning to kill him? No matter what he said, they would not believe for one reason which he had previously pin-pointed: “You do not belong to my sheep” (Jn. 10:26). How could they believe he was the Christ when they had said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons” (Mt. 12:24)? And it is certain that no one can say Christ is Lord but by the Spirit. They were, therefore, guaranteed not to believe his words, because the Spirit was absent from their thinking. It is hard for anyone to come to Christ if he is not first drawn by the Father, and the Jews, and especially their leaders, had aroused the wrath of God by their words and actions.

The second part of the reply:

It was Christ's custom, whenever he was asked a question, either not to answer, or, if he did answer, to answer with another quite different question. This is a clear sign of his rejection of the question, as was clear when he was asked about the power by which he performed signs and miracles. He only replied with a question, which implied that they were against God and unworthy to ask him about his power since they despised the power of God.

“I will ask you a question ... Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?” (Mk. 11:29 – 30). His question thoroughly confused

them for it made them face the fact that they were against the work of God. "And they argued with one another. 'If we say, "From heaven," he will say, "Why then did you not believe him?" but shall we say, "From men"? — They were afraid of the people, for all held that John was a real prophet" (Mk. 11:31 – 32).

Here too, if Christ had said he was the true Messiah come from God, they would not have believed, and if he had asked them about the signs and miracles which he openly performed before them, they would not have answered him. Christ's double-sided reply implied that he was the true Messiah and also that the men of the Sanhedrin including its chief priests were hypocrites and murderers, and that behind their question lay a trap intended to harm him.

Christ was thus able to bear true witness to himself without giving them an opportunity of catching him out in an answer they could use against him. This is Jesus' wisdom in the most difficult situations. Christ was right to exchange the title of "Christ" for the title "Son of man," for the title "Christ" on earth had become meaningless at the hands of these butchers. Therefore, he says, "Hereafter," that is, from the time of the crucifixion and what followed it, Christ is the "Son of man" who was raised and entered into his glory and sat at the right hand of the Father.

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dn. 7:13 – 14).

In Christ's saying as Son of man, "Hereafter the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God," he invalidated decisively the image of the Messiah as the Jews sought for him, a king on earth restoring the kingdom of David and defeating the enemies of Israel. By this saying he prevented them from going back and accusing him of being a rebel against the Romans or ambitious for an earthly kingdom, for his kingdom was one that would not pass away.

4. The other position is the one Christ took before Pilate in reply to his question, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

It was known that the messiah coming to the Jews was of necessity a king able to subjugate the nations and the Gentiles to the power of Israel, and, therefore, definitely an enemy to Caesar.

The chief priests had handed Christ over to Pontius Pilate with the charge that he had made himself a king in opposition to Caesar, and said that he was the Son of God.

"And Pilate asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' And he answered him, 'You have said so'" (Mk. 15:2).

The whole trial depended on this question, because the meaning of the question is, "Are you an enemy of Caesar?" But since Pilate made no reply when Christ said, "You have said so," the clear implication is that Pilate perfectly understood Christ's intention, that is that Christ had not said so, and that it was not so according to Pilate's understanding of kingship. Certainly, if Pilate had understood Christ to be agreeing with the accusation, the proceedings would have taken an immediate violent turn.

In St. Luke's Gospel, what makes it clear that Pilate understood from Christ's reply that the Jews were bringing a false accusation is that he went out to the people immediately after Christ answered and said, "I find no crime in this man" (Lk. 23:4). It is very strange that Pilate's vision should be pure and clear in his evaluation of the personality of Christ, and this is a testimony of no little significance.

But in St. John's Gospel, Christ goes back and clarifies to Pilate that even though he is not an earthly king of the Jews, he is nevertheless a king. "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world." Christ witnessed faithfully to his heavenly kingdom. "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (Jn. 18:36, 37).

Once again, Pilate understands what the Jews and chief priests could not understand: that Christ was greater than the speculations of the Jews, and that he spoke the truth. "For this I have come into the

world, to bear witness to the truth” (Jn. 18:37). He went straight out to the people saying, “I find no crime in him” (Jn. 18:38), from which it is clear that he believed the words of Christ. Pilate’s testimony three times that he found no crime in Christ worthy of death does not only refute all the charges of the Jews that he was a king with all that implied for politics, revolution and war, and that he claimed to be the Son of God. It also confirms that Pilate understood the opposite of the Jews concerning Christ. It is enough that the master of the highest court in the world at that time should declare that there was no crime in Christ. This makes Christ’s true statement concerning his mission as Messiah and Son of God a testimony from an international court to the fact that he spoke and did the truth.

5. Christ’s disapproving question concerning the teaching of the scribes that Christ is the son of David.

“And as Jesus taught in the temple, he said, ‘How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared, “the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet.” David himself calls him Lord, so how is he his son?’” (Mk. 12:35 – 37).

This question, although it has mystified all the commentators, ancient and modern, is very clear in meaning. Christ rebukes the scribes for being content with earthly epithets for Christ, which meant that they overlooked the full truth of the personality of Christ as Son of God and true Lord. Christ clarifies here that he is not only son of David, because David himself calls him Lord. That is, he is also David’s Lord. This confirms his human descent from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David according to the promise while at the same time definitively asserting his Lordship. The Apostle Paul clarifies this in his introduction to the Epistle to the Romans: “which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 1:23 – 4).

So, here Christ poses this disapproving question to the scribes so that their understanding of Christ according to the prophecy of David will be that, while being the son of David, he is also a lord on the level of the Lord, that is God. "The Lord said to my Lord." The Psalm confirms the prophecy with "Sit at my right hand," for here equality with a divine heavenly kingdom is fulfilled.

The reader should note that Christ, while criticizing the teachings of the scribes, makes clear through their teachings that "the Christ" is the son of David, but he goes on to establish that Christ is Lord according to what the scribes said of the saying of the Spirit in the Psalm. This is the most forceful statement Christ made about his being the Christ, the son of David and at the same time David's Lord, that is, in our understanding, a son of man is a Son of God.

But here Christ asks a significant question: "David himself calls him Lord, so how is he his son?" (Mk. 12:37). Here it is not difficult for us to glimpse in Christ's words a secret hidden allusion to his virgin birth from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, for she was truly a descendant of David, but her son Jesus was born of God through the Holy Spirit. This implicit concept is clarified by a text in St. John's Gospel about the sons of God, or the Son of God, "Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn. 1:13).

In fact, this describes the virgin birth of Christ from the Holy Spirit and the holy Virgin Mary, who was of the descendants of David. The presence of God in the birth of Christ through his being essentially the Son of God completely excludes the involvement of the will of man or the will of the flesh in the birth of Christ. It was rather the will of God and the will of the Holy Spirit that was involved. This is birth from God, for Christ is a descendant of a woman, but not of a man. According to the first promise to Eve and the words spoken to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head [the head of the serpent], and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Here God says nothing about the involvement of Adam or his seed. It is the seed of Eve that first bruises the head of the serpent, that is Satan, but only

after the devil has bruised the heel of that seed, that is his body. The bruising of the serpent's head is annihilation, but bruising the heel only means a death that is followed by resurrection.

The virgin birth from a virgin descended from David secures for Christ the title son of David according to the flesh, but Christ's being Lord certainly epitomizes the fact that he is born of God, that is, from the Holy Spirit, which is the divine aspect of the virgin birth.

The emphasis of the Holy Spirit in all the gospels on Christ being Lord and the tireless repetition that he sat down at the right hand of God to confirm his lordship, alerts the mind of the believer to the fact that the Father is the most characteristic sign of his nature and, thus, of his birth.

"Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God" (Rom. 8:34).

"For he must reign (sitting at the right hand of God) until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:25).

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

"... according to the working of His great might which he accomplished in Christ when He raised him from the dead and made him sit at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:19, 20).

"He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3).

"Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb. 8:1).

"But when this one had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12).

"... who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him" (1 Pet. 3:22).

"For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand'" (Acts 2:34).

“God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).

“But he (Stephen), full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55).

“He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21).

“The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet” (Mt. 22:44).

“Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven’” (Mt. 27:64).

“David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet’” (Mk. 12:36).

“And Jesus said, ‘I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’” (Mk. 14:62).

“So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God” (Mk. 16:19).

“For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand’” (Lk. 20:42).

“But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God” (Lk. 22:69).

This continual declaration of Christ’s sitting at the right hand of God demonstrates through the Spirit that Jesus is the Christ and that he is God.

But a biblical Christian faith does not quote the Psalm as if it were the only reference. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles went beyond the Old Testament Psalm as a reference and were raised up as in a vision to see the truth of Christ in heaven and at the right hand of the Father, not as a victor over the enemies of Israel as the

Psalm says, but as a victor over the enemies of humankind and the enemies of salvation. The Apostle Peter, seeing this as the revealed truth of the Christian faith says: "... who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities and powers subject to him" (1 Pet. 2:22). The angels here are the evil angels, the collaborators with Satan, and the authorities are the powers of the enemy.

The Apostle Paul describes the Lord Jesus Christ in his glory and power in heaven where not only enemies are forcibly subjected to him, but also all who are holy kneel and worship him in heaven and earth. "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him a name which is above every name [the correct reading should be: 'and gave him the name which is above every name,' that is, 'Lord'] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9 – 11).

THE TRANSITION OF THE TITLE "CHRIST" FROM TITLE TO NAME. The title Christ the Messiah in the days of Christ was only used by the Apostles with great caution, but after the Lord rose from the dead confirming that he was the Christ and Son of God, the early Church began using this title without hesitation so that the title Christ became overwhelmingly used to refer to the person of Jesus. The name "Jesus" was only mentioned in conjunction with "Christ" to express faith in the truth of Christ and as a measure of the worship given to his name. It began to be said openly and forcefully that Jesus was the Christ. Then, emphasis on the title "Christ" increased till it came to be used without the first name, Jesus, and the name in common use was Christ. St. Paul stressed the importance of the title "Christ" over the name "Jesus" to the extent that he used to say Christ Jesus, putting the title Christ first. This is all because faith in Christ had taken its final form in relation to redemption, salvation and the truth of his sonship to God.

When the title "Christ" became the usual name whose validity was confirmed by faith, the idea of Messiah with its earthly, temporal,

political connotations for the Jews receded and faded from the thinking of the Church completely, and Christ became a name pointing to love and peace linked with forgiveness, reconciliation and adoption by God.

In relation to the title of Christ, it is important to note that “son of David” was omitted after the truth of Christ’s birth from the Virgin Mary became widely known in the Church. All the prophecies related to the royal genealogy of David were seriously shaken since they spoke of the Messiah bearing his seed and consequently inheriting the promises of God through the continuance of His kingdom. The birth of Christ of the Holy Spirit and the truth of his sonship to God were an essential factor in the development of the understanding of kinship and kingdom from linking them to David and earth to associating them with the kingdom of God and Christ in heaven, especially since Christ himself minimized the importance of the Messiah’s descent from David the prophet, which the scribes and Pharisees used to celebrate in their passion to give the Messiah an image that tied him to Israel and lent support to a kind of racial superiority and pride. This was clear from the time when he asked his critical question, “David himself called him Lord, so how is he his son?” (Mt. 12:37).

The basic intention of Christ was to raise the eyes of the disciples above his physical sonship to David, to see the truth of his spiritual and divine sonship to God, to see the truth of his spiritual and divine sonship to God, which came not through a man, but through the Holy Spirit and a virgin, which meant that the body was more related to God than to David and immeasurably more holy.

This is why the Church’s pride in the holiness of Christ exceeded the greatest pride of the Jews in the Messiah of politics and military power. It must also be noted that from Pentecost onwards the Church saw a strong and clear link between the title of Christ and his sonship to God and his lordship. “Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). So, the name “Christ” came to indicate his lordship, his sonship to God and his heavenly kingdom,

as well as resurrection and eternal life. "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn. 11:25).

The Church understood in a mystical and very powerful way through a kind of revelation and spiritual experience of its relationship with the risen Christ who made himself known for forty days, the extent of the connection of the holiness of Christ and his sonship to God and his supreme glory with his virgin birth of a holy Virgin and the Holy Spirit. This was received as an oral tradition handed down from the beginning. St. Luke writes with certain knowledge of the circumstances of the birth of Christ with such precise details that only the Virgin herself could have revealed them. Matthew wrote using another reliable source, but he wrote briefly.

The Church became certain of this awesome mystery — that it was necessary for Christ who would lift the curse from the children of Adam to be born without the curse of sin and death. Christ did not die as one upon whom the curse of Adam and Eve had fallen. He died of his own free will and by his own authority. "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (Jn. 10:18). He bore the curse, the curse of sin and death by his own will and that of his heavenly Father "for he laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Is. 53:6). "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pet. 12:24). Again, Christ was born without the curse of sin and death because he was born of the Holy Spirit and a holy Virgin, that is without a man, without the joining of a man and woman. In this way, the rule of the curse over the child that was born was broken, for it is known that all who are born of Adam and Eve inherit the curse of Adam and Eve, because the joining of Adam and Eve took place after they received the judgment of death and the curse. Now, Christ was not born of a man and a woman and so he did not inherit the judgment of the curse and death.

It was also necessary because he was to sanctify the people with his own blood. Therefore, he was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin. He also lived a holy life without blame. "He was without sin and no guile was found in his mouth." He himself movingly confirmed this: "For their sake I sanctify myself" (Jn. 17:19).

And so the image of Christ in the early Church was transfigured in its divine reality as a glorious and effective power made more efficacious by his presence to sanctify those who believed in his name. The believers sensed his power sanctifying the spirits of his beloved. From the first day they bore witness to him: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses to all that he did" (Acts 10:38 – 39).

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Christ as “Lord”

The earliest name of God we hear of is “YHWH” without the vowel points of Hebrew. The exact pronunciation of the name is lost in antiquity for fear of uttering it.

It is God Himself who makes it known to us through Moses: “God also said to Moses, ‘Say this to the people of Israel: YHWH, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’” (Ex. 3:15).

In English, as in Arabic, it is pronounced *Yahweh*. During the Renaissance, about AD 1600, it has been modified as *Jehovah*. However, the original pronunciation of the word is lost from the Hebrew language since c. 300 BC—the reason being refrain from uttering it while reading Scripture out of fear and awe towards the name’s Owner. Instead, it is exchanged for “Adonai,” which means “Lord.” This appellation occurs in the Greek translation of the Old Testament as *Kyrios* and in the Latin as *Dominus*.

THE NAME OF YAHWEH AS “I AM” (ἐγώ εἰμι). The root of the word *Yahweh* is mentioned in Exodus 3:13, 14:

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.’”

The name occurs in the Septuagint as ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν, which means in English: I am the Being, that is Existence, or Absolute Existence.¹ This name corresponds in common Hebrew language to “*Ahia* who is *Ahia*,” or “I am who causes to be” or “I am he who causes to be,” that is “I am who creates being or existence.”

However, the name of God becomes a taboo; to utter it is a deadly restriction. This occurs in the book of Leviticus 14:16 according to the Septuagint version: “Any one who utters the name of the Lord shall die; the whole company of Israel shall stone him whether he be a proselyte or an Israelite he shall die because he uttered the name of the Lord.” It is to be noted here that the name “Yahweh” is not mentioned but substituted for by “the Lord” on purpose, thus warning and avoiding in fear the utterance of the name. But regretfully the Rabbis have altered the text while transcribing it and have changed it to, “Anyone who utters the name of God ‘falsely’ ...” which is translated into Arabic as “blaspheme.” But if the reader wishes to make sure of the authenticity of the Septuagint version, he is referred to Christ’s commandment, “Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not swear at all! ...” (Mt. 5:33, 34).

On account of the clear warning from pronouncing the name of God, “Adonai” is substituted for “Yahweh.” And so is the name “Yahweh” veiled from utterance and shrouded in oblivion. Consequently, the sounds and correct pronunciation of the word are lost.

Later on in the third century BC, the Jews decide to efface the word “Yahweh” from manuscripts and substitute “Adonai” for it with “I am” (ἐγὼ εἰμι) as a prefix. Instead of “Yahweh” the authorized pronunciation is now “I am Adonai” which is exactly “I am the Lord.”

¹In order that the reader may understand the meaning of “I am existence” as related to Christ, we say that there is no creature which can claim that it is self-existent. For every creature, including man, draws its being from him who is “Existence” itself. Temporal existence is transient and, therefore, cannot be considered absolute existence which exists before and after time in eternity. Therefore, it is impossible for man to reach real existence except in Christ.

But in most cases it occurs without "Adonai," which is "Lord," in the form "I am" as a full expression of "Yahweh" the name of God.

The new name has a striking effect on the hearer, thus becoming a substitute for "Yahweh" in inspiring fear and glory. For "I Am" now means "I am the Self-existent and Creator of any other existence or entity." In Hebrew, it is pronounced *Ani hu*, which originally occurs in conjunction with "Adonai" to indicate "Yahweh" = "I am the Lord." But when "I am" occurs alone it indicates "I am the Lord."

GOD CONFERS HIS OWN NAME UPON THE COMING MESSIAH. The reader should now ask how and when is it granted to Christ to speak in the name of God: "I am the Lord"? The answer is inferred from the words of God to Moses: "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put *My words in his mouth*, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not give heed to *My words* which he shall speak *in My name*, I Myself will require it of him" (Deut. 18:18–19). And again more clearly in another place: "Behold, I send an angel before you, to bring you to the place which I have prepared. Give heed to him and hearken to his voice, do not rebel against him; *for My name is in him...*" (Ex. 23:20–21). This angel is regarded, of course, as the self-same Messiah in his apparitions before his incarnation.

THE NEW NAME OF GOD IS A NAME OF CONTACT AND PROPRIETY. However, there still remains another profound notion for us to grasp which forms a bridge between "Yahweh," the private name of God, and the "Lord" which now replaces it.

A little profound speculation will reveal to us that "Yahweh" is the private or personal name of God which man is forbidden to utter. It bears the existence of God within His own self. Anyone who utters it should be elevated to the same level of existence or supernatural state of being in order to find access to God or see Him face to face or being to Being. But who can ever bear or endure it?! It is for man's safety, then, that the name of God is a taboo: "for man cannot see me and live" (Ex. 33:2).

As for the name “Lord” or *Kyrios*, it is a name serving as a means of contact and propriety; for God is not a Lord over Himself. God here takes a people for Himself. They are his people and he is now their Lord. But they are servants. They worship him as a Lord or an elevated Master. For this reason, he who does not worship God rebels against Him as a Lord or elevates himself over His lordship. Therefore, God being worshipped is a divine right of his which is due by the creature as an open attestation of God’s lordship. He who does not worship Him is on par with him who rebels against him like Satan. Satan refuses to worship God. He thus falls from his rank. He afterwards suggests to Adam to disobey God’s commandment and eat from the forbidden tree “to become like God knowing good and evil.” When Adam disobeys God, he is expelled from God’s presence and is cast down to earth to live under curse and death.

LORDSHIP IS A TITLE OF GOD’S ABSOLUTE SWAY OVER CREATION. Lordship here expresses the kind of relationship between a master and his servants who acknowledge his lordship. We find this most clearly applied in Christ. For when Christ fulfills the will of the Father by accepting redemptive death for the world’s salvation and reconciliation to God, God raises him to the lordship he has with the Father before his incarnation:

“... who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:6 – 11).

This tallies with the words of Christ to the Father:

“I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which Thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify Thou me in Thy

own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made" (Jn. 17:4–5).

It is evident here from the biblical text that Christ is the image of God and equal to Him in personal glory before the incarnation. It follows then that he is surely "Lord" in the full sense of the word. By divine economy and counsel he empties himself and becomes incarnated in the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. He then fulfills the verdict of death on the cross to the end. So, the outcome is that God exalts him and bestows upon him *the* name (τὸ ὄνομα). (The definite article here denotes unequivocally the name of God, that is "Lord.") Consequently, worship is now his due whether by earthly or heavenly beings; for he is the Lord of heaven and earth — not that he is another Lord, but as a Lord to the glory of God the Father.

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST BEFORE THE INCARNATION AS THE SON OF GOD AND THE CREATING WORD. Divine Inspiration says in Colossians:

"for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities — all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16–17).

From the words, "all things were created through him and for him" (Col. 1:16), it is understood that God the Father creates all things by him, that is by the Son. But this does not mean that he is merely a tool for creation, but an Owner and Lord of the creation which he creates. Hence, the words, "... through him and *for* him." This means that the Father gives the creation to the Son.

THE STRONG RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD THE FATHER AND THE CREATION. It is not at random that God gives the creation to the Son. For the creation which the Son creates remains *in* him — that is, it belongs to him: "He is before all things, and *in* him

all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). This means that the creation, after taking its beginning from him and coming out into being, still exists in him. However, this does not mean that the Son is part of the creation; for the verse clearly states: "He is before all things..."

The Letter to the Hebrews develops this meaning by saying that the Son is "upholding the universe by his word of power" (Heb. 1:3). Divine Inspiration even goes further in Colossians by saying that the Son is "the first-born of all creation" (Col. 1:15) in the sense that he bears in himself the image of every creation which emanates from him; and thus he is described as "the first-born of all creation," that is, the precursor and antecedent of every creation. By saying so, Divine Inspiration means to define the strong lineage which remains between the creation and the Son, its Creator. This transcendent relationship between the Son as Creator and the creation he creates reveals the dependence which the creation owes to the Son — its owner and upholder. It is a dependence of a very private ownership like that of Yahweh to the people of Israel in times of old. He is at the level of lordship, and they are at that of private servants. Likewise, the Son is the Lord of creation veritably and authentically. He is also its Lord in terms of dynamic efficacy. For in him it exists, and by him it moves: "In him all things hold together"; "... upholding the universe by his word of power" (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). It is, therefore, a relationship of active dynamism. On the same pattern is God's relationship with the people of Israel: he pastures them as a Lord, and they are his own servants who worship him. He belongs to his creation, and it belongs to him.

HE TAKES A BODY FROM A CREATION INDEBTED TO HIM FOR LOVE AND WORSHIP TOGETHER. When the Son chooses to take man's flesh for himself — that is a body out of his creation — he is not abased from his state of lordship over his creation. Rather, the creation, embodied in the flesh of man, is dignified; it is raised up to him. He fills it with his divinity, and it receives "from his fullness grace upon grace" (Jn. 1:16) and love upon love. He, thus, remains

the beloved Lord to the flesh, and the flesh is raised to be the beloved flesh to the Lord. It is, thus, that the Son of God can save man and the whole creation in the flesh when he becomes flesh. This is materialized by the death he dies in the flesh and the resurrection he rises in the flesh. Likewise, the flesh he takes from the creation is not an obstacle in the way of his ascension to the highest heavens and regaining the lordship he has before the incarnation; for he is a Lord before the incarnation and after the incarnation. Listen to him as he addresses the Father:

"I glorified Thee on earth, having accomplished the work which Thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify Thou me in Thy own presence with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was made" (Jn. 17:4 - 5).

And here is what God the Father does for him in all glory and honor:

"... and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe, according to the working of His great might which He accomplished in Christ when He raised him from the dead and made him sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church" (Eph. 1:19 - 22).

"... that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is *Lord*, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10 - 11).

We thus make it clear to the reader how Christ is a Lord over the creation before his incarnation — truthfully, worthily and in active dynamism. Again, we say that Christ ascends to his former glory as a Lord in the flesh. This is attended by the confession of every tongue that Jesus Christ is a Lord to the glory of God. For the lordship of Christ is not conferred upon him as a gift or a prize for the glorious works of redemption and salvation which he accomplishes. Rather,

he remains the self-same Lord despite being in the form of a servant. His throne in heaven does not abandon him even at the cross. Listen to what he says regarding himself: "No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man [who is on earth] who is in heaven" (Jn. 3:13); "You are from below, I am from above" (Jn. 8:23). John the Baptist says of him: "He who comes from above is above all ... he who comes from heaven is above all" (Jn. 3:31). "I came from the Father, and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father" (Jn. 16:28).

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST BEFORE AND AFTER THE INCARNATION IN VIEW OF DIVINE ECONOMY. There is a historical gradation which the lordship of Christ undergoes. It carries salvation into a profound and magnificent realm which is both divine and human.

It is quite remarkable that God should manifest Christ to us as Lord before his incarnation. He is the Son and Creator of all creation. God then reveals him once more as Lord after the incarnation. He is the Savior of mankind, its new Creator and Conciliator to God the Father. This betrays a role of Christ as the Only-Begotten, Beloved, Son — a role for mankind as a whole. He is himself the *Lord* of man and creation, but then its Redeemer and Savior to the Father's account. This is the mystery which God consigns to the Apostle Paul to proclaim in his latter days. He reveals it as follows:

First: In relation to God's selection of man and adopting him in Christ before the foundation of the world — that is before time and history exist, according to the words:

"... who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will" (Eph. 1:1 - 3).

Second: In relation to eternal divine economy, also before the foundation of the world, to recapitulate at the end the redeemed humanity and all creation in Christ according to the words:

"For He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:9 – 10).

Third: We find that this enormous recapitulation under the authority of Christ as the Lord of man and creation rests primarily upon two links. The first is the original, dynamic and strong link which binds mankind and creation to Christ as a Lord and Creator. The second is that which results from the work of redemption and salvation. On account of the latter, human creation melts to become one with Christ as a Creator and "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36) and then as a Savior and Redeemer and Conciliator to the Father. Revelation unveils to St. Paul in the Letter to the Philippians that this recapitulation rests on "[him] who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself" (Phil. 3:21).

Fourth: Christ finally reaches absolute authority over all creatures whether in heaven or on earth. This is fulfilled by his ascension into the highest heaven and being seated on the right hand of God. God then declares that this authority which Christ receives as a Lord over all while being in the flesh he receives for the sake of the Church. God reveals the mystery of the Church as the body of Christ which is taken from mankind. Christ becomes one with it so that the redeemed humanity may become one with him. Being his own body, it is united to him without separation. For all the fullness of the Godhead is cast into his body when he becomes flesh. He gains, or rather regains, all the glory of his lordship by his death, resurrection and ascension to the highest heavens and being seated at the right hand of the Father. It follows then that this same glory is also cast into the Church, because it is his self-same body in which he sits down now at the right hand of Majesty on high.

"...and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe (His body), according to the working of His great might which He accomplished in Christ when He raised him

from the dead and made him sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named ... and He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:19, 20, 21, 22, 23).

Fifth: The lordship of Christ, the Son of God, after being *over* mankind and all creation before the incarnation, becomes after the incarnation *for* mankind and not over it. For man becomes one with him. In other words, after being servants of God before the incarnation of His Son and he being our master and Lord, we become after the incarnation of His Son children and beloved of God. For we have become His body to which he is joined like the union of a bride to her bridegroom. In this vein, St. Paul says, “for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Eph. 5:30 KJV). And thus the lordship of Christ to us is turned from a relationship of mastership and servitude to one of love, freedom and mystical union: “... you in me, and I in you” (Jn. 14:20).

Sixth: Christ, having contained us in his body, which is the Church, still keeps watch over that body. His hope is to see it reach the fullness of his stature veritably and genuinely. He keeps vigil over it that it might deservedly, and not figuratively or symbolically, be called his real body. For the Church is his own body in which he appears before his Father in the fullness of sanctity, faith and love:

“... until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head” (Eph. 4:13, 15).

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST AS REVEALED AFTER THE RESURRECTION AND THE ASCENSION, AND ESTABLISHING ITS DEVOTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE IN THE CHURCH. The title “Lord” for Christ does not appear in its divine significance except after his resurrection from the dead and his ascension before the eyes of his

disciples. Henceforth, the title "Lord" occurs synonymous with the title "Son of God" as resting on heavenly revelation. St. Paul declares this in his Letter to the Romans: "and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). From now on, Christ is known among his disciples in his full title "The Lord Jesus Christ." This title emerges against the background of the glorious ascension, which comes to bolster the work of salvation fulfilled on the cross: "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be *Lord* both of the dead and of the living" (Rom. 14:9). It is from here that St. Paul's famous words come forth: "If we live, we live to the Lord," for he is Lord of the living, "If we die, we die to the Lord," for he is Lord of the dead; "so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8).

THE CONFESSION OF FAITH IN THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST. The first person to testify to the lordship of Christ after his resurrection from the dead is the Apostle Peter. This takes place on the first Pentecost. (The testimony springs from visual witnessing, for it is known that "the Lord has appeared first to Peter" according to tradition; cf. Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5.) The occasion is his famous protest before the high priests² and the Jews in all vigor and courage. (It is the same Peter who previously denies Christ three times before a maid!)

² It is not out of nothing that Christ should cry out before the Jews saying he is Lord. For one of the Rabbinical teachings which is taken for certain among the people is that on the saying of Isaiah, "Behold, my servant shall prosper" (Is. 52:13): "This saying of the Prophet Isaiah refers to the person of the Messiah, the coming prophet and king. The words, 'He shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high' (*Ibid.*) denotes that he will be exalted above Abraham and rise above Moses and elevated high above the angels" (*Yalkut Sim 2*, fol. 53.3 on Is. LII,13, cited by Westcott, *On St. John*, p. 16).

The Rabbis also say, "The Messiah is greater than the Patriarchs, and greater also the Moses and the ministering angels." (*Ibid.*)

St. Paul comments on this ancient Rabbinical teaching in the Letter to the Hebrews saying: "... he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name [Lord] he has obtained is more excellent than theirs" (Heb. 1:3, 4).

“Let all the house of Israel, therefore, know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Again, the Apostle Peter raises his voice up in Acts saying:

“You know the word which He sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)” (Acts 10:36).

As for the Apostle Paul, he hears him speaking to him from heaven; and it is St. Paul who first lays down a creed of faith: “... because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

WITNESSING TO THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT. In another place, the Apostle Paul confirms that no man can confess Christ as Lord without possessing the Holy Spirit — the first and foremost witness to Christ:

“...no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3).

It is also a fact that the descent of the Holy Spirit is a post-resurrection blessing.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DISCIPLES AND THE LIVING LORD IN HEAVEN. With the practice of worship in Church, the relationship between Christ as a Lord and his disciples embarks now on a personal phase of revelation.

St. Paul’s words betray this kind of relationship when he writes with emotion, “If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. *Maranatha* (= Our Lord, come!)” (1 Cor. 12:3).

This kind of relationship and form of address devolves on the whole Church. For all the congregation shouts after mass: “Let the world end and grace come. Lord Jesus, come!” (*The Didache: Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, 10:6).

CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD AS A SIGN OF CHRISTIAN FAITH. Calling on the name of the Lord Jesus be-

comes a sign which indicates Christian faith. We encounter this as a common custom at the prelude of St. Paul's letters:

"To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:2).

To conduct oneself safely in an exemplary life, one should live in common among those who call on the name of the Lord:

"So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22).

PREACHING THE LORD. "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5-6).

ZEAL AND GLOWING WITH THE SPIRIT MARK DEVOTION TO THE LORD. "Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" (Rom. 12:11-12).

SERVING THE LORD HAS A PROMISED INHERITANCE. "...knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:24).

CHRI^ST ANSWERS GENEROUSLY ALL WHO CALL UPON HIM AS LORD REGARDLESS OF RACE OR COLOR: WHOEVER CALLS UPON HIM IS SAVED. "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. For, 'everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Rom. 10:12-13).

THE EUCHARIST IS A WITNESS TO THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE LORD, AND TREATING IT LIGHTLY IS A VIOLATION OF THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST. "For as often as you eat

this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:26 – 29).

The Church definitely believes that the Lord Jesus is the divine power which integrates the Holy Trinity. The Apostle Paul confirms this on three vital occasions:

First: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one" (1 Cor. 12:4 – 6)

Second: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all"
(2 Cor. 13:14)

Third: "yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Cor. 8:6).

The Godhead of the Father, however, is complemented with the lordship of Christ and vice versa. The Father, then, is Lord with Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is God with the Father: "I am in the Father and the Father [is] in me" (Jn. 14:10); "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30); "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9).

In himself, the Lord Jesus Christ is spirit, as he reveals to the Samaritan woman: "God is spirit" (4:24); "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face (that is, without the veil of the Law) reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17, 18).

The change into the likeness of God here is parallel to what happens to Moses. For if by gazing at the benignness of God the face of

Moses shone with light, now by gazing at the glory of the Lord who is the Spirit the light of Christ's face is printed on us: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Christ is spirit. Therefore, all who worship and approach him in spirit are united to him: "But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (1 Cor. 6:17).

It is from here that Christ becomes the greatest point of gravity for saintly spirits—both in heaven and on earth. He is able to assemble all spirits within his person so that the eternal Church of glory, which fills heaven and earth, may arise.

January 1994

The Beloved

[Love carries in it all the mysteries of divinity, creation, salvation and the promised inheritance.]

“He destined us 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. 1:5 – 6)

The purpose of this title is to draw our attention to a characteristic of Christ that arises out of his nature and to touch our hearts. If Christ was the Beloved of the Father, as he deliberately declared (“The Father loves the Son,” Jn. 3:35; 5:20), this is a state in the Father’s heart, as Christ explained in a mystery when he said, “I am in the Father” (Jn. 14:10). Here, the “I” ego is the full and complete being of Christ the Son, which filled the heart of the Father. But just as the Father loved the Son, so the Son loved the Father, with the same love and with the whole of the being that filled the heart of the Son.

This is why Christ hastened to add, out of his sense of his own being, “And the Father is in me” (Jn. 14:10), so that love in the Father and the Son became expressive of a power of totally mutual attraction,

and we do not find the Son outside the Father or the Father outside the Son. So, Christ was able to say with conviction springing from this love that filled his being, "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30).

How amazing and unimaginable is the mystery of love, which is the mystery of divinity and its sublime substance. Who can still say that the Father and the Son are two? For shame! On the contrary, they are one essence, one being and existence, Father and Son, Lover and Beloved. And this is the essence of God which has the fullness of perfection and sufficiency and is necessarily and inevitably one. This is why it is said that the divinity is not divided and neither increases nor decreases and has within it neither first nor second, nor greater nor lesser, nor preceding nor following. At the same time, it is not a numerical unity, for number expresses a material existence, but the oneness of God expresses the whole presence, personified by an essence in which are both fatherhood and sonship. This essence is the whole being that encompasses all of the true presence and all that truly exists and from which emanates fatherhood and sonship, incomparably united in the intimacy of love, to raise up the world and everything in it by the power of love. This is what St. John meant when he said, "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). For God created the world by love and redeemed it by love, and love scorned death just as light scorns darkness and overcame it without a struggle. Thus, we have seen how love, or the Beloved, raises up from death a life that is established above the heavens.

GOD CREATED THE WORLD BY LOVE. "For in Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities — all things were created through Him and for Him" (Col. 1:16).

Here, we see how love creates existence from nothingness.

AND GOD REDEEMED IT BY LOVE THROUGH THE DEATH OF HIS SON. "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).

And here we see love creating life out of death.

So, we have become the creatures of the Beloved: in him the Father created us and in him He redeemed us. By this creative redeeming love we are bound to the Beloved and the Father with the bonds of existence and life. Christ says concerning this, “He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (Jn. 14:2). Thus, Christ is revealed to us in love.

HE WHO LOVES ME. There is a love that exists in the mind of which the tongue speaks easily, so that it may be said, “Who is there who does not love Christ?”

But there is a love that exists in the heart which is like a throne of light upon which Christ is seated. Of this, no one can speak, but it overflows with his light so that no one can deny his presence. If the Beloved dwells in the heart, the heart can contain nothing but him, for he is everlasting and eternal, he is the fullness that fills all in all, and of his fullness we have received grace upon grace (Eph. 1:23; Jn. 1:16).

As the Son has filled the Father’s heart, and the Father only sees or loves in the Son, and we are loved by the Father in the Son, that is in Christ, so it is with us. Whoever truly loves Christ, Christ truly fills his heart, and no one can truly love another person, except in Christ.

“CHRIST WILL DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS BY FAITH.” This is the spring of divine love that has been opened up for us as the greatest of God’s gifts.

Take note dear reader. The Beloved, with all the fullness of the love of the Father and his own love, lowered himself in obedience to the Father’s love and was willing to dwell in our hearts by faith. So, if we believe in Christ, that he is the Father’s only beloved Son, and are certain that he is, he is able to transfer his presence to within our hearts and make his title “the Beloved” real within us. His presence

in us thus becomes the pledge of our faith that he is, and his love for us the pledge of our faith in the Father's love for him.

Listen to what he says in a mystery: "If a man loves me ... my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn. 14:23). There is a hidden mystery in this, for when we love him, we become open to his love, and then his love will definitely be poured out on us without measure. We must not forget that "God is love," so who can know God apart from those who are able to love Him? So it is with the Beloved. Who can overwhelm him and make him enter willing or unwilling into their hearts, apart from those who are open to his nature through love? For we know that he is the fullness of love and so only enters a heart that is fully open to him. And we must still be constantly aware of the depth of the meaning of his title "the Beloved." Certainly, the Father is remembered in it for he is "the Beloved of the Father," and so it is impossible that he should enter alone into the hearts of those who love him. "If a man love me ... my Father will love him and I will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn. 14:23).

How deep and burning is love! The awe-inspiring Father to whom are due all glory and honor and everlasting praise, can be received in our hearts in the Beloved. This is the mystery of the Beloved and his awesome sublimity. The title carries with it the fear of the Father — "Beloved of the Father." The title "Beloved" is a door open to the fullness of God. If we go through it with our love, he will come to us with the Father in all his love. So, it is that the divinity works with humankind by coming to visit, or rather to make a dwelling: "We will come to him and make our home with him." But we must not take lightly the coming of the Beloved Son with the Father, for it means that we have reached the depths of his love, and the depths of his love were revealed to us in his death. So, it is love on a cross. This is how Christ spoke truly when he said, "He who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Mt. 10:38). And so, the door to Christ and the Father is open, and the door is love on a cross. In order that we may be worthy of Christ and the Father, we must keep love and its cross in balance.

If the Beloved enters the heart, he makes it a home for himself and the Father. It is no longer a human heart, but a temple in which God dwells. O Son of God, what is left for me? Come and let the fire of your love consume me. What use is my existence? Your life swallows up my death, and so I live, "not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). O Paul, who brought yourself to death so that you might gain the life of Christ in you, in life and in death you gained them both.

Have you heard of a mother who loves her child and swears she will love him to the point of death? She has received the beloved as a guest together with the heart of the Father and his love. Have you heard of a bridegroom who loves his bride to the extent that he forgets to eat and drink and is continually on the brink of death? Know that he draws his love from the Beloved and love has so overwhelmed him that he prefers it to life. Celibates and virgins, it is the desire of the Beloved that he should find a home in your hearts, a place where he can practice divine forms of love with which to respond to the Father's love for him, and that he should offer to the Church lamps to light up this dark night that has continued for so long. Husbands and wives, put on a new mind, for the treasure of the divine love in your hearts cannot be marred by marriage or the love of sons and daughters. Nor can marriage extinguish the flames of the Beloved's fire; rather it makes the fire burn higher, for you have experience of the unity of love. So, raise it high above the cares of life and it will have greater honor in the eyes of the Beloved. "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25).

Do you see how St. Paul elevates the honor and glory of the love of a man for a woman, making it a parallel for the love of Christ for the Church? There is nothing strange in this. It is rather the mystery hidden in it that is amazing. For Christ loved the Church because it is his body, that is those who believe in him and whom he loves in order to draw them to the Father and perfect them in love as holy sacrifices on the throne of grace. This is the measure by which woman entered the mind and heart of Christ, for it is she who offers to Christ and to God the Father children for the kingdom and holy sacrifices by

which the Church is enriched to fulfill its destiny. So, it is not strange that woman should stand in relation to man as the Church stands in relation to Christ. This is how Christ raises the value of marriage and makes it as holy as the work of the Church for the Father. St. Paul speaks of this too: "Therefore, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. Whoever loves his wife loves ... as Christ does the church" (Eph. 5:28, 29).

That the wife should be to the husband, in the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit, as his own body and as his own soul too, is the mystery of holy matrimony, for the two, the husband and the wife, through their mutual holy love in the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit, have become one body and one soul.¹ For the wife's body has become to the husband like his own body insofar as he cares for it, loves and values it, and the soul of the wife and the soul of the husband become one in love.

What is truly amazing in the way St. Paul completes his mystical vision of the value of marriage in the sight of God is that he refers to it in terms, such as love, honor and esteem, which he would use of Christ and the Church. There are two aspects of this.

1. The first is defined by the sacred union between the husband and the wife based on mutual holy love. The husband loves the wife in Christ as his own body and soul, and likewise the wife. In this, the mystery of the sacred union takes place, and by that, marriage is in itself counted as being on the level of what Christ accomplished with the Church (the believers): "So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). That being so, marriage is considered a living model, a microcosm as a much repeated-repeated, self-sufficient unit, of the Church with Christ.

2. The second is that in the Church the baptism of boys and girls takes place, and thus, the Church becomes like a sacred womb giv-

¹The spirit is not mentioned, because the spirit is not involved in marriage. The human spirit cannot enter into marriage, except in Christ Jesus, when the human spirit and the spirit of Christ become, through sanctification, one spirit.

ing birth to sons and daughters for the kingdom and for God. This is exactly how the wife is considered in the mystery of marriage, for she offers to the Church boys and girls upon whom the Church sets a seal in baptism so that they become sons and daughters of God and inherit the kingdom of God.

Thus, the mystery of the Church and the mystery of marriage perform one work together, which is in the last analysis the work of Christ. Then, if we look deeply into the title of Christ, "the Beloved," we find that he is the power and spirit of the Church and also the power and spirit of marriage.

The Beloved loved the Church and betrothed her to himself, a pure virgin to bear him sons and daughters for the kingdom and the Father. And the Beloved entered into a mystery of marriage and joined the two under his love so that they should be one, so that they should have sons and daughters in the faith for Christ and the Father.

The Apostle Paul completes the verse thus: "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). That was for the sake of the Church. Now, what is the parallel to this in the love of a husband for his wife? Does it lie in his readiness to die for her?

We say that the Church has lived and lives, because Christ did, indeed, give up himself for her, as the Beloved of the Father. Out of his love he gave her life taken from his life. But in marriage the situation is not the same, because the husband's readiness to die for his wife does not benefit the wife or give her life. What really benefits her and results in benefit to the husband and children too, in helping to fulfill the sacred purpose of love and marriage, is that the husband should constantly practice death for the sake of his wife and children in the sense of self-mortification in long-suffering and patience, and dying to desire and all that is not fitting for a Christian husband whose responsibility it is to guide the ship of the family through the shocks of the ocean of this world until it lands on God's shore.

Here, the two pictures match: the death of Christ, the Beloved, for the sake of the Church to redeem her and give her life from his own

life, and the continual self-mortification of the husband to redeem his family through his patience and long-suffering and love so that they should live in the peace of God and reach their destination. This is only possible if the Beloved fills the hearts of the husband and wife, for love is an energy that man can direct as he pleases. The husband's love endures and grows and achieves the impossible if he draws from the Beloved the power of self-surrender for the Church, taking that power from Christ and using it for his wife. Then, the love of the Beloved is transformed in the husband's heart and provides almost miraculously all the wife's needs.

The mystery of marriage has profound power and significance, for it takes its depth from Christ and his union with the Father. "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him" (Jn. 14:21). If marriage encompasses the love of the Beloved Son, then the power of the Most High will overshadow it and it will draw on the love of the Father and become a sign and a witness to the truth of the divine love that acts in holy matrimony.

THE BODY IN MARRIAGE. But what astonishes us is why St. Paul ends by saying: "Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it as the Lord does the church, because we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:28 - 30).

"BECAUSE WE ARE MEMBERS OF HIS BODY, OF HIS FLESH AND OF HIS BONES." This is a return to the value of the body in marriage, so that no one should despise it, for if the Church is the bride of Christ, she is at the same time his body, and we too are his body according to the mystery of the Church. We have undeniably become members of his sacred body, of his flesh and of his bones, because the fullness of the divinity dwelt in the body of Christ. If the husband has taken to himself one of the daughters of Christ as a bride, she is undeniably one of the members of the body of Christ,

of his flesh and of his bones. So, how could the husband not love her and hold her sacred? And how could he not count her as his body and his soul? In the light of this mystery we also gain an exceptional understanding of how the two become one flesh. All this is contained within the concept of marriage in the light of the indwelling of the Beloved in this holy mystery.

Finally, we understand that the mystery of marriage is none other than the mystery of the divine love poured out by the Beloved wherever he is and whenever he blessed a man and his wife, desiring that they become one in the mystery of the divine love. But why does a man leave his father and his mother and unite himself to his wife? It is because through Christ she has become to him as it were a Church, his new body, which he has acquired from the Lord. "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:28).

THE UNION OF CHRIST WITH THE HUMAN SOUL SO THAT MAN BECOMES ONE WITH CHRIST: THIS IS SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE, "UNITY WITH THE LORD." Just as Christ the Beloved dwells with husband and wife when the divine love is present to make them one body for the Church, so it is when Christ the Beloved comes to dwell in the human soul in the presence of the divine love, that man becomes one spirit with, or in, Christ. "He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (1 Cor. 6:17). The basis of being united to the Lord is the fact that the body of the believer in the Lord is the temple of God. "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; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body and in your spirit which is God's" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Thus, whoever does not choose to be united to a woman, that is, does not choose to be married, but chooses to be united to God and to give the needs of the spirit precedence over the demands of the body, he has in fact chosen to please God rather than to please a wife, according to the promise: "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about

worldly affairs, how to please his wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit..." (1 Cor. 7:32–34). The Apostle Paul differentiates, thus, between marriage and celibacy for God: "He who marries does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better" (1 Cor. 7:38). That is, it is not a question of holy and unholy, or pure and unclean. God forbid! It is rather a question of holy without anxieties and holy with anxieties!

Those who direct their lives and their bodies to choose to be united with the Lord are they to whom the Lord refers when he says that this is not for everyone, but for those who can receive it. "The disciples said to him, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.' But he said to them, 'Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it'" (Mt. 19:10–12). Here, "receiving" in the Lord's mind is receiving the overcoming of sexual demands.

Thus, Christ speaks of being united with the Lord as something that is not for everyone. Rather, it is for whoever chooses it and has that desire, as the Apostle Paul makes clear: "Whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well ... and he who refrains from marriage will do better" (1 Cor. 7:37, 38).

From the words of the Lord and the Apostle Paul, the picture of what it means to be united to the Lord becomes clear: (1) It is not for everyone; (2) It is for those to whom it is given; (3) And for those who can receive it; (4) Marriage and being to a woman are good things; (5) But to choose to be united to the Lord is better; (6) Those who choose virginity, that is celibacy, and being united to the Lord, should not be the victims of their passions, but should be steadfast and in determined control of their desires.

THE LORD EXALTED THE WHOLE OF HUMANITY, MARRIED AND UNMARRIED. THE UNION OF CHRIST WITH THE SOUL RESEMBLES A SPIRITUAL, HEAVENLY MARRIAGE. “And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever ... I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more [after his crucifixion and death], but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (Jn. 14:16–20).

“YOU ARE IN ME AND I IN YOU.” Christ speaks of this here before the crucifixion as an established fact that will be manifested to them after his resurrection from the dead: “in that day,” which is the day on which the Holy Spirit came upon them directly.

“You are in me [in the Beloved] and I in you” speaks of a state of perfect union, equal on both sides. We are in him, that is in “the Beloved,” and he is in us, so that there remains for us nothing that is outside him.

“And I in you” shows that the Beloved, with all his love, is in us. This is in fact spiritual marriage of complete union, the highest mystery of the work of the Beloved in us and the greatest mystery of the love of Christ.

When he says “I in you,” it might be thought that he thus negates our existence. But he precedes it by saying emphatically that we shall also be in him with all our being. Therefore, our existence — in the Beloved — is confirmed and assured by his existence. And he says first of all, “I am in my Father,” like the introduction to the clauses of a marriage contract, a first clause, it indicates that the union takes place in the total presence of the Father, because he is one with Christ. That is the basis of our union with the Beloved and his union with us, in the sense that Christ — the Beloved — ratifies this sublime spiritual marriage by the presence of the Father, so that it is a holy marriage in every way in the sight of the Father and with his agreement and good pleasure.

Notice here, dear reader, that Christ speaks of his disciples as an image of the early Church. As we know, the Apostle Peter was one of the disciples and he was married and with him were others, both married and celibate together. Union with Christ in the presence of the Father as an exalted spiritual marriage, therefore, extends to encompass all the believers, married and unmarried alike, with no differentiation or distinction or discrimination.

In our opinion, this established a new spiritual and elevated state of virginity for humankind, which we have obtained through sanctification by the blood, which unites those who are virgins together with married men who have by the Spirit and by grace attained to a state of spiritual union in the body with a wife. Now, we certainly and clearly have before us a physical virginity and a spiritual virginity, a physical marriage and a spiritual marriage.

The physical celibate is called to physical marriage as is completely fitting. He is also called at the same time to spiritual marriage through union with Christ, which is also completely fitting.

The spiritual celibate has renounced physical marriage in order to attain spiritual marriage to Christ alone.

The difference between the two is clarified by the Apostle Paul:

“I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord, (the Beloved)” only.

“But the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife.”

But we add from the Gospel and the general invitation to the kingdom that marriage can appropriately exist side by side with the original and basic call to union with Christ, and the husband and wife can be concerned together with the affairs of the Lord. This is absolutely undisputed in the Bible. Marriage between a man and woman and their physical union is not a simple choice in terms of either marriage or unity with Christ, either marriage or the kingdom of God. That is completely out of the question and contrary to all God's promises about salvation and entry into the kingdom and attaining

eternal life, which are for everyone. But what is added to the state of physical marriage is bearing the burden of the anxieties of the world, and we would add, bearing responsibility for the salvation of the wife or the husband.

The spiritual celibate, whether man or woman, who has fled the cares of the world and rejected marriage, is by definition called to union with Christ, attainment of salvation, seeking the kingdom and striving for eternal life, on the same level and with the same call as married people who have accepted marriage and become one flesh and borne the cares of the world together. They married with the understanding that their calling Christianity is first and foremost and above all else, to cleave to Christ and to strive to remain worthy of being unity with Christ. This applies to both man and woman, because each of them has his or her own spiritual struggle and his or her own spiritual journey, and their being together may make that struggle and that journey easier. Husbands and wives are called to salvation and eternal life by divine right and divine promise, just as spiritual celibates who have rejected marriage.

This brings out clearly what the Apostle Paul said: there is no difference between the two except the “care of the world,” which married people bear and which is replaced for spiritual celibates by the care of overt struggle with the enemy together with the subduing and subjection of the body for the benefit of the spirit.

The spiritual celibate is distinguished by gaining a high level of spiritual experience for the Beloved and the Church — that is if he really succeeds in subduing and subjecting the body and keeping his spirit in line with the will of Christ. He is also distinguished by being able to discern the mysteries of the Gospel and the characteristics of the way of salvation and eternal life and by being a leader of many people, both in his lifetime and after his death.

The married person is distinguished by two things. The first is his having a sister, whom he keeps and care for in the fear of God and whom he offers with himself as a perfect partner in one faith and one journey to salvation and one hope of the Kingdom of God,

so that together they fulfill the will of God in their lives. The second is that he offers whatever sons and daughters it pleases God to give them — whether many of few — and if they are many the reward is greater — to the Church so that they enrich it in faith and love. The Church is the bride of Christ and his body, and so from their own bodies they make a gift that is an adornment for the body of Christ which grows and continues generation after generation.

The celibate, who consecrates his life to the divine Beloved, gives the Church a holy life, divine knowledge, heavenly light and living experience. He bequeaths to the Church his name and his spiritual struggle so that the Church may have more power, grace and light in the world, and presents a living model of a living, existential gospel that is passed on from generation to generation so that the light of the Church is never extinguished.

Married men and women add their bodies, or rather their one body unified in love, to the body of the heavenly Beloved (the Church), and out of their bodies they make a gift of love, the fruit of consecrated love, sons and daughters, to the temple of the Church so that it may increase in members and activity and love and work and service and light for the world.

Christ says at the end of his discourse on this subject: “He who is able to receive this, let him receive it.” Christ does not pick people out, but from a distance turns his eyes on the one who loves him more, as a lover does.

ONCE AGAIN THE SUBLIMITY OF SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE, THAT IS UNION WITH CHRIST THE BELOVED. Here, Christ emphasizes and repeats that his unity with us is parallel to the Father’s unity with him and bound to it: “As Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us... I in them and Thou in me, that they may become perfectly one.” So is spiritual marriage elevated to the level of divinity. If we remember what we have previously said, that the unity of the Father and the Son is a unity founded on mutuality — “The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father” — it

shows us that the unity of Christ in us and us in him is a unity of mutual love by the same power. It is a unifying love such that the oneness of man in the Beloved interacts with and approaches the oneness of the Father with the Son.

HE RAISED THE MODEL OF DIVINE MUTUAL LOVE BETWEEN THE BELOVED SON AND THE BELIEVERS TO THE LEVEL OF SUPREME WITNESS TO THE TRUTH OF THE MISSION OF THE SON TO THE WORLD. "I in them and Thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that Thou hast sent me" (Jn. 17:23).

HE RAISED THE MODEL OF THIS MUTUAL LOVE BETWEEN US AND THE BELOVED SON SO THAT WE SHOULD WITNESS THAT THE FATHER HAS TRULY LOVED US AS THE FATHER LOVED THE BELOVED SON. "That the world may know that Thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as Thou hast loved me" (Jn. 17:23), "that they may be one as we are one" (Jn. 17:22), "that they also may be one in us" (Jn. 17:21).

This is the miracle of the condescension of the divinity to enter into man through the mystery of the divine love between the Father and the Son, which is the basis of the divine unity between the Father and the Son.

Who can believe it? Is this not the wonder of the wondrous divinity, that God should so humble himself? That we should enter into the realm of the love of the Father, the same realm as that in which he loved the Son, or at least parallel to it ("As thou hast loved me," "As we are one")?

This is, indeed, the mystery of the Beloved, the Son who encompasses all the love of the Father, who when he humbled himself and took the form of a slave and became in form as a man when he took a body from the virgin, came down to our world with all the love of the Father in him. Through death and redemption, he raised humanity to his own level so that it entered with him and in him into the

treasures and the inheritance of the Beloved, and became a redeemed humanity, participating with him in the same love of the Father. In this, Christ, when he was within sight of the cross, revealed his greatest mystery about the extent of the glory he has given us and made us participants in: "The glory which Thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one" (Jn. 17:22). This is a promise of the extension of the love of God the Father to us throughout time and into eternity. This is the promise of the Beloved, the promise that heaven has recorded so that it will resound eternally and be fulfilled before our eyes and in our hearts day by day till he comes. Yes, he certainly will come and fulfill the promise openly, and we shall see the glory of the Lamb with our eyes. He is the guarantor of the promise he made, and he will see that his word is carried out. "I made known to them Thy name and I will make it known, that the love with which Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn. 17:26). Yes, come quickly, O Beloved, for our springs are dry.

Wake up, reader. This is not a dream, but a true vision and a certain promise recorded for us by the Beloved and ratified by the presence of the Father. We live now through the period of our betrothal, and we are being prepared every day by the purification of the Holy Spirit which we sense in the beatings of our hearts, so that we shall see and shall become participants in the fulfillment of the promise of the Beloved. Listen to what the Spirit says: "Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:12, 13). "For I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure bride to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).²

Dear reader, it is clear that we discover the truth of all these blessed and precious promises, which the beloved Son has sealed

² "When will this hope be realized
And the time for the wedding come
And my eyes see the glory of the Lamb
And my ears hear the sound of celebration?"

with his blood, in the love of Christ, which we taste in prayer every day, in the praise of a jubilant, joyful heart, in chastity and purity of heart, in a longing, burning spirit, in our standing before the holy heavenly altar to receive the glowing coal of the divinity deep within us, but much more in the fire of love that sets our hearts aflame for the Beloved and other people, all other people. For everything will fade and wane, apart from love which is the spiritual wings that in the end will lift us and fly to bring us to rest on the presence of the Beloved and the Father.

The Apostle Paul, a man experienced in the knowledge of the mysteries of the Beloved, has given us, in a mystery, the key to the treasure so that we may attain the aim: "That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints ... and know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17, 19).

This phrasing is perfectly parallel to that of the prayer of the Beloved in John 17. So, whether it is in the prayer of the mystery of Christ in John 17, or the explanation of it in the highest and truest of the Apostle Paul's writings in the Epistle to the Ephesians, we find that everything centers on the realm of love which the Beloved spread abroad in our world. And he stands guarantor of all he has promised to accomplish.

Someone may say, "What are these wonders that you write of?"

I reply, the Spirit says, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12).

"The Spirit searches everything even the depths of God" (1 Cor. 2:10).

So, reader, if you say these things are beyond us, the Spirit replies, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:9).

Or else why does the Bible say, "Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given

to us" (Rom. 5:5)? Was not the love of God that has been poured into our hearts poured out in order to grant us communion with Christ and the Father? "Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this to you that your joy may be complete" (1 Jn. 1:3, 4). Have we not said, O reader, that we are called to this same fellowship as a bridegroom and bride, through the confirmation of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit? Can we have perfect joy without the bond of marriage between the soul and the Beloved being ratified, in the sight and by the agreement and goodwill of the Father?

We cannot end these thoughts about the Beloved without repeating what the Apostle Paul said:

"That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints... and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17-19).

Here ends the mystery of the Beloved, who made his love the open door to "the fullness of God."

We have agreed, O writer, with what you have written, but how do we begin and where is the way?

It is a beat of the heart which lovers recognize immediately as a sign that the Beloved has entered. That is the beginning of the way that leads where God wills.

January 1994

The Ransom and the Expiation

Theologically speaking, and according to Old Testament origins, Christ is *not* the “Redeemer” but the “Ransom,” which was offered by his Father who is worthy of all glory and honor. It is the Father who redeemed us by sacrificing his Son. The Father is the Redeemer and the Son is the Ransom. Hence, the title “Redeemer” never occurs in any of the New Testament books as referring to Christ. This indicates a remarkable and accurate theological awareness. The Father is the source of eternal counsel and divine economy in planning to offer his Son as a ransom:

“You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake” (1 Pet. 1:18–20).

The Fatherly counsel had taken place in eternity and so we had been chosen in Christ from eternity according to the forethought of God:

“Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will” (Eph. 1:4, 5).

God the Father concluded our redemption in eternity and the Son completed it in time. For that reason, the title of “Redeemer” came to be one of the most special attributes of God the Father concerning our salvation. The epithet of “Ransom” is that of the Son’s obedience to his Father and is one of the most valuable and noble attributes of Christ known to us. It has bound us to him with an everlasting bond. Our main valuable characteristic is that we are the “redeemed,” an epithet of salvation to glory and pride. We bear the mark of redemption, which makes us known in spirit among the angels and heavenly hosts: the blood of the Lamb. To the evil powers, the sign of redemption that marks us out and makes them tremble is our appearance in white robes:

“Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ (Rev. 7:13, 14).

In the Hebrew language, the word “ransom” is close to “expiation” in meaning and pronunciation. But it is mentioned that God redeemed us in his Son and offered him to us as an expiation. When Christ expiated our sins, he redeemed us from death. In Hebrew, both expressions mean “cover.” Redemption is, therefore, a cover, a veil concealing death from us. Expiation is a cover, a veil concealing sin. Covering in Hebrew is *kapporeth*, in Arabic *kaffarah*. The word in English is influenced by the Hebrew, hence *cover*.

RANSOM IN THE GOSPEL OF ST. MARK. “For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45).

RANSOM IN THE GOSPEL OF ST. MATTHEW. “... *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. 20:28).

The only difference between the two passages is both subtle and uniquely original. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, Christ endows the ransom with the motive of service. He also endows it with its honor in offering it up.

On the other hand, St. Mark presents ransom as an independent fact: "the Son of man ... a ransom." St. Matthew mentions it as an example to be followed which Christ handed over to his disciples. He, thus, became the pioneer of very humble service so as to enhance its theological value. It is the preceding verse that proves Christ's intention: "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 ..." (Mt. 20:27, 28).

The wonderful thing, which draws our attention, is that Christ actually got up and washed his disciples' feet before concluding the last supper. Thus, he became a true Servant [or Slave] before becoming a true Master: "Jesus rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet ..." (Jn. 13:4, 5). Afterwards, he completed his self-sacrifice by pouring out his blood in a cup and perfecting the ransom before consummating it on the cross.

Brethren, take heed where the position of service/stewardship lies in relation to redemption: what servitude! that of a slave! "For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant [or slave = you] is not greater than his master (Christ)" (Jn. 13:15, 16).

Clergymen and Church delegates, who always meet to quarrel over the theology of redemption ignoring the gateway, take note!

THE RANSOM ACCORDING TO ST. PAUL. "For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time" (1 Tim. 2:5, 6).

Now, the object is no longer the title "the Son of man," which Christ used when he spoke of ransom in the Gospels. His intention

was to offer it as a service done by a humiliated Servant to all mankind — washing feet that had become soiled on the roads, or ways, of the world: “We have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6). But St. Paul here proclaims “the Son of man” mentioned in the Gospel[s] as the self-same God-man who stood as a mediator on the cross before God the Father, representing humiliated mankind, pleading *mercy* and forgiveness for humanity.

It is worth noting here that the word “mercy” (ἔλεος) is that from which the word “expiation” (ἱλασμός) is derived. In both liturgy and theology, it came to mean the cover of the ark of the covenant (ἱλαστήριον) otherwise named the “mercy seat.” St. Paul considered it as the Christ (Rom. 3:25) who bore in his blood all the sins of mankind — expiating them, that is, forgiving them or covering them up. He then rose from the dead and appeared in front of us and was declared to be the Son of God who represents the Father to us. He reconciled us to him who adopted us and poured out his love together with his Holy Spirit.

According to St. Paul, Christ offered his life as a ransom for our sake. He intends to say that this very act qualified Christ to become a mediator between the Father and us according to God’s will and divine economy. So, in our name, flesh and blood, he established the covenant of eternal reconciliation with the Father, having borne our sins in his flesh on the tree. He accepted the curse willingly, with the bitterness of agony choking him as he hung on the cross. (So much so that this quiet and gentle man, whom nobody had ever heard raise his voice in the streets, cried out loud on the cross from the depth of humiliation and disgrace — for the sense of shame filled him and broke his heart. He questioned the Father for making him undergo such a harsh ordeal and for making him drink such bitter gall. He cried out in a loud voice ignoring how horrified the angels must have felt and how Satan was gloating: “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”) Yes, this is our mediator who accepted the curse and the death sentence from God the Father. How could the Father refuse

to grant him a share in the spoils with the strong and highly exalted him above all the mighty? How could He refuse to give him his heart's desire for us: reconciliation, peace, sonship through his sonship and inheritance through his inheritance? What a glorious Mediator!

Brethren, we have ignored our Mediator's rights with the Father. Up till now we have not offered him even the slightest speck of dust in return for the mountains of mercy he surrounded us with. [Neither could we have cared less about] the love he poured out to us from his wounded heart and about the love which flowed from the Father's heart. For his Father was pleased to bruise him with grief that he might exact life for us from his blood. We have not even offered a prayer of thanksgiving that befits him. Neither have we sung praises to him by day nor by night. Much less have we entered into an intimate relationship with him where we would have been able to converse with him, either secretly or in jubilant, unabating voices — a relationship that would make the angels in heaven jealous!

Brethren, you have forgotten the bond of love he committed to you from his pierced side: the bond of betrothal which Paul issued with his hands (2 Cor. 11:2); better still, a wedlock that is ratified on the altar every day by the Holy Spirit: for the Holy Spirit offers us the blood of the Bridegroom to drink and his flesh to feed on. He ratifies our union with Christ that Christ may live in us and we live through him, just as a bride is joined to her bridegroom: "You in me and I in you" (Jn. 14: 20). Where is the love we exchanged with him? Where are the vigils? Where are the oil vessels? Though we hear the cry from afar, where are the lamps? What are you going to do? The appointed time has grown very short, and the night is far gone. It is the last hour. You have wasted your lives in vain and your oil is spent. The days are evil. Selling *and* buying have become dear and rare.¹ Words have dried out in the parched throat of the wise man. There are none to teach the truth while all believe they are teachers. The Redeemer calls you: look at my wounds, the sins I have borne, the curse I have accepted, the heartbreak I have suffered. Put away your ignorance and come to

¹ Cf. Matthew 25:1 – 13.

me. I have the life, light and grace. My purity I will give you freely. My inheritance of the Father's love to me I will share with you. Come!

THE RANSOM ACCORDING TO ST. PETER. "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake" (1 Pet. 1:18 – 20).

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24).

The Apostles are still impressed here by the characterization of "ransom" as it had been presented by Christ. It is on the same plane as that of the crushing servitude of slaves, with the humility that deigns to wash the feet [of others] in accordance with the commandment. St. Peter here intends to stir up the zeal of [his] Jewish brethren who had inherited bad customs and shameful practices from the traditions and futile ways of their fathers. He found nothing to kindle their hearts better than the sufferings and blood of the ransom which Christ offered as a meek lamb without blemish or spot. St. Peter then describes the main qualities of that ransom as incomparable with perishable materials such as gold or silver: it is a ransom whose standards are truth, genuineness and immortality. For the ransom which Christ paid, Brethren, by delivering up his flesh to be slaughtered and his blood to be shed, this ransom was valued by God his Father at the price of eternal life and the entire glory of heaven as well as the best seat at his right hand. His blood speaks in intercession for us for all the time. Moreover, the effects of that ransom are everlasting: they stand just as they did the day it was offered. They are present to this hour and forevermore. For Christ is not less than Abel; neither is the blood of Christ inferior to that of Abel who "died, but through his faith ... is still speaking" (Heb. 11:4).

Such is the ransom of Christ: it still speaks and tells of the horrible pain and the sins that were laid on him. He who knew no sin

God the Father “made . . . to be sin” for our sake. Even when the adulterer, the licentious, he who is wallowing in the mire of impurity and the filth of shameless deeds — I say, even when such a sinner evades Christ, a voice runs after him; it is the blood of God’s Son calling out: Come, beloved son! your sins are with me. I have entirely borne them the day you had made them. I have paid the price: I have been put to shame; I have been scourged, crushed, crucified and have borne the curse. I have secured you the deed of forgiveness and innocence and even obtained for you the order of merit. Come, come that I may rejoice in you as much as I suffered for you. Come that I may crown you with salvation and pour out my love and Spirit upon you and present you to my Father. You are the most precious of my lambs, and I have valued you at the price of my blood.

St. Peter compares Christ to a lamb. However, he is not concerned about the lamb itself but rather about his blood. He sees the lamb with the blood as a sacrificial victim. The lamb stands for the purity and perfect innocence of the Ransom. St. Peter here has in mind the lamb who, according to Isaiah, was led to the slaughter yet opened not his mouth:

“But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him, ‘Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?’ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly” (Mt. 27:12 – 14).

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth . . . and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all . . . although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth” (Is. 53: 7, 6, 9).

By mentioning “a lamb without blemish,” St. Peter here takes the occasion to convey an association between the ransom of Christ and the lamb of the Passover — a clever allusion to salvation from the angel of destruction as it centers on “blood.” The precious blood (τιμίς) indicates the tremendous value of the ransom. The blood of God’s Son was not offered in return for the value of gold or silver; it was

offered in return for the heavy price required to pay the penalty of sins — sins which the law was unable to forgive.

Sinners of the earth with all kinds of willful, premeditated sins whose penalty is death without mercy: Come forward! Get closer to the precious blood! You will find your sins invalidated by the power of that ransom.

Albeit, forgiveness by the blood does not hinder the enforcement of the laws of justice. On the other hand, the death of the flesh does not stop the effect of forgiveness and the gain of eternal life, on the condition of confession and repentance.

“HE WAS DESTINED BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD BUT WAS MADE MANIFEST AT THE END OF THE TIMES FOR YOUR SAKE” (1 PET. 1:20). This sums up who Christ is. But St. Peter intends to highlight the process of redemption and what was accomplished in accordance with it by the Father’s eternal will and divine economy. For God had already chosen man and accomplished his redemption through his Son. But when the time had fully come the Son became flesh and carried out his Father’s eternal will. Thus, that which had been hidden in the Father’s will from eternity was disclosed in time. St. Peter says that redemption according to the Father’s will was made manifest at the end of times. In this way, he differentiates between the end of times and early times. The early times belonged to the prophets, who announced the coming of the Righteous One beforehand:

“The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory” (1 Pet. 1:10, 11).

St. Paul affirms the fact that God the Father had previously chosen us before the foundation of the world. This choice was definitive on account of the redemption whose image had already been completely formed in the Father’s will and plan:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. He destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will²” (Eph. 1:3 – 5).

From St. Paul’s words it is evident that we had been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, meaning from eternity. But it was also the good pleasure of God’s will for us that He would make us holy and blameless — standing before Him to praise His glorious grace which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. This was to take place in time. But whether it be this or that, such had been the integrative, eternally pre-existent plan for us. In the fullness of time, the Son carried out that plan. Whether it is seen as an image that had been formed in God’s mind from eternity or an incident which took place in time — in either case we must realize that it was all the plan of a tremendous love which God maintained in his heart. In the fullness of time, He handed that plan over to the beloved Son for him to fulfill His love and reconcile us to Himself.

Children of God’s love: God has transferred you from the dominion of darkness under the shackles of Satan to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Col. 1:13). He has protected you with His grace, upheld you by His Holy Spirit and engraved you on the palms of His hands (Is. 49:16). What have you offered to the Father’s heart to gratify His loving will which had loved you from eternity? [How have you responded to] a love that has even increased when He offered you His Christian perfection; when He adopted you as a new creation to stand before Him praising His glorious grace? Do you know that your duty is to stand before Him praising His glorious grace and leading the choirs of all the angels in heaven, for that is why you became His children?! Do you know that He has adopted you as children that He may enjoy your company and that you may enjoy His presence?

Out of living experience St. John says:

² Or *the good pleasure of his will* (AV).

“that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn. 1:3, 4).

What was the Apostles’ fellowship? “All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts 1:14); “And they devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). This is the basis on which the Church was built: the unity of Spirit together with prayer.

“HE HIMSELF BORE OUR SINS IN HIS BODY ON THE TREE, THAT WE MIGHT DIE TO SIN AND LIVE TO RIGHTEOUSNESS” (1 PET. 2:24). The sharp contours of redemption begin to take shape here in St. Peter’s thought. Originally, redemption meant that Christ redeemed us from the curse of damnation and the judgment of eternal death. But this judgment can by no means apply to Christ; neither can his body receive the curse or suffer death: for he is holy and without blemish according to the Scriptures’ testimony and his own confession: “Which of you convicts me of sin?” (Jn. 8:46).

That he should assume a pure body from the Holy Virgin Mary was the first step in drawing up the plan of redemption. Next came his own free will acceptance to bear our sins *in toto* in his body on the tree. However, his acceptance was in accordance with his Father’s will. This makes it perfectly clear that the resolve to die was actually definitive.

There arises here a question which has kept repeating itself over again as a theological puzzle since the beginning: How did he himself bear our sins in his body on the tree?

For the answer we have to refer back to the trial of Christ, both before the Sanhedrin and the Praetorium. The former officially represents God: it speaks and judges in his name. The latter represents the highest judicial court in the world.

We will examine the court's official report and the conditions which attended the sentence to death by crucifixion:

A preliminary investigation into the court's official report would suggest that the case had been rigged, the proof being that Pilate declared that the high priests had delivered him up out of envy. Three times Pilate went out and declared that the accused was innocent and that he found nothing in him deserving death. At the end, he washed his hands from the guilt of killing this righteous man and ordered his crucifixion.

What is the exact situation? Was it the chief priests or Pilate who erred?

If we concentrate on Christ's confession as the accused we will discover the truth. The reader will find that the most astonishing of all the details in this case is Christ's attitude.

It is in fact Christ's behavior which led the chief priests to sentence him to crucifixion with a clear conscience. The reader is invited to consider the high priest's direct question to Christ after the two false witnesses had declared their accusations: "The high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?' But Jesus was silent" (Mt. 26:62, 63).

To Pilate's question:

"Now Jesus stood before the governor ... But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?' But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly" (Mt. 27:11 - 14).

In the Gospel of St. Mark, the questions are repeated by the high priest and Pilate, the head of the court: "But Jesus made no answer" (Mk. 14:61; 15:5).

Herod hoped to see some sign performed by Jesus before him: "So he questioned him at some length; but he made no answer" (Lk. 23:9).

In the Gospel of St. John, the account of the trial differs concerning Jesus' behavior as he attacks both the high priest and Pilate.

“The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, ‘I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple [before the chief priests], where all Jews come together; I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me [and ask yourself], what I said to them; they know what I said’” (Jn. 18: 19 – 21).

To summarize Christ’s behavior:

The Gospel emphatically records Christ’s silence before Pilate in response to the main questions concerning the accusation. This reveals that Christ made sure he would not answer any of them, not even a word: “But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly” (Mt. 27:14). Pilate wondered because the behavior of the accused would cause him to lose all his rights and to end up getting the most severe penalty.

Christ was officially accused of being an evildoer, an agitator and of perverting the nation with his teachings. His behavior during the trial [namely, his total silence] inevitably resulted in the confirmation of these accusations. The indictment necessarily included contempt of the law and breaking the Sabbath. The penalty of this was crucifixion, according to the law.

Christ’s silence, in particular before the chief priests, led these to convict him easily, as they believed that he really did deserve to be crucified. By remaining silent before Pilate, Christ caused the voices of the chief priests to be the only audible sound. Consequently, their insistence on punishment by crucifixion without any objection on the part of Christ forced Pilate to agree in the end.

If we recall the number of times Christ had previously announced to his disciples that he would die on the cross, meaning under the curse, we will realize that he was actually leading the court to sentence him to crucifixion — the aim being to bear sin and its curse by his own free will. When his body was nailed [to the cross], sin was nailed to it as the cause of death. When the cross was raised up high, the conditions stipulating the curse were gratified: “Cursed be every-

one who hangs on a tree” (Gal. 3:13). Christ, thus, accepted the curse of the law by holding his peace.

Up to this point, we will have summed up the theological meaning of the Ransom.

What, then, is “the Expiation”? This is considered by itself an illustration to/of the Ransom.

THE EXPIATION ACCORDING TO THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPT

ST. PAUL: “... they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation (ἱλαστήριον) by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins” (Rom. 3:24, 25).

The reader is to note here the mentioning of the word *hilasterion*, meaning expiation.

ST. JOHN: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation (ἱλασμός) for our sins” (1 Jn. 4:10).

“If any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation (ἱλασμός) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:1, 2).

ST. PAUL IN HEBREWS: “Therefore he (Christ) had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful (ἐλεήμων) and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation (ἱλάσκεσθαι) for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17).

THE EXPIATION. In the Hebrew language, the word for expiation is *kapporeth*, which means *covering*—that is, covering sin so that it no longer exists as the cause of death.

In the Greek language, it is ἱλασμός, which is derived from ἴλεως, meaning *mercy*: “For I will be merciful ἴλεως toward their iniquities”

(Heb. 8:12), which refers in the Old Testament to God's attribute of mercy—but only in the Old Testament; for this attribute is unfamiliar in the New Testament, because it derives its meaning from *hilasterion*, which is the mercy seat that covers the ark of the covenant, which Moses kept in Sinai. The ark contained the two tablets of the covenant, the urn holding the manna and Aaron's rod that budded and blossomed in remembrance of how God had dealt with His people while they journeyed across Sinai. For Aaron's rod sprouted, putting forth buds and producing blossoms. This was a sign of God's approval of the people on account of the tribe of Levi, which was headed by Aaron, the first high priest. It was kept in the ark of the covenant as a remaining token of God's goodwill towards the people, even when confronted with the rebellion that had happened: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony [that is, the ark], to be kept as a sign for the rebels, that you may make an end of their murmurings against me, lest they die'" (Num. 17:10). The two tablets of the covenant are the tablets of stone on which God's commandments were written. The urn holding the manna was a sign of God's concern for His people as He gave them bread from heaven throughout their forty years in the desert. The mercy seat, the *hilasterion* which covered the ark, was made of gold, and God spoke to Moses from above it.

It was St. Paul who introduced the word *hilasterion* into the New Testament. He referred to it in the aforementioned verse of Romans 3:25 with the direct meaning of expiation. This was an unprecedented hint which brought to our attention that the *hilasterion*, or the mercy seat, represents "the expiation." For the high priest would take blood with his fingers from the expiatory sacrifice of atonement and sprinkle it over the mercy seat. He did this that all the sins confessed by the people or the sinner at the head of the burnt offering before slaughtering it might be forgiven. The theological meaning of that ritual in the Old Testament is now unfolded to us when applied to what occurred on the cross, Christ being the burnt offering. His blood carried all our sins and expiated them, that is, covered them on the cross on which it was shed.

[In this connection, it is worth noting that] according to the Coptic Church's Liturgy, the "ark," or the box in which the chalice holding the holy blood is kept, is set on the altar upon a wooden slab traditionally called "the board of the covenant," which derives its meaning from the mercy seat on which the high priest used to sprinkle the blood of the sin offering to expiate the sins of those who confessed them over the sacrificed bull's head. Thus, "the board of the covenant" came to represent the cross.

The words "expiation," "sacrifice of atonement" and "the *hilasterion*," which St. Paul used meaning the Expiation, all entered into Christian theology as a practical means to explain the concept of the cross and the power of the blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. They even came to expound the sacrifice of Christ itself and the concept of its expiatory power. This revealed to us all the mysteries of redemption and forgiveness of sins in the New Testament besides their early typology in the rituals of the Old Testament.

It is important to draw the reader's attention to the fact that God had ordained all the ancient rites of the Old Testament in such a way as to bear within their folds an elucidation of all the facts of theology without an expositor or exposition. For the people had previously believed and practiced them until light was shed upon them in the age of light and grace.

Among the wonderful Church rituals that have been ignored and forgotten is that of the people's confession without a mediator over the blood of Christ on the altar. It is an integral part of the raising of incense that the priest go round the congregation, offering the censer in front of every believer present in church. He should have to pause for a moment, taking his time before each one that he [or she] may confess in secret. The priest then goes to the door of the sanctuary and stands to offer incense upwards praying with eyes raised to God: "... accept the confessions of Thy people ... etc." He then advances to raise incense before the altar and on top of it over the chalice to carry his people's sins to the blood of Christ to be expiated — that is, forgiven.

Though some priests still formally perform it as a ritual, this practice became practically obsolete since the thirteenth century. It has been replaced by [private] confession to the priest. (See *Misbah Al Tholma Fi Idah Al Khedma* by Ibn Kabar, the priest of the Hanging Church, but in an unadulterated manuscript. The original dates back to the thirteenth century.)

THE RECTIFICATION OF A COMMON THEOLOGICAL ERROR: "HE DIED FOR US" AND NOT "INSTEAD OF US"

Christ accepted the curse for our sake and not "in our stead," for he died with us in him but did not die in our place. He took his flesh from our flesh and bore our sins on the cross in the flesh which he took from us. This means that Christ took on our old humanity for himself. When he was crucified with it, this meant that the curse inevitably entered with him to fulfill its own punishment. It was on account of our sins that we deservedly received the curse through Adam. As for Christ, he received it in communion with us according to his Father's will and by his own free choice. He did not deserve it in the least; for he was holy and without sin. Bearing our old humanity with its curse within him, Christ went through suffering and death that humanity might receive its punishment to the full while being carried in him. In his divinity, he arose from the dead, raising humanity up with him. When he died on the cross, we died with him. When he was buried, we were buried with him. But as he was the Son of God and not deserving the curse or death, he arose from the dead as a God on account of his holiness and power of life that endures forever. It was not possible for him to be held by death, neither could the curse confine him to the pit. Consequently, he arose in the fullness of the glory he shares with his Father, triumphant over sin, the curse, death and the pit.

As for us, we were raised with him, for we were in him.

Had it not been for Christ we would have remained in death with the curse forever. When he rose, however, he raised us with him. As he was united to us we overcame death by his victory and rose by his res-

urrection. We took on a new nature from [Christ's] nature over which the sentence of death and the curse no longer rule, nor will it ever be subject to the power of sin. This is the new humanity which is qualified by the Spirit to share eternal life with the Father and the Son.

When St. Paul says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Gal. 3:13), he means that Christ redeemed us by accepting the curse on the cross for our sake and, therefore, became a curse for our sake. This means that he was crucified for our sake and not in our stead. "Instead" is a most serious error, because it makes his acceptance of the curse and death personally deserved, which would completely invalidate the ransom. He accepted the curse for our sake — but only out of love and in obedience to his Father. He, thus, became a ransom of love in the full sense of the word and by all standards: "... who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2: 20).

Note that what is said of the curse is also applicable to the passion. We, therefore, say: "We suffered with him," because he suffered for us and not "instead of us," as if it were by personal desert — God forbid.

The same goes for death; we died with him because he died for our sake and not "in our stead," as if he died deservedly.

This reveals the extent of the theological error in saying that Christ suffered instead of us, or died instead of us, or accepted the curse instead of us. Unfortunately, many make the same mistake up till now, which calls for paying attention.

THE BURNT OFFERING AND HOW CHRIST REDEEMED US FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW. In the Old Testament, the high priest or the people represented by the leaders of the tribes confessed over the head of the bull or the beast to be sacrificed as a burnt offering. But they confessed only the sins committed unwittingly; for there was no sacrifice for those committed deliberately. The high priest would then slay the bull, take of its blood, enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle the blood over the mercy seat. This took place before God, who would be present in the cloud of incense raised by the high

priest over the ark from the censer in his hand. The offering would then be burnt outside the camp, and the fire would remain burning before the people all night long — a sad and dreadful sight. For the bull bore the sins and its blood was shed, some of which was offered over the mercy seat before God to obtain forgiveness, and then the bull was burnt completely to ashes.

What was actually accomplished by this?

Slaughtering the bull and shedding its blood stood as a life for a life; for blood is known to contain the life or soul. The bull's soul and life were given in lieu of the sinner's soul and death. As it were, the bull's soul and life saved the sinner's life before God. In meaning and actual fact, the sacrifice should die for the sinner to live. The fire represents God's anger and the curse which, instead of consuming the sinner, consumed the bull completely. The bull bore God's curse and wrath instead of the sinner. The offering, here, was considered an expiation for the sinner's sins. The slaughter, death and blood of the bull brought about God's forgiveness. The blood, which was sprinkled before God on the mercy seat, carried those sins. The burning fire, which completely annihilated the bull, signified and atoned for God's curse and wrath and His neglect and total, final abandonment of the sinner.

Such is the image given us by St. Paul in his unequalled verses where he describes what happened to Christ in relation to us as sinners under the curse: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21); "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree'" (Gal. 3:13).

Concerning sin, Christ bore all sins: those committed unwittingly along with those committed deliberately. In order to describe Christ as qualified to bear every sin of each and every kind that not a single sin whatsoever might escape him, St. Paul phrased it in the absolute: "he made him to be *sin*." He put it like this so that no sinner whosoever may ever be anguished at whatever sin he has commit-

ted, even when he deems it too atrocious to be among the sins which Christ bore.

We have previously dealt with when and how Christ bore our sins in his body on the tree, which he did by accepting the verdict of the chief priests in the Sanhedrin and that of Pilate in the Roman court without objection or argument. He deemed as rightful all charges against him, whichever sin he was accused of having committed.

The scene now is very moving to those with a vivid imagination: Here stands Christ in silence just as the burnt offering stood before the slaughter, with the whole people confessing their sins over its head. It is the law that now condemns Christ as deserving slaughter and death. Here he holds the same position before the high priest and the elders of the people. They now stand counting his sins and pouring them over [his head] while he remains silent, accepting their accusations without raising the least objection or attempting to plead his case. They finally settle on the instrument of his death as one who is cursed from God for having transgressed the law: the cross. He makes no protest, but takes up the cross of the curse on his shoulder like one bearing the shame by his own free will before being raised on it by other men. He, thus, accepts the curse as a punishment from God which even deprives him of God: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

It is, thus, that he became a curse for us that we might be saved from the curse forevermore.

And he was also made to be sin for our sake that we may gain forgiveness and eternal righteousness.

But did God's curse really fall on Christ, or is it just a matter of words and fantasy?

The critical debate concerning the question of the curse began in the fourth century. It was St. Jerome (AD 324–420) who raised this serious controversy. He insisted that Christ could not have received the curse, for he is holy, and that to maintain that Christ became a curse is blasphemy. Western bishops followed in his steps since then

and some up till now. Bishops and theologians stood out defending the holiness of Christ just as Peter zealously forbade the idea of Christ's crucifixion, out of firm conviction: "God forbid, Lord!" (Mt. 16:22). For Peter knew that crucifixion was the punishment of criminals and sinners who bear the curse and hang on a tree. How then can the Lord Jesus tell them, "the Son of man will be delivered up to be crucified"? But Christ, nay, theology itself untarnished by any human thought, retorted: "Get behind me, Satan!"

"And Peter took him and began to rebuke him (rebuke Christ?!) saying, 'God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men'" (Mt. 16:22, 23).

In his book *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Galatians*, the German scholar H. Meyer enumerates the great theologians of our time who head Peter's position in defense of Christ's holiness and the impossibility of him receiving the curse. It is not our intention here to create an issue of contention out of this problem which is the heart and spirit of the faith. However, we say that if Christ had not accepted the curse of the law for our sake, which is itself the very curse of God, he would not have been able to die and his death would not have been genuine. It would have only appeared to them as such [as Docetic heretics claim]. Neither would we have been able to escape eternal damnation or eternal death. [There are two alternatives]: Either Christ must have received the curse for our sake and died and risen on the third day, or we must have had to live subject to the curse and death under the wrath of God, never to rise again. Any argument which claims that because Christ is holy and the Son of God and, therefore, denies that he should have received the curse, we refute thus: If Christ were not holy and were not the Son of God, he would never have accepted to bear sin and the curse, that is, crucifixion and death. For it was on account of his holiness and divinity that he trampled death underfoot by his own death, having risen from the dead and shaken off the curse from himself and from us forever.

Christ took on our nature, with its pros and cons. He bore its sins in his flesh on the cross, accepting its curse without any reduction. He took it on according to his Father's will and divine economy. The plan had been laid down from eternity to be fulfilled as an act in the very fullness of time. Through and out of that nature taken on by Christ God intended to make a new creation that would be fit for co-existing with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This new creation was meant to live in a communion of eternal life and on the same plane with the Son in sonship, love and inheritance. That our "Peteristic" emotions should interfere and rebuke Christ once more saying, "God forbid it should be so," is still the counsel and philosophy of Satan which aim at putting an end to the power of redemption and the meaning of the expiation, turning all these concepts into bogus theories.

Isaiah cries out across the ages: You [foolish] theologians! It is the Father's will: "Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin" (Is. 53:10). It is from the cross that the voice of Christ answers: Amen! approving the Father's will to bruise him and the cup of gall [he has made him drink], but questioning the harshness of the punishment: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Christ was crying out of the depth of his sonship to the Father in defense of man whom he carried in his basest form of disgrace with God's wrath having fallen upon him.

Assuming Christ had not accepted God's curse in its entirety, St. Paul's words "he redeemed us from the curse of the law" would then be sheer deception and imposture.

It is God the Father who consented to make him to be sin and a curse for the sake of our redemption and salvation according to the eternal counsel and judicious will. But it is God the Father also who raised him from the dead and highly exalted him above all the heavens, seating him at His right hand on high.

If some theologians still claim that Christ did not receive the curse, we then ask: how did he accept the cross which is the very curse itself? Indeed, it was to gulp the curse to its last dregs and to

fulfill it to the last breath that he endured suffering to the very end. His last testimony came out with his last breath: "It is finished." Yes, the toil of the cross is finished: the curse, the wrath of God—even unto death. It is only now that the verdict, which came forth out of God's mouth against Adam, is at last fulfilled.

And now, we cannot help but wonder at those sickly notions which fall short of rising to the towering greatness of redemption and which still find folly in the word of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). However, "the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (1 Cor. 1:25).

In order to focus the reader's thought and confirm the truth, we draw his attention to St. Paul's concern for certifying his words about Christ. When he said Christ "became a curse for us," he added the incomparable proof and confirmation directly quoted from Scripture: "for it is written, 'cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree.'" The reader is to note how many times Christ lauded his approaching crucifixion like one who saw in the coming curse the culmination of his mission, the crown of redemption and the gate that opens out into the new covenant.

But we ask: For what reason does St. Paul mention this paramount redemptional truth, confirming it, insisting on it and verifying it?

It is evident that with the ending of the law's curse, the whole law ends, and with the ending of the law, faith in God apart from the law begins. Thereby, the gate is opened to the Gentiles for believing in God after the order of Abraham, according to the faithful promise of the new covenant.

Finally, we would like to convey to the reader the quintessence of research done by a Bible scholar in Kittel's *German Theological Dictionary* on the subject of the curse:

It is not for nothing that Paul speaks of our redemption (Gal. 3:13), of our justification (Rom. 3:21 ff), of our reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17 ff), in short of our new fellowship with God, before he speaks of Jesus as the One who became a curse, as the *hilasterion*, as the One who was made sin ...

That Jesus was made a curse for us implies, then, that he is set by God in our alienation from God in order that he might bring us out of it to fellowship with God. (G. Kittel, *TDNT*, Vol. I, p. 451)

Nor is any help to be found in the restrictions of a mediating theology which derives the curse only from the law and not from God, or which applies it only to the Jews and not to "us." (*Ibid.*)

Now, brethren, we have come to know and are sure that Christ bore our sins in his body on the tree and accepted the curse of sinners and sin and was satisfied with the cross of shame, all for our sake. He was appointed by his Father to be the Ransom so that with his blood and his cross we may receive the forgiveness of sins and with his resurrection new life and reconciliation with the Father, together with kinship, boldness, adoption, fellowship and eternal life. There is nothing left for us now but to accomplish what we know and in which we believe.

To realize these gains and blessings there exists no other way than prayer. Prayer is the only means to live them out, rejoice in them and enjoy our heavenly share — actually savoring God's righteousness and extolling his glory. Prayer is the gate of heaven, always and forever open to us. All who have entered through it have borne witness, and their witness remains an incentive for us to pray and also bear witness to him "... who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

CONCLUSION

LOVE AND REDEMPTION: [We will deal now with] the sources from which redemption and expiation spring.

The reader may find it difficult to understand the intricacies of redemption or expiation. However, [he should know that] the main source from which the concept of redemption sprang and the pattern on which all its blood-letting work was designed is God's love towards mankind. In all clarity, the Spirit in the Gospel says plainly about the origin of redemption: "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).

The first practical step God took was to motion to His Son to take on man's flesh and unite with God's own image. His aim was to make His Son the head of a new humanity after having removed the

curse and penalty of death. Christ would then bring humanity into the realm of God's personal love to live with Him anew, humanity praising God and God rejoicing in humanity. The descending of the Godhead to unite with the form of man, in which there are so many infirmities, demonstrates not only God's love towards mankind but also His unbelievable tribute which led the Son to declare:

"Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, *to behold my glory which Thou hast given me* ... I made known to them Thy name, and I will make it known, that the love *with which Thou hast loved me* may be in them, and I in them" (Jn. 17:24, 26).

This implies an eternal guarantee that they will never again have to leave God's presence.

If the narrative of redemption began on man's part with a life of sin, iniquity and transgression urged by ignorance, enmity, hatred, envy, strife, attended by perplexity, disorder, sorrow, weeping, sighing and a sense of God's wrath — redemption reveals the other side on God's part as extremely radiant, overflowing with sincere love and a genuine intent for reconciliation. Concerning the Father [St. Paul] says: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). As for Jesus Christ, the Son, the first words in which he expressed the redemption he was determined to achieve for mankind from his blood were: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you ... For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Mt. 11:28, 29, 30). He then began to explain the works and attributes of the Ransom: "For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mt. 9:13 AV); "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. 20:28); "You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am ... I ... have washed your feet" (Jn. 13:13,14); and the last and greatest of all the words he said were: "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins ... Do this in remembrance of me" (Mt. 26:2, 28; Lk. 22:19, 20).

In this way, Christ comprised the whole concept of the Ransom by giving us his blood in a cup to drink, like a lover who has given himself up to the slaughter for his beloved. He gave his blood to his beloved to remind them of the love which he valued at the price of his blood. He turned the love gushing out of his heart into blood poured out in a cup. However difficult the language of theology on redemption, it is only the ticks of the Father's heartbeats which will remain unheard by man until he begins to understand the language of love. If God's heartbeats have been made audible by the Son through the lashing of whips, through crucifixion, through the shedding of blood, it is only to awaken our dull senses into understanding the language of God's love and his true intentions toward the sinner, which existed from eternity.

The greatest theologian in the world, who is also the greatest sinner (1 Tim. 1:15), realized the mystery of redemption with its intricacies. He understood God's language and heard his heartbeats and expounded all the works of the Son's ransom on the cross. This prompted him to express redemption in a praise he kept singing all the days of his life, which consists of a couple of words summing up the entire mystery of the Godhead: "... who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

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An Amendment to the Concept of Salvation and Faith

The relationship between salvation and faith seems to be misunderstood theologically by many. Someone may assume that he must have faith in Christ — the faith which consists in believing that Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification, as the verse goes (Rom. 4:25). [He assumes that it is] through this faith we are saved: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Salvation [in this view] comes through the forgiveness of sins and liberation from the punishment of eternal death [on the basis that] Christ died on the cross for our sins. Salvation [in this perspective] also includes the acceptance of eternal life — for Christ trod death down and rose from the dead, raising us with him in newness of life.

[So, to summarize the view of many] salvation is understood as being effected through faith, faith being the instrument of salvation or that which brings about salvation. However, this is a theological concept which has been turned on its head.

The correct concept is that Christ fulfilled salvation for humanity and offered it to sinners as a free gift. To him who has faith, who believes, God reckons his faith as salvation. Therefore, faith here is not [something we have to offer in exchange for] salvation, for salvation was fulfilled free and offered free without exacting any kind of price whatsoever. This point can be illustrated practically as follows.

Christ fulfilled salvation, took it in his hands and offered it to the sinner. He who stretches out his hand and takes it is saved. Faith then is neither a price nor a means of salvation; it is both believing and taking together. Such is the case because God in Christ, through love and compassion for the sinner, wishes to save us (“the sinner shall not perish but live”). So, the sinner has no preconditions to meet. He only has to trust in the Father’s love — “We know and *believe the love* God has for us” (1 Jn. 4:16). He has only to accept the gift of salvation which God tore out of His Son’s flesh and blood.

For a sinner to be saved, faith demands no mental, emotional or physical effort. All that God requires of him is to accept and be content with the salvation that was fulfilled and offered to him. He has only to make it his own possession and right, starting to live it out on the spot. This he does in conformity with the will of God and Christ “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

It is God’s dealings with Abraham which highlight this theological process. They reveal the depths of God’s benevolence, which transcends our mind and logic. They form the divine basis for the significance and validity of God’s gift and man’s faith, standing for the best image of God’s heart and His thoughts toward humanity:

“After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’ ... And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to Him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:1, 5, 6).

It is evident here that God offered to become Abraham’s shield, his guardian and protector from all evil, without stipulating any condition or prerequisite. God then affirmed to him that his reward, which means Abraham’s share in God, would be very great, again without setting any conditions or reasons. After this, He endowed him with the blessing to have descendants in unbelievable numbers. In answer to all these gifts, Abraham’s only response was to believe God’s free

promise. God in turn reckoned to Him his faith as righteousness, meaning that he considered Abraham as having become righteous and saintly without any work on Abraham's part.

The question now is: was it Abraham's faith that gave him God's promise and blessing?

In point of fact, it was before Abraham's heart moved with faith that God had [already] made His covenant with Abraham and had promised and blessed him!

What then is the value or weight of Abraham's faith?

It is his belief in the truthfulness of God, his love, promise and covenant. Abraham's *belief*, meaning his faith under such circumstances, captivated God's heart extremely. It was an honoring, gratification, acknowledgement and praise of God's faithfulness in His promises and of His lavish love and compassion which He freely shows. Nothing is more honoring to God than to believe in His promises and His extremely bountiful love. Conversely, there is nothing more insulting to God's glory than to doubt His promises and love. That is the reason why Christ never scolded his disciples more than when he scolded them for being faithless: "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" (Mk. 9:19). Note that all that was required to provoke such a forceful rebuke was the fact that their lack of faith had led them to fail to carry out a miracle. God was so pleased at heart with Abraham's faith that He reckoned it as righteousness, which means that He considered Abraham's belief in God's works to be equivalent to the attainment of righteousness or, in other words, godliness and sainthood in the fullest sense. This is the wonder of God's behavior and also of Abraham's behavior at one and the same time.

Hence, among the theological items which deserve all understanding and attention is the fact that faith in God, in itself, is the greatest honoring and glorification to be rendered to God; for it means believing His promises and covenants with mankind, which are charged with love freely-given. Faith means accepting God's gifts and boldly taking possession of them as rights given to mankind; this

is the proper response to God's unconditional giving. When God said to Abraham, "I am God almighty; *walk* before me and *be* blameless" (Gen. 7:1), it was not said to Abraham in the sense of an appeal or expectation or even endeavor: God said it in the same tone in which He said to creation: "Let there be ...; and there was ..." (Gen. 1:3). It was [given] in the form of a command, [no sooner said than] carried out, because the blessings given by God include the guidance and protection of grace: "I am your shield" (Gen. 15:1).

The divine saying, "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), [describes] what God fulfilled through Christ. God connected love, sacrifice, faith and eternal life. Together [they represent] an offering or a completeness of self-giving which must be carried out. Faith in what God did through Christ is a gift, like the gift of love, the gift of sacrifice, the gift of eternal life which He gave freely. He who has faith, believes and trusts, will have entered eternal life. Faith is offered as a gift together with eternal life. A person has no merit except in responding with trust by grace — thus gaining the gift as a right [of his own], because it was offered to him free of charge. Faith is offered side by side with eternal life — both gifts together. He who takes the one takes the other. If you believe this offer, you are saved. Faith is nothing more than a matter of the heart's belief. [As] a person is moved to trust, [so] eternal life flows in.

From what is said above, it is clear that faith, in God's eyes, is equal to righteousness, meaning complete godliness and sainthood. In other words, faith is esteemed by God as being on a higher plane than offering one's whole life in fasting, praying or doing good deeds to gain His favor.

Such is the reality of faith in the Christian life. He who believes and trusts that God exists lives in that existence. He who believes and trusts that God is love lives in His love. He who believes and trusts in the salvation which God made through His Son lives in that salvation. We, therefore, say: "Whoever believes in him shall have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16); "He who believes in him is not condemned" (Jn.

3:18); “He who believes in the Son has eternal life” (Jn. 3:36); “if you would believe you would see the glory of God” (Jn. 11:40); “Believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (Jn. 12:36); “He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live” (Jn. 11:25); “He who believes in me shall never thirst” (Jn. 6:35); “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes has eternal life” (Jn. 6:47).

We would like to remind the reader that according to [the pattern of] Abraham’s faith, the blessing comes first, then faith; that is, it is believing which justifies a person before God. It is not faith that gives a person the blessing, but the blessing is offered first and faith follows. For God [first] blessed Abraham and promised him an inheritance. Then, Abraham believed and God reckoned it to him as righteousness. You have received salvation, grace and eternal life. All that is left for you to do is to have faith in this fact and believe it, so that God may reckon your faith as righteousness. But your faith will have no value unless you believe that God has given it to you freely [without demanding anything in return]. He has already brought you salvation, blessings, grace and eternal life as a gift. Your faith by itself is not equal to the cost; it will not soften God’s heart nor oblige Him to give you anything. For God’s heart is full of compassion for you, and He has offered you all His love [without demanding anything in return], in the salvation brought about through His Son. Now, do you believe you have really been saved?

In the case of, for instance, Lazarus’ sister Martha, God’s glory was in front of her and around her. Christ said to her: “If you would believe, you would see the glory of God” (Jn. 11:40). This meant that her mere faith was enough to let her see and possess the glory of God. Faith then is like an open window through which we can see God’s glory. But our faith does not bring down God’s glory from heaven nor raise us to it. Salvation is such: it is in us, for us and around us. If we have faith or believe that it exists, we will see it and live: “For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved” (Rom. 10:10). It is clear that this verse applies to Abraham’s faith, through which he believed the promises and which

God reckoned to him as righteousness. St. Paul considers that the heart, and not the mind, is the source of belief; for God's gifts and talents to us and the salvation which has been fulfilled lie at the spiritual and not the intellectual level. Belief then is a vision of the heart.

The heart, thus, becomes the source of faith, i.e. vision, belief and trust. The weight of its faith, in other words, the belief in God's promises and salvation that was fulfilled through the Lord Jesus Christ, is a true claim to salvation and consequently to obtaining the righteousness of Christ. For Christ, in working out [our] salvation, "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). For this reason, our faith in salvation, meaning our belief in it, indicates that we have received it in the spirit; for we were actually raised and inevitably justified! Hence, it is the heart that has faith, [in the sense that] it believes, and so is justified by Christ's righteousness, which is equivalent to the utmost Christian perfection.

Dear reader, your faith in salvation, which in practice means that you believe that Christ died and was raised for your sake, directly offers you the "righteousness of Christ" from God as a free [gift]. "Righteousness" we define as the utmost godliness and sainthood. It is for that reason that believers in apostolic times were named saints, for they had truly become sanctified by their faith in the blood of Christ:

"To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:..." (Rom. 1:7);

"To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus [through faith] called to be saints..." (1 Cor. 1:2);

"To the church of God, which is at Corinth, with all the saints..." (2 Cor. 1:1);

"To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus:..." (Eph. 1:1);

"To all the saints in Christ Jesus..." (Phil. 1:1);

"To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossæ:..." (Col. 1:1).

It is obvious from the manner in which St. Paul addressed them that all the Christians who formed the Church were considered

saints, because they had faith in Christ and were in Christ. "Saints in Christ" means that they draw their righteousness from Christ's righteousness, and their sainthood from Christ's sainthood. Therefore, they are truly righteous and truly saints. Theologically speaking, faith in Christ means union with Christ based on salvation, receiving the Holy Spirit and eternal life. Union with Christ also implies communion in Christ, that is, sharing in eternal life.

Sadly and unfortunately, Christians nowadays are no more named saints. Only the bishops and the rest of the clergy are named as such, and then only as a title. Each of them is given this title and addressed as "your sainthood."¹ This is despite the fact that any Christian believer is called righteous and a saint in Christ, on the basis of his faith. [Through faith] he has believed and accepted his fellowship with Christ and his inheritance in God with Christ. This is evident from the verse: "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons..." (Phil. 1:1). Accordingly, St. Paul made the title of sainthood the same for all the congregation which believed in Christ, together with their bishops and deacons. For the attribute of sainthood is derived from "faith" in Christ: it is not [acquired] as a personal qualification. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. 10:10 AV), meaning unto sainthood or sanctification. Christ, in whom we believe, "is the source of... our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

The discrimination that exists today in [the use of] the title of sainthood can be traced to a loss of appreciation of the value of faith for godliness. Once freely available as a gift, faith in Christ has become a matter of status and personal prestige. Its value as a gift of godliness, by which we trust in God's promises and receive His free gifts, has been lost: "For it has been *granted* to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake" (Phil. 1:29). So, sainthood became associated with suffering alongside Christ.

We now call for raising the value of faith as being God's first and foremost gift given to whomever God has chosen and called to

¹ According to Coptic practice (Ed).

Himself, that he may receive through faith, i.e. through believing God, all the promises of salvation which God fulfilled in His Son for our sake. His faith will then be reckoned to him as righteousness, which means he will receive sainthood in Christ, there being no difference between one believer and the other. Titles we will not discuss, but would have the ordinary believer be aware that his faith will be reckoned to him as righteousness, meaning sainthood, provided he believes that the promises of salvation have been fulfilled for him and that he has received them according to God's sure word. For everyone who received salvation and lives it out is the true believer in Christ.

Now that we know the truth and firmly believe that God has reckoned us righteous in His Son and made us saints to His glory and praise, what sort of life are we to lead in the sight of God, Christ and His angels? We repeat and confirm to the reader that God does not only count us as saints, but will also judge us on the grounds that we are actually saints who have been sanctified through the blood of His Son and by His Holy Spirit. [Even] if we find it too much to be counted or called saints in terms of the Gospel and the Church, we will [still] be judged on these grounds, [as really being the bearers of] the blessed name of saints. If God through Christ made us true saints, and not only assumed it, then we must understand and trust that He has given us His Holy Spirit to work in us holy works with the thoughts, ideas and meditations of the saints.

We are called saints in God's Church, and were determined to have communion with all its saints since the beginning: "Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). Hence, we definitely have the support, help and reminder of their spirits to live up to the level of their behavior and sainthood. As for the sainthood that holds us together as believers in Christ, it [does not consist of] promises, names or titles, but [constitutes] an inheritance — the inheritance of filial sainthood in the body of the Son. The Church is a Church of saints. None can live in it or belong to it except saints, whether they be children, men or women — all alike. All are contained within the body of Christ as

its members who have an existence and communion in him and with him, who live in his sight and presence.

And now, in accordance with what we have said and again affirm as a living experience which God has offered in His Son as one of our rights, which are sealed with the blood of Christ and the good pleasure of the Father, let us trust God's promises and the gifts of His Son. The sainthood we have received is the fruit of His Holy Spirit who is with us and in us — dwelling in the temples of our spirits which God and Christ have sealed with blood. What is left for us to do is to set the Holy Spirit free to work within us by opening up new potentialities in our behavior and actions — offering love to everyone, especially to our enemies who curse us, abuse us, persecute us and plunder our property. For sacrificial love activates the Holy Spirit and speeds up his work — illuminating thought and [showering] his countless gifts [upon us]. The Holy Spirit does not come from outside us but is within us, dwelling in us according to the promise of our Lord and Savior. He is only waiting for us to beckon him by obedience and submission. Then, he will act in power, to [bathe] the depths of our [beings] in light, and open us up to the depths of the Son[’s being], that we may know the Father’s will that has been offered us in Christ.

Praying for the Holy Spirit to descend upon us or fill us is but an expression in terms of the feelings and senses: we seek to feel his action in us. But he *is* actually within us awaiting the movement and offer of our will in order to manifest himself in it, enhance it and ignite it with fire from Christ. The fire of Christ is the flame of divine love. If divine love dwells in us, it will turn everything in us to God’s account, [and also] to that of our neighbor and our enemy, free of charge. In return, we will have nothing but the face of Christ looking down on us from heaven as he once looked down on St. Paul, filling his life with thanks, praise, prayer and ministry which never grew cold.

Saints in Christ, strength, light and oil of the Church: the Church without your sainthood is dark, and its doors burn with the fire of sin, negligence and irresponsibility. Kindle your sainthood by zealously believing the truth and action of the Spirit, that the fragrance

of Christ's sainthood may return to the Church, making the world believe that Christ really [lives] in you. When your lives and the activity of your sainthood are absent, Christ is absent from the Church. The cross in the Church is turned head-down and abased, because there is no one to take it up genuinely and follow Christ with the true determination to *die* on it. Crosses are sold in churches and on streets for piasters. This has led to the value of the cross being debased in peoples' eyes, because [that quality of] sainthood and the saints who valued the cross at the rate of sacrificing their necks and their blood have fallen into oblivion.

We always need to go back to Abraham's faith and look for its meaning, nature and power. When God gave Abraham and his descendants His gifts of freely given and eternal blessings, Abraham believed and God reckoned it to him as righteousness. Abraham's faith here was simply his belief — but with confidence in God's grace which had been given him. We cannot help but wonder at his faith, which was nothing more than believing God's promise of a blessing. It was but a signature or seal on an agreement for a gift and inheritance which God pledged to him on oath. It became immediately valid with the signature of his faith.

This is exactly the case with the decree of salvation, which Christ wrote with his blood and God the Father sealed by offering His freely given fatherhood to all who would receive it. Nothing remains but to seal it with our sanction and believe it in confidence that it might become effective here and now.

What is really amazing about the greatness of God the Father is His decision to offer righteousness — the righteousness of Christ — to anyone who would stamp it with his endorsement and believe, that is, have faith in the work of salvation: he will offer him the power of sainthood or sanctification in Christ.

It is the importance given to faith in the first place which deserves our greatest wonder. For God decreed that the mere endorsement of any person for the work of salvation would make it immediately effective to his benefit. Not only so, but God set no limits to His gen-

erosity when He added that he who has faith, who believes what the Father and Christ have done, will be made righteous, that is, will be given sainthood — which is the full qualification to obtain eternal life with God.

Salvation in itself confirms to us the greatness of God the Father, which is manifest in His fatherly love and in the offering of His Son for our sake. The way to receive salvation reconfirms to us the greatness of God the Father. For it is demonstrated in the way He transmits salvation to us through faith. Faith is the gift of believing trustingly in God's promises in order to gain all these promises, which He pledged in His divine economy from eternity. Over and above everything else, God decided that he who would have faith and believe would be offered the righteousness of Christ, that is, the sainthood of spirit in Christ—free of charge.

People of faith, wake up and make use of your right to faith. Do not disdain your inheritance with the saints in Christ. Your faith and sainthood are treasures to the Church and the world. They are a living testimony for more faith to manifest the reality of Christ, if you really want Christ to have an existence in the Church and in the world. For Christ's presence and manifestation depend on your faith in your sainthood.

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thes. 4:3).

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Emmanuel

Ἐμμανουήλ

The word “Emmanuel” is to be pronounced as it is in Hebrew. The right translation of it is “God is **with us**,” to be understood as applying to the future — God will be **with us**. Isaiah, by a supernatural sign, took it as a promise of salvation.

The Kingdom of Judah had fallen prey to Aram and Ephraim, as both had agreed to wage war against it and have one of their kings rule over it. “Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, ‘Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it’ (Is. 7:5, 6). This happened in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah. His line was of the house of David, the center of kingly rule in Judah. When he was told, “his heart and the heart of his people shook” (Is. 7:2):

“Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz (through His prophet Isaiah), ‘Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.’ (The purpose of offering Ahaz the sign was to reassure him that God was **with him**.) But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.’ And he said, ‘Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel’ (Is. 7:10 – 14).

Seven hundred years later, God fulfilled the promise mentioned in that verse and presented the miracle which attained in height the

stature of the Lord of heavens and in depth the form of mankind!

It is God's nature to speak mercifully and offer help with a verse that will be fulfilled in due time, when we are in trouble. If it is slow to come about, we are not to worry, for it will work retroactively, to remove all the distress and troubles of the past and continue to ensure a life of glory for the future! The Prophet Habakkuk said:

"I will take my stand to watch, and station myself on the tower, and look forth to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint. And the Lord answered me: 'Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end — it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay'" (Habakkuk 2:1 – 3).

Isaiah promised this to Ahaz, to Judah and to the House of David. Thus, seven hundred years later, and according to Isaiah's words, Emmanuel was born to a virgin from the house of David. Out of Judah, the word spread throughout the world, and there was salvation from the house of David for the whole world.

The essence of the miracle of God being born of a virgin is found in the fact that God is called "Emmanuel," which means "God is **with us**." This name is the catalyst that gives the miracle its full power and effect. That a virgin should give birth is in itself a miracle, but that the baby should be named Emmanuel is the miracle of miracles.

It was God's initiative, and it reveals the extent of the concern that He has felt for us through ages past, during which He waited for the appropriate time to come close to us to reconcile and befriend us, so as to remain **with us** forever.

Emmanuel "God is **with us**" is no longer a name or title of the Lord Jesus Christ born of the Virgin, but an Entity that was firmly established forever by taking a human body from the Virgin with the spirit of the Father. In nine months, he took on this nature and will never change it.

Through his incarnation **he joined us** and became part of us, even as one belonging to us. He placed us in himself as if we had become

his flesh and bones. This had been an eternal desire of the Father to have children who would love Him and praise His glory:

“... who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world (before the existence of time — there in eternity), that we should be holy and blameless before Him. He destined 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. 1:3–6).

As for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, His desire was to be the first-born among many brothers and insisted on being like them in every respect (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 2:17)!

God, in order to fulfill his name of “Emmanuel,” God is **with us**, first made His Son incarnate then a sacrifice, a savior, a reconciler and an adoptive father. Until it reached the point where He made us His children, to be able to stand before Him as saints, without blame, to praise Him with the love He poured out so lavishly onto us.

Christ truly fulfilled the title of his birth, “Emmanuel,” which he obtained in the prophecy, seven hundred years before his birth! “Emmanuel,” God is **with us**, his last wish when he was a few steps from the cross was: “Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given me, may be **with me** where I am, to behold my glory which Thou hast given me in Thy love for me before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:24).

Emmanuel did not stop at fulfilling “God is **with us**,” but desired that we too should be with Him! This reveals to us the hidden secret in Emmanuel. God came to live **with us** for a definite purpose: that we ourselves should live **with Him**. For what would the point be of all the sacrifice and redemption which cost the Father the offering of His beloved Son to the sufferings of humiliation and death? Is it not for us to be **with Him** in the end?!

“Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt. 25:34). “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). “I will come

again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (Jn. 14:3). “And so we shall always be **with the Lord**” (1 Thes. 4:17).

If we are whole-heartedly **with God**, then He will be **with us** whole-heartedly. On the degree of our love for Christ depends the degree to which we will experience the reality of the title of Emmanuel, i.e. “God **with us**.” It was mentioned in the past by the prophet:

“The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded, and he went out to meet Asa, and said to him, ‘Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: The Lord is **with you**, while you are **with him**. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you” (2 Chron. 15:1, 2).

As a result mankind became responsible for “Emmanuel,” or in other words for the degree to which “God” would “be **with us**.” Consequently, St. Paul threatened: “If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed” (1 Cor. 16:22). It is true that he loved us first, but we will take retribution on us if we do not love him. While his love cost him his life, our love for him will give us life!

The first verse of “Emmanuel” in Isaiah has a continuation even though the name was not mentioned, yet it describes how “Emmanuel” became “God is **with us**.” Isaiah says:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore” (Is. 9:6, 7).

Isaiah illustrates how Emmanuel was conceived and born by the Virgin of the house of David. He goes on to reveal the whole of humanity in Emmanuel as conceived by the the Virgin. She carried in her the heavenly visitor, who had assumed a human body and accommodated himself so that it became his new temple. St. Paul, the Apostle, expressed this fact in the precise words: “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; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).

If we consider that this is a description that is limited to the individual whose body is a temple dedicated to God, then a comprehensive description shows that God occupied the whole temple of mankind as a permanent temple to rest in: “Built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole [human] structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:20 – 22).

“Behold, the dwelling of God is **with men**. He will dwell **with them**, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be **with them**” (Rev. 21:3).

Mankind is astonished. What could have happened and how did God condescend and lower Himself to such an extent? It is as if the heavens in all their glory had not appeased His heart. Since the beginning He had thought and planned to take on living a real life **with mankind**, to become part of humanity, making it a holy temple for Him to live in. In this way, He could demonstrate his great love for human beings and at the same time accept their love. This is the true and intrinsic illustration of Emmanuel. There is no lack of brilliant introductions to the story of this godly love, unique in its kind. For at the first step in the process of making the great sacrifice which God had taken upon Himself to fulfill: How did he do it?

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life [**with God**]” (Jn. 3:16).

The events of this murder committed against love were revealed as the greatest tragedy history has ever known. The Son of God was the sole protagonist with the greatest role. The Father was the planner of the action and the controller of the ending. In it mankind received a new nature that would qualify it to live “**with God**,” so that Emmanuel would rest at his creation! Yet, what surprises us still

more is the manner in which an omnipotent God stoops and reduces Himself to a child's stature!

Being named "the Mighty God — *él gibbôr*" God's greatest characteristic of might was thus joined to the characteristic simplicity of a child's gentleness and meekness of which He was so proud. As if it were only through this great contrast that God could reveal Himself to mankind! This outlook marks the beginning of the study of theology and the understanding of God's attributes: "Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt. 11:29). "Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes" (Mt. 11:25).

The awareness of this contrast remained hidden, till it was revealed by the incident of the children who ran to Jesus to touch them and were rebuked by the disciples. It was as if Christ in his simplicity had been injured:

"And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, 'Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it'" (Mk. 10:14-16).

Jesus saw himself in these children. When they were rebuked, he felt hurt. His gentleness was only comfortable with their gentleness. Mankind's greatest quality of love was deeply rooted in God's heart because he found in it an echo of his divine love. Christ with his countenance of simplicity and love shone on the people daily and does so up until now. For the reader to believe my words and description, let him listen to Christ's words on the relationship of the gentleness and meekness of childhood, in its simplicity, with entrance into the kingdom of God in the presence of the great King:

"Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mk. 10:15).

Therefore, there exists a love and understanding between a child's spirit of innocence, meekness and gentle love and the King of heav-

ens. Without these qualities, it is difficult to enter the kingdom of God. Thus, Jesus Christ, the Messiah of the great God, has the heart of a child overflowing with gentleness and meekness. As though Christ chose out of all the characteristics of humanity, those of a child, in which to place all his divinity.

Have we not now put our finger on the mystery of “the kingdom of His beloved Son”? God has made our entry into the kingdom conditional on a person being completely filled with the spirit of His sovereign. He, therefore, insisted: “Learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart” (Mt. 11:29).

Consequently, the range and scope of the effect of the title Emmanuel is now revealed. Beyond the range of the gentleness of a child, He is not **with us** and cannot operate in us. He will not open up His kingdom to anyone who does not have this gentleness.

Maybe our spiritual experience confirms these words, as everyone knows. For the ways of life and patterns of thinking of all who are tested by Christ, of all to whom he offers the gift of the Holy Spirit, are transformed. His innocence, joys and hopes become as simple as a child’s. He no longer worries over the troubles of the world but can leave everything for his love of Christ, as a child, without any pretense.

The qualities of a child, that exist in Christ, are those which God pours into us when He tests those who love Him. In other words, when Emmanuel comes to us, he comes with the spirit of a child to hand over to us the qualifications with which we can enter his kingdom. He comes to make us equal to the simplicity of his love, and to include us among the offspring who call God, “Daddy” — as a child does when he coos at a familiar voice.

As for him who does not receive the renewal, in the spirit of a child, and is unable to have the quality of a child’s love, Christ becomes an intimidating and fearful mystery which no one dares overcome. It is more surprising when we realize that even then Christ still hurries out to meet us like a child who rushes forward toward those who love him.

Listen to his words: "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat **with him**, and he **with me**" (Rev. 3:20). He knocks at the door of those who love him, because he still wishes to see and break bread **with them**, exchanging his love with theirs: "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn. 14:21).

When the children of Jerusalem saw him, they rushed out towards him carrying palms in their hands and crying out: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (Jn. 12:13). The head priests and Pharisees, on the other hand, were burning with fury, refusing to rejoice with the people, and saying to each other, "You see that you can do nothing; look, the world has gone after him" (Jn. 12:19).

"When Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn. 13:1).

Thus ended the life on earth of Emmanuel, God **with us**. The outpouring of love that resulted from it is unsurpassed! He reveals that he joined his own people by the bond of a life for a life. The last supper held the promise of a new life.

He expressed it by his desire for communion through the sharing of the bread of the Passover: "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover **with you** before I suffer" (Lk. 22:15). The cup was one of both life and death. By sharing it **with Christ**, his celebration of the Passover became our celebration, and his manner of departure became ours too! This represents a guarantee to us that Emmanuel will remain here, as well as being Emmanuel there. In the same manner that he is here **with us**, we will be **with him** there.

This is how he conceived it. He shared the cup with a pledge: "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new **with you** in my Father's kingdom" (Mt. 26:29). The new passover is for the kingdom of God. It is the passover of glory and a share in the eternal inheritance.

As we participated in the passover of his pains, so will we take part in the passover of his glory. Emmanuel, God is **with us**, here and there, always and forever.

“I will not leave you desolate ... but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice” (Jn. 14:18; 16:22).

The Jews met to plot how to lay hands on the godly lamb, but not during the feast so as not to hurt the owner of the feast. They were unaware that he was the owner of the feast. Satan led them to kill the owner of the feast on the day of his feast.

For three and a half years, they had pursued the lamb of God, Emmanuel. He had left his glory to come to live **with them**. He was presented to them as their son: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; ... and his name will be called; Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God ...” (Is. 9:6).

In the end, Satan covered their eyes. They got hold of Jesus and isolated him in the Sanhedrin. They stayed throughout the night wearing out his gentle spirit, probing the parts of him that they would tear to pieces. In the morning, they presented him to Pilate, who was surprised at the radiance of his countenance and the godly light that emanated from his gentle eyes. This moved Pilate to say to them: “What accusation do you bring against this man?” (Jn. 18:29). For Pilate was used to the duplicity of the Jews and had also heard “that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up” (Mt. 27:18). When they felt Pilate’s sympathy for him, they said to him angrily: “If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed him over” (Jn. 18:30).

Pilate was alarmed at the sight of him and wanted to rid himself completely of this case: “Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law’” (Jn. 18:31). They then revealed what they had decided to do: “The Jews said to him: it is not lawful for us to put any man to death” (Jn. 18:31). This happened within earshot of Jesus, who was standing with his hands tied, so as to fulfill the word Jesus had spoken to show “by what death he was to die,” which was on the cross (Jn. 18:32). The lamb then realized that matters were going according to his Father’s will!

Pilate entered the praetorium to speak to Jesus. He realized that he alone knew the secret of the case, and had heard from them that Jesus had called himself “king.” Pilate asked him simply: “Are you the king of the Jews?” (Jn. 18:33). When Jesus answered: “My kingship is not of this world; ... I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth” (Jn. 18:36, 37), Pilate continued listening to him and asked him: “What is the truth?” (Jn. 18:38). At this point, Jesus had permeated Pilate with the truth, which made the latter realize that the true place for this case was in heaven and not under Caesar’s jurisdiction. Pilate went out fully confident of his testimony. He testified before earth and heaven, as if the words came from God: “I find no crime in him” (Jn. 18:38) — a testimony of Pilate’s that was not registered for the sake of the Roman registries but for the sake of the Gospel!

Does there exist on this earth any person who is without fault? Does there exist a court, any court that can issue such a verdict? Or a judge who, no matter how able he may be in examining the registries and the human heart, can proclaim that there is no fault in a person who is about to die by the cross — according to the judgment of a religious court that judges in the name of God, and a public that shouts with its leaders: “Crucify Him, crucify Him”?¹ Pilate represented all the nations of the earth, to give a testimony that speaks for all the peoples of the world, except the Jews.

This happened so that the nations would gain the greatest interest in Jesus Christ’s blood on the cross, and their rightful share of the salvation and forgiveness of sins. It is not by chance that Emmanuel is the Emmanuel of the whole world.

When Pilate heard their words: “His blood be on us and on our children” (Mt. 27:25), he washed his hands and handed him over to them. They devoured him while he was still in Pilate’s presence.

¹ The Jews, through the priests and elders of the people, accuse him of evildoing and kill him on the cross. The nations, through Pilate, the Roman judge, a representative of all the nations of the earth, testify that there is not one fault in him, for him to die! May earth record it and heaven testify to it.

But he had anticipated the event by his testament — that his flesh would be given to all the poor of the earth and his blood provided to pilgrims on their way to the kingdom of God.

After the resurrection, Emmanuel proved to be the same Emmanuel “God **with us**.” He gave his disciples his last instruction, which was to go out and preach to all the nations. He strengthened them on their travels by his continuous presence among them: “Lo, I am **with you** always, to the close of the age” (Mt. 28:20), and as a partner in their work: “The Lord worked **with them** and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it” (Mk. 16:20). In this way, he demonstrated the desire of his heart, which was always to be the same Emmanuel everywhere. Without any discrimination, he would be equally available in every city or village, every road or alley. He would go **with the disciples** into all the houses and churches, greeting his people and healing the sick. He would commune **with them**, feeding them the bread of life. He would call his children to himself and embrace them, laying his hands upon them to bless them, and choosing from among them his saints and missionaries.

This is the Emmanuel of all the ages.

Time passes and the world will perish, but the testament of his love is forever **with us**:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat **with him**, and he **with me**” (Rev. 3:20).

O Emmanuel, we have opened our hearts, and kept our vigil,
Emmanuel, come, Maranatha ...!

Written before the Feast of the Ascension — June 1994

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The Author of Life

Ὁ Ἀρχηγὸς τῆς Ζωῆς

There is no living being which exists in and of itself except God! Eternal life is of a quintessentially divine nature: it is both eternal and infinite. The kind of life God lived, free of death and change, was unknown to us until the Son of God came to live among us in bodily form. Although his crucifixion and burial brought that life to an end, on the third day He arose from the dead alive and in the body. For the first time, humanity got to know, see and touch eternal life in Christ. He had not only risen from the dead, but was also alive with an everlasting power which death could never overcome. This is how humanity became conscious of eternal life, the life of God.

This truth is expressed by St. John the Apostle in his first Epistle: “The life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us” (1 Jn. 1:2). Eternal life, the life of God, was made known to us when “God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16) — that is, when the Son of God became incarnate.

But eternal life was not to be made known through Christ except after a public confrontation on the cross with death, and with the devil, who has the power of death. Christ accepted the challenge, sure of his eternal life. When the Son had died on the cross and was taken down to be entombed, Satan came to receive his prey. He came to sow the seeds of decomposition and decay, yet he found the body pulsat-

ing with a divine life that did not belong to that age. The devil's power over death had been built on a foundation of sin and iniquity: all the death sentences he had tried to pronounce through the high priests had been based on envy, treachery and lies. Confronted with that living body, risen from the dead with the power of everlasting life that was in Him and of Him, the devil lost his power. Judgment ended with God in innocence and absolution. The devil was exposed: he was shown to have killed the Author of life by treachery. "You denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses" (Acts 3:14, 15).

The crux of the incarnation of the Son of God was a formal entry into the lists in this invisible, dangerous battle against the devil, death, sin and the curse that had fallen on mankind. He had to become incarnate to be able to take to himself the death sentence that had come upon us and nullify it in the flesh—to bear our sins in his body, on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24) so that he would formally die in accordance with the words of the death sentence and of the curse. However, he was confident of victory over death and over him who had the power of death and so of overcoming the root causes of the sentence, which were disobedience, sin and rebellion. This confidence was based on the power of eternal life that was within him and his absolute holiness.

Thus ended the battle between life and death which the Author of life entered for our sakes, by taking to himself our death in the flesh on the cross. With the resurrection, he gave us his eternal life in that same flesh. In this manner, humanity gained a partnership with the Author of life, in death as well as in life.

Christ did not want this mortal combat between life and death to remain in its invisible sphere. Consequently, Christ instituted a sacrament which expressed the mystery of the transformation of death into life. He did this during a joyful festive supper in which he poured forth all his love into a sacramental offering, from which the knife had been removed as it had been removed from the hand of Abraham:

“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (Jn. 13:1). “Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them and said, ‘Take; this is my body’” (Mk. 14:22).

It is worth noting the timing of the institution of this sacrament in all its details. It took place three days in advance. This supper, according to its position and practical significance, should have taken place on the Sunday of the resurrection. While he met with them on the heights, he could have given them with his hands the broken bread and the cup of blood and it would have been interpreted according to what had happened on the cross. For this would have made it completely clear that he had actually been a real sacrifice that was offered for the redemption of the world. But Jesus did this in advance of the cross and the resurrection. He instituted this sacrament in order to demonstrate that he was the actual resurrection and the life, both before as well as after the cross. The will to die that was within him already amounted to a sacrifice—even before it was actually carried out and recorded by history as if it were an act which was forced upon him. He was also ahead of time in the way that he revealed the mystery of his resurrection and the eternal life in him so that it would not be said that this life had come to him from an external source when he rose from the dead.

From this point of view, the mystery of the Thursday supper takes on great theological significance; as the tangible and substantial demonstration that he alone had offered himself, according to his own will, as a sacrifice for the redemption of the world. He used the death he had taken from us to create a sacrifice which he infused with his resurrection life to enable humanity to enter into eternal life in the new age: “The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn. 6:51). Because of the sacrifice of His body, which He raised up after death, eternal life entered the world. For “he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:54).

When we eat the broken bread and drink the shed blood, we acquire the mystery of death transformed into life, even a participation in that same death and same resurrection to eternal life: “He who eats my flesh abides in me”:

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever: and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn. 6:51).

To clarify what he meant, Jesus goes on to say: “This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever” (Jn. 6:58). He will live forever, because eternal life is found in Jesus.

With these words, Jesus reveals his deep mystery, that his flesh contains the mystery of everlasting life itself. He allowed death to come upon his flesh yet transformed death in his flesh into life — so that he who eats of it will live forever!! Or a clearer illustration would be that he who eats of it is allowed to pass from death to life!! For “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (Jn. 6:56).

But the transition is completed through faith that is conscious and deliberate and by the invisible workings of the grace of God: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

“I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE”: For him to be the life, he must inevitably be the truth. And for him to be the truth, he must inevitably be the way. “The life” as we know, is eternal life, a life free of death, free of change or extinction. In other words, it is not the kind of life we live on earth, which is based on change that ends in death and extinction.

Thus, the way is the celestial way to life in heaven. Jesus has opened that way, as is mentioned in Hebrews:

“Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the (highest) sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh” (Heb. 10:19, 20). Meaning that by offering his body as a sacrifice until

death, he rose from the dead, overcoming death with the eternal life that was within him. He rose to the highest heavens, opening the way to God, to truth, to life and eternity. As he overcame death and abolished sin in the flesh, he consequently abolished all treachery, deceit and falsehood, and all things changeable and ephemeral. Hence, he uncovered the indisputable truth that is within him.

His words I am “the life” are the definition of himself as the origin and source of every living being for a material life that is ephemeral on earth, and a spiritual life that is everlasting in heaven. As tradition has it, He is “Creator of everything seen and unseen” (The Apostles Creed). But as we are now discussing the way, the truth and the life we are primarily concerned with the “Author of life” — the life that is everlasting and eternal, which is the life hidden in God.

This was unknown, unheard of and unperceived until the day that Jesus rose from the dead, alive—in the flesh he had died in—still undefeated by death. The eternal life that was in him became known, therefore, as life after death, or life **despite** death, because it is life eternal and immortal; the life of God!

This new life which exists with God’s spirit, Jesus brought forth from deep within the flesh and rose with it from the dead. God gave it to whomever believed that the Son had died and risen to give us this new life:

“But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades’” (Rev. 1:17, 18).

“He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (Jn. 11:25, 26).

“The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him” (Jn. 3:35, 36).

This then is the eternal life that was hidden in God; because it is the substance of God’s absolute essence and of His eternal and ev-

erlasting nature. This is the life that the Son brought forth into the world of humanity when he rose from the dead. Since he was alive in the flesh, he had taken from us, our [renewed] human nature gained the right to resurrection. The Son infused the very core of our new nature with eternal life, so that we could remain in the Son and with the Son eternally.

This truth St. John explains in his First Epistle: “the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us — that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn. 1:2 – 4).

Thus, Jesus proclaimed that he was the Head, Author and Giver of life in our world. Because when the Son was hidden in the Father before his incarnation, eternal life was hidden in him and in the Father: “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (Jn. 5:26). When the Son was revealed in the flesh, eternal life was hidden in him and remained hidden within him until he brought it forth with the resurrection of the body from the dead. It was thus proclaimed by God’s omnipotence, encompassed in glory and reverence.

Had it not been for the incarnation of the Son, we would not have attained the mystery of eternal life. He permitted death to come to him while he was embodied in our flesh, so as to fulfill in us [all the requirements of] the death sentence that was [pronounced] upon us. Had it not been for this, we could never have attained to the power of eternal life, with which he broke the grip of death and blazed a trail for us to life and eternity. So, the Son received death in our flesh in order to give us his eternal life in that same flesh! By his resurrection, he created within us an eternal life that will not pass away.

Jesus’ resurrection and the eternal life which he introduced into the human sphere showed us that he really is the Son of God; as Paul the Apostle says “designated Son of God in power according to the

Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). Of course, his Sonship is also confirmed by the power of eternal life, which he not only possessed [within himself], but also demonstrated [to others].

Before he proclaimed it with the resurrection from the dead, Jesus drew upon this eternal life that was hidden in him — for it is the essence of his divinity. He used to raise the dead, teach the truth and set people free: “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free . . . So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn. 8:32, 36).

Here, after the resurrection he says: “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” (Mt. 28:18, 19). This shows that the Son returned to his position with the Father to speak and act in His name [in partnership] with the Holy Spirit.

The net result is, as St. John says: “We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 Jn. 5:20).

In our preaching at present, we cannot go beyond what St. John taught: namely, that with the manifestation of the Son, the eternal life that was hidden in God and is the life of God, became manifest; and with the death of the Son and his resurrection from the dead, it entered the world as the power to transcend all powers. All the powers in the globe are tied to the world and with its disappearance will pass away — all except the power of eternal life which the Son brought into the world by his resurrection from the dead. It is the power of God, the power of an indestructible life (Heb. 7:16), which is eternity itself, total happiness. It is the creative love of the Creator Himself.

God’s life is love and God’s love is life. It is in itself the true nature, the essence of the Son. The Son himself is “eternal life,” as he is also the “truth” and the “freedom” that is unlimited: “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn. 8:36). Because he who tastes eternal life plumbs its very depths, and its depths are the depths of

God: "... God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit (which is the spirit of life) searches everything, even the depths of God. ... So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God (i.e. eternal life)" (1 Cor. 2:10–12). "And this is the testimony: that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life" (1 Jn. 5:11, 12) "... and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19).

That means, fill yourselves to the utmost with the love of God; be filled with eternal life! Within the sphere of "human life" on earth lie all human scientific achievements, understanding, happiness, joys, hopes and freedom. All these are incomplete, variable and deficient. They are inevitably ephemeral.

The "eternal life" that Jesus Christ introduced with his resurrection from the dead is the life of God. He offered it to renewed human beings so that their new nature could be completely filled with it, through the Holy Spirit which is God's spirit. In this way, human beings may get to know, taste and live out in their experience all the eternal acts of God which are part and parcel of his blessings. All these blessings we receive here as a pledge of what we will inherit hereafter: a life that is everlasting, complete and eternal with Jesus Christ.

Yet, to discern perhaps the greatest quality attributed to Jesus Christ, we need to turn once more to St. John:

"And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:20).

July 1994

“I Am the Light of the World”

Ἐγὼ εἶμι τὸ Φῶς τοῦ Κόσμου

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” (Jn. 8:12).

“I AM” (Ἐγὼ εἶμι): In expounding the Gospel of St. John, we have often spoken of this title.¹¹ It is the divine proclamation of Yahweh throughout the Old Testament: “Hearken to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am He, I am the first, and I am the last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens” (Is. 48:12, 13). Jesus Christ said the same in the book of Revelation with the words: “But He laid his right hand upon me, saying: ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades’” (Rev. 1:17, 18).

Therefore, the declaration “I am” at the outset is an open proclamation meaning that Christ authoritatively and powerfully proclaims himself to be the Yahweh of the Old Testament.

¹¹ Fr. Matta El-Meskeen, *Key to the Exposition of the Gospel of St. John*, (in Arabic), Monastery of St. Macarius, Wadi El-Natrun, 1989, pages 218 to 246.

“I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”: Here, the word “light” is defined by the definite article, so that the light is absolutely and completely Christ’s. This renders the meaning as: I am the complete light of the world. There exists no other light for the world. No one else other than Christ can be considered as its light.

Indeed, the whole verse, not only the phrase “the light of the world” but also its beginning “I am,” is defined by the definite article. It is a proclamatory verse in which Christ announces himself as the Yahweh God of the New Testament. The definite article in “the light” points to the person of Christ and not to his nature. So, the light here is not thought of as a mere emanation but as a radiant person. So, the meaning is defined in this way: the light works through the person of Christ and not through the nature of God. Christ does not give out light but offers himself: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (Jn. 12:36).

Christ explained it in the rest of the verse by saying: “... he who follows me will not walk in darkness; but will have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12). We perceive “the light of life” as we perceived “the bread of life.” The bread is not bread nor is the light light, but life in Christ is the bread and the light. The world does not need a light to illuminate what is in it but needs a completely new life based on the light of God. Which means Christ’s words “I am the light of the world” aims basically at changing the world to a completely new life. Therefore, Christ’s aim of being in the world is focussed on faith in him personally so that the world is transformed into light through Christ: “While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (Jn. 12:36).

Faith in Christ, based on abiding in him, transforms the world and its sons to a world of light, which means the world of God. Christ offered himself to the world through three means: love, truth and the sacrifice of life till death:

For “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (Jn. 13:1). Thus, he implanted his love in the Church, which he made his body, indeed his kingdom.

He established the truth by making known to the disciples all that was in the Father. He proclaimed the truth to the world and bore witness to it: "and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (Jn. 18:37).

Then, he made a sacrifice of his life to the point of death, thus deepening the love and consolidating the truth for the world to be nourished by the love and drink in the truth.

Yet, Christ did not say that he would remain permanently in the world. Christ did not pledge himself to the world of man. He warned humanity that his existence in the world was for a certain time. For that reason, he laid great stress on following him and having faith in him: "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes" (Jn. 12:35).

When Christ uttered these words, the time available to him was actually very limited. So much so that after quoting his words, St. John highlights the depth of mystery in them by adding the comment: "When Jesus had said this, he departed and hid himself from them" (Jn. 12:36). Yet, until today, Christ offers himself to whomever opens up his heart to him. But beware, the offer will not remain open! If anyone is slow to respond and then changes his mind and goes back to trying to discern the voice, he will not find it. When Christ begins to proclaim himself to humanity, as the light of the world or the light of mankind, his presence depends on man's response. It is as if the world and everyone in it were responsible for the presence and permanence of Christ. We can accept the light, becoming his children or, rather, his followers. But if we do not accept the light, the words of the Scripture will be fulfilled: "he departed, and hid himself from them" (Jn. 12:36). The call is thus defined; either to be followers of the light, or his enemy and live in darkness. In Christ's words, "I am the light of the world" lays the promise to remain; and a permanent promise to the world that, according to the degree of its faith in the light, it will be transformed into the light of life. As a result, love will survive and the truth be attained.

In taking a close look at history, we find that it has been recorded in a unique and ineffable way that the earth and its inhabitants have had several fruitful experiences in receiving, uniting with and adopting the light. There were whole epochs when almost all the world loved and knew the light, when the truth was revealed through the great Apostles, saints and bishops of theology who had attained the highest revelations and recorded their experiences and knowledge. These exist as a testimony to the world that it has gone through stages of terrific transformation. All of which have been counted as credit in the records which Christ started the day he said: "I am the light of the world."

Setbacks and failures, no matter how numerous or overwhelming, are not going to be counted in the records of change. For the world is still changing and advancing. Behind it there is a driving force which ensures its progress. He who said, "I am the light of the world" spoke advisedly. He knew the power of the light to overcome darkness. No matter how much territory death may have won both in time and space, the final victory of the resurrection is assured. I have already mentioned that Christ did not offer himself on the cross until he had made himself accountable for the whole world. Satan had roamed freely for a time. He had tyrannized humanity and sullied a few of its epochs with darkness and ignorance. Yet, the resurrection became known and was reckoned from the day Christ rose from the dead.

When Christ said: "I am the light of the world," he placed himself in a position of confrontation with the evils of the world and the violent upheavals caused by rebellion against God. These movements of apostasy have to run their course until the stocks which fueled them are burned up. These amount to faithlessness, treachery, lies and the distortion of truth. When God's truth is declared, the light is made manifest, and all humanity sees it. After which the works of the flesh which Satan exploited for his own purposes will fade away, as the works of light begin in the world of light.

LIGHT AND LOVE: St. John the Apostle interchanges the meaning of light with love and of hatred with darkness. As acts of love do

not agree with acts of hatred any more than light with darkness: "Yet I am writing you a new commandment, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes" (1 Jn. 2:8 – 11). The darkness is the stretch of time without Christ; while both light and love exist wherever Christ is present.

Since love is the most sensitive measure of light, it became the standard by which to discern between light and darkness. The true light was originally alien to humanity, being found neither in human nature nor its characteristics. For this reason, God, in His grace, offered Himself to humanity, to share with Him the life of light. He, therefore, transferred us from darkness to His marvelous light. Out of love for us, He brought us into the Kingdom of His Son. This reflects the nature of true love which, like the light, is a gift of God: "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). It follows that he who walks in the ways of love will walk in light. If anyone says he is walking in light and hates his brother, he is immediately discovered to be a liar. Because he who walks in light lives in light, in other words, lives in Christ — and Christ does not harbor hatred or animosity.

Therefore, he who lives in Christ, as Christ said, has "the light of life," which means he loves his brother. Love, light and life are mutually compatible: they are a trinity of synonyms. He who leads the life of one of them leads the life of the rest. Hatred, darkness and death are also synonyms. They make a stubborn trio. He who stumbles into one of them stumbles into them all.

Hence, Christ with his words "I am the light of the world" has called for, and at the same time guaranteed, both love and everlasting life. He has pledged himself to every human being in the world:

anyone who follows him and has faith in him will find the promise of the love of God, and eternal life in him, fulfilled. Every human being inherits from the past darkness, animosity and death and these are what his life consists of. A person who is transformed in Jesus Christ is converted to the love, life and light of God. And it is by the conversion of individuals that the world itself is transformed.

Christ's offer to the world of himself to be its source of light, life and love is not made without a price. God invested this gift with a value by the offering of his Son to suffer until death, bearing the hatred of his killers and the injustice of his accusers. The only motive that God had for suffering this tragedy in his Son was his true love of the world: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..." (John 3:16).

Christ's words "I am the light of the world" were neither empty nor cheap. They were paid for in advance with the acceptance and joy with which he endured his suffering, shame and disgrace on the cross. "Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). This means that now every human being in the world has the right to his share of life, in God's light, with the gift of love. For whoever desires it and believes in him, God has paid the price in pain and death with his son's blood on the cross.

Actually, this fearful cost was precisely calculated. Even though it is really high, in God's eyes, it is worth it — so that you can triumph over darkness, death and animosity to live with him eternally in his light. "You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:20). "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:18, 19).

HOW CHRIST INTRODUCED THE LIGHT OF LIFE INTO THE WORLD: Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee and a teacher, con-

fused the present world with the kingdom of God, which is God's world, known to be eternal life. Christ corrected his belief with his words: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Jn. 3:6). A human being cannot enter the kingdom of God, meaning the world of God's spirit, unless he is born anew from above, of water and the Spirit, known nowadays in the Church as baptism.

Until Christ's crucifixion and death, it had never been heard of before, that a person had been born anew from above, of water and the Spirit, or had entered the world of the Spirit. Nor had there ever been seen a human being who had come from the new world of the Spirit until Jesus Christ rose from the dead and it was witnessed by all his disciples and many others; as it is written in the Scriptures:

"On the evening of that day, the first day of the week [Sunday], the doors [of the attic] being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (Jn. 20:19, 20).

At that hour, the world of the Spirit was opened and Christ looked out upon his disciples who were gathered together in the attic in Jerusalem, Palestine, on this world's earth. Christ continued coming to our world for a period of forty days during which he founded the mystery of being born again from above of water and of the Spirit. Through Christ, the world of the Spirit was introduced to the Church so that it could gain its spiritual energy and sacraments and the chosen, who had completed their mission in this world, could be sent to him.

Christ accomplished his promise and pledge "I am the light of the world" with his resurrection from the dead while he was at the height of the proclamation of his divinity. The price Christ paid to save the world from the darkness, hatred and death that gripped it was not trivial. Neither was it with ease that Christ freed the fate of mankind from the clutches of Satan, the prince of this world, named the prince of darkness, the liar and father of liars, and the murderer since the

beginning. Christ achieved this on the Cross after bitter suffering. He “cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it [that is, the cross]” (Col. 2:14, 15). “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Lk. 10:18).

Christ redeemed the world with his death, and with his resurrection opened up the way that leads to the world of light and to eternal life. With his flesh and blood, he inaugurated the way to the holy sanctuary:

“... We have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh” (Heb. 10:19, 20).

Consequently, to follow Christ has become the everlasting guarantee to reach the light of life:

“He who follows me (ὁ ἀκολουθῶν μοι) will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12). Here, Christ places himself as a door, way, shepherd and teacher.

“If anyone serves me, he must follow me (ἐμοὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω); and where I am, there shall my servant be also: if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” (Jn. 12:26).

Christ made serving the best position that would guarantee meeting him and following him. At the end of his gentle rebuke of Peter, he gave him the password:

“Follow me (ἀκολούθει μοι)” (Jn. 21:19).

When Peter quarreled to find out John’s fate, the Lord rebuked him:

“If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me (σὺ μοι ἀκολούθει!)” (Jn. 21:22).

Yet, Christ does not deal in the world with people as groups but treats each person as an individual on his own:

“The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world” (Jn. 1:9).

What happens to each person in the church during his baptism in Jesus Christ is that he is offered the Holy Spirit, who is active in

the process of rebirth from above, by offering a person "the light of life." For that reason, baptism "in Christ" is said to be an "enlightenment," not because an intellectual or any kind of spiritual enlightenment is attained, but because of the acquisition of "the light of life," or in other words the divine life.

Thus, Christ becomes the light of the world through every individual in it, and Christian groups are named the sons of light:

"For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness" (1 Thes. 5:5).

"For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8).

This means that the Church has come to represent the world of light. It addresses its children in the Invitatory to the Midnight Office (which is one of the oldest traditional chants of the Church):

"Wake up ye sons of light to praise the Lord of Hosts...!"

To begin to grasp the subject of the sons of light and midnight praise, we must imagine the coming of the midnight bridegroom to end the world and announce that the time is fulfilled. Christ in the parable of the ten virgins warns us to be sure to stay watchful, to keep oil in our lanterns and to wait for the cries.

Oh, Light of the world, our eyes are turned towards You.
We have kept awake for long with our lanterns lit,
The oil has diminished,
And there are no cries!

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“The Bridegroom”

Ὁ Νυμφίος

“Now John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, ‘Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?’ and Jesus said to them, ‘Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day” (Mk. 2:18 – 20).

That this title should be found among the theological titles of Christ is very astonishing indeed, especially when we consider that it was he who chose it for himself. The word recurs in the three Synoptic Gospels, so it is no coincidence that he should mention this term, which is very special to him and brim-full of meaning. He repeated it in one of his most favorite parables which is cherished both by him and by the Church — the parable of the ten virgins. Five were wise and five foolish. The foolish were blamed for neglecting their duties in the preparations to meet the bridegroom. Their punishment

was a bitter one, as they were prevented from entering with the bridegroom. The parable is clear: Christ is speaking of entering his kingdom and the preparations for his second advent.

This is what we can infer from the Lord's description of himself as a Bridegroom. The bride, unmentioned but implied by his words, is the Church. This was revealed by St. Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians as being on the same plane as the actual relationship of marriage:

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31, 32).

However, St. Paul set this status on a very high plane. He considered that Christ had actually and mystically united with the Church, becoming one body with it in himself. So, the Church came to represent the actual existence of his body on earth, on the basis of a true love relationship which joins them together in a state of union:

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy (in him) and without blemish (like him)” (Eph. 5:25 – 27).

This description and theological characterization of the actual state of the Church in its relationship with Christ as his body does not involve symbolic or metaphorical representation. On the contrary, St. Paul, speaking out of practical theological conviction, states that we, as believers and as the Church of God and Christ, are counted as members of this his mystical body in actual fact. He, therefore, says:

“For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Eph. 5:29, 30 AV).

St. Paul here abandons the cerebral reality of theology to enter into the tangible, eucharistic reality. For if we consume [Christ's] body, we inevitably become members of that body. Furthermore, in

order to fill out the description of the existential relationship, which now exists between Christ and us, St. Paul did not content himself with the flesh and blood we partake of in the Eucharist, but added the bones — with the aim of unfolding what had occurred during the first union between Christ and humankind. Christ did not share with us in flesh and blood only, but also in bones. Our communion with him then came to exist on that plane after he had sanctified the body and given it as it is to become our own body in bone and flesh.

Thus unfolds to us the origin of the marriage that was primarily consummated by his union with our body in the Virgin, from whom he took his bride which is the body [of Christ]. He was born united with her through his divine nature. In other words, the Church was born united with Christ the day Christ was born. Therefore, every one of us was born in Bethlehem, which became the birthplace of redeemed humanity.

On the cross, Christ officially consecrated [his body] for the Church when he anointed it with the unction of redemption by God’s shed blood poured over it. The Church was thus consecrated to God forever — being his own body which he had taken from us, sanctified and offered to us with all its divine properties as the body of the Son of God. He offered it to us, after fulfilling with it his elevation to heaven on high, in order to add his eternal properties to the Church’s credit:

“Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us (the church) who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things *for the church*, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:18–23).

Notice that the Father took part in offering the Church all these powers which are very peculiar to the Son: "... and [the Father] has made him head over all things for the church, which is his body."

In other words, it was the Father who had designed and executed this mystical union, which surpasses description, between His Son and the flesh of humanity. He did this so as to raise mankind in the Son and through him to the level of being seated at His right hand and so fulfill the holy revelation: "at your right hand stands the queen" (Ps. 45:9).

This was the most successful and definitive attempt which God made under the old covenant *in toto* to bring His people closer to Him in friendship. He was like a man trying to woo His beloved in vain, while she ignores His affection and is unfaithful to His love:

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her ... And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And in that day, says the LORD, you will call me, 'My husband', ... And I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD" (Hos. 2:14, 15, 16, 19, 20).

And again, Isaiah sings of God's love for His people:

"For you will forget the shame of your youth, and the *reproach of your widowhood* you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, and the LORD of hosts is His name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth He is called. For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer" (Is. 54:4-8).

The Lord here mentions the shame of Israel's widowhood, because He actually wrote the decree of her divorce:

“Thus says the Lord: ‘Where is your mother’s bill of divorce, with which I put her away? ... Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away’ (Is. 50:1).

Jeremiah explains it more clearly: “I saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce ...” (Jer. 3:8). Of course, adultery, in God’s eyes, is idol worship — that is, a wife’s disloyalty to her husband, when her husband is God.

What truly amazes us is that we find in the conjugal language, which the prophets use to speak of God’s love for his people, feelings of jealousy. God had these [feelings] over His bride, i.e. the people He had chosen for Himself, when Israel strayed after strange gods. Moses had taught [the people of Israel] that [to be jealous over them] was part of God’s nature:

“for the LORD, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land [of Canaan], and when they play the harlot after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and one invites you, you eat of His sacrifice” (Ex. 34:14, 15).

So, Israel was considered faithless to her covenant of betrothal to her God when she was allured into worshipping the gods and idols of other nations. [This assessment was carried] to the point that we hear of Him divorcing her, which means that He hid His face from her and would no longer defend her against her enemies.

Such is the way in which the relationship between God and his chosen people is to be assessed. These are the people to whom God had joined Himself in the Old Testament. Hence, when Christ gave himself the title of “Bridegroom,” it was a proclamation of Yahweh’s attitude towards his people in the times of old. Yet, God was finally able, through his Son’s incarnation, to conclude an actual marriage with His people whom He had loved by a mystical union between God and mankind which the Son bore within his being when all the fullness of deity united with the flesh — and so the Son of God was born. In this way, Christ confirmed in himself the union of divinity with humanity by a bond which time cannot break asunder. Mankind, therefore, became God’s eternal possession as an acquired Church

redeemed by the Son on the cross and washed with blood — thus becoming blameless in him. What Isaiah had seen in the vision was then fulfilled: “and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Is. 62:5).

Edersheim, the Jewish historian who became a Christian, mentions that among Jewish traditions, there was a custom, when a bridegroom was affianced to his bride, which stipulated that each of them should have a representative — especially the bride, whose representative became the guarantor of her virginity. It seems that St. Paul knew about this custom. With the full boldness of the appointed Apostle chosen by the Lord, he presents himself as the guarantor of the Church in Corinth and with godly audacity says: “I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband” (2 Cor. 11:2).

Behind these words lies a tragedy that was going on in the city of Corinth. It was the city of debauchery and immorality, filled with idols and strange cults. Therefore, we are here before a virgin betrothed to Christ and Satan prowling around her with demonic cults, or, in the language of the Old Testament, making propositions of fornication and faithlessness to God. We, therefore, hear St. Paul proceeding: “But I am afraid that as the serpent (Satan) deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3).

Therefore, temptation in its Old Testament context is still rife — deluding the Church, which God has bought with His blood, into straying after the devil. St Paul by his preaching had betrothed the church in Corinth to Christ. He stands as a guardian to protect her so that the devil may not corrupt her with his seduction and she may remain faithful to her covenant with Christ. From his discourse with the Corinthians, we sense that St. Paul is full of the idea of Christ as an actual “Bridegroom.” The Church must keep up to the [pure] standard of faithful worship. As a betrothed virgin, any taint to her purity would violate her honor. Such should be the feeling of every bishop or priest toward the Church, whether in his prayers, sermons

or visitations: "I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband."

It is amazing how these unique concepts of Christ as a Bridegroom and the Church as a bride should survive ever since early Old Testament times when the people of Israel left Egypt. They are carried through all the prophets to be afterwards elevated to take on their theological senses. They are heard from the mouth of Christ himself and are then further clarified by St. Paul (the open-eyed Apostle). [Paul] counted himself as having completed with his sufferings in his own flesh what was lacking in the afflictions of Christ (as a Bridegroom) in his body, which is the Church (Col. 1:24). While he preached, he felt he was but betrothing souls of both men and women for a true marriage to Christ. It is St. Paul who said: "But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (1 Cor. 6:17), which indicates a wedlock at the level of the smallest individual church. But the concept of the marriage of Christ and the Church will not stop at the level of the earth only, but will soar with vision to heavenly places:

"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure' — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints" (Rev. 19:6–8).

The fact that the marriage of the Lamb has come, and that his bride, which is the Church, has been clothed with the righteous deeds of the saints, clearly indicates that the eternal Passover has been inaugurated in order to fulfill the deeds of the first Passover. They are made new in the kingdom of God, as Christ pointed out on the evening of the Last Supper, [when he said of the Passover], "I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Lk. 22:16).

The book of Revelation finally proclaims the nature of the bride, the wife of the Lamb, which is the Church, in its ultimate form. It is the new Jerusalem, the Church of all ages and generations, transfigured with the deeds and talents of her saints, while God's grace adorns her righteous ones and martyrs with crowns of glory:

“Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God ...” (Rev. 21:9 – 11).

In fact, we find great comfort in Christ terming himself the “Bridegroom” of the Church; for he has thus raised our relationship with him from the state of compulsory worship to one of love that reaches up to the pitch of worship. Our relationship with Christ as the Bridegroom of our lives has taken the form of passionate love, not only on our part but also on his. Once, dear reader, your heart awakens to the fact that you are loved by the Father and Christ, something more than love will be kindled in it. If you feed it with prayer and intimate conversation [with God] it turns into passion. At that time, your heart will find it difficult to be mindful of anything but Christ. Listen to the words of a lover of old: “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides Thee” (Ps. 73:25). Is that not the voice of a passionate lover? Listen to the voice of a beloved prophet openly and publicly divulging his love affair: “the desire of the soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired Thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek Thee early” (Is. 26:8, 9). This is the lover by day and by night who is taken up with God’s name and remembrance to the exclusion of anything else. Are these not live images of a genuine state of wedlock in the spirit? Or when John, or rather Christ, says, “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). Does Christ not here unveil the hidden secret of a passionate love which beset the Father’s heart to the extent that He found no difficulty in slaughtering His Son?

In the face of the Father’s love, which was so sacrificial that it went to the length of slaying His Son, His Son’s response was [to say] in turn: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk. 14:26). This is what equals

the passionate love of the Father for the Church which made it easy for Him to slay His Son for her salvation. It is not too much then that he for whom God slew His Son should in turn slay himself for God. Yet, what is needed is not killing but love — better still, passion; for passion is the only fitting response to passion, which is love from all one's heart. In response to the Father's love, St. Paul made a most appropriate answer when he said:

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things (including father, mother and all the family) and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him" (Phil. 3:7 – 9).

Even if a person loses everything, he will not be able to equal the love of the Father who slew His Son in order to win us, or the love of the Son who slew himself on the cross to win us to God his Father. So, there is no exaggeration when we say that the love of the Father and the love of the Son surpassed the [usual] meaning of love. It was passion, the very source and fount of passion.

The source of this powerful and surpassing passion is to be found in the nature of the Father and of the Son; for the Father loves the Son in the entire and absolute sense of the word. In other words, there is not any bit of the Father's love which falls outside the Son. The same goes for the Son: the Son loves the Father in such a way that there is not any bit of the Son's love which exists outside the Father. It is an absolute love of mutual attraction. For that reason, it is stated that the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. Therefore, the Father and the Son are absolutely one. When the Son became incarnate, the flesh of humankind to which the Son was joined entered the sphere of the Father's love, and so did the Church. The Church then became the center of gravitation between the love of the Father and that of the Son. This love became further crystallized when Christ became the head of the Church and when the Church became his body. The Church thus became personified in Christ before the Father.

Consequently, all the Father's love was transferred to the Church as if she were the Son himself.

For this reason, we should not be surprised to hear that the Father treasured up all the properties and inheritance of the Son in the Church when He raised Christ above the highest heaven to deliver to her in return all that Christ has gained. Listen:

“...and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things *for the church*, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:19 – 23).

Notice how all these enormous potentialities have become the property of the Church when Christ became her head according to the Father's divine economy. What is the meaning of Christ becoming the head of the Church which is his body? Is that not the only characterization of the relationship between a bridegroom and bride? As previously mentioned, St. Paul explained this very clearly. Due to that very high distinction given to the Church above all heavenly beings, she became appointed to preach and proclaim her Christ among them all:

“... that *through the church* the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose which He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:10, 11).

The Church thus gained Christ's inheritance in the heavenly places, and we were consequently called the sons of God, not only in name, but through the work of the Holy Spirit. [The Spirit] confirmed our right to sonship by proclaiming and bearing witness to it. As St. Paul says:

“... 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” (Rom. 8:15 – 17).

However, what truly amazes us is that just as the Church inherited the Son, so the Son inherited the Church. This was a direct result of the wedlock and exchange of benefits between both parties. Listen to the following:

"Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious *inheritance in the saints*" (Eph. 1:18).

And so the saints entered the glory of Christ as special, chosen witnesses who will accompany him openly in the cloud of glory:

"Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!'" (Rev. 5:11, 12).

"... when he comes on that day to be *glorified in his saints*, and to be marveled at in all who have believed" (2 Thes. 1:10).

"... so that he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, *at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints*" (1 Thes. 3:13).

Now, we have feasted on a love so rare and extraordinary and at a level which is most holy and palpable. It includes the Father, the Son, the Church and all creation, whether in its past, present or future on earth, in heaven and in the second advent. [Now that we have experienced this] we are able to declare that our world, as depicted by the Gospel, is a love story that began from heaven where the Father is. [The story has been] — violent and blood-letting, reaching the highest pitch of tragedy, attaining to the heroic feats of a martyred love — only to conclude calmly, as serene as the dawn light, with the joy of a bride and Bridegroom.

Sunday, 17th of July, 1994

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“I Am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life”

Ἐγώ Εἰμι ὁ Ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ Ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ Ζωή (John 14:6)

Christ said these words when at the peak of manifesting himself and the powers he had in him. Here, he emphasizes the words “I am” to proclaim and reveal himself in circumstances that were full of anxiety and sadness. It was after Judas had betrayed Jesus and left, with the disciples in disarray especially after Christ had announced to them: “Yet a little while I am with you” (Jn. 13:33), as if he were facing them with the unknown future they were to suffer soon after his departure. In his confusion, Peter asked him: “Lord, where are you going?” (Jn. 13:36). The answer was obscure and awesome: “Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward” (Jn. 13:36).

To his disciples, Jesus characterized “the way” by saying: “Where I am going you cannot follow me,” meaning it to be the way of death. However, he continued saying: “but you shall follow afterward.” Thus, he characterizes it as a relief in the *parousia*, the second coming, which Christ expressed in the words: “And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way where I am going” (Jn. 14:3, 4).

That is how Christ explained “I go,” but unfortunately and as usual, Thomas did not understand: “Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” (Jn. 14:5). Thomas lived a materialistic life, within the limits of his country and times, and could not imagine how Christ could go, where to and what this new way would be.

In order to encourage his disciples and help them depend on him, Christ reassured them of his everlasting abilities by declaring straightforwardly to them: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

Adding to the definition of himself and not of the way, he said: "No one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn. 14:6). Christ presented to them "a way" that required a new manner of thinking, that was not like Thomas': "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also" (Jn. 14:7). Because "the way" Christ mentioned was not more than the manifestation of the Father and the Son. The Father sent the Son to the world, on the descending way, to fulfill the Father's will to save those redeemed; and the Son fulfilled the ransom and opened the ascending way to the Father and the redeemed.

Yet, Christ in his words: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" presented himself with each of the three extents distinctively emphasized on its own. For he is "the way," he is "the truth," and he is "the life." Christ came to divulge the mystery of these three extents to the world, but because each one of them cannot be separated from the other, to discuss one without the other is an inevitable shortcoming. When we discuss Christ, the way, it is certainly the way of truth and life; in truth he planned it, and with life He fulfilled it.

THE WAY OF TRUTH OR THE TRUE WAY: Adding the truth to the way becomes I am "the way of truth." This elevates the way to take on its unique divine nature. It is the way from God to the world. God is the universal truth, while the world of man is the habitat of falsehood and deception; two fields that are completely different and opposed. They can only meet in the form of the cross to bring out the height of the contrast. Thus, the dangers, the tragedy and the cross resulting from the mission the Son received from the Father to fulfill across the world were not only taken into account, but previously planned. Christ had always known it. He had often mentioned that the Son of Man would be crucified and die, not only as information but as a testament he had received from the Father before setting foot in the world of evil: "No one takes it (his life) from me, but I lay it

down (to death) 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. 10:18). "For I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me" (Jn. 8:42). The Father as well as the Son accepted to pay the price before he took on the task: "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).

The nature of the future battle was not hidden from Christ. He was intimately aware of its full scope and extent: "And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mk. 8:31). Christ certainly suffered from opposition, resistance, insults and attempts of being stoned, chased, threatened and even beaten. So, Christ bore the truth in the way of the world through its evils of lies, deceits and pitfalls till the way ended with his arrest and the variety of insults and pain that were inflicted upon him.

The way descending from God to the world finally ended at the cross on the hill of Golgotha. This is the height of the struggle that was fulfilled between the truth of God born as the only Son and the deceit of the world. The master of the deceits of the world together with all his aides, disciples, followers and beneficiaries rallied to defend this world and take revenge on the truth that had dared reveal its defects. But the battle ended with a total defeat to the master of death and deceit. Here ended the descending way from God to man with the ransom of all who had been unjustly sentenced to death and the freeing of the expectant prisoners shackled in the abyss from their unjust bonds.

THE WAY OF LIFE OR THE WAY AND THE LIFE: From the midst of death, that is the height of deceit and false victory, the truth emerged alive, to begin the ascending way carrying life out of the depths of death. A life alive, which neither death, nor sadness, gloom or sighs will ever touch or even approach; a life forever in the light of the truth. In that manner, the truth had become free to follow its ascending way to the Father: His triumphant Son carrying in his vic-

torious procession redeemed mankind which had gained the crown of life. Thus, the Son would be able to sit at the right hand of the Father with those he had bought with his blood and for whom a place had been prepared in the house of the Father. The promise had been fulfilled: "I go to prepare a place for you. And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again (the *parousia* = the next coming) and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way where I am going" (Jn. 14:3, 4).

Such is the way descending with the truth and ascending with the life as "no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn. 14:6). It is the way best expressed in Hebrews: "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh" (Heb. 10:19, 20).

Who can separate the truth from the way? Or, how can it be fulfilled without the life?

If we bear in mind that Christ is the way then we will realize that surely in Him are the truth and the life.

“I AM THE TRUTH (ἡ Ἀλήθεια)”: When Christ says: "I am the truth," God is "the truth." When Christ says he is "the truth" while he is a man standing in the midst of people, it means that he had just manifested himself by the Word and through his acts. It is proved by the words: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known (ἐξηγήσατο) (Jn. 1:18), which means proclaimed. Christ explained it to Pilate: "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (Jn. 18:37). That is the reason for his definition to his disciples: "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know Him and have seen Him" (Jn. 14:7). "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9).

We find that Christ's definition of "the truth" is clear in the Gospel and in the epistles since they mention the certain truth and correct faith:

"You did not so learn Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21).

"The truth" concerning Christ is established in the Gospel as follows:

"But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas ..." (Gal. 2:14)

"The truth" is mentioned as Christ's highest standard and test for every sin:

"But for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury" (Rom. 2:8).

Truth is mentioned as the forthcoming standard of judgment by Christ:

"We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things" (Rom. 2:2).

St. John proclaims the relation of the truth to Christ as the light:

"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth" (1 Jn. 1:6).

Paul the Apostle links truth with joy, Christ himself and anything related to him:

"It does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right" (1 Cor. 13:6).

Thus, Paul the Apostle relates God's fury with those who hide the truth and uphold sin:

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18).

The truth existing in Christ is transferred with righteousness and holiness to the new nature He created in His image:

"And put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24).

If mankind holds on to the truth in Christ, it can become a domain that will attract him spiritually:

“Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14).

Paul the Apostle established firmly the truth of Christ in the Gospel:

“Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel which has come to you” (Col. 1:5, 6).

“In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, ...” (Eph. 1:13)

Peter the Apostle said that the Christian faith was established in the truth:

“Therefore, I intend always to remind you of these things, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have” (2 Pet. 1:12).

Christ speaks of himself as the truth: “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn. 8:32). Then, he continues to reveal the nature of this truth; that it is neither science, nor understanding, nor action: “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (Jn. 8:36).

Here, the meaning and the content of this freedom is made clear. It is not conceptual, but it consists in breaking the fetters of sin: “everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (Jn. 8:34).

As the truth is Christ himself, it, therefore, sanctifies: “Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth” (Jn. 17:17). For the word is not merely doctrine but the revelation of his nature. The nature of Christ is sustaining: “And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth” (Jn. 17:19).

Christ is God’s word. He is the truth revealed to the world, blessing it with his presence. Christ himself is an act of consecration, an event of sanctification in the world: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14). He is the fullness of grace and holiness. The coming of truth and holiness has sanctified us and filled us with grace.

In Christ’s words concerning God’s request of those who worship Him: “the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and

truth" (Jn. 4:23). It is the Holy Spirit which allows one to be in God's presence, and the truth is the revelation Christ fulfilled for God. Thus, worshipping God means worshipping in His Spirit with a sincere declaration to God of faith in Christ.

To be brief, the worship that is required is in the Holy Spirit and faith in Christ: "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that He gives the Spirit; the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand" (Jn. 3:34, 35). Worship also depends on Christ's revelation about how crucial his relationship to God the Father is for us: "No one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn. 14:6). Furthermore, worship is based on the Spirit leading the believers to all "the truth" (Jn. 16:13), for he is called the "Spirit of truth" (Jn. 16:13); "The Spirit is the truth" (1 Jn. 5:7).

Thus, we have found that through Christ's word: "I am the truth," this reality has become intrinsic to worship, and our fathers the Apostles used it in building the whole temple of Christian life. The truth of Christ is the Gospel; adhering to it is adhering to Christ. The truth of Christ has become the basis and the rule of thinking, acting and behavior. It has become the criterion of life and judgment. The truth of Christ is the gauge and scales of the Last Judgment. The truth of Christ is light; walking without it is darkness and death. The truth of Christ created the form and frame of the new human being in righteousness, holiness and truth. He who holds on to Christ is equal to him who girdles himself with the truth. The truth of Christ is salvation. Christianity is truth present. The truth of Christ is actual freedom. God asks those who worship Him to do it in the Spirit and the truth of Christ, and the Holy Spirit is entrusted with revealing the truth of Christ. When we look closely at Christ's revelation of "I am the truth" we find that the whole course of Christianity was based on it.

"I AM THE LIFE": Having seen that "the way" which Christ designated by himself was active ever since he descended from the Father and then rose to sit with Him at His right hand, "eternal

life” was his share that rose to the heavens to sit at the right hand of the Father. This share is unseen for all but the elect few. For they alone witnessed him, saw him, touched him and ate with him. This means that though eternal life is our heavenly share fulfilling our salvation and is kept for us in heaven till our struggle through faith on earth is achieved, the physical eye cannot see it but it is revealed by faith: “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (Jn. 11:40) We are now living this unseen share which means eternal life. To put it in better and stronger terms we are living with Christ. For Christ is our eternal life. Even though we do not see him it is sufficient that he sees us: “I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice” (Jn. 16:22). Every joy that surprises us and overcomes our worry and grief is that of Christ himself and a foretaste of the joy of eternal life. If we ever miss sensing the truth of this promise, then faith will suffice for it. It is enough that Christ confidently says: “Because I live, you will live also” (Jn. 14:19).

Faith and a heart full of love make us believe the verity of his words, that he is actually living and we are truly alive. Life in Christ is not to fulfill one’s own desires, but it is a love that inflames the heart so that living waters will gush forth from it to quench the thirst of others.

Eternal life is not merely a promise we wait for with faith. Rather, it is a living spirit, his spirit, which he placed in our hearts to work for him. The Spirit may become so active that it covers all the outlets and movements of the flesh; to the extent that the flesh will only crave for the Spirit. The Spirit is the source of all knowledge and enlightenment: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; ... for he will take what is mine (joyful news) and declare it to you” (Jn. 16:13, 14). He who is disciplined by the Spirit becomes a sage. For it is the spirit of wisdom and understanding. It is the high school for God’s children to graduate in righteousness, piety, holiness and truth gaining accredited degrees to enter without scrutiny into the Kingdom of God. Eternal life to those who have known it and lived it is a life that renders present life inferior. In it, the diligent rise from glory

to glory with their spiritual forms truly and actually changed in order to be prepared to become the very image of their Creator in all truth:

“Beloved, we are God’s children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn. 3:2).

Our situation resembles that of a group or a cast of actors who are diligently practicing the roles each has been given. Each continues to study and repeat his role day and night, standing before the mirror playing his role but is not pleased. So, he perseveres to improve his performance, words and movements. Actually, dear brothers, the curtain will rise and we will be elevated to take up our real positions not those of actors. Here, whether we like it or not, we are wearing masks. Blessed are those who wear the masks of weakness, poverty and meekness, honestly performing their roles because of their love for Him who was poor while rich, weak while being the God of power and meek being the Son of God. Because there the masks will be removed and the laurels of glory received. Note that eternal life is within us. It begins here below with all it has to offer but behind masks, so that only the sufferings of these times are felt. There above, however, eternal bliss is found.

August 1994

“I Am the Bread of Life”

Ἐγώ Εἰμι ὁ Ἄρτος τῆς Ζωῆς (John 6:56)

“I am the bread of life” is among the simplest titles Christ conferred to himself. At the same time, it is so profound that it cannot be equaled nor surpassed.

He is “the true bread” (Jn. 6:32); “For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world” (Jn. 6:33); “I am the bread of life” (Jn. 6:48); “This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die” (Jn. 6:50); “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn. 6:51).

The way to understanding this very mystical title is through Christ’s words: “My Father gives you the true bread from heaven” (Jn. 6:32). With these words he clearly alludes to himself. Later, he states it plainly in the words: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven...” (Jn. 6:51).

When he says “the true bread,” he highlights two points: First, that he is “divine bread,” for this is what “true” means since there exists no truth or anything true in the absolute sense other than God and things that are attributed to his nature. Second, that he refutes a bread which is not true, which is not part of God’s nature: the “manna” God sent to the people of Israel during the forty years they roamed the wilderness of Sinai. Even though the manna came down

from heaven, God's abode, yet it does not belong to God's nature; for if some of it was left over, "it bred worms and became foul" (Ex. 16:20). Anything that rots and becomes foul cannot be attributed to God, since God is incorruptible. That manna Moses named "bread": "And Moses said to them: It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat" (Ex. 16:15). Nehemiah named it "bread from heaven": "Thou didst give them bread from heaven for their hunger and bring forth water for them from the rock for their thirst" (Neh. 9:15). It was also named "the grain of heaven" and "bread of angels": "and he rained down upon them manna to eat, and gave them the grain of heaven. Man ate of the bread of the angels; ..." (Ps. 78:24, 28).

Even though manna was the bread from heaven, it did not provide sustenance for more than one day, so the people of Israel would gather it day by day. It is known that all those who ate the manna from heaven died like the rest of mankind. Eating the manna did not preserve them from death. As Christ said: "not such as the fathers ate and died" (Jn. 6:58).

Let the reader understand that the death meant here by Christ is not just that of the flesh but the eternal curse of death which passed from Adam to his seed under the judgment of wrath.

Nevertheless, the Jews considered the manna one of God's divine mysteries which he had dispensed particularly to them. When Christ, therefore, said he was "the bread of God come down from heaven" (Jn. 6:33), they were alarmed: "The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, 'I am the bread which came down from heaven' ... 'How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" (Jn. 6:41, 42).

But in fact, Christ based his argument on the fundamental teachings of the Jews that the manna was something special. For according to tradition, the people of Israel would be fed the manna with the coming of the Messiah. This is also associated with a historical fact: when the temple of Solomon was built the ark of the old covenant was placed in it. It contained the two tablets with the Ten Commandments engraved on them, Aaron's rod that budded and blossomed and the

golden jar holding the manna: "And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations"" (Ex. 16:33). It is said that when the temple was destroyed, the Prophet Jeremiah hid the jar of manna and nobody knew where he had hidden it. According to Jewish tradition, when the Messiah comes, he will retrieve it from its hidden place and feed the believers from it.

In the book of Revelation, we hear of this tradition as follows: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna" (Rev. 2:17).

Among the rabbinical teachings prevalent during the time of Christ was that Moses' deeds would be repeated at the coming of the Messiah. He would be the second Moses who would bring them manna from heaven. This manna would then be kept in store as provisions for the godly in the age to come, and the only ones to eat from it would be those worthy of it. According to this teaching, Moses is the first redeemer who brought them the manna from heaven, and the Messiah is the second redeemer who will do the same.

Another predominant belief in Jewish circles was that in the Messianic age, the Lord would arrange a heavenly banquet for believers. This belief is echoed in the New Testament with the words of Christ:

"But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.' When one of those who sat at table with him heard this, he said to him, 'Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!'" (Lk. 14:13 - 15).

Therefore, we can believe that Christ, being the Messiah and fully aware of this basic tradition, broke sensational news by proclaiming himself the bread from heaven when the Jews brought up the subject:

"Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?' Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom He has sent.' So they said to him,

“Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’” (Jn. 6:28 – 31).

This was an implicit request from him to bring manna down from heaven to prove that he was in fact the Messiah.

Therefore, when Christ said, “I am the living bread which came down from heaven” (Jn. 6:51), he obviously meant to proclaim himself the Messiah and his coming the beginning of the Messianic age. Sadly enough, though, these people who along with their prophets and saints had lived impatiently awaiting the coming of the Messiah did not believe him when he did come and say, “I am he.”

However, the reader must note that Christ proclaimed to whomsoever had insight that he was not only the Messiah but God as well. For when the Jews said that Moses had given them manna, believing that with the death of Moses the manna ceased, Christ refuted their belief saying: “Truly, truly I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven” (Jn. 6:32). Christ then affirmed that he is the bread of life and he will give them that bread: “the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn. 6:51).

With these words, Christ made it clear that the Father gives the true bread. For the true bread is the food of everlasting life. He then concluded by saying that he also gives the living bread (everlasting life): “the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Christ here implicitly reveals that he is the Messiah and that he and God are one; for he does the work of God which is to give eternal life. The reader must note that he who gives eternal life must necessarily have the power to abolish death. Consequently, with Christ saying that he gives life, we find ourselves before the mystery of immortality.

THE MYSTERY OF IMMORTALITY. Among all the mysteries we come across in the life or words or miracles of Christ, none equal that awesome mystery — the mystery of immortality. Christ kept it

hidden until the last hours of his life. On the night he was to deliver himself up to death for the life of the world, he sat at table with his disciples and prepared for that mystery by proclaiming his love for his own who were in the world — a love which the Gospel describes as "to the end" (Jn. 13:1).

Christ was not exaggerating when he said, "I am the bread of life." For during that last Passover meal, when he took bread in his hands and looked upwards, he imparted to it the Spirit of eternal life that was within him. He charged the bread with the self-same eternal life that was in his flesh, so that the ordinary bread became tantamount to his divine living flesh: it became a life-giving bread. Christ even went so far as to apply another mystery to the sacrament: he broke the bread to actualize what would happen on the cross. He thus imparted his life-giving death to the living bread. In other words: he charged it with the power of redemption and forgiveness at one and the same time. Consequently, whoever eats of this bread crosses over in the flesh from death to life, as Christ did. This means that the power of the resurrection from the dead entered this living bread. Therefore, Christ proclaimed at the end: "... and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me'" (1 Cor. 11:24).

Just as Christ charged the bread with the breaking of the flesh, so did he charge the cup with the shedding of the blood and the forgiveness of sins:

"And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'" (Mt. 26:27, 28).

When Christ had turned his eyes upwards and, as this Scripture passage says, "He had given thanks," Christ would have committed the Spirit of eternal life, which is in him, to the blood.

Thus, Christ charged the bread and the cup with the mystery of the breaking of the flesh, the shedding of the blood on the cross and the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins implies that eternal life is

revealed. Christ made the disciples pass over from death by feeding them the broken body and offering them the blood that was shed as a ransom. They thus gained the forgiveness of sins and arose to everlasting life. Having accomplished that, Christ would have handed the mystery of immortality over to them — that mystery which St. Ignatius of Antioch names “the elixir of immortality.” To put it more clearly but more mystically, Christ would have thus given them his own self and existence: flesh and blood, spirit and life!

Christ gave us the bread which bears the spirit of eternal life and the mystery of the breaking of his body on the cross. Inevitably, he also gave us the cup of his blood shed for us, in which is the spirit of eternal life. By so doing, he has given us the mystery of total communion with him in his life and his death. Communion here is not metaphorical but actual and factual, confirmed and realized in his words: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him” (Jn. 6:56). This mutual abiding means that Christ has a permanent existence in the life of mankind, and this inevitably qualifies for eternal life: “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:54).

EATING AND DRINKING IN RELATION TO THE MYSTERY OF THE FLESH AND THE BLOOD. When Christ had imparted his Spirit to the bread, which became his flesh, and to the wine, which became his blood, and when he had bestowed upon the flesh the act of breaking and upon the blood the act of shedding which he intended to fulfill on the cross, he would thus have committed the act of redemption to the flesh and the blood. When he said the flesh is “broken for your sake” and the blood “shed for your sake” these two things consequently came to bear the person of Christ and, therefore, the fellowship of eternal life with him. It was all accomplished through the action of the “Word,” meaning with the power of creation that belongs to Christ — he who creates existence out of non-existence and life out of death. Yet, Christ here used the power of creation to transform the material presence of the bread and wine into a spiritual one

that springs out of his own presence. The bread thus became Christ's flesh indeed and the wine Christ's blood indeed — a divine, unseen, unfelt presence, just like his own divinity and the image [of God that he bears] which, though existing and active and life-giving, is unseen and unfelt [by the senses].

"See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have" (Lk. 24:39).

Here, because of his disciples' lack of faith, he made his divinity manifest and tangible so that when Thomas saw his wounds and touched him with his hand and fingers he realized the divine power at work and cried out, "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:28). Christ's comment was that it is only through faith and not through sight or feeling that we must believe in Christ and in his divinity: "Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe'" (Jn. 20:29). This is the self-same Christ who exists in flesh and blood in the mystery of the Eucharist. If necessary, Christ will manifest himself visibly and tangibly, but it is through faith that he must be accepted along with his divinity.

Henceforth, eating the flesh, i.e. the transformed bread, and drinking the blood, i.e. the transformed wine, becomes not normal eating or drinking but food and drink indeed, that is, divine food and drink *par excellence*. For "food and drink indeed" [meaning "true food and drink"] is a direct reference to God or what belongs to God, as already mentioned: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6). That is the reason why Christ cautioned: "For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (Jn. 6:55). Henceforth, eating the flesh and drinking the blood came to have the efficacy of faith — a mystical, genuine and direct efficacy of abiding in Christ, just like the mutual abiding of two similar things in one: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (Jn. 6:56), which means nothing but union! "Abide in me and I in you" (Jn. 15:4). Consequently, the direct outcome of abiding in Christ and of Christ abiding in the *believing* communicant is the gushing forth of the eter-

nal life belonging to Christ into him [or her]: “he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:54). In other words, he who eats of the flesh and drinks of the blood abides in Christ, and Christ abides in him. Eternal life is thereby accessible to him and consequently, yes, even inevitably, the resurrection which is the source of eternal life exists within him.

For those who eat of his flesh and drinks of his blood Christ summarized it all in one comprehensive verse: “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me” (Jn. 6:57). Christ here in a clear, concise and powerful manner reveals the mystery that lies in the Eucharist: he who eats the bread transformed into the flesh of Christ and drinks the wine transformed into the blood of Christ will have eaten the person of Christ and obtained the mystery of immortality. This is the basis for the martyr St. Ignatius’ definition of the consuming of the flesh and blood as the “the antidote of death,” i.e. “the elixir of immortality.” His definition is absolutely right, for it implies, first, healing or forgiveness of sin and, second, victory over death and obtaining eternal life.

ST. PAUL’S REMARK ON THE SACRAMENT OF THE FLESH AND BLOOD. The first thing to draw the attention of St. Paul the Apostle, who is the greatest expositor of the mysteries of the New Testament altogether, is the mystery that results from the consuming of the flesh and blood, that of the communion between the believer and Christ and the communion between those who partake together of the flesh and blood: “The cup of blessing, which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread, which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16).

From the reality of this divine communion, the result of believers partaking together of the one flesh and one blood in the Eucharist, St. Paul concludes that the believers unite together in Christ and attain the unity of humankind which Christ had striven for with his death on the cross in order to present humanity as one person to God:

A. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17).

B. "To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, 13).

In these two verses, St. Paul discusses the mystery of the Eucharist; that in communion all differences of race, physical appearance, character, customs, strifes, controversies, contrasts and false disputes are removed. This happens because partaking of the one bread unites us in the one body of Christ, and drinking from the one cup unites in exultation our hearts and spirits with the one spirit of Christ. To make it clear to the reader, take for instance a great group of believers, whose faith is sincere because of the efficacy of the mystery of the Eucharist; they come from all the churches and countries of the world; they have gathered together and have all partaken of the one flesh and the one blood. Then, God suddenly invites them to proceed to the world of light. What will there remain of their various races, ways of life, customs, principles and beliefs? The truth is that everything physical and earthly will immediately disappear. Only the body of Christ that unites us and the spirit that animates us in unsurpassed love and friendship will remain.

Now, we are required to fulfill this unity here, at this present time, because it exists in us even though it is hidden behind barriers, contradictions, conditions and conflicts that are all physical and false. When are we going to wake up to the truth of the one body and the one spirit that is within us and to the mystery of the one everlasting life that unites us?

To give you a living example of this world in the present age concerning groups of various races with a variety of concepts, principles and mores, who became united in the divine unity of the spirit that instantly overcame all the differences and physical variations, with a great mystical power, and without any help or teachings, one must refer to the early Christians after Pentecost and note how they truly became one in Christ:

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

“Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the Apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 2:44 – 47; 4:32, 33).

In this manner and on this basis was the one Church of God established.

THE MYSTERY OF THE EUCHARIST IS THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH: We have clearly seen that partaking of the flesh and blood results through the spirit and faith in communion with Christ and acceptance of eternal life. We have also seen that if a group of believers partake of the flesh and blood, they become united mystically with each other and with Christ. We then commented by saying that the Church was based on the communion of the one flesh and blood that bound them in Christ with the bond of faith and love which removes differences.

Thus, the divine logic of faith, in brief, is that if the element of a united brotherhood is absent from the established Church, which was originally based on the abolishment of differences and on true love ensuing from the partaking of the one flesh, blood and spirit; then, it immediately reveals a serious lack of understanding and fulfillment of the partaking of the flesh and blood of Christ, which Christ himself emphasized: “My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed,” meaning it is awesomely divine.

PAUL THE APOSTLE'S CONDITIONS FOR PARTAKING OF THE BODY AND BLOOD IN ACCORDANCE TO THE DIVINE TRUTH:

After having ascribed to the flesh and blood Christ's attribute of absolute divinity, he gives some alarming warnings to those who are negligent and approach this mystery in an unworthy manner. This unworthiness does not relate to their deeds and behavior, but to their lack of faith, first of all in the divinity of Christ, and consequently in the divinity of the body and blood:

"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27).

Here, he qualifies the person who approaches the holy sacrament undeservingly, as a defiler of the body and blood of the Lord, meaning that he has defiled the holiness and divinity of this awesome mystery.

Paul the Apostle explains the reason for considering the person who takes communion undeservingly as the defiler of the body and blood of the Lord, by stating clearly about approaching the body and blood without distinguishing between eating ordinary bread and drinking ordinary wine, and that of consuming the divine body and blood in truth:

"For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (1 Cor. 11:29).

Meaning that the only great condition for a person to be worthy of presenting himself for the consuming of the flesh and blood is to be truthfully and spiritually aware in his faith of the essence of the mystical transformation that Christ himself produces in the bread and wine for them to become His body and blood that contain the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Whoever denies this transformation or ignores it resembles him who ignores Christ and dares to deal with him, who is God, as a naive person.

Paul the Apostle gives advice to set right whoever approaches to partake of this mystery:

"Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor. 11:28).

It is obvious from St. Paul's words that he was fully aware of the mystery of the Eucharist, regarding it as if Christ himself was actually seated at table breaking of His body and giving with His hands, pressing his blood out and giving to drink from the cup. This highly divine concept has elevated this saint to a position of unsurpassed piety and godliness, of love, understanding and enlightenment.

Our intention with the above-mentioned is to show the reader that to treat this sacrament with such suitable restraint, awareness, discrimination and reverence is the basis of true piety which affects a person's behavior as if he were continuously in God's presence. Because whoever keeps in his heart the body and blood of Christ is like he who keeps eternal life, having been united to the mystery of eternity. This is the mystery of "I am the bread of life"!

What a deep mystery!

What a joy for him who enters this depth!

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**“I Am the True Vine,
and My Father Is the Vinedresser”**

**Ἐγὼ εἶμι ἡ Ἄμπελος ἡ Ἀληθινή,
καὶ ὁ Πατήρ μου ὁ Γεωργὸς Ἔστιν (John 15:1)**

“I AM THE TRUE VINE, AND MY FATHER IS THE VINEDRESSER.”

The addition “and my Father is the vinedresser” gives “I am the true vine” another lateral, hidden sense. For the attribute of fatherhood on its own means God in relation to Christ as Son. But when Christ attributes to God the Father the quality or work of vinedresser, it means that the Father is the planter and owner of the vine — the vine being only a tree. This means that Christ is the vine but only in terms of the flesh [that is, after the incarnation], otherwise he would be attributing to God the Father the function of planting the divinity [and *hypostasis*] of the Son — which would involve us in theological error.

In fact, when saying of himself “I am the true vine,” Christ means to refer to the false vine that is no longer worthy of being named a vine. We, therefore, have to dwell first on that vine which, having lost its genuineness and identity, has become rotten.

It is well known that the people of Israel, being considered the people of God, had been called “the vine” by him, but only as privileged by God who had planted it Himself and become its vinedresser and owner. The following verses [and comments] mark such outstanding privilege at the beginning:

“Yet I planted you a choice (fruitful) vine, wholly (completely) of pure seed” (Jer. 2:21).

The history of God planting this vine, that is, the people of Israel, began in Egypt. It then moved to Palestine where God destroyed whole nations to plant them there. They became rooted there and grew exceedingly strong under the care of the vinedresser:

“Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt; Thou didst drive out the nations and plant it. Thou didst clear the ground for it; the mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; it sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the River...” (Ps. 80:8 – 11).

The vine that God had planted and established in the land, and which spread and bore fruit, was the object of God’s pleasure and delight, because God greatly loved the people of Israel: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son” (Hos. 11:1).

The object of this love was implied by the vine, so it became the love of a vineyard, a desired vineyard:

“Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it;...” (Is. 5:1, 2).

Also:

“... A pleasant vineyard, sing of it! I, the Lord, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest any one harm it, I guard it night and day” (Is. 27:2, 3).

In loving the people of Israel, God went not only as far as entitling it to the position of a “son,” but as naming it the “first-born” denoting precedence over all nations:

“And you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is My first-born son, and I say to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me, ...’” (Ex. 4:22, 23).

God actually gave a strongly emotional comparison of His great love for the people of Israel at the beginning. God here speaks thus:

“and in the wilderness where you have seen how the Lord your God bore you, as a man bears his son, in all the way that you went...” (Deut. 1:31).

The seriousness and repetitiveness of these words prove that there already existed a plan for the people, and that this plan would inevitably appear clearly one day in the future. They were obviously not mere descriptions or allegories, for God showed his feelings unequivocally which the people of Israel felt and depended upon, taking certain liberties with God that lasted even throughout the years of alienation. The prophets kept alluding to them, at times with the hope of returning to the old days and at other times with tears and cries over the days of love gone by.

However, it is striking that the attribute of the first-born son is always attended by the attribute of the vine. They are both joined continually to form a double braid united in a rare mystical form: the pleasant vineyard and the beloved son. From this pairing of attributes we glimpse in such approach a hidden intention from God to unite His people into one. No better example could be found except in the vine whose numerous branches are organically united in one stem. God also attributes sonship to the vine. When plumbed to its depth, this fact suggests that God had already long ago intended to bring the people into a privileged kinship with him that is factual and not metaphorical.

It is obvious that this had been a project which God began when He came to deal with the people at the beginning of their history. But unfortunately man is man and God is God. All such planning on God's part was stopped and the project aborted. The reason is the coarse nature of mankind in general and not only the people of Israel — even though Israel had practiced all kind of stubbornness, rejection, defiance, rebellion: "For they have turned their back to Me, and not their face" (Jer. 2:27); "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people" (Rom. 10:21); "Thus says the Lord: 'Where is your mother's bill of divorce, with which I put her away?'" (Is. 50:1).

The people was never in God's good books. They committed such ungodliness in such a way as to force God to turn away [in disgust] and put off for a while his wonderful project. This is obvious in the

prophets' tales of unrequited love and rejected care. For in one and the same passage Isaiah joins his praise of the vine to a dirge: "Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard... and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes" (Is. 5:1, 2).

In the same passage, Isaiah continues with God's bitter complaint of the people and God's intention to destroy the pleasant vineyard and raze it to the ground:

"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard, that I have not done it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will remove its hedge (take away His divine providence), and it shall be devoured (plundered by all nations); I will break down its wall (dissolve its unity and strength), and it shall be trampled down (scorned by nations). I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed (will not return to its days of youth), and briers and thorns shall grow up (they will become a belligerent and quarrelsome nation for no cause); I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it (God's mercy shall be taken away)" (Is. 5:3-6).

This complaint and threat of a disaster, with the men of Israel and Judah themselves as witnesses, clearly justifies God's opting for chastisement and punishment. Isaiah proceeds with summarizing the whole situation: "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant planting; and He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness but behold, a cry!" (Is. 5:7).

Thus did that "foolish" people manage to thwart God's plan (Deut. 32:6) according to Moses' description:

"For they are a nation void of counsel, and there is no understanding in them. If they were wise, they would understand this, they would discern their latter end! How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had given them up? For their rock is not as our Rock, ... For their vine comes from the vine of Sodom, and from the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes are grapes of poi-

son, their clusters are bitter; their wine is the poison of serpents, and the cruel venom of asps. Is not this laid up in store with me, sealed up in my treasuries? ... For [the Lord] ... makes expiation for the land of his people" (Deut. 32:28 – 34, 43).

Therefore, the plan which was a source of good pleasure to God came to a halt. For the people were worthy of being neither God's vineyard nor His son. Through his ignorance and the impurity of his heart, man destroyed the intention of the Most High. He (man) proved the coarseness of his quality which cannot be grafted into God's nature: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is. 55:9).

Was it possible, however, that God should remain silent and accept defeat under the matter-of-fact conditions imposed by man's nature? Never!

THE PROJECT OF THE VINEYARD RETRIEVED — BUT AT THE HANDS OF THE ONLY SON. We are now in the New Covenant, and Christ is the speaker:

"I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser."

PRELUDE. We have already seen how God's purpose from eternity came to be revealed afterwards [in time]: namely that His people should live up to the standard of the vine and son. Having tried to apply it to the people of Israel with all zeal and effort, God found that they failed due to the crudeness of man's nature which proved unable to be welded to God's nature. God, therefore, sent His only Son already welded to man's nature to raise its capacities up to those of God's nature. The only Son would then gather the people into one and into union with his own self — being the incarnate Son of God. [It follows then that] through the Son, the people would become God's vine out and out and in all truth. "I am the vine, and you are the branches" (Jn. 15:5).

But the Son, becoming flesh, is himself "the true vine." Consequently and inevitably, the branches of the true vine must ab-

solutely be true branches, because they are one with the vine. But “the true vine” is “the Son”: therefore, the branches, i.e. God’s people, would be the “vineyard,” which at the same time is “the Son.” In this way, God worked out His plan, steering across the Old Covenant, after which the divine economy He had set from eternity culminated in [man’s] union with His only Son.

By saying “my Father is the vinedresser,” Christ would have attributed to God the Father all his works in the plan of setting the people on par with the true vine. So, Yahweh, as in times of old, would be the owner of the vine which represents God’s people. The Son would thus have made that vine with his blood and handed it over to God to tend it.

VERIFICATION. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.”

As we have often mentioned before, Christ’s “I am” sayings are a direct proclamation and manifestation of his divinity, of the fact that he is “Yahweh” according to the Old Testament, as “I am he” or “I am the being” is the meaning of God’s proper name, Yahweh. The “he” of the Hebrew should be considered a verb of being rather than a personal pronoun. In the Greek New Testament, this is expressed by the verb “to be” in the first person singular: “I am,” whereas it ought to include as a predicate the third person: “I am he-who-is.” So, the passage which concerns us here should properly be rendered “I am He-who-is the true vine.”

His word “true” (ἀληθινή) is also an attribute of God. Lineage from God is, therefore, attributed to the vine. This means that it is then no longer the rejected vine of Israel but a vine that has been penetrated by a divine and filial element. It is intended to raise the people’s standard, making them worthy of being descended from God. This would consequently make Christ’s people truly God’s people — fit for union with God at the end.

Christ’s words, that he is “the vine,” come to reveal God’s original intent, which existed from eternity: how to make a new covenant

with His people through the blood of His Son. This was revealed in a mystical and very transcendent manner: Jesus mixed wine in a cup and said: "this is the new covenant in my blood ..." then tasted it and gave it to his disciples. This revelation is made clearer in the Gospel of St. Luke with Christ's words during the meal on the eve of the last Passover: 'And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said: "Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes ... This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood ..."' (Lk. 22:17 - 20).

A DESCRIPTION OF THE WAY CHRIST CREATES A HOLY PEOPLE FOR GOD. By stressing how important it is for the branches to abide firmly in the vine (otherwise they would become useless), Christ paved the way [for creating a people for God]: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (Jn. 15:4). The fruit here is the works that glorify God and for which the vine was originally planted.

This is the first step, the beginning of forming God's people, which is metonymically expressed by the vine and the son.

The steadfastness of every believer in Christ is the beginning of the greatest congregating movement and later of the people's union in the Son for God's sake: "that they may all be one ... in us" (Jn. 17:21). Accordingly the abiding (or steadfastness) of any believer in Christ makes him one with all those who abide in Christ. This takes place unawares and without performing any particular work in that direction. This is from where pure and sincere brotherly love springs; namely, the union of every believer [with other believers] in Christ. Thus, all believers become one in Christ through love. Christ continues in the opposite direction by describing the contrary, pointing out the reason why people fail in that respect and completely stray out of his realm: "for apart from me you can do nothing (especially the attempt 'to love one another' is impossible without Christ). If a man

does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned" (Jn. 15:5, 6). The steadfast union of a man [or a woman] in Christ safeguards him against dislocation from the unity of God's people and against His own personal perdition.

"I AM THE VINE AND YOU ARE THE BRANCHES." After this initial teaching on how the condition of the branch depends on reciprocal steadfastness and on its fruitfulness, Christ set forth the wonderful reality of the unity of the vine with the branches. Herein lies a hidden and mystical meaning. For here the branches inevitably take on the attributes of the vine, because when you look at a big vine tree you will only see the branches. The word "I" here is actually hidden and unseen. Looking at a people, who are fruitful and steadfast in Christ, one sees the individuals, each of whom is secretly holding on to Christ within his heart. So, Christ is mystically present to every one of them. Christ, therefore, succeeded in creating for God the Father a great vine that spreads and fills the whole world with Christ hidden within the heart of each one of his individual branches.

THE MYSTERY OF THE BRANCHES ABIDING FIRMLY IN THE VINE. The branch does not firmly abide in the vine from the outside but from inside. The secret lies in the sap, which flows from the vine to the branch — giving it growth, firmness, strength and fruit. It is from this perspective that the mystery of persons abiding in Christ is seen. The sap here is in the cup: wine turned into the true sap of Christ: his *blood*. Whoever is counted worthy in spirit to drink of Christ's blood, that blood runs in him just as the sap runs through the branch to give it strength to bear fruit. Such is the case that the Church counts Communion as part of Confirmation. In short, when the faithful partake of the mystery of the blood, they unite in Christ and become true members of his body on the same pattern as that of the branches on a vine. This is the pattern on which the true vine bearing the mystery of divine existence was formed; or, the holy peo-

ple, one in Christ, bearing the mystery of the perpetual presence of God [in the world] through the Son.

With that, Christ would have fulfilled Yahweh’s old plan, which had been thwarted because man’s nature had become unqualified to be welded to God’s nature and bear the title of son. It is obvious that the success of the plan was fulfilled on the basis of the Son of God’s incarnation. This meant a condescension on God’s part; for it was He who resolved to begin by Himself the process of welding His own nature to human nature. By so doing, He intended to qualify its owner to bear the title of “son” *par excellence*.

GOD’S GOOD PLEASURE FULFILLED IN THE DESIRED VINEYARD AND IN HIS CHOSEN SON. We now go back to the old prophecy of the 80th Psalm predicting what would follow. [We cannot help but] wonder how God succeeded in fulfilling the good pleasure of His heart as He had planned from eternity. Where mankind had failed as represented by the people of Israel, the man Jesus Christ succeeded as being the Son of God. Consider the following passage:

“Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock which Thy right hand planted and upon the son whom Thou hast reared for Thyself . . . But let Thy hand be upon the man of Thy right hand, the Son of man whom Thou hast made strong for Thyself! Then we will never turn back from Thee; give us life, and we will call on Thy name! Restore us, O Lord God of hosts! let Thy face shine, that we may be saved!” (Ps 80:14 – 19).

The reader should note here that the prophet in his definition of the Son mentions “the man of Thy right hand.” This is a mastered prophecy indicating Christ who finally sat at the right hand of God.

The prophet’s vision here penetrates the clouds of the coming thousand years to find the people represented here by God’s chosen Son, who is at once a man on the same plane as mankind. By saying “the man of thy right hand,” the prophet presented him as the one who must necessarily be the Son of God and specifically the Son of man. The prophet then from painful experience asks us not to forsake

the Son chosen by God for Himself in the manner that the people of Israel forsook God: they lost the title of the chosen people and the vineyard was destroyed. But then Jesus Christ the Lord reassures the prophet of a thousand years past by saying: “because I live, you will live also” (Jn. 14:19). This was in answer to the words: “Give us life that we may call on Thy name”:

“In that day you will ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father. I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father” (Jn. 16:26–28).

Jesus fulfilled God’s desire by reconciling man to God: “that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). He bound the people to God with an eternal bond by giving them the spirit of a filial relation to God. Therefore, they became the object of the Father’s good pleasure: “The Father Himself loves you”! And so did Jesus fulfill God’s good pleasure in mankind and was fittingly named a Son, fruitful with the Spirit like the desired vineyard.

Listen to the words of Paul, the new prophet, about the vision that spanned the ages before the creation of the earth:

“Even as He chose us in him (in Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. Having destined 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).

This was the project God had planned from eternity according to His own good pleasure. The implementation of His attempt failed with the people of Israel as did the test of the vineyard and the son. But God would not remain quiet until He had accomplished what He wanted through Jesus Christ, His beloved Son. He fulfilled the New Covenant with the blood of the vine for mankind to stand before God in holiness, praising His glory forevermore.

Thus, it becomes clear to you, dear reader, how God began, before the foundation of the world, the project of the vineyard and the son to the benefit of mankind.

Therefore, God's call for the people of Israel to take on the role of the desired vineyard and that of the first-born son, in which they failed, was not a novelty but the first blueprint for the project conceived from eternity. The project remained suspended until the coming of the true Son, who bore the message of the true vine and gave mankind to drink of the sap of the vine, which at the same time is the blood of the only Son. Therefore, redeemed man bore the structure of the desired vineyard and of the only Son simultaneously. In this way, he made the good pleasure of God's desire from eternity complete, and entered into God's everlasting joy.

"And we are writing this [to you] that your joy may be complete"
(1 Jn 1:4).

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“The Lamb of God”

Ὁ Ἀμνὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ (John 1:29)

A SACRIFICIAL TITLE. “The next day he (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” (Jn. 1:29).

If we cast a quick look at Jesus’ numerous titles, we find that each title proclaims a different trait, message or special relationship that pertains to God on the one hand, and to mankind or creation as a whole on the other hand. For while the title “Son of God” reveals [Christ’s] subjective relationship to God, “Son of man” proclaims a strong relationship to mankind. The latter is a title which Christ took on to hide his messiahship, that is, being the Messiah who came to the world. But at the same time, it reveals the inner relationship that links him to mankind. “The Vine” is a title which reveals a favorite truism of Jesus, that is his special mystical unity with his close friends: “I am the vine, you are the branches” (Jn. 15:5). It is a relationship where it is difficult to discern a line of demarcation between the vine and the branches: so strong and reciprocal is the union! The same goes for “I am the bread of life” (Jn. 6:48), another mystical title which Jesus extremely loved. It aims at the feasibility of offering his body to mankind to eat from it and live. On the same pattern is the title of “Lamb of God.”

In this title, the arrow points sharply to the cross. In divine economy, no function exists for the Lamb but to be sacrificed. Generally speaking, the basic function of an offering in the Old Covenant was

to *cover up* sin. For this reason, John the Baptist was sure to highlight the function of Christ by crying out, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who *takes away* the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). "The Lamb" is then an attribute which defines the power of action of the sacrificial offering in the New Covenant.

Every morning and evening a lamb was offered. On different occasions not only hundreds but thousands of lambs were sacrificed. This was a proof that the lamb of the Old Covenant was insufficient. But now we find John the Baptist clearly pointing to Jesus as one Lamb that is able to take away all the sins of the peoples of the world. How? Here, John the Baptist rendered to the Lamb the unsurpassed divine strength and power with his words: "Behold, the Lamb of *God*, who takes away the sin of the world!" In the Old Covenant, the lamb belonging to people was offered to God, but what is inconceivable here in the New Covenant is that the Lamb belonging to God is offered *to* people or *for* people!

As we are discussing the subject of sacrifices, we must present the reader with a very short description of sacrifices and their role in the Old Covenant with special emphasis on the sacrifice of the lamb.

THE LAMB IN JEWISH OFFERINGS. 1. The first and most important sacrifice in the Old Covenant:

"Now this is what you shall offer upon the altar: two lambs a year old day by day continually. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer in the evening; ... It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you, to speak there to you. There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it (the people) shall be sanctified by My glory" (Ex. 29: 38 - 43).

Notice that nowadays we offer the divine offering at morning mass when we meet with God and listen to His words, to be blessed and sanctified.

The burnt offering was doubled on the Sabbath (Num. 28:9, 10).

This daily burnt offering was the most important offering among the Jews. If for any reason the sacrifice stopped and was not carried out, it would have been the greatest tragedy as at the time when Antiochus Epiphanes destroyed their temple and all the people of Israel reacted with bitter wailing because it meant that God was angry. But the fatal blow and total anger which they have not got rid of up till now happened at the time the offerings ceased for ever on the 17th of July in AD 70, when Jerusalem was besieged and its temple burnt and the people of Israel dispersed all over the world.

2. "At the beginnings of your months you shall offer a burnt offering to the Lord: ... one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish" (Num. 28:11).

3. The Nazirite offering: "And this is the law for the Nazirite, ... and he shall offer his gift to the Lord, one male lamb a year old without blemish ..." (Num. 6:13, 14).

4. The offering for purification: "a lamb a year old for a burnt offering ..." (Lev. 12:6-8).

5. The offering for anointing the altar: "... one male lamb a year old; for a burnt offering ... and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs a year old" (Num. 7:1-83).

6. The offering for the feasts of harvest: "And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the Lord" (Lev. 23:12).

7. The offering for the fiftieth day, the feast of early fruits and the feast of the trumpets: "And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish ...; they shall be a burnt offering to the Lord ... and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings" (Lev. 23:18-19).

8. The offering for the special occasions designated to God such as David's preparations to build the temple: "And they performed sacrifices to the Lord, and on the next day offered burnt offerings to the Lord, a thousand bulls, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs, ..." (1 Chron. 29:21).

9. During the reign of Hezekiah after the sanctification of the altar, he offered seven lambs a year old as a sin offering and two hundred lambs a year old as a thanksgiving offering (2 Chron. 29:21 – 32).

10. The offering for renewal in the days of Josiah: “Then Josiah contributed to the lay people, as passover offerings for all that were present, lambs and kids from the flock to the number of thirty thousand...” (2 Chron. 35:7).

11. The offering for the return from captivity during the times of Ezra the priest was ninety-six rams and seventy-seven lambs (Ezra 8:35).

Our aim in mentioning the above list is to highlight the importance of the lamb offering in the people’s daily relation to God. This shows the great significance of John the Baptist calling out to Jesus: “Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” For it meant the hail of a new covenant that had begun with one sacrifice represented in Jesus, who stood before him. This was an offering to replace all the offerings of the Old Testament that had merely covered or only temporarily hidden the sins of him who presented them to God. As for this Lamb, the offering of himself would remove the sins of the world once and forever.

THE MAIN ELEMENT IN THE SACRIFICES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. The establishment of the system of sacrifices and its importance in worship was laid down by God. It is based on the main fact that “blood is life”: “Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood” (Gen. 9:4); “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life” (Lev. 17:11); “Only be sure that you do not eat the blood; for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh. You shall not eat it; you shall pour it out upon the earth like water” (Deut. 12:23, 24).

The reader must note that our interest in explaining these matters is that these terms and words related to offerings entered the New Testament as they are and for the same value, while their meaning

was elevated to the level of the divine. For the offering in the New Testament is divine in every sense. So that the significance of "blood" as life entered as that of the living soul; as well as the word "atonement," which is the work of the blood, and so is "ransom"; and "the blood of the covenant"; and the word "sacrifice" itself. All these terms entered Christian theology.

THE DIVINE VALUE OF OLD TESTAMENT OFFERINGS. a. The offering in Jewish rites, on the whole, gave mankind the opportunity to meet with God.

b. In the offering, God participates with the giver: man meets God and God also takes part in the offering. As a result, the offering becomes an opportunity for reconciliation and peace between God and mankind. During [the process of offering] man feels he is in an honorary position, because God and mankind share in the flesh and blood of the sacrifice. The rite stipulated that God's share be the small limb of the flesh offered to God as a burnt offering. The rest was to be eaten by the giver of the offering and the priest. As for the blood, all of it had to be poured out on the altar of God.

c. The spiritual value of the offering is that it gives man the tangible opportunity to present himself before God with it or through it. The concept in the Old Testament is that man does not present an offering to God, he advances into the presence of God with his offering. It is the mediator with which one enters God's presence.

d. The continual meeting with God through the offering prods the conscience of man and consequently changes his behavior.

e. It emphasizes the immorality of sin and embeds in the conscience a cautiousness and fear regarding evil as an impediment to pleasing God.

f. Resorting to God always through offerings rouses the spirit of repentance in mankind. It does not allow man to fight alone by himself and shoulder the responsibility of his sins on his own. Resorting to God with offerings gives him the opportunity to express himself and find comfort for his soul.

g. Through an offering, one obtains an inner peace even though it is through material means — which is the reason why such peace is temporary.

h. With an offering, man is given the opportunity to feel he is accepted by God, his sins washed away and the evils cleansed with the blood. But if the sin is repeated, the offering must also be repeated which has made all the rites temporary and of a limited effect.

i. Communal offerings create a feeling of belonging to a community which in turn gives a feeling of security, agreement and pride in the community. It is a social and edifying factor of great importance to purify the spirit and the community to finally attain a unity in faith and life.

j. Whoever presents the offering out of his own possessions and money feels the sense of giving which is the right step towards self-sacrifice.

k. The most important offerings:

THE PASSOVER OF EGYPT [COMMEMORATING] THE CROSSING OVER FROM DEATH TO LIFE AND FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM THROUGH THE BLOOD. There does not exist among the offerings anything resembling the Passover in Egypt and the exodus of the people of Israel. It was the first sacrifice with which God inaugurated His covenant with the people of Israel. The story of the Passover in Egypt is thrilling. It was celebrated at the end of the ten plagues Moses had brought upon Egypt. The whole country had greatly suffered from them, and they abased Pharaoh's pride. Finally, God Himself intervened to rescue the humiliated people from their captivity in Egypt and set them free. God ordered that in every house a lamb should be slaughtered and that the two door posts and lintel of the house should be smeared with its blood:

“For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord” (Ex. 12:12).

As for the houses which had blood on them, they would be passed over, which is the meaning of "the Passover." It was the month of Abib, on the fourteenth day of the month, and so God ordered that it should be considered the first month of the year. "... This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance forever" (Ex. 12:14).

That is the origin of the paschal lamb of the Passover feast. It is called *Pesach* or in Arabic *Baskha*, which means the crossing over, i.e. the crossing of the people from destruction to life, from captivity to freedom through the blood of the lamb.

It is for that reason that when John the Baptist pointed at Jesus saying, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," his words alluded to the coming passover that was to be for saving the world from death to life, from the slavery of sin and Satan to the freedom of the glory of the children of God in Christ.

THE PEOPLE AND THEIR LEADERS' MISUNDERSTANDING AND MISUSE OF THE OFFERINGS. Now that we have given a summary of all the offerings and their divine value, which God asked the people for, we have to mention also the various misconceptions about these offerings and their misuse; matters in which the people of Israel deserved to be strongly rebuked by God through His prophets:

1. With time, the offerings lost their value and changed to become duties with predetermined results. This meant that the offering turned into a compensation of the soul as if it had become a tax which God needed, or as if it were enough to placate Him; whereas its spiritual philosophy, as we have already mentioned, consists not in man giving it to God but in entering with it into His presence. It is a means and not an end. If man gives it only in compensation of himself, he will return from God's presence empty handed. But if he presents himself forward offering it to God, he becomes intimate to God and leaves his presence filled with joy.

2. As a consequence, the people reached the conclusion that the offering was to placate God and that is all, although it does not concern God but concerns the relationship of man to God.

3. The people also came to understand that the value of the offering lay in its slaughter and death, which gradually crept over the minds of many people in the New Covenant concerning the sacrifice of Christ, among whom are even theologians. This idea stands in contrast to what we have previously mentioned that man but enters into [God's presence] with the offering; for God ordered it as such so as to share it with Him who offers as a means of communion with man. This is, in the first place, the correct understanding of the sacrifice of Christ. For through Christ and in him, we have become partners and fellow heirs with God.

4. The people came to believe that with the blood of the sacrifice, once it had been put on the altar, the sin was automatically forgiven, while it is stipulated in the theology of the Old Testament that when the high priest sprinkles the blood of the offering on the mercy seat or *hilasterion*, [which covers] the ark of the covenant, it atones for the sin, which means it only covers it. It covers the one sin the sinner has made. It covers it from God's face. But the effect of the blood does not proceed to cover the following sin. The reason anyway for the countless sacrifices was the inadequacy of an animal's blood to remove sin: "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). The call of John the Baptist describing Jesus, "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," was a new event of outstanding power which the rites of the Old Covenant had yet to know.

5. Finally, the offerings had lost their divine spiritual value as the people belittled them and doubted their meaning and power because all the priests and teachers had come to neglect the spirit of the Old Covenant and the true worship of God. Thus, the offerings and all religiousness reached a dead end along with perdition and a remoteness from God. The offerings became the opium of the conscience and an ersatz for true godliness.

GOD’S REJECTION OF THE OFFERINGS IN THEIR OLD FORM. As the people and their leaders degenerated and were unable to reach God’s true objective, blind to the significance of the offerings and the principles of worship, the prophets, since the beginning of sixth and seventh century before Christ, set out to proclaim God’s displeasure in very strong words:

Amos (5:21 – 27): “I hate, I despise your feasts, ... Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. ... ‘Did you bring to Me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You shall take up Sakkuth your king, and Kaiwan your star-god, your images, which you made for yourselves; therefore, I will take you into exile beyond Damascus,’ says the Lord ...”

Hosea (6:6, 7): “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings. But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.”

Isaiah (1:11 – 15): “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies — I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.”

Micah (6:7, 8): “Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? ... He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Jeremiah (7:9-11, 21): “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal... and then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’ — only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? ... Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh.”

Jeremiah (31:31 – 34): “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ... for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW COVENANT. “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

The Lamb mentioned here by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God is in the Church the paschal lamb as proclaimed by the Apostle Paul in a loud voice: “For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7). There is no doubt that John the Baptist, his eyes wide open, saw him slaughtered on the tree of the cross carrying in his flesh the sins of the world. As the Bible says, “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” (1 Cor. 14:32). That is the reason for which John the Baptist named him the Lamb. No other prophet had seen him or spoken of him as the slaughtered Lamb of God except Isaiah. He saw him meekly being led to the slaughter with God laying all our sins on him. Because Isaiah had mentioned that God was pleased to put him to grief (Is. 53:10), John the Baptist realized that he was undoubtedly the Lamb of God.

As for the Apostle Peter, whom Christ opened his mind to understand the Scriptures, he saw the Lamb slaughtered before the foundation of the world according to the Father's economy, the great plan of salvation and the prepared work of redemption:

"You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake" (1 Peter 1:18 – 20).

The Church fulfilled Isaiah's lamb through the Spirit to be Jesus. [This is evident when we read that] Philip the deacon was asked by a eunuch, a minister of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, who while reading the book of Isaiah stopped at the point: "As a sheep led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth" (Acts 8:32).

"And the eunuch said to Philip, 'about whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture, he told him the good news of Jesus" (Acts 8: 34, 35).

As for the Gospel of John, it makes room for Christ to speak of himself as the eternal paschal lamb in such revealing words: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (Jn. 6:54); "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him" (Jn. 6:56). Jesus thus proved that he is truly the Passover of eternal life.

It is obvious from the above-mentioned that the sinner does not offer his sacrifice to God, but steps forward to God with his sacrifice. When applied to the offering of Christ, the congruence here is paramount. For the blood of Christ also transports us from the death of sin (the destructive angel) to a life of righteousness through Christ, and from the bondage to Satan (pharaoh) to the freedom of the glory of God's children which is nothing other than the ransom. Christ redeemed us with his blood that we might become his own.

It, thus, becomes established that Christ is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

THE LAMB AND THE CHURCH. This relationship is the highest mystical status of the Lamb of God. It is the relationship between the Lamb and the faithful (the Church). According to the Book of Revelation, the Church is the Bride of the Lamb.

The Apostle Paul’s words are, therefore, true: “I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband (the Lamb)” (1 Cor. 11:2). This is the final revealing condition of the relationship between Christ (the Lamb) and the faithful (the Church). In the end, the Church is wedded to Christ in the same way as a virgin is wedded to her husband but in a holy manner purified from sex. It is expressed in the union: “you are in me and I in you.” It is a union which is mutually joined by the bond of divine love: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water (baptism) with the word (the Gospel) that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot ... that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25 – 27). The Apostle Paul then elevates the meaning of the union between Christ and the faithful to the standard of “the one body”: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:31, 32).

Yet, in another place, he describes the position of the Church in relation to God as an acquisition gained by God for Himself as well: “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which He obtained with the blood of His own Son” (Acts 20:28). The reader must note here that the Church is the bride of Christ, which God obtained for His Son, to enter His own home.

THE CHURCH IS THE LAMB'S BRIDE IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION. When the final revelation of Christ's kingdom is completed, the place of the faithful, who are the Church, in relation to Christ, will be immediately proclaimed:

"Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder-peals,¹ crying, 'Hallelujah!' For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage²² supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God'" (Rev. 19:6-9).

Fortunate reader, this blessing awaits you.

OUR FAITH AND HOPE IN THE SACRIFICE OF THE LAMB. After having given your commandments with their length, breadth and height, who can fulfill them?

You, you have offered yourself as a sacrifice to be our succor, strength and fulfillment.

He who has failed in loving a brother or an enemy, your offering runs to his rescue to be a compensation.

He whom holiness is too high for his stature, your sacrifice takes over to fill him with holiness.

He who was overcome by his passion, your sacrifice makes him stand blameless and acceptable to your Father.

He whose repentance was difficult, is not your sacrifice sufficient a repentance and you the guarantor?

Your blood which has raised us from death, does it not at least raise us above our shortcomings?

¹ Creation exults as the time of liberation has come.

² As the Arabic hymn says:

When will this hope be fulfilled and the time of the marriage arrive,
When my eyes see the glory of the Lamb and I hear the voices of praise.

Or why did God chose us in you before the foundation of the world, to be saints, before Him, loved and without blame?

Lamb of God, bestow me with your gentleness and meekness.

Grant me your stillness at the hand of he who shears me,

Grant me your silence under the knife of he who slays me, that I may share at the supper of your divine marriage. For "Blessed are those invited to the supper of the Lamb's marriage!" (Rev. 19:9).

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“I Am the Resurrection and the Life”

Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ (John 11:25)

Thank God! For with these words, which were spoken by Jesus Christ the Son of God, death and the times of crying over the dead have come to an end among the children of God. These words themselves have set an end to the definition of disasters, misfortunes and sorrows in the world of God’s children, because the spirit of resurrection surpassed them with eternal life following. These words were said by Jesus before he offered himself up to judgment, the cross and death. This renders Christ’s resurrection on the third day no more a new event to him, because with these words, resurrection becomes his nature and eternal life his life. Christ told this statement to Martha when she said to him about Lazarus her dead brother, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (Jn. 11:24). This she said in answer to Christ’s words, “Your brother will rise again” (Jn. 11:23). Jesus was affected and said that he was the resurrection and the life. Christ proclaims here his power in transcending time; for “the last day” is the same as the present day, because time surrenders and does not exist to him whose nature is eternal. Christ took that which is God’s concerning the resurrection from the dead at the last day and entered the world with it to implement it for the Father. He who believes in him will surely see the resurrection and the life. This was the best expression of the power of his divinity in front of which death, in all its forms and circumstances, cannot withstand.

We, therefore, find that Christ himself explains his words that he is the resurrection and the life thus: "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (Jn. 11:25, 26). Which means that death does not exist for him who lives with Christ. How can a person who clings to the resurrection die? He will surely live and surpass death as if he had not died, because he carries his resurrection within him. In the same way, if a man has gained eternal life, how can one say that he died? The words in the prayers of the Church for the dead are true: "It is not death, but a passage for your servants." Yes, a passage it is from a temporary, superficial life to a true eternal one across the return of dust to dust. At the present, the earthly flesh obstructs light and eternal life from our spiritual eyes. As soon as we get rid of the flesh and consign it to the dust, we will see light and life.

Christ corrected Martha's concept on the resurrection. She had learned from the Rabbis and Pharisees that there is a resurrection of the flesh at the last day. But by the coming of Christ to the world bearing the resurrection and eternal life, the resurrection is now present and eternal life has its doors wide open to those who believe in Christ and accept the spirit of resurrection. It is the reason for which he said: "I am the resurrection and the life" as a salvational fact, and not merely as credal words, which exists at the present to remove from the Christian the fear of death and the grief and pain at the loss of family members and friends. For with the entry of the resurrection through faith into the world of believers in Christ, death ceased to exist. The sorrow and cries over the dead became laughter among their spirits in heaven and ignorance, for which believers will be held accountable. As the Bible says: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O Sheol, where is thy victory?" ... But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:54 - 57).

In Christ's words, "I am the resurrection and the life," the fact of Christ's divinity is proclaimed. For it is well known in the faith that

it is God who will resurrect the flesh and give it life. Christ's words here that he is "the resurrection and the life" means that he from now resurrects and gives life like God, which was considered to be God's prerogative at the end of times. Thus, Christ proclaims here his transcendence over time by introducing the resurrection and the element of eternal life as a pledge affecting from now on the essence of the life of believers without waiting till the end of times.

The Apostle Paul comments on this fact saying: "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1 AV). That is to say that those who are in Christ transcend the expected day of judgment: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:14); "He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col. 1:13). It is clear that these are firmly established facts of faith as we have undergone death with Christ and have been resurrected with him. We, therefore, are no longer under sin or condemnation but live with Christ and the Father in the fellowship of eternal life, which we gained through the redemption and salvation that have been fulfilled:

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:1 - 4).

Consequently, our interest and solace has become in the above, which means that we have penetrated death and transcended the present life through faith. We are risen with him and are seated with him in heaven. Christ made it clear when he said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (Jn. 5:24).

With these words, Christ does not cancel the forthcoming resurrection nor future judgment but proclaims that he descended from heaven

to begin it here and now. Because he who came to forgive sins definitely removes condemnation. He who came to abolish death had inevitably to give the resurrection and life immediately and from now on.

In order to confirm to whomever believes in the last day that he who gives the spirit of resurrection here is he himself who will resurrect them from the dead at the last day, Christ said straightforwardly and indubitably:

“And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:39, 40).

Therefore, we are now before a divine plan of great love, mercy and justice — all together. In order that we may not be taken by surprise on the last day of judgment when no one will be saved and every mouth will be stopped — judgment being according to everyone’s works — God took the initiative and sent His only Son bearing resurrection and eternal life within his very being. He offered him to bear judgment instead of mankind and to fulfill the punishment of death within ourselves and raise us from eternal death by his resurrection and quicken us with his life. We would thus have undergone judgment before [the day of] judgment and have been freed from eternal damnation and received eternal life as a pledge from now. The Apostle Paul saw it and hailed it with love: “There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh (still), but after the Spirit (inevitably)” (Rom. 8:1 AV). Thus, we realize for sure that when Christ says: “I am the resurrection and the life,” he proclaims to everyone who believes in him that he has traversed the last day and passed through judgment earning innocence and justification by the salvation fulfilled by Christ. How glorious God is!

It is a unique opportunity to be saved from eternal damnation and to enter the era of grace freely instead of wrath and punishment: “the Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. He who

believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him" (Jn. 3:35, 36).

After he said to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life," he raised Lazarus, her brother, who had rot in the grave, as he had been dead for four days. He said to him, "Lazarus, come out," and the dead man came out alive. The resurrection Christ effected was a sort of new creation as the body had decomposed and was infested by worms. Creation from dust or from nothing is even easier than restoring a mangled and fetid body back to life. Because in this instance, the creation annuls all the aspects of decay the minute it regains life. With this allusion, Christ proclaims the power he has given to the resurrection to annul all the sinful acts which ruined the life of man, thus expressing the complete removal of condemnation. How glorious God is!

Christ offered the resurrection of Lazarus as a living and visible model of what he exactly performs on the invisible plane. For when we received the spirit of resurrection and life, all the features of corruption secretly fell from us and the surrounding works of sin dissolved and disintegrated without being felt either by us or by others. Thereupon condemnation also disappeared never to be seen again. And just as they unbound Lazarus from the bandages of death and released him from his shroud, so has the resurrection of Christ released us. And as Christ ordered "... let him go," we too, in the same manner, became free to move even to the highest heaven. How glorious God is!

"So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin (i.e. surpass it) and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11).

Maybe the greatest expression on the indwelling of the spirit of resurrection into man's very heart is Christ's words: "So he who eats me will live because of me" (Jn. 6:57). This happened when we entered into fellowship with Christ in his death on the cross and his resurrection on the third day. Consequently, through faith, we became with Christ and in him. But when we ate of his flesh and drank of his blood, it was as if we had really eaten resurrection and drank life.

Therefore, the words “I am the resurrection and the life” do not in any way concern Christ but deeply concern us. Christ offered it to us as a divine act that penetrated our souls and raised us from the death of sin to live to God.

But there exists a fundamental condition to Christ’s words, which was the only question he asked Martha before raising her brother from the dead. It was also the same question he inevitably asked before offering us his resurrection and a share in his life: “Do you believe this?” The exemplary answer, on which basis Lazarus was raised and we will be raised, was: “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (Jn. 11:26, 27).

We say again that when Christ says, “Do you believe?” he does not require more than believing his words. If we believe his words, then we will immediately receive all he has promised. Believing God is a matter of the heart that is inflamed by love, joy and hope: “Did I not tell you that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?” (Jn. 11:40). Faith, therefore, is a window we can open with the belief of our hearts to see God’s glory and all the works he has done.

In a previous chapter, Christ uncovers the mystery of Lazarus’ resurrection and at the same time uncovers the mystery of our resurrection if we desire it to happen: “Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (Jn. 5:25).

For sure, the voice of the Son of God penetrates the ears even though they be decomposed and eaten by worms and turned to dust; for it is a voice to which death succumbs, and [consequently] everyone who is under the power of death. Lazarus heard Christ’s cry from the depth of the abyss and immediately put on the flesh and rose. This is one of the most wonderful examples of Christ’s works in those who believe in him and now love him: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (Jn. 5:24).

Here, the ability to obtain Christ’s promise for receiving eternal life crystallizes. It depends on the fitness of the ear to hear Christ’s

voice and words: "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word" (Jn. 8:43).

The qualification enabling one to hear Christ is actually an awareness or an enlightened consciousness. The inception of an enlightened consciousness is based on one's inner decision to be devoted to the word of God. To a person who has devoted all his understanding and interest to discipleship to the word of the Gospel, the mystery of Christ's words is deciphered and the Holy Spirit comes to complete the mind's enlightenment in understanding that which is written or heard.

The Scribes and Pharisees took Christ's words lightly while paying great attention to hunt for mistakes in his words or accusing him of departing from the law or tradition. They were thus totally unable to listen to him gratifyingly or adequately and, therefore, could understand none of his words.

As for him who follows the words of Christ with a readiness to listen in faith to all his sayings, Christ promises him "... eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (Jn. 5:24). We are positive we can explain it to the reader in a few words: he who is faithful to Christ, with the devotion of love, making the Bible his most cherished book, will gain a personal closeness to Christ which will end by a constant feeling of God's presence. Accepting the resurrection is living [perpetually] in such a state. It is the pledge of eternal life. It is the removal of the yoke of judgment from one's neck without a price. How glorious God is!

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD AND ITS RELATION TO HIS WORDS "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE." We must note that the "resurrection," an act fulfilled by Christ when he arose from the dead on the third day, is an act that does not actually concern God. For God does not die and, consequently, does not rise from the dead. It is, therefore, an act that essentially concerns mankind. He who rises from death must have accepted death which Christ as man had accepted in the flesh trusting in the power of eternal life that existed in him being divine. It should not, therefore, be

said that Christ arose from the dead, but it must be said that he arose from the dead *in the flesh*, because he died in the flesh according to his will and arose from the dead according to his will.

Therefore, when Christ said, "I am the resurrection," he said it out of the fact of his incarnation, "by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:21). Had not the Son of God become incarnate, he would not have been able to die nor rise from the dead. Therefore, Christ's words "I am the resurrection" are in the sense of the eternal life that is his because of his divinity and which is in the flesh with moreover the transcendent divine power that is able to abolish death along with all its actions. To Christ, the "resurrection" is the result of the power of his victory over death and then his manifestation of the eternal life that is his. When Christ says, "I am the resurrection and the life," this springs out of a fact he has actually fulfilled in his flesh when he annulled death from the flesh and gave it the power of eternal life: and thus it arose. Christ fulfilled his victory over death in the flesh so that he could exercise this power over death and life through giving the resurrection and eternal life to whomever believed in him and cleaved to him.

The narrative of the cross, the grave and the third day, i.e. death and resurrection, is not an episode in the life of Christ but a narrative of the new man who has been given the nature of eternal life. Christ's words "I am the resurrection and the life" are but the reality of the new man. It is as though Christ had uttered them in the tongue of redeemed mankind.

The Gospel verifies this fact. It regards Christ's resurrection as actually the first movement from which and through which resurrection runs into the veins of humanity which would accept [Christ's] resurrection and believe in it:

"... that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23).

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:20, 21).

"He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent" (Col. 1:18).

It is clearly evident that Christ inaugurated the resurrection from the dead in the flesh through his divine power which conquered death and through eternal life which is his nature. Next started the resurrection from the dead, because Christ offered what belongs to him to whomever believed in him. Thus reigned Christ over all the living he had raised: "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living" (Rom. 14:9). Such is the meaning of Christ becoming the head of the Church which is his flesh: "Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power ..." (Rev. 20:6).

Paul the Apostle, addressing those awaiting the second resurrection, described the soft voice that would circulate among the dead to raise them, as if they had been in a state of sleep, to see the light of Christ. But He was also speaking to those who were overcome by the sleep of the present world and had entered into the unconsciousness of the worries of this age so that their eyes could no more see the light of Christ: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light" (Eph. 5:14).

St. John the Apostle offers us a clear picture on the essence of the second resurrection with his words: "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears [at the forthcoming resurrection] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn. 3:2). This means that at the forthcoming resurrection we will gain a total vision, understanding and consciousness with which to see Christ the true God as he completely is in his divine manifestation. This complete revelation of Christ will be due to our having gained, in the coming resurrection, the nature emanating from Christ like that of an image from its original. All that belongs to Christ will be ours as well so that we will see him as we see our own selves. The proportion between the actual resurrection and

the future resurrection is the same as the ratio between the present “it does not yet appear what we shall be,” and the latter “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” It is the resurrection of complete manifestation, with Christ also as its source, i.e. Christ will also be as he is the basis of our first resurrection, meaning that we were raised with his resurrection or in his resurrection, so that if Christ had not risen from death we would never have risen even to eternity. But our manifestation of the glory of his resurrection and our vision of the splendor of his glorious divinity was very limited because of our present confinement in the flesh and its very severe restraint. Therefore, when we gain in the coming resurrection an open vision and widening consciousness we will see his resurrection as it really is in the full splendor of its glory.

“I AM THE LIFE” (Ζωή). That which is meant here is “eternal life,” but the word “life” is sufficient because in theology life in the flesh is not acknowledged as life because it is overcome by death. Life in the flesh is not considered more than a life in death by God and those living in the spirit or, as Christ declared in the parable of the prodigal son, “for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Lk. 15:24) and as in a statement of the Apostle Paul concerning the self-indulgent woman who “is dead even while she lives” (1 Tim. 5:6). The true “life” is the life in God, the life of whoever lives with God in the spirit, because he obtains his life from God: “and as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed” (Acts 13:48).

For that reason, when Christ was raised from the dead and his eternal life revealed, it was said that death could by no means approach him any more: “For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him” (Rom. 6:9).

The resurrection being manifested, eternal life in Christ was also manifested, proving beyond a doubt that he is the Son of God: “designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4).

The essential characteristic of eternal life is that it is God's life. Eternal life was introduced to create the relationship between God and mankind in accordance with a divine promise God gave to mankind through Jesus Christ: "Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:1); also, "And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life" (1 Jn. 5:11, 12); "And this is what he has promised us, eternal life" (1 Jn. 2:25).

It is obvious that we did not know anything about eternal life nor did we think that God would give it to us in His Son. But the resurrection from the dead which Christ obtained by his overcoming of death is that which made eternal life break forth in the world of mankind as St. John perceived: "the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us" (1 Jn. 1:2).

Later, St. John defined it as Christ himself: "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 Jn. 5:20).

It is truly wonderful that our knowledge of eternal life should be the direct result of his incarnation, death on the cross and then his resurrection which made eternal life break forth that we might see it, feel it and get to know and share it for the first time in the history of mankind. For us to know eternal life and gain a share of it, God paid a price, a very high price, which was the death of His Son on the cross.

With the death of Christ we were reconciled to God, our sins forgiven and freed from the previous judgment that had befallen us. So that through his life, as the Apostle Paul said, we gained salvation freely when he gave us his life: "For if while we were enemies (through sin) we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Rom. 5: 10). The eternal life that is in Christ has become the source of all blessings and gifts. We live and enjoy the promise of it, which

God fulfills according to the degree of our closeness to Him through our love and faithfulness: "For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:3, 4). Our eternal life is now hidden in Christ, and Christ's life has become mystically our own: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). For the life we now live is not that of the flesh as we were invited to share in the eternal life which has made our lives truly that of Christ and all the blessings we received have emanated from his overflowing life.

When Christ says, "I am the way and the life," it is as if he were saying: I am your Savior from death and corruption, I am your life and glory and the giver of God's love, joyful hope and the mystery of eternal life.

With the resurrection, as the Apostle Peter says, we were born to a permanent living hope: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). In other words: with the resurrection of Christ from the dead, mankind was registered in God's books to a new eternal life springing from the self-same life in which the Son and Savior was resurrected. It is a new type of creation on every side. With this eternal life, which is in Christ, we openly entered a fellowship and inheritance of immortality with the Son: "and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4). As those who have obtained the pledge of life here are waiting for the hidden treasures of mercy prepared for them by God: "Keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21). The eternal life in Christ and consequently along with it the inheritance were given to us: "Bestowing honor on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7). From now on, eternal life has a role: "He that would love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile" (1 Pet. 3:10).

The Apostle Paul finds that the eternal life to which we were invited is in itself the aim of our struggle and pursuit, and man is required to hold on to it: "Fight the fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called" (1 Tim. 6:12). Eternal life is a living and realistic aim which we must hold on to whether here or in the hereafter: "Thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed" (1 Tim. 6:19).

We consequently note that the eternal life in the past was a promise, and in the present is love, joy and a reason to fight for faith to firmly hold on to. It is the future of the eternal life that can be seen from now, as it starts in Christ from this life and will remain forever after being disturbed by death for a while to resume its existence forever unhindered in Christ: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty (here in this world) I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. He who conquers shall have this heritage..." (Rev. 21:6, 7). Eternal life in this world here is a great consolation and there in the other world an eternal joy: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful (here) over a little, I will set you (there) over much; enter into the joy of your master (eternal life)" (Mt. 25:21). The eternal life there exists in glory and bequeaths glory: "as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed... And when the chief Shepherd is manifested, you will obtain the unfading crown of glory... the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ..." (1 Tim. 5:1, 4, 10).

Due to the relation between eternal life and the resurrection the offer of eternal life necessarily starts from now, in present times. Because the resurrection of Christ occurred during present times and the eternal life entered into the present times of mankind. At the present, we are undoubtedly reckoned as having resurrected with Christ and consequently as a pledge obtained eternal life now. But it is the flesh which at the present hinders the manifestation of the infinity of eternal life.

The Apostle Paul underlined that those who have acquired the pledge of eternal life at the present have the fragrant aroma of Christ: "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from (eternal) life to (eternal) life" (2 Cor. 2:15, 16).

The Apostle Paul also emphasizes that the word of the Gospel is the word of Christ, the word of eternal life. At the present, we deal with it in all its depth. It is the word of the Gospel which links us to eternal life in a joyful living reality: "Holding fast 'the word of life' so that in the day of Christ I may be proud..." (Phil. 2:16). "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." It is the angel of the Lord who uttered these words to the Apostles in prison (Acts 5:20). Christ emphatically confirmed these words: "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (Jn. 6:63). The disciples heard, believed and witnessed, and their words became the faith of the Church according to which we live: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68).

THE APOSTLE PAUL AFFIRMS THE PRESENT EXISTENCE OF ETERNAL LIFE: "... God who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of His own purpose and the grace which He gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:1, 2).

This is not new but is a calling that has existed from eternity: "...and their knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago" (Titus 1:1, 2).

Paul the Apostle affirms that having died with Christ, we inevitably live with Christ and Christ lives in us. This is eternal life through Christ: "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

(eternal life) by faith in the Son of God ..." (Gal. 2:20); "But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:10).

A correspondence exists between gaining life and the amount we bear of the burdens of faith and witnessing:

"always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live (eternal life) we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:10, 11).

Eternal life is known to be a gift from God: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23); "But now that you have been set free from sin (through the salvation that has been accomplished and the resurrection) and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life" (Rom. 6:22).

It is St. John who associated eternal life with divine light. From the beginning of his Gospel, we get to know that the light that shone on the world with Christ's coming was the eternal life that is in Christ: "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (Jn. 1:4). Because the light is the light of awareness and the manifestation of God as God is Himself "the Light." Christ's coming with the eternal life in him was initially for the manifestation of God, because God is "the Life." God's commandment is itself eternal life: "And I know that His commandment is eternal life" (Jn. 12:50).

Christ, having given us God's commandments and His love, gave us eternal life. He himself is the life, the bread of life, the water of life, the light of life. All these attributes denote one sense through which only he reveals God and that he is God's revelation. His words are inevitably spirit and life, and it is he who has the words of eternal life. For us to live through him did the Father send Him: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 Jn. 4:9). That we might live through him proves to us that the gift of light and

life is fulfilled from the present and that the eternal life is effective from now. This is very clear in the words of the Gospel: "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). To emphasize that this concerns the present without doubt Christ also says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life" (Jn. 5:24). This promise concerns the present and the future at the same time, and is confirmed by St. John: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:14).

But what is really strange and depends on our acceptance now of the eternal life is that we must at the same time have accepted those matters of the hereafter with eternal life, because God has placed them in the same place which Christ revealed and made us enter. So that he who has gone to one will go to the other: "Truly, truly, I say to you, the [last] hour is coming, and *now* is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (Jn. 5:25). This was actually fulfilled with Lazarus' resurrection confirming that in Christ himself there is life, and that he truly is the future resurrection and the eternal life. This fact resulted in the answer to the enigma, which he set openly with his words: "he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live," because he is eternal life, "and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (Jn. 11:25, 26). In both cases, the meaning is the same, for he who believes in the eternal life will live it out, and he who lives it out will never die even though he dies. Christ explains it in another passage: "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him (the grace of the Spirit) will never thirst, the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn. 4:14). At the same level, he is "the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (Jn. 6:51).

In consequence, all Christ's promises concerned with the giving of eternal life are not devoted to eschatological times or to the dis-

tant future but concern the present moment here and now, if accomplished with absolute faith. But the beginning is here, and the continuation is there. For the resurrection was fulfilled in present times but will be completed and revealed in the end: "and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn. 6:40). The exemption from judgment begins now: Go, "your sins are forgiven" (Mt. 9:2) and will be completed at the end. Even salvation begins now, to be completed at the end because the coming of the Son of God in the flesh to reveal God to us is considered an established eschatological event. With the coming of Christ, the first resurrection was fulfilled and eternal life was given as a true beginning to be lived out: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). Eternal life is God's nature. If it is present now, it will be present eternally, but its manifestation in us and its action now are limited because of our present confinement to time and the flesh.

We proclaim the eternal life that is in us and which we are living now, by brotherly love without deception or hypocrisy as in St. John's words, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:14). Eternal life is revealed in us with true joy: "These things (the words of eternal life) I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (Jn. 15:11); "but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn. 16:22); "these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (Jn. 17:13).

Once more fortunate reader:

"these things I speak in the world that they may have my joy ..."

"that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves."

This is "eternal life."

As we have seen, in the future resurrection, we will end up by seeing Christ as he is in the full glory of his divinity, because in that resurrection we will become like him. The same goes for eternal life; in the future resurrection, eternal life will be revealed to us as it exists in the Father and in the Son, because we will live it out as it is. St. John

the Apostle says: "and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ," then comments on the effectiveness of this fellowship thus: "that your joy may be complete" (1 Jn. 1:3, 4). He is speaking about our present fellowship which has a limited view point during which we cannot see what it will be like when there. Nevertheless, this fellowship and joy will there be full and complete: "Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which Thou hast given me ..." (Jn. 17:24).

December 1994

“The Desire of All Nations”

“And I will shake all nations, and
the desire of all nations shall come”

(Haggai 2:7 KJV)

The entire verse as it appears in the Prophet Haggai is as follows:

- 6 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it [is] a little while,
and I will shake the heavens, and the earth,
and the sea, and the dry [land];
- 7 And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall
come:
and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.
- 8 The silver [is] mine, and the gold [is] mine, saith the LORD of
hosts.
- 9 The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former,
saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace,
saith the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:6–9 KJV)

The Greek translation known as the Septuagint does not use the expression “the desire of all nations” as a title for Christ. Rather, it opts for a more ambiguous expression. However, if we refer to the Latin Vulgate, which is closer to the Hebrew, we find that “the desire of all nations” is the expression of choice.

“I WILL SHAKE THE HEAVENS, AND THE EARTH, AND THE SEA, AND THE DRY LAND; AND...ALL NATIONS”: This earthquake, which occurs in the heavens and earth and all the nations they contain, is a prophetic allusion to a radical change in the way God deals with man. Nature will participate in this change as it is liberated from its state of slavery to corruption as a result of Adam’s sin. As it is written: “Cursed is the ground because of you...” (Gen. 3:17). This change will come about when mankind’s salvation is completed and he enters into his heavenly dwelling.

This took place for the first time in history when God descended to speak with Moses from the peak of Mt. Sinai. “And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly... Now when all the people perceived the thunderings and the lightnings and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off...” (Ex. 19:18; 20:18). In this way, the Old Testament inaugurates nature’s celebration of God’s descent to speak to His people. This is the beginning of God’s old covenant with his people.

In the same fashion, we see nature celebrating the advent of the “desire of all nations.” The heavens are also involved in the celebration because he comes from above — from the heavens. Also, “all the nations” participate in the festivity by virtue of the earthquake that shakes the nations. However, this event is not viewed in human, visible terms, but in spiritual terms. The “desire of all nations” is none other than the Son of God who came in secrecy and peace without public recognition: “Truly, Thou art a God who hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior” (Is. 45:15).

Indeed, we observe that the signs of the end time are displayed in much the same fashion (Mk. 13:8, 24–26). These signs accompany the Son of Man’s completion of the work of salvation. At his final appearing, he will be revealed as God, coming in glory with the saints. All creation will be shaken, including the earth, the sun, the moon

and the stars. This is the final celebration of man. Nature will participate in this emancipation as the curse is lifted from it.

“THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS”: This particular title of Christ is unique in that it describes Christ’s role in regard to the nations in our day. The word “desire” suggests an intense love — an intimate relationship of heart, soul and spirit with this one who is Savior and Redeemer. The Prophet Isaiah foretells something of the ardor and passion which possesses those who love Christ. Listen to his words: “Thy memorial name is the desire of our soul. My soul yearns for Thee in the night, my spirit within me earnestly seeks Thee” (Is. 26:8–9). Isaiah is not speaking of himself but prophetically. He is speaking of a future reality when Christ will be the desire of the nations. If this prophecy was for Haggai and Isaiah, it is also for us. Indeed, it speaks for us if we are only willing to speak the mystery of Christ in truth.

CHRIST’S POSITION AS THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS: Christ himself sanctifies this title and encourages its use. Listen as he says, “The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of man . . .” (Lk. 17:22). While the verse refers specifically to the desire for his “days,” the clear meaning of the passage is a desire for him. He is directing our hearts and minds to consider the depth of relationship which is to bind us to him. It is difficult to find him if we wade in waters outside the sea of desire for his love. In order to find him, we must be motivated by a passionate desire to see him. He will not be found apart from the deep recesses of a desiring heart. He who grasps this mystery has learned the best of man’s secrets and more. Listen as he speaks about his Gospel and his words: “Truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear” (Mt. 13:17–16).

What the prophets and righteous men longed for — to see Christ and hear his words — they did not receive. We who believe in Christ

have received the Word made both visible and audible. This vision and hearing is the meaning of the word “desire.” Seeing and hearing this “Christ who is desired” has become our right. It is also clear that the vision of Christ has become a vision of faith which is a higher level than the physical sense of sight. Concerning his words, his Gospel has been granted to us. Therefore, Christ has fulfilled the title assigned to him by Haggai centuries ago (520 BC). Indeed, he is the desire of all nations by faith and the Gospel. Faith makes his person present. The Gospel reveals to us his word.

Concerning the prophets who desired but neither saw nor heard, perhaps the clearest example is Daniel. We read in his prophecy that when he desired to know the mystery of Christ and the end, he was told:

“Go your way Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand. And from the time that the continual burnt offering is taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he who waits and comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days” [in other words “until the coming of Christ”] (Dan. 12:9–12).

After Christ declares: “many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it,” he applies this word to us when he says: “But blessed are your eyes because they see.” This is the same blessing pronounced in the book of Daniel on those who are to be present at the coming of Christ.

After this, the book of Daniel describes Christ in the following terms: “To bring in everlasting righteousness... to anoint the most holy, ... an anointed one, a prince” (Dan. 9:24–25). This is one of the most beautiful and most powerful revelatory titles of Christ. He alone is righteous. He is the seal of all visions and the end of all prophecies. He alone is holy, Christ the prince of peace.

Not only did Daniel prophesy about the coming of Christ. Other prophets and righteous ones spoke these inspired words:

We hear Jacob the Righteous, the father of Patriarchs, declare: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah (the tribe of Judah), nor a lawgiver from between his feet (a king who orders and establishes), until Shiloh comes; and unto him [shall] the gathering of the people [be]" (Gen. 49:10 KJV).

Notice that a prophecy given as early as the book of Genesis clearly relates Christ's rule to the nations. James' soul also desired to see this "Shiloh," of whom Scripture spoke. But he did not see or hear.

Consider also the prophet Balaam, "who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, but having his eyes uncovered" (Num. 24:16). He says: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh; a star shall come forth out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17). Balaam also had an intense desire to see this one whom he beheld as a star who lit up the sky. Still, he neither saw nor heard.

Isaiah also says: "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (God with us)" (Is. 7:14 KJV). Through this astounding mystery, Isaiah reveals certain facets of Christ's advent. How could his soul not long to see and hear Emmanuel? He cries out, "Truly, Thou art a God who hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Savior" (Is. 45:15). His eyes grew dull before the vision was fulfilled. His ears were not allowed to hear it.

Isaiah himself speaks of this one who is coming: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'" (Is. 9:6). Isaiah, as well, longed to see and hear that divine Son. However, he neither heard nor saw him.

The inspired word also speaks of Christ as a vineyard through Isaiah: "A pleasant vineyard, sing of it! I, the LORD, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest anyone harm it, I guard it night and day" (Is. 27:2, 3). Imagine how great was Isaiah's desire to see that vineyard and know who it was. Still, he did not see or hear.

Isaiah speaks again: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert" (Is. 35:5–6 KJV). Isaiah longed to see that one who would cause rivers to spring forth in the desert, but he did not see or hear.

Isaiah calls out yet again, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law" (Is. 42:1–4).

Isaiah's words are for the comfort of coming generations, yet he himself does not grasp the depth of the words he speaks.

Daniel the Prophet also says, "Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand ... Blessed is he who waits ..." (Dan. 12:10, 12). Shiloh is hated at his coming, thus fulfilling the prophetic word that the wicked shall not understand. The star of Jacob appeared but they despised him and even produced a counterfeit of him (i.e., Bar-Cochba, d. AD 135). The son of the virgin came. They merely said, "We know his father and mother," and they began to look for an occasion to stone him. A son was born to Judah who did the works of God. They said, "He does these things by the prince of the demons." He came who causes waters to break forth in the desert. He opened blind eyes and deaf ears. The lame and paralyzed carried their beds and walked. They asked, "Are you he who is to come, or do we wait for another?" He came who did works of truth. They wore him down, judged him and killed him. However, the wise ones were purified. Their clothes were made white in the blood of the lamb. They were cleansed by the Spirit. These received the blessing from the mouth of

Christ because they saw and heard in truth. Their desire was fulfilled. These are the ones of whom the prophets and seers spoke: “It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things . . . things into which angels long to look” (1 Pet. 1:12).

It is truly amazing that the “desire of all nations” is also the one desired by the angels. Is it not because he is Lord of heaven and earth whose “speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable” (Song of Solomon 5:16). Indeed, the desire of the saints and angels!

“Blessed are your ears because they hear . . .”, hear what they desire — the word of Christ.

THE DESIRE OF THE GOSPEL: The Gospel is the incarnate voice of God. It is hearing and seeing, by faith, at the same time. The desired one is found in the Gospel by faith (seeing) and by the Spirit (hearing). One might well ask: “How can I long for the Gospel?” The Apostle Peter responds: “Like newborn babes, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation” (1 Pet. 2:2).

This longing for the Gospel is portrayed by a most creative means. The Apostle Peter represents this desire through a suckling, laid upon his mother’s breast, urged by an instinctive longing to obtain his mother’s pure milk. It is as though he is calling us to be animated by a similar instinctive, unquenchable desire to obtain the Gospel. The suckling is moved to satisfy his natural hunger. He must have this milk for the sake of his growth and health. If the infant is deprived of his longing for food, he will refuse to nurse. He will even vomit his food if forced to nurse without this desire. The Gospel is viewed in the same light by the Apostle Peter. If one reads without a believing spirit, the desired result will not be forthcoming. If the Gospel is read by force, the words will simply exit as easily as they entered accruing no benefit for life and spiritual development. So, the desire for the Gospel is an essential element of the Gospel. Indeed, he who gave the Gospel, the “desire of the nations,” also insisted on a desire for it. The purpose and origin of this analogy is Christ himself as he declares: “Many prophets and righteous ones *desired* to see and hear what you

see and hear.” What we see and hear through our earnest desire is Christ himself.

Dear reader, please pay attention. This is no exaggeration. It is established truth. In this truth, lay the mystery of life, the Gospel and growth in Christ: “*Long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation*” (1 Pet. 2:2).

The question is, “How can I long for the Gospel?” The answer is at the heart of the meaning of “Gospel.” The Gospel is the voice and image of Christ. If your love relationship with Christ has come to the point of longing, then your desire for the Gospel will take on the same quality. Listen as Saint Peter speaks of vision, love and longing for Christ: “Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy” (1 Pet. 1:8). In the Gospel, you meet with Christ by the vision of faith. This vision creates an inexpressible joy in your heart in anticipation of the future glory. In this way, the saying is fulfilled in us: “Blessed are you for you see and hear ‘the desired one.’”

This fact is not some hidden mystery. It is open to all as we have often proclaimed that the reading of the Gospel is an encounter with Christ. This is why it produces inexpressible joy which gives witness to the fact that a true encounter has taken place, leading to growth and life. This title of Christ, “the desire of all nations,” is a mystery of mysteries.

EXAMPLES OF MUTUAL DESIRE: Christ said: “I am the true vine ... and you are the branches” (Jn. 15:1, 5). What is this union of the branches and the vine, this passionate, longing love? Is not this union the utmost example of mutual desire? “Abide in me and I in you” (Jn. 15:4). This is a love which never ceases day or night until the branch brings forth fruit. Is not this a case of passionate mutual love which refuses any separation?

Furthermore, what is the origin of these unique qualities? Do they not spring from the identity of the vine as it is he who is “the desire of all nations?” Here is he who revealed the secret: “A pleasant

vineyard, sing of it! I, the Lord, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest anyone harm it, I guard it night and day" (Is. 27:2–3).

"And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the Apostles with him. And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer'" (Lk. 22:14).

He grasped the cup of his slain love on behalf of his beloved ones in this world. He breathed his love into it. He poured out the passion of his soul and said to them: "Drink of it, all of you" (Mt. 26:27). It was said about Christ that "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn. 13:1). It was also said about the cup that he took: "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Lk. 22:15). Can we not discern here, dear reader, that a story is unfolding? It is a story taken from the mystery of the Eucharist. The sayings of Christ are part of this mystery. They live in the heart of him who eats of Christ. When we partake of the bread corporately, we partake of his love to the uttermost and the passion of his soul in its completeness.

The Gospel and the Eucharist are one mystery, revealing Christ as "the desire of the nations." "[They] have tasted the goodness of the word of God" (Heb. 6:5). "... for you have tasted of the kindness of the Lord ..." (1 Pet. 2:3). This is the taste of love and passion. Christ says: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (Jn. 6:56). Is this not the result of mutual love which has reached its highest degree? He also says: "You in me and I in you ..." (Jn. 14:20). Is not this liaison of communion the completion of all that the soul desires in Christ? Is it not the completion of all that Christ desires from those who love him and believe in him? It is also an enlarged picture of the word of the Gospel when it takes up residence in the desiring heart.

Paul elucidates the highest degree of practical application of this name "the desire of the nations." He describes Christ's union with those who believe in him — his beloved Church — as a model relationship of love between a bride and groom. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph.

5:25). Let the reader observe that Paul depicts believers in the feminine form. Christ's love is like the love of a man for his bride — the very essence of passion in its holiest sense. He further elevates his description of this holy state of love: "... that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle" (Eph. 5:26 – 27). Saint Paul carefully places believers on the level of a bride who deserves the love of her husband — the level of a holy passion. By means of sanctification by baptism and the blood, believers attain to the state of holiness and, thus, become the bride of "the desire of all nations."

It may seem to the reader that this description of a passionate mutual love between Christ and redeemed mankind is a temporal expression. The truth is that God designed this plan, preparing it for implementation before the foundation of the world. It was a matter of his choice concerning those who were to be united to Christ. "... who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph. 1:3 – 4). Then, he further clarified the ultimate objective of this unique condition of communion with Christ: "He destined 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. 1:5 – 6). We are to become a new creation capable of standing before Him in heaven to proclaim praise and glory to Jesus Christ the beloved.

This is the "desire of all nations." This is how the nations receive this "desired one." This is how they become one with Him and He with them in the ultimate attainment of glory.

Now that we know the position of "the desired one" in regard to ourselves and our place in regard to Him, the path we must follow to arrive at this passionate love for Him has become well-marked. We join Isaiah, making his words our life's song:

"Thy memorial name is the desire of our soul.

"My soul yearns for Thee in the night,
"my spirit within me earnestly seeks Thee" (Is. 26:8 - 9).

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“I Am the Good Shepherd”

Pastor bonus = Le bon pasteur

Ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ Ποιμὴν ὁ Καλὸς (John 10:11)

We are so used to pictures showing Jesus as the Good Shepherd that we fail to grasp the implications of such a comparison: between Christ as the agent of all creation and the character of one who goes out of his way to care for unconsidered creatures in remote places; between the author of life and a slaughtered lamb. Father Matta draws out the rich meaning of these images, and through them leads us into a deeper understanding of the character of God.

“I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD. THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP.” “I AM” (Ἐγὼ εἶμι). Christ begins with these words by way of a personal introduction, revealing his nature. It is a distinctive title specific to “Yahweh” God in the Old Testament: “Hearken to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am He, I am the first, and I am the last” (Is. 48:12). With these words, Christ means to draw the attention of the listener to the fact that he is speaking for Yahweh.

“THE GOOD SHEPHERD.” This title was another distinctive way in which God characterized Himself in ancient times. God considered Himself to be Israel’s own shepherd:

“For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I Myself will search for My sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his

flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out My sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Ezek. 34:11, 12).

When Christ says, “I am the good shepherd” (Jn. 10:11), he is giving a pointed indication that he himself is Yahweh. “God was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16 KJV) so as to fulfill the work of God in the Old Covenant. For in ancient times, Yahweh’s concern for His people was to discipline and teach them, but Christ’s concern in the New Covenant is to redeem them. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn. 10:11).

It is strange to hear God saying that He is a shepherd who tends His people as a shepherd tends his sheep: “He is among His sheep” (Ezek. 34:12). This title, which God gave Himself, reveals a new and completely unexpected side to His character: [it shows] traits which, taken at face value, are hard to credit. Who would believe that God does the work of a shepherd? “He will feed his flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs in His arms, He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young” (Is. 40:11). Could it be this same great, almighty and omnipotent God whom [we see with] the weakest and least significant of His people? Can He be carrying them in His arms, even hugging them to His bosom? Is He truly as tender as a mother who refuses to abandon her young and keeps close to them? “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you” (Is. 49:15). This gives an insight into facets of God’s character which are greater and more valuable than all we have known and read in theology. We must not be surprised, therefore, when we hear Christ, who is the new shepherd, say: “Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart...” (Mt. 11:29). For this characteristic, revealed to us in Christ, was already inherent in the heart of the great Yahweh.

Here is another picture from the Prophet Isaiah of the great Yahweh caring for His people: “They shall not hunger or thirst, nei-

ther scorching wind nor sun shall smite them; for He who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them" (Is. 49:10).

This is an illustration of God bearing the responsibility of feeding His people, meeting their need for water, sheltering them from the heat and drought. In this way, the strong and loving relationship between God and His people reaches the level of a father's, who has taken responsibility for the children He has had to the point where He cannot rest or sleep, until He has more than provided for their livelihood! Yet, the example of the shepherd is deeper and more expressive, because the shepherd deals with sheep which do not speak, complain or know where they are going. So, the responsibility which God took on Himself through the title of Shepherd has made us realize the extent of God's conscientious care for His children: His kindness, affection and wakefulness. "Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4).

Can we trust God's promise? Fact and history confirm it beyond doubt. For when the people were hungry in the wilderness, God sent them manna from heaven; and when they were thirsty, He made water gush forth from the rock! As their journey lasted a long time in the wilderness, He sent them, for the whole period of forty years, a cloud to shelter them from the scorching heat of the day and a light to lead them by night!

To prove that he himself was truly the Yahweh of old, Christ fed and satisfied the hunger of five thousand men in a desert place, as well as the women and children that were there. He did this with five loaves and two fishes that were in a boy's sack (Jn. 6:5 - 14). This miracle prepared the ground for Christ to give the true bread, that would remain with them throughout eternity, so that whoever eats of it shall never hunger or die: "So he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died (the manna); he who eats this bread will live forever" (Jn. 6:57, 58). What was symbolically done by Yahweh was actually fulfilled by Christ.

Jeremiah the Prophet predicts in God's words, "Then I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply" (Jer. 23:3). The great and feared Yahweh thus punishes with the one hand and embraces with the other. Truly aware of the Father's heart, Christ mentioned the father who rose and rushed to receive his prodigal son: "He (the prodigal son) arose, and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father (heavenly Father) saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him" (Lk. 15:20).

This is the wonderful Yahweh, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who commanded His Son to descend, look for the stray lambs and carry them in His heart and soul. Christ was to raise them and take them to the Father in heaven so that He could offer them the feast of His love. This fills the Father with joy, and all the heavens also, because those who were once dead now live. Is this really God's way of dealing with us? It blows the mind, it is beyond imagining! How then did the teachers, the theologians and even some elders of the Church come to picture God as "the God of ages under which all are despised and humbled to him by the yoke of bondage under the staff of his reign"? (*The Divine Liturgy*) What type of a king would that be, a Nebuchadnezzar, a Caesar, or a Hitler? It is for that reason that the great God Yahweh appointed Himself as the shepherd of His people. For in this way, a shepherd's nature, feelings and emotions towards his sheep, along with the publicly known characteristics of a shepherd, would become the basis of the regulations and ordinances for priests. The sheep fall asleep while he neither rests nor sleeps. They do not see from which direction their enemy is coming while he can see it. They do not know how they will eat the next day, but he has arranged it on time. He feels their pain before they cry out and knows their needs before they ask. And if he uses the stick to strike them on their backs, it is to prevent them from straying into the paths of the wolves:

"In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed

them; He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old"
(Is. 63:9).

A shepherd knows how to save souls when they are in trouble.

"Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear" (Is. 65:24).

"I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' to a nation that did not call on my name" (Is. 65:1).

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think..." (Eph. 3:20).

For the shepherd knows how to give his sheep what they have not even asked or thought of or hoped for.

"On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed: 'If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink'" (Jn. 7:37).

"And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price" (Rev. 22:17).

All of a sudden, we find that the Shepherd himself is the living source of water and the bread of life: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (Jn. 6:35). We also realize that Jesus gives his flesh as food, because whoever eats of it will find his eyes opened and himself among the saints.

If Jesus had not learned how to tend a flock and had not inherited a shepherd's heart from his Father, he would not have offered himself as a lamb to be slaughtered by his Father's knife. Whoever heard of a Shepherd who, in his love for his sheep, goes to the length of slaughtering his Son, a docile Lamb, to save his flock from the wolves' claws? A Shepherd who will carry his sheep on his shoulders, defying and defeating the horrors of death and the abyss? A Shepherd who then rises up to offer them safe and sound to his Father?

Isaiah visualizes Christ crossing over death and harrowing hell while he carries humanity on his shoulders, as Shepherd of the sheep.

Then, he sees Christ rise up like a giant who wakes from wine to shake off death — from himself and from humanity. Isaiah puts it like this:

“Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses his servant. Where is He who brought up out of the sea the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put in the midst of them His holy Spirit, who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble” (Is. 63:11 – 13).

David adds that when he crossed the waters with them he left no trace:

“Thy way was through the sea, Thy path through the great waters; yet Thy footprints were unseen. Thou didst lead Thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Ps. 77:19, 20).

It is as if the epic of the people’s safe crossing of the sea was completed by Christ’s immediate ascent to heaven. Moses and Elijah talked with him of this conclusive ascent on the day of Transfiguration: “... who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure (exodus), which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Lk. 9:31).

When he rose to heaven in glory, the saints and prophets who had been waiting for him throughout the ages welcomed him. As soon as they saw his wounds, they asked him, “What are these wounds on your back?” He said to them, “The wounds I received in the house of my friends” (Zech. 13:6). Then, they asked him, “Did they not repent?” He answered them, “When I send them the Spirit of repentance [they will repent].”

“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born” (Zech. 12:10).

Nearing the cross, Christ still saw himself as the Shepherd who leads his flock. While death was staring him in the face, it is astonishing that all he could think of was his flock. He remembered and repeated God’s words that were spoken by Zechariah the Prophet.

"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,' says the Lord of hosts. 'Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered'" (Zech. 13:7, [cf.] Mt. 26:31).

Yet, why should we be astonished [by this]? Did he not face death by his own will and because he delighted to redeem the scattered sheep?

The pages of theology should testify that the spirit in which the ransom was offered had its source in the spirit of the Shepherd [himself]. They should acknowledge that the lives of the sheep were worth the ultimate [price of] death on the cross. He is the one who said: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn. 10:11). The cross answered and said: ["Amen"].

The beloved Shepherd died to open before them the gate of the sheepfold of the kingdom by [the power of] his spirit. By his body, he provided for them a safe passage leading to heaven. By his blood, he cleansed them so that they could take the position of saints, while he stands there before his father to present them to him. All bear the image of the Redeemer and have their names recorded in heaven as his children, to inherit with the Son what is God's. Christ stands there encouraging them and making their hearts glad:

"Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; that you may suck and be satisfied with her consoling breasts; that you may drink deeply with delight from the abundance of her glory" (Is. 66:10, 11).

It is as if the Shepherd above is still milking the teats of his ewes and helping the weak sheep to drink, or as if heaven has become a mother and the sheep have gone to suck its glory. So, the Shepherd has gone to heaven, taking his sheep with him — still caring for them, hugging the young to his bosom and patiently tending the sucklings.

We see that Christ's characterization of himself as the Good Shepherd permeated his whole life on earth and stayed with him when he went to heaven. He looks upon us only as the gentle sheep that bear his brand mark and follow him wherever he goes: "It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (Rev. 14:4).

We find that all Christ's teachings and advice are represented in the form of the Shepherd who counts his sheep. He imprints on them his image, writes his name on their foreheads and numbers them to take them there with him.

Here, he trains them, leads them and gives his whole self to them.

He purifies and sanctifies them to become worthy offerings to his Father in heaven.

He cares for them in the sheepfolds of love, making them drink of the water of life for them to live and feed from God's word.

He writes his name on them, etching their names on his palms so that they may become accredited among the flock of heaven.

He teaches them the word of life setting out the way and the mystery of entering it.

Those who have learned to graze here in this world in the pastures of grace will live over there in heaven around his throne.

Those who have eaten here the fruit of the Gospel will feed there on the tree of life.

O glorious Shepherd, possessor of the mystery of the Lamb, how was it that you were able to slaughter yourself to feed your sheep with the mystery of your divinity? And then raise up your sheep from their earthly pens to the heights of glory?

I am at a loss! The mystery of the Shepherd [on the one hand] and the mystery of the Lamb [on the other] leave me at a loss.

How was it that you were able on the cross to take off the garb of the Shepherd and take on the shape of the Lamb?!

Whoever heard of a shepherd taking on the shape of a lamb that is slaughtered — so as to lead his flock across the valley of death and raise them up with him to reach the safe haven of life?

O faithful Shepherd of souls, my soul follows you!

February 1995

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About Father Matta Al-Meskeen (Matthew the Poor)

- ◆ Egyptian Coptic Orthodox monk (1919–2006)
- ◆ Orthodox theologian and reformer
- ◆ Author of spiritual and theological books

Father Matta is not unknown to the American public. *Time* magazine wrote twice about him in December 1975 and April 1976. St. Vladimir Seminary Press published a collection of his articles entitled *The Communion of Love*. Recently, *Orthodox Prayer Life*, already published in English, was also been published in French and Italian.

Father Matta el-Meskeen, born in 1919 into a middle class family, studied pharmacy and earned a bachelors degree in 1944.

Two years later, in 1948, as he felt God's call to leave everything and take up the monastic life, he sold the pharmacy he owned, gave its money to the poor, and joined the Monastery of St. Samuel the Confessor, at that time the poorest monastery in the Western Desert of Upper Egypt. He was the first Egyptian university graduate to become a monk in the Coptic Orthodox Church. Transferred to the Monastery of the Virgin Mary Al-Seryian in Wadi El-Natroun (the ancient Desert of Scete) in 1950, he was entrusted by the Bishop of the Monastery to lead the community of monks as their spiritual father.

In 1954, he was chosen as Vicar of the Coptic Patriarch in Alexandria. However, he resigned after 18 months only to return to his seclusion. Due to some problems in the Monastery, he went back in

1956 to his original monastery in Upper Egypt, followed by his disciples the monks (12 monks). Later, they preferred to live as hermits deep in the open wilderness of the Western Desert, 60 kilometers beyond the Fayoum, known as Wadi El-Rayyan. There they dug caves in the rocks to live in, imitating the ancient anchorites of the early centuries of monasticism. There they lived for ten years, during which time Fr. Matta wrote prolifically. Many inspiring spiritual books were written by him during this period.

After the lapse of ten years, the Coptic Pope asked Father Matta in 1969 to join the Monastery of St. Macarius in Wadi el-Natroun, which was falling into ruins. St. Macarius Monastery is one of the most ancient monasteries of Egypt. Its founder, St. Macarius the Great (or the Egyptian) was the first monk to inhabit the wilderness of Scete. He founded the monastery in AD 360.

That twelve monks should together join the monastery was certainly a historical event in the life of the monastery, inhabited by only six elderly monks. Thereupon began a spiritual and architectural revival in the monastery. Today the number of monks exceeds 120, most of whom are university graduates.

To date Fr. Matta has published more than 100 books dealing with all aspects of religious life. They include more than 15 volumes (some 800 pages each) of Biblical commentaries on the books of the New Testament. There are his earlier books on Orthodox Prayer Life, Coptic Monasticism, the Eucharist and liturgy, St. Athanasius of Alexandria – Biography and Teachings (800 pages), Church seasons and feasts, the Holy Spirit, the History of Israel, the New Creation of Man (2 volumes) and the Life and Works of Christ, and more. His writings also include works dealing with social issues such as Birth Control, Women's Rights and Obligations, Church and Politics, as well as hundreds of articles and taped sermons.

He has profoundly influenced monastic daily life, linking it with hard work and production for the good of society. This has taken place in the fields of agriculture and desert reclamation. Through these, the monk has achieved self-sufficiency thus eliminating any

claim that he is a burden to society. At the same time, he maintains his solitude away from the world.

He was the first to discuss the relations between the Eastern and the Oriental Orthodox Churches with the Metropolitan George Khodr of Lebanon in 1960 where this was the first step to begin the unofficial consultations between the two Orthodox families after 1,500 years of separation.

